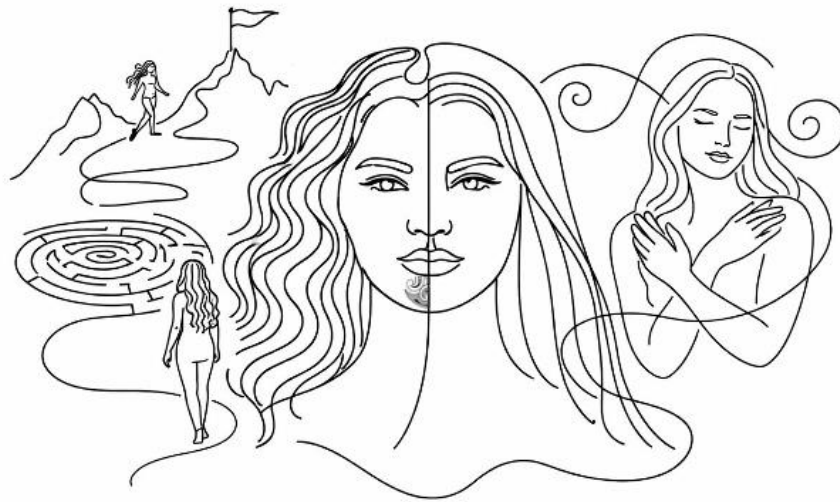


Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying Cultural Hybridity: The Lived Experiences of Wāhine Māori–Pākehā in Aotearoa



A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Psychology

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

Loren Silva

2026

Abstract

This research explores the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā in Aotearoa, examining how cultural hybridity is understood and expressed in everyday life. While Māori and Pākehā identities have often been positioned as distinct within certain social and political narratives, less attention has been given to those who live across these cultural worlds. These experiences are particularly significant for wāhine, whose lives are shaped through intersecting cultural and gendered histories. This research used a qualitative approach, drawing on reflexive thematic analysis and informed by Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine perspectives. Participants shared their experiences through pūrākau, reflecting a narrative orientation, with themes developed from the meanings conveyed within these stories. The findings suggest that for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, cultural hybridity is not a fixed or singular identity, but a relational and evolving process shaped across different life stages and contexts. Three key movements were identified across participants' shared experiences. Navigating Cultural Hybridity involved occupying liminal spaces, adapting identity, and negotiating conditional belonging. Challenging Cultural Hybridity involved questioning legitimacy, authenticity, and colonial expectations. Embodying Cultural Hybridity involved growing cultural confidence, intergenerational responsibility, and lived expressions of mana wāhine. These processes are conceptualised through the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework, offering an interpretive framework for understanding Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity. The framework conceptualises these movements as interconnected, non-linear processes that shift across different life stages and contexts, offering a lens for understanding how wāhine Māori–Pākehā negotiate identity across changing social environments and within the gendered positioning of Māori womanhood. This research suggests that wāhine Māori–Pākehā do not simply exist between cultures, but actively navigate and reshape how these cultures are understood, lived, and carried into the future.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people.

First, I want to acknowledge the wāhine who shared their stories with me. Before I began this research, I felt alone in these experiences and unsure of where I fit. Hearing your stories changed that. Thank you for trusting me and for speaking so openly. It has been a privilege to learn from you, and I hope this experience has sparked something in you, just as it has in me.

I also want to acknowledge Te Rau Puawai. Thank you for creating a space where I could begin to feel comfortable in my Māoritanga and start reconnecting in adulthood. This kaupapa began there. If I had not gone to that first hui, this thesis would not exist.

Thank you to my supervisor, Kathryn, for your guidance and support. Being able to go through this process with someone so light-hearted and reassuring made it all the more enjoyable. Your trust in my creative vision through all of the ups and downs allowed me to finish strong with work I am truly proud of.

To my friends, thank you for supporting me and for understanding why I have not always been as present over the past two years. A special thank you to my colleague in the chamber of labour and learning. I would not have finished this final stretch without you, even if you are annoying.

To my whānau, thank you for backing me through this whole process. I know I was not always the easiest to be around, and I appreciate you for holding me through it anyway. Thank you for always being in my corner.

To Antony, thank you for standing beside me through all of this. You met me at the start of my academic journey and now, eight years later, I can hopefully say I will never study again (maybe). Your support has meant everything to me, and I would not be here without you. I love you.

Finally, to myself, for finishing this. I am so proud of you. Do not let the spark die. Keep it going. Poipoia te kākano kia puāwai.

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
List of Figures	vii
Glossary of Māori Terms	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Locating the Self Within the Research	2
Research Aim and Questions	3
Researcher Positioning and Rationale	3
Research Approach	4
Significance of the Research	4
Thesis Structure	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review	7
Introduction	7
Historical Foundations of Wāhine Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	7
Relational Ways of Being	8
Colonial Reconfiguration	8
Negotiated Survival	9
Conceptualising Cultural Hybridity	11
Cultural Hybridity as a Global Process	11
Cultural Identity as Becoming	11
Cultural Hybridity within a Third Space	11
Limitations within Indigenous Contexts	12
Navigating Invisibility	12
Liminality and In-Betweenness	12
Internalised Identity Conflict	13
Conditional Belonging	14
Navigating Visibility	16
Proximity to White Dominance	16
Identity Organisation Under Pressure	17
Identity Expression Under Observation	19
Challenging Contested Access	20
Performed Equity	21
Racial Legibility	22

Blood Quantum Logic	23
Challenging Cultural Policing	24
Tradition Tension	25
Gendered Silencing	26
Authenticity Surveillance	28
Embodying Generational Continuity	29
Vulnerable Development	30
Self-Rangatiratanga	31
Whakapapa Accountability	32
Embodying Hybrid Authority	34
Innovative Māoritanga	34
Mana Wāhine Leadership	35
Reclaiming Agency	36
Empirical Landscape of Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	37
Global and Gendered Cultural Hybridity	37
Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	38
Mana Wāhine	38
Wāhine Māori–Pākehā	38
Synthesis and Research Gaps	39
Chapter Three: Methodology	40
Introduction	40
Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations	41
Kaupapa Māori Influences	41
Mana Wāhine Theory	41
Recruitment and Participants	42
Recruitment	42
Participants	42
Data Collection	44
Researcher Reflexivity	46
Ethical Considerations	47
Data Analysis	48
Chapter Four: Findings	52
Participant Narratives	52
Sonya	53
Hana	54
Natalie	55

Lexi	56
Leah	58
Rahera	59
Interpretive Analysis: Patterns Across Participant Pūrākau	60
Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	61
Cultural Limbo	61
Nowhere and Everywhere	61
The Tug of War Within	62
The Weight of Assumptions	64
Cultural Chameleon	66
Privilege and Pressure	67
Reading the Room	68
Responding to the Room	70
Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	72
What is Māori Enough?	72
The Illusion of Progressiveness	73
Skin Deep Standards	74
Bloodlines and Burdens	76
The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori	79
Tradition on Trial	79
The Long Fight to Be Heard	81
Policing Authenticity	83
Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	85
The Growth of Cultural Confidence	85
Fragile Beginnings	85
Belonging on Your Own Terms	88
Raising Culture	90
Modern Day Mana Wāhine	92
Culture Reimagined	93
Wāhine as Cultural Carriers	95
Release, Acceptance, Action	97
Chapter Five: Discussion	101
Introduction	101
Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	101
Cultural Limbo: Invisibility	102
Cultural Chameleon: Visibility	104

Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	107
What is Māori Enough?: Contested Access	107
The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori: Cultural Policing	109
Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	112
The Growth of Cultural Confidence: Generational Continuity	112
Modern Day Mana Wāhine: Hybrid Authority	115
The NCE Framework: Interpreting Relational Development in Wāhine Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	118
Navigating	119
Challenging	120
Embodying	120
The Value of the NCE Framework	121
Implications for Theory and Practice	122
Cultural Hybridity Theory	122
Mana Wāhine and Indigenous Scholarship	122
Cultural Reconnection and Identity in Aotearoa	123
Limitations	124
Future Research	125
Concluding Reflections	126
References	128
Appendices	134
Appendix A	134
Appendix B	135
Appendix C	138
Appendix D	140

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual illustration of participant Sonya, derived from her pūrākau	53
Figure 2. Conceptual illustration of participant Hana, derived from her pūrākau	54
Figure 3. Conceptual illustration of participant Natalie, derived from her pūrākau	55
Figure 4. Conceptual illustration of participant Lexi, derived from her pūrākau	56
Figure 5. Conceptual illustration of participant Leah, derived from her pūrākau	58
Figure 6. Conceptual illustration of participant Rahera, derived from her pūrākau	59
Figure 7. Conceptual representation of Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	101
Figure 8. Conceptual representation of Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	107
Figure 9. Conceptual representation of Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity	112
Figure 10. Conceptual representation of the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) Framework	118

Glossary of Māori Terms

Aotearoa

Māori name for New Zealand.

hapū

Sub-tribe; kinship group within an iwi.

hui

Gathering or meeting.

īkura

Menstruation; life-giving blood of wāhine.

iwi

Tribe.

kapa haka

Māori performing arts involving song, movement, and haka.

kaupapa

Principle, purpose, or collective agenda.

kaupapa Māori

Māori-centred approach grounded in Māori values and ways of knowing.

kōhanga reo

Māori language immersion early childhood education.

kōrero

Speech, discussion, or narrative.

mana

Authority, prestige, and spiritual power.

mana wāhine

Māori feminist framework emphasising the authority and dignity of wāhine.

marae

Communal and sacred meeting place.

mātauranga Māori

Māori knowledge systems.

Māoritanga

Māori culture, values, and way of life.

moko kauae

Traditional chin tattoo worn by wāhine.

pepeha

Form of introduction expressing identity through connections to land, ancestors, and community.

pūrākau

Storytelling; traditional and contemporary narratives.

te ao Māori

The Māori world; Māori worldview.

te reo Māori

The Māori language.

tikanga

Māori customs, values, and correct ways of doing things.

tino rangatiratanga

Self-determination; sovereignty; autonomy.

tūpuna

Ancestors.

waiata

Song or chant; used in cultural contexts such as kapa haka and expressions of identity.

waiwhero

Menstruation; sacred concept connected to whakapapa.

wāhine

Women.

whakapapa

Genealogy; ancestral lineage and connections.

whakawhanaungatanga

Process of building relationships and connection.

whānau

Extended family.

whare wānanga

Traditional place of higher learning; also used to describe contemporary spaces of shared knowledge and learning.

whenua

Land; also placenta, symbolising connection to land.

Chapter One: Introduction

Cultural identity in Aotearoa New Zealand is shaped by complex historical and relational influences. The relationship between Māori and Pākehā is grounded in a history of colonisation, which continues to shape contemporary dynamics between Indigenous and settler identities (Smith, 2012; Walker, 2004). Although identity is often framed as fixed or singular within Aotearoa's colonial society, it may be more accurately understood as developing across multiple cultural and social contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). Māori and Pākehā have often been positioned as distinct and identifiable groups, with gender adding an additional dimension shaped through its own colonial history (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). However, these frameworks do not fully account for the lived realities of those whose identities exist across both Māori and Pākehā worlds, particularly for wāhine navigating intersecting cultural and gendered experiences.

This research explores the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā and how they understand, negotiate, and express cultural identity within Aotearoa New Zealand, hereafter referred to as Aotearoa. In this thesis, Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) refers to the lived experience of holding both Māori and Pākehā whakapapa, where identity is shaped through ongoing cultural and relational engagement. Māori–Pākehā refers to individuals with both Māori and Pākehā ancestry, with Pākehā used here to describe New Zealanders of European descent. More broadly, cultural hybridity describes identity formation across multiple cultural contexts. It is not always experienced as a straightforward sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990), and for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, identity is shaped through lived and relational experiences across contexts, often involving both connection and tension. By centring these experiences, this research moves beyond simplified representations of identity and engages with the nuanced realities of living across cultural worlds, seeking to understand how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience and make sense of MPCH in contemporary Aotearoa.

Locating the Self Within the Research

This research is grounded in a moment that brought forward deeper questions of belonging and legitimacy in relation to identity. During a Te Rau Puāwai hui, a wāhine I deeply respected for her work and presence asked me an unprompted but pivotal question that would come to shape the direction of this research: whether I had ever considered receiving a moko kauae.

The question unsettled me. It had not emerged from anything I had shared, but from how she had come to see me. I responded instinctively that I had never thought of myself as worthy of receiving a moko kauae. This interaction brought into focus a tension I had not yet fully articulated. Although I carried Māori whakapapa, I did not feel Māori enough to take up space within visible expressions of Māoritanga. This experience reflected more than a personal uncertainty. It pointed toward a broader pattern in which cultural belonging could feel uncertain, negotiated, and at times conditional, shaped by both internal doubt and unspoken expectations of legitimacy.

My whakapapa reflects both connection and ongoing learning:

Ko Maungatautari tōku maunga

Ko Waikato tōku awa

Ko Tākitimu tōku waka

Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa tōku iwi

Ko Whākirangi tōku marae

Nō Kemureti ahau

Ko Loren Silva tōku ingoa

The inclusion of Maungatautari and the Waikato River reflects the environments in which I was raised, grounding my identity in place and lived experience. Tākitimu, Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa, and Whākirangi represent my ancestral connections to Māoritanga, locating my identity within whakapapa, whenua, and intergenerational ties. My pepeha expresses a contemporary form of Māoritanga that is grounded in whakapapa while shaped by the environments that have influenced who I am today. It also reflects a growing sense of

responsibility to strengthen and carry forward cultural connection within my whānau and for future generations. I embrace the evolving nature of this pepeha as a reflection of my cultural identity, shifting as my relationship with Māoritanga and MPCH deepens over time. This research emerges from this intersection of knowing, questioning, and becoming. It seeks to better understand how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience cultural hybridity, and how connections to culture are formed, disrupted, and reclaimed over time.

Research Aim and Questions

This research aims to explore the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā and their journeys of cultural connection within MPCH. The specific aims are to examine how wāhine Māori–Pākehā make sense of their identities within this context, how cultural connection is experienced and developed across different life stages and contexts, and how cultural hybridity is lived within everyday relationships and the wider social world. This research is guided by the following questions:

- How do wāhine Māori–Pākehā understand and make sense of their cultural hybridity?
- How is cultural connection formed, disrupted, and strengthened across different life stages and contexts among wāhine Māori–Pākehā?
- How do wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience cultural hybridity in everyday life?

Researcher Positioning and Rationale

This research is shaped by my positioning as a wāhine Māori–Pākehā with lived experience of cultural hybridity. My personal journey of engaging with and making sense of my MPCH has informed both the direction and focus of the research. As both researcher and participant within this broader context, I approach the research with an awareness of how these experiences shape the way I understand and engage with it. Grounded in both personal and collective significance, this research draws on my own experiences while responding to the broader complexities faced by wāhine Māori–Pākehā in understanding and experiencing identity and cultural connection. These experiences are not always visible within dominant narratives in Aotearoa, highlighting the need for research that centres and validates these

perspectives. My positioning offers both insight and responsibility. This insight enables me to engage with participant narratives through a shared understanding of their lived experience. At the same time, this proximity requires ongoing reflexivity to ensure that participant voices remain central and are not overshadowed by my own experiences. A sense of responsibility also drives this research, with a focus on contributing to the strengthening of Māoritanga within my whānau and for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, both now and in the future. This reflects a commitment to understanding how cultural connection develops over time and is carried forward.

Research Approach

This research used a qualitative approach, drawing on reflexive thematic analysis and informed by Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine perspectives, with a narrative orientation. Participants shared their experiences through pūrākau, with themes developed from the meanings conveyed within these stories. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how MPCH is experienced and expressed across everyday life, life stages, and contexts. These frameworks position wāhine Māori voices at the forefront of the research and guide both the interpretation of participant narratives and the research process. A pūrākau-informed approach supports a more immersive representation of participant narratives, enabling greater insight into identity and cultural hybridity as they are lived in contemporary contexts.

Significance of the Research

This research contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand cultural identity in Aotearoa beyond binary frameworks. By placing wāhine Māori–Pākehā at the centre, it offers insight into forms of identity that are fluid and shaped through everyday experience, providing a more grounded understanding of MPCH as it is lived in practice. The lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā are often difficult to articulate within dominant identity frameworks. Creating space for these experiences to be shared and recognised contributes to the validation of identities that may otherwise remain marginalised or overlooked. Broader conversations within Māori communities around cultural connection and identity may be supported by this research. By examining how cultural connection is formed,

disrupted, and strengthened, it highlights how Māoritanga can be carried and sustained across different contexts. This contributes not only to academic understanding but also to the continuation and strengthening of cultural connection for wāhine Māori–Pākehā and their whānau.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured across five chapters.

Chapter One introduces the research, outlining its context, aims, and significance, alongside the positioning of the researcher and an overview of the research approach.

Chapter Two presents the literature review. It begins by examining the historical and relational foundations of MPCH, before moving into a conceptualisation of cultural hybridity. It then explores the theoretical perspectives that inform how cultural hybridity is experienced by wāhine Māori–Pākehā and concludes by outlining the empirical landscape relevant to this research. This chapter is organised around key conceptual themes that provide a foundation for understanding the lived experiences explored in this research.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach. It begins by situating the research within Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine philosophical and theoretical foundations, before detailing the qualitative design, the use of reflexive thematic analysis, the central role of pūrākau, and key ethical and reflexive considerations.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this research in two parts. First, participant narratives are presented using a pūrākau-informed approach, allowing each participant's lived experiences to be expressed in a way that honours their contributions. Second, the interpretive analysis is presented, identifying key patterns across the narratives and organised into three thematic movements that reflect how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience and make sense of cultural hybridity.

Chapter Five presents the discussion of the research findings. It begins by interpreting the findings in relation to existing literature and broader social and cultural contexts, organised around the same three thematic movements. These are then developed into an original framework that offers an interpretive model for understanding the development of wāhine

MPCH. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, alongside limitations and directions for future research, and concludes with final reflections.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity develops within a landscape shaped by tensions between colonialism and indigeneity. The lived experience of wāhine Māori–Pākehā sits where these tensions intersect, with gender further shaping how identity is lived and negotiated within culturally contested spaces. This review brings together global, Māori, and mana wāhine perspectives to examine how Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) has been conceptualised and experienced across everyday life, life stages, and contexts for contemporary wāhine Māori–Pākehā. It traces the movements through which MPCH is navigated, challenged, and embodied across wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience.

The chapter begins by outlining the historical foundations shaping MPCH, including the gendered impacts of colonisation in Aotearoa. It then draws on key theoretical perspectives to conceptualise MPCH. Three movements, navigating, challenging, and embodying, are used to examine how wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity is negotiated through conditions of visibility, access, and authority. The chapter then turns to the empirical landscape most relevant to this research, beginning with global cultural hybridity research, before examining Māori–Pākehā identity studies and mana wāhine perspectives, and concluding with literature most closely aligned with wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience.

Historical Foundations of Wāhine Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Before theorising the contemporary dynamics through which MPCH is navigated, challenged, and embodied, it must be situated within the historical and relational conditions from which it emerged. Wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity is not a universal cultural experience, but a context-specific identity shaped by te ao Māori foundations and the colonial restructuring of Aotearoa. Drawing on Māori socio-historical literature, this section traces MPCH across three phases: relational foundations prior to colonisation, colonial reconfiguration through the imposition of Western structures and gendered hierarchies, and its emergence as negotiated survival within conditions of cultural disruption. This grounding provides a foundation for

understanding wāhine Māori–Pākehā, where inherited and imposed experiences of MPCH help to illuminate contemporary lived experience.

Relational Ways of Being

Forms of diversity and relational complexity may be understood as present within te ao Māori prior to colonisation. They were not necessarily conceptualised explicitly, but were grounded in ways of living that reflected diversity and interconnectedness. Māori scholarship cautions against treating ‘Māori’ as a singular, homogenous category, as this risks obscuring the distinct histories and identities of individual iwi (Durie, 1998a; Smith, 2012; Walker, 2004). Māori identity is grounded in whakapapa, connecting individuals to whānau, hapū, iwi, tūpuna, and whenua, establishing shared responsibility to uphold tikanga. Relationships across kinship groups strengthened whakapapa connections, reinforcing alliances and supporting collective wellbeing (Pihama & Cameron, 2012).

Within this relational framework, mana wāhine scholarship highlights how gender relations in te ao Māori were understood as complementary, with difference between genders valued as a source of balance rather than hierarchy (Mikaere, 2003; 2019). In this context, gender-specific responsibilities were understood as contributions to collective wellbeing rather than markers of social ranking. Wāhine held valued positions within te ao Māori, contributing skills central to community functioning. Ruwhiu (2009) emphasises wāhine as guardians and transmitters of te ao Māori knowledge, sustaining tikanga and intergenerational continuity. The relationship between tāne and wāhine can be understood as reflecting a logic in which difference functioned as collective strength.

These dynamics within te ao Māori reflect a worldview in which difference was valued as a source of continuity. This foundation provides a basis for understanding how MPCH may be experienced as both recognisable and disorienting in a society that redefined difference from relational strength to categorical distinction.

Colonial Reconfiguration

While identity in Aotearoa prior to colonisation was primarily grounded in te ao Māori, colonisation created the conditions for cultural hybridity to emerge, including the

development of Māori–Pākehā identities. The imposition of Western legal systems reshaped ways of belonging within Māori society, contributing to the introduction of racialised and gendered colonial hierarchies. As the settler population grew, breaches of Te Tiriti undermined Māori sovereignty and intensified pressure toward assimilation (Hill, 2010; Keenan, 2021; Orange, 2012). Cultural hybridity in Aotearoa shifted from an implicit and valued feature of social life to a more explicit and, at times, divisive cultural condition, increasingly understood through distinctions between Māori and Pākehā rather than being grounded solely in whakapapa.

This polarity was further shaped through processes of urban migration. Land dispossession and economic restructuring led to many Māori moving into urban environments that often privileged European norms, reshaping how cultural connection was experienced (Derby, 2011; Meredith, 2015). Kukutai (2013) notes that rapid rural-urban migration shifted how Māori identity was formed and how cultural inheritance was experienced, at times moving from lived immersion to more disrupted or varied forms of connection. As European social systems became increasingly dominant, Māori ways of life were reshaped through the introduction of patriarchal and racial hierarchies.

The intersecting forces of gender, class, and race marginalised Māori collectively and positioned wāhine Māori within increasingly constrained locations of the colonial social order (Mikaere, 2003). Western domestic and legal ideals reshaped Māori role distribution, contributing to shifts in wāhine Māori positions from authority toward more marginalised locations within colonial society (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). This colonial reconfiguration introduced many challenges for Māori as a collective, but the layered loss of mana made this shift particularly complex for wāhine Māori.

Negotiated Survival

Within these colonial conditions, forms of cultural hybridity became increasingly visible through intermarriage and the formation of Māori–Pākehā households (Wanhalla, 2009). This shifted identity from a more clearly divided ‘us and them’ dynamic toward a distinct yet contested identity in its own right. Pākehā perspectives of the time framed intermarriage as a method of biological assimilation that strengthened European dominance and diminished the perceived need for Māori cultural continuity. In contrast, some Māori leaders interpreted

intermarriage as a survival strategy, recognising that whakapapa across both Māori and Pākehā worlds could provide access to colonially legitimised platforms within Western political and social spaces, enabling advocacy for Māori rights within Pākehā systems (Walker, 2004; Wanhalla, 2009). These competing interpretations positioned forms of cultural hybridity within a contested space shaped by colonial pressure and Māori survival.

Despite multiple layers of discrimination following colonisation, wāhine Māori emerged as pivotal figures in sustaining whānau and community wellbeing amid increasing pressures to assimilate. Their leadership played a key role in resisting these pressures, including through initiatives such as the Māori Women's Welfare League (Harris, 2004; Māori Women's Welfare League, n.d.). Some scholarship suggests that colonial discourses positioned wāhine Māori as more 'civilised' and adaptable to European society, enabling them to act as intermediaries within colonial systems (Pihama, 2001; Smith, 2012). Wāhine Māori–Pākehā drew on this positioning to move between Māori and Pākehā worlds, building legitimacy to advocate for their communities. These dynamics illustrate how cultural hybridity shifted from a condition of survival under colonial power toward a source of strategic agency.

The history of cultural hybridity in Aotearoa reflects a shift from relational diversity within Māori society to more politicised forms of negotiation under colonial conditions. Prior to colonisation, difference was embedded within Māori society as a source of balance and cohesion (Durie, 1998b). Colonial intrusion reshaped these relational foundations through the introduction of racialised and gendered hierarchies, redefining belonging and authority. In response, cultural hybridity became a site through which Māori navigated and negotiated cultural continuity within Western systems. These dynamics were shaped by wāhine Māori, whose leadership contributed to sustaining and advancing Māori cultural advocacy. Wāhine Māori–Pākehā drew on this positioning to move between Māori and Pākehā worlds, supporting these efforts across cultural contexts. Together, these foundations position wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience as historically situated, shaped through relational and gendered processes that continue to influence identity formation in Aotearoa (Meredith, 1998; Walker, 2004).

Conceptualising Cultural Hybridity

Cultural hybridity has been widely theorised within postcolonial and cultural studies. This section engages with key theoretical contributions to examine how cultural hybridity is understood as an evolving process, before considering its limitations within Indigenous contexts.

Cultural Hybridity as a Global Process

Pieterse (2001) conceptualises cultural hybridity as a global ‘melange’, a process of cultural mixing produced through ongoing historical interactions between cultures. Pieterse suggests that cultural hybridity emerges through continuous exchange across time and space, meaning cultural forms are not fixed or original but shaped through layers of interaction, including migration and colonisation. Cultures can therefore be understood as fundamentally hybrid, challenging notions of cultural purity and fixed identity.

Cultural Identity as Becoming

Hall (1990) shifts the focus to identity, conceptualising it as a process of becoming rather than a fixed state. Hall suggests that identity is not something individuals possess, but is continuously produced through history and lived experience. This challenges essentialist understandings of identity and emphasises its ongoing formation. For individuals with cultural hybridity, identity is negotiated through lived experience and the social conditions that shape belonging, often within contexts of tension and contradiction.

Cultural Hybridity within a Third Space

Bhabha (1994) conceptualises cultural hybridity through the “third space,” an internal site where identities are formed through the interaction of cultural influences. Bhabha suggests that within this space, identity is constructed through processes of negotiation and reinterpretation rather than allegiance to a single culture. The third space disrupts binary understandings of identity, creating a site of tension where new meanings and forms of identity can emerge. However, this space is not neutral, as it is shaped by the unequal power

relations that structure colonial encounters.

Limitations within Indigenous Contexts

These theoretical perspectives offer insight into the fluid nature of identity, but do not fully account for the historical and cultural conditions shaping Indigenous experiences of cultural hybridity. Within Aotearoa, this concept is shaped by the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the negotiation of cultural legitimacy and belonging. As such, it cannot be understood solely as a space of possibility, but is shaped by power and colonial history (Mikaere, 2003; Smith, 2012). These limitations highlight the need for a more contextually grounded understanding of cultural hybridity within Aotearoa. The following section develops a theorisation of wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience, reflecting the ways cultural hybridity is navigated, challenged, and embodied in everyday life.

Navigating Invisibility

Against the historical and global backdrop outlined in the previous section, this section examines how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience social invisibility within colonial contexts and the conditions that shape social recognition and belonging in Aotearoa. Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) is understood as the lived experience of navigating identity across Māori and Pākehā worlds. Drawing on Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) as the lived experience of navigating identity across Māori and Pākehā worlds, this section explores how social invisibility is shaped through structural and psychological conditions, including liminality, internalised identity conflict, and conditional belonging.

Liminality and In-Betweenness

Cultural hybridity is understood as a feature of identity that must be continually navigated in everyday life, rather than a stable or fixed position. Liminality captures what it means to exist between social systems organised around binary distinctions.

Liminality, originating from van Gennep (1960), was defined as a transition between established social or life stages, and was later reinterpreted as a more enduring social

condition. Turner (1969) reframed liminality as a structural state of in-betweenness, where individuals exist outside recognised social roles. His focus on ambiguity and incomplete incorporation provides a foundation for understanding how in-betweenness can become socially persistent in contexts that resist partial membership. Postcolonial theory extends this by examining how in-between positioning is lived over time. Drawing on Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1990), cultural hybridity can be understood as resisting closure and stable recognition.

In Aotearoa, liminality within Māori–Pākehā lived experience is structured and sustained through colonial categorisation that positions Māori and Pākehā identities as singular and opposing. Recognition can be shaped through Eurocentric logics that privilege Western expressions of identity. Theorists such as Smith (2012) and Mikaere (2003) argue that colonial classification systems continue to constrain Indigenous identities, privileging hierarchical norms and marginalising relational ways of being. As a result, MPCH is positioned within a sustained liminal condition, where recognition may remain structurally constrained under binary colonial classifications. This shapes both external recognition and the internal experience of MPCH. This liminal positioning is reflected in the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā, where identity is continually negotiated across contexts, recognition is inconsistent, and belonging remains conditional rather than assured.

Internalised Identity Conflict

Internal identity conflict arises when individuals experience competing definitions of self. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos' (2005) framework of Bicultural Identity Integration positions this experience along a continuum from harmony to conflict, where perceived compatibility supports integration and perceived incompatibility produces internal conflict. Baumeister et al. (1985) similarly identify conflicting self-definitions as a predictor of chronic identity strain. Together, this literature shows that unresolved or incongruent identity integration can impair psychological well-being.

Individuals whose identities fall outside dominant social norms often experience identity conflict as ongoing internal process, as they negotiate recognition within systems that do not accommodate multiplicity. Over time, in the absence of reconciliation or awareness, these pressures may become internalised and produce enduring identity conflict rather than a secure sense of identity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

However, these interpretations often assume that identity integration occurs within relatively neutral social contexts. For individuals whose cultural identities do not align with the social majority, unequal power relations shape how identity is experienced. Ward et al. (2011) conceptualise ethnocultural identity conflict as the psychological distress that arises when individuals experience incompatibility between cultural identities or between heritage and dominant cultural contexts. In contexts where cultural identity is socially marginalised, this conflict can be intensified, making identity integration more burdensome.

The cumulative effects of these structural conditions are further illuminated through literature on the internalisation of contradiction. Fanon (2008) emphasises that for those positioned as inferior within colonial societies, persistent external devaluation can become internalised as inferiority and self-surveillance. Anzaldúa (1987) highlights the toll of living in contradiction, where conflicting cultural demands perpetuate self-questioning and apprehension.

Māori scholarship offers insight into the effects of internal identity conflict within Aotearoa. Durie's (1998b) concept of *whaiora* emphasises balance across relational, spiritual, and cultural dimensions for wellbeing. When this balance is disrupted by colonisation, it can produce disconnection and internal strain. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013) describe how ongoing colonial impositions place cumulative pressure on Māori wellbeing, while Pihama (2001) shows how *wāhine* Māori experience additional layers of scrutiny and oppression. Kukutai (2004) further illustrates how contested definitions of Māori–Pākehā identity intensify uncertainty in self-identification. This work suggests that within colonial social frameworks, distance from Western, binary models of identity may increase vulnerability to internalised identity conflict.

Conditional Belonging

Conditional belonging is a recurrent and situational form of social recognition, granted only when marginalised identities align with dominant expectations. For those who do not align, belonging can be tested, requiring reassurance that they will not disrupt the status quo. In the absence of stable criteria, authority over belonging can rest with dominant groups, allowing it to be granted or withdrawn without justification.

Borell (2005) and Moeke-Maxwell (2005) illustrate how conditional belonging operates for Māori, particularly for what they describe as bi/multi-racial wāhine, in contemporary Aotearoa. Recognition can be shaped through proximity to dominant Pākehā norms, affecting when and how Māori identity is deemed legitimate. Acceptance within mainstream contexts can become situational, influenced by visibility and adherence to normative standards. In contrast to Māori relational understandings of identity, which value difference as a source of balance and cohesion, this conditionality can intensify liminality and internal identity conflict for those with MPCH. This expectation that belonging must be earned through conformity can frame recognition as contingent rather than relational. Scholarship on representation further shows how conditional belonging can be shaped through social surveillance. hooks (2014) conceptualises the racialised gaze as a process through which dominant groups allocate meaning to marginalised groups, turning visibility into a mechanism of control rather than acknowledgement.

Hokowhitu (2004) and Moeke-Maxwell (2005) extend this analysis to show how Māori identity can be subject to scrutiny in Aotearoa, particularly when expression does not align with dominant Pākehā expectations. Māori are often perceived through a deficit lens, where Māori identity is framed as inadequate unless it conforms to colonial standards of behaviour. This deficit narrative has been present within colonial representations of Māori identities since early colonial periods. Borell (2005) highlights how Māori identities are portrayed as dysfunctional, dangerous, risk-prone, or as recipients of undeserved advantage. These representations shape everyday interactions and intensify social misrecognition. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013) and Sue et al. (2007) show how this racism is enacted through everyday microaggressions. Within a colonised society, these biases often remain unnamed despite their cumulative harm. This deficit lens encourages assimilation to Pākehā standards and the marginalisation of Māori worldviews to secure social acceptance.

The psychological outcomes of conditional belonging are well documented in academic literature. Steele and Aronson (1995) show how recognition of negative stereotypes produces elevated self-monitoring and critique, even without overt discrimination. This vigilance extends into everyday self-presentation, shaping how individuals occupy space to remain accepted. This process is theorised through Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour which describes the regulation of emotions to meet social expectations. Pihama (2001) and Moeke-Maxwell (2005) extend this to wāhine Māori, showing how emotional expression can be more closely regulated within gendered contexts. Because expectations around emotional

expression are already imposed on women, intersecting racial and gendered stereotypes can further shape how wāhine Māori expression is interpreted and regulated. As a result, wāhine Māori must undertake significant emotional labour to navigate dominant Pākehā spaces and access belonging under conditional terms.

Navigating Invisibility for wāhine Māori–Pākehā is not passive, but actively produced through social systems that restrict recognition and regulate belonging. Liminal positioning, internalised identity conflict, and conditional belonging shape how MPCH is experienced as unseen within dominant contexts. Invisibility is not the only condition through which wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience recognition. Moments of visibility introduce new forms of negotiation, where MPCH becomes socially recognised and is shaped through shifting strategies, tensions, and expectations.

Navigating Visibility

While the previous section examined how Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) is rendered socially invisible, this section considers what occurs when it becomes visible. When visible, MPCH is negotiated through shifting thresholds of legitimacy. To explore these dynamics, this section focuses on proximity, pressure, and observation as key mechanisms through which visibility is experienced and evaluated within everyday contexts.

Proximity to White Dominance

Proximity to white dominance can assist the navigation of cultural discrimination and increase access to legitimacy within dominant social contexts (McIntosh, 1989; Tatum, 1997). While these frameworks provide useful insight into how privilege operates, they are situated in Western conceptualisations of identity that do not fully account for the relational and whakapapa-based nature of Māori belonging. For individuals with MPCH, Pākehā identity is an inherent component that can be strategically utilised to mitigate overt marginalisation and increase manoeuvrability within colonial frameworks. However, this mobility does not ensure automatic or unburdened acceptance. It instead positions individuals with MPCH within new parameters of assessment, where legitimacy is shaped by shifting expectations and forms of surveillance.

Scholarship on white normativity and privilege shows that proximity to dominant norms reshapes patterns of scrutiny once individuals with MPCH become socially legible.

Frankenberg (1993) describes whiteness as a normative position that structures everyday social expectations within colonial environments. McIntosh (1989) conceptualises privilege as an implicit system of advantage for those read as aligning with dominant norms, reducing exposure to surveillance and the need to prove legitimacy. Within racialised societies, this proximity is assessed through physical and behavioural cues that signal alignment with whiteness, influencing how individuals are perceived and treated in institutional and everyday contexts. Tatum (1997) extends this by showing how proximity to whiteness can offer increased credibility and access to resources within colonial power structures.

These conditions are reflected in Aotearoa, where structural racism privileges those positioned as Pākehā within institutional and everyday environments (Came et al., 2021). Individuals with MPCH may at times avoid discrimination when read as aligning with Pākehā norms. However, this proximity does not result in full incorporation into dominant status (McIntosh, 1989). Legitimacy for individuals with MPCH within dominant contexts instead operates along a continuum, where acceptance is partial, conditional, and subject to change rather than clearly secured. As individuals move between social contexts, each carries different expectations and thresholds for acceptability, shaping the level of recognition available. The ability of individuals with MPCH to reduce marginalisation through strategic identity expression does not remove scrutiny, but recalibrates it. Evaluation shifts from overt exclusion to more subtle assessments of alignment with dominant standards. Legitimacy becomes relational and context-dependent. The degree of legitimacy afforded to individuals with MPCH varies according to perceived alignment with dominant norms within each context. These shifting thresholds shape both external perceptions of MPCH and the internal organisation of identity (Tatum, 1997).

Identity Organisation Under Pressure

While proximity to legitimacy may provide mobility in Western contexts, it remains conditional and revocable, requiring the adaptive negotiation and organisation of identity. When recognition operates on conditional or graded terms, individuals navigating multiple cultural worlds develop context-sensitive adjustments to identity expression in response to

how their cultural identity is likely to be perceived. Over time, this calibration reshapes the internal organisation of identity.

Smith (2012) and Mikaere (2003) argue that colonial classification systems continue to constrain Indigenous identities by privileging hierarchical norms that conflict with relational Māori ways of being. Within social systems organised around these norms, such as Aotearoa, individuals whose identities do not align may be pressured to adapt in ways that prioritise legitimacy and acceptance to achieve recognised forms of success. This process may come at the cost of constraining or devaluing aspects of Indigenous identity.

These pressures extend beyond structural positioning, producing internal tensions around the negotiation and valuation of identity. Paringatai (2016) emphasises that when individuals are perceived as belonging to a dominant group, they may be expected to abandon marginalised aspects of their identity in exchange for conditional advantages. For individuals with MPCH, this creates pressure to manage how much of their Māori and Pākehā identities are made visible across contexts. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013) conceptualise cultural labour as the ongoing navigation of identity within inequitable social frameworks, highlighting the psychological cost of adaptive social positioning, where access does not cancel out burden but can intensify it through increased self-monitoring and regulation.

To understand how identity is organised in response to these pressures, situational ethnicity provides a useful framework. Situational ethnicity provides a framework for understanding how individuals organise identity across social environments, anticipating how they will be perceived within each context (Okamura, 1981). Identity modulation becomes a patterned internal orientation, where aspects of the self are foregrounded or subdued according to learned expectations of acceptance. Over time, these understandings become embedded within self-concept, shaping how individuals choose to express their cultural hybridity in environments governed by dominant norms. Whether this organisation is experienced as empowering or constraining depends on how it aligns with one's desired cultural identification. Regardless of whether coherence or strain is felt, this internal process remains a persistent reality for wāhine Māori–Pākehā.

Building on this, Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre (1997) describe adaptive identity strategy as the immediate and responsive adjustment of identity in response to shifting social contexts. While situational ethnicity reflects a patterned orientation to familiar environments, adaptive identity strategy operates as a real-time appraisal of shifting social dynamics. New

environments carry uncertain acceptance, placing this monitoring on high alert, while even familiar contexts remain open to fluctuation. When expectations of adherence to dominant norms shift, individuals may rapidly reorganise the visibility of identity components within the self. This involves a rapid, often unconscious assessment shaped by the early internalisation of hierarchical norms within Aotearoa's colonial context. Over time, this repeated process can produce cumulative strain, particularly as individuals reconcile these shifts with their broader sense of cultural alignment.

As identity becomes increasingly context-dependent, sustaining a unified sense of self under colonial pressures becomes central to psychological well-being. Ward et al. (2018) distinguish between hybrid and alternating identity styles as differing methods of identity organisation. Hybrid identity styles reflect an integrated structure where multiple cultural identities are held in alignment. In contrast, alternating identity styles involve a division of identities, activated separately depending on context. Hybrid identity styles are associated with more positive psychological outcomes, while alternating identity styles are linked to greater strain, as repeatedly reorganising the self to meet shifting expectations may intensify cumulative pressure. For individuals with MPCH, these pressures shape whether identity is experienced as coherent or divided. This internal organisation shapes how MPCH is expressed in everyday contexts.

Identity Expression Under Observation

While 'Identity Organisation under Pressure' examined how MPCH is organised internally, these dynamics also shape how identity is expressed in everyday interaction. Situational ethnicity, adaptive identity strategies, and hybrid versus alternating identity styles extend beyond this internal lens, shaping how MPCH is expressed externally. Cultural hybridity becomes visible in how individuals assert, withhold, or recalibrate aspects of identity across social contexts.

Behaviourally, identity organisation becomes visible in how wāhine Māori–Pākehā respond to different social contexts through shifts in language, behaviour, and cultural expression. Situational ethnicity (Okamura, 1981) and adaptive identity strategies (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997) help explain how these responses are shaped, reflecting both patterned adjustments within familiar environments and more immediate recalibration in

response to changing social cues. These responses are further shaped by broader patterns of identity organisation, where hybrid identity styles support more integrated expression and alternating styles involve more compartmentalised forms of presentation (Ward et al., 2018). Together, these shifts illustrate how MPCH is actively negotiated within environments structured by uneven recognition.

Māori and mana wāhine scholarship reframes these dynamics not as burden but as resilience (Durie, 2001; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). While colonial standards shape how legitimacy is assessed and require identity to be organised and enacted strategically, Māori scholarship positions this modulation as a cultural strength. Durie (2001) conceptualises bicultural competence as the capacity to maintain cultural alignment while moving fluidly between Māori and Pākehā worlds. This reflects an integrated internal structure where multiple cultural reference points are held without fragmentation. Although emerging within colonial constraints, it signals Māori resilience in sustaining cultural integrity under pressure. Pihama (2001) emphasises self-determination as vital in sustaining cultural identity in marginalising environments, while Simmonds (2011) highlights relational awareness as enabling wāhine to uphold integrity within layered expectations. These perspectives show that the ability to navigate multiple cultural contexts without surrendering cultural grounding reflects the enduring strength of MPCH within systems where recognition remains uneven.

Navigating Visibility reveals how Māori–Pākehā identity is shaped within hierarchical systems of recognition. Proximity to colonial legitimacy, internal identity organisation, and strategic behavioural expression shape the conditions under which belonging is recognised and enacted. While visibility can offer forms of acceptance, it can also be experienced as a double-edged tension between belonging and incoherence. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, the ability to employ necessary survival strategies without compromising a sense of self reflects wāhine strength, while also creating space to question the structures that necessitate these strategies.

Challenging Contested Access

Access to belonging for wāhine Māori–Pākehā can be shaped not only through invisibility and negotiated visibility, but also through the structures that regulate who is recognised as

legitimate. Legitimacy is contested through processes of symbolic inclusion, visual assessment, and fractional measures of Indigenous identity.

Performed Equity

Biculturalism is widely promoted as evidence of partnership and postcolonial maturity, positioned as a commitment to Te Tiriti and recognition of Māori as tangata whenua (Bell, 2006; Smith, 2012). Despite this framing, biculturalism is often understood as operating symbolically, while colonial power structures remain intact. In this context, inclusion can become performative, offering reassurance of equity without delivering substantive structural change. Biculturalism is interpreted by Māori scholars not as reparation for colonial harm, but as sustaining colonial authority under the guise of partnership. Smith (2012) argues that recognition-based frameworks such as biculturalism remain embedded within the epistemic structures they claim to reform, projecting responsiveness while underlying power distributions remain intact. Bell (2006) shows how the language of partnership can recast inequity as collaboration. Genuine partnership would require dismantling governance structures and rebuilding them through collaboration with Kaupapa Māori principles. Instead, biculturalism retains Western institutional framing, incorporating Māori participation without altering underlying structures. Bicultural partnership can become a narrative device that softens visible inequity without disrupting the systems that sustain it.

Beyond institutional design, biculturalism also operates as a mechanism of settler self-understanding, shaping how settlers perceive themselves and their nation. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013) characterise this as settler benevolence, where gestures of goodwill, such as bicultural policy, coexist with reluctance to confront colonial harm. These gestures can attempt to reconcile colonial guilt and sustain a moral self-image, perpetuating forms of ignorance that obscure ongoing systemic inequity. Biculturalism therefore can operate as both a political framework that reinforces colonial authority and a psychological buffer that reassures settler society through a narrative of progress, while power distributions remain structurally continuous.

This framing can produce wider political consequences. Meer and Modood (2012) suggest that symbolic recognition can diminish urgency for structural reform, functioning as an apparent substitute for equitable redistribution. Came et al. (2021) warn that in Aotearoa,

surface-level bicultural practices risk reinforcing Indigenous marginalisation by creating the impression that justice has been achieved. When progress is narrated as complete, momentum toward deeper transformation may slow, positioning symbolic acknowledgement as a ceiling on change rather than a catalyst. Biculturalism can therefore be understood as a system of managed inclusion. One way these dynamics become visible is through the visual interpretation of identity, where belonging may be assessed through racial legibility.

Racial Legibility

Appearance and external presentation operate as an unspoken threshold of racial legibility within Aotearoa (Harris et al., 2012). In contexts where either Māori or Pākehā are dominant, identity is often subject to implicit visual scanning upon entry. While these dynamics emerge from distinct rationales, both Māori and Pākehā contexts can rely on appearance as a cue of legitimacy. Belonging becomes contingent on visible conformity, with identities outside social expectations more likely to be scrutinised.

Colonial governance embedded classification systems that organised populations into racialised hierarchies, establishing race as a visible and administratively legible distinction. Identity became regulated through census recording, legal definitions, and related practices that linked belonging to observable markers. Smith (2012) argues that colonial systems of classification fragment Indigenous identities into governable categories. Relational understandings of whakapapa were reshaped as Western classification systems took precedence, with external appearance becoming a visible marker of belonging. Colonial governance structured hierarchies through visible markers of difference, legitimising unequal access based on racialised distinctions. Hokowhitu (2004) and Pihama (2001) show how Māori bodies have been read and interpreted through colonial and political lenses. This logic continues to treat appearance as evidence of identity, shaping how belonging is visually interpreted and judged.

Socially assigned ethnicity explains the interpersonal dynamics of visual identity classification. Harris et al. (2012) show that visible characteristics often take precedence over self-identification in ethnic categorisation. Applied to MPCH, this positions the body as a site of divided evaluation in tension with internally formed hybrid identity. In practice, individuals are often assigned to the culture they most closely present as externally, with

limited recognition of whakapapa or cultural affiliation. Such assignments can carry stereotyping, marginalisation, and assumptions about intent, legitimacy, and cultural fluency. For those who externally present as culturally hybrid, classification becomes less straightforward, inviting heightened scrutiny and implicit forms of ‘admission testing’. Across these variations, socially assigned ethnicity reveals how visual classification privileges appearance legibility over complexity.

Visual and behavioural cues have also functioned as boundary-setting practices within Māori contexts to safeguard cultural affiliation and resist superficial claims of belonging. Borell (2005) notes that Māori identity may be measured against appearance or behavioural cues that signal legitimacy within Māori spaces. These expectations can operate as protective mechanisms in response to dispossession and appropriation. However, reliance on recognition as evidence of belonging can reinforce appearance-based thresholds. These dynamics show how protective strategies remain shaped by colonial conditions that continue to contest and regulate Māori identity. Beyond visual interpretation, colonial regulation of belonging also operates through numerical classification, where Indigenous identity is assessed through fractional measures of affiliation.

Blood Quantum Logic

Indigenous belonging is often subject to fractional thresholds, where identity is translated into quantifiable terms such as percentages or proportions of ancestry. As a result, following visual assessment, Māori identity may be subjected to further scrutiny, where belonging is interrogated through fractional or percentage measures of affiliation. Under these conditions, identity is not only visually assessed but recalculated through systems that compress whakapapa into numerical form. This shift from appearance to percentage reframes Māori identity through a lens of colonial measurability (Kukutai, 2004; Mikaere, 2003).

Colonial categorisation contributed to the development of systems that divided Indigenous identities into administratively manageable categories, making identity legible to colonial authority (Smith, 2012). Over time, these frameworks influenced how whakapapa, traditionally relational and complex, came to be interpreted through criteria that prioritise blood quantum and percentage as markers of legitimacy. Belonging has come to be evaluated according to perceived dilution or purity across generations. Mikaere (2003) similarly critiques blood-based definitions of Māori identity, arguing that fractional measurement can

distort whakapapa and shift its grounding away from collective, intergenerational responsibility toward more biologically framed understandings.

Kukutai (2004) shows how these logics continue in contemporary Aotearoa, particularly for those with MPCH, whose identities are often constrained within frameworks that struggle to capture layered affiliations. Barker (2011) describes blood quantum as a threshold that establishes fixed percentage criteria, ensuring that over generations, fewer descendants remain eligible for recognised Indigenous status. In this way, blood quantum extends beyond immediate classification, contributing to the gradual reduction of recognised Indigenous populations across generations. Walker (2004) challenges this logic, asserting that Indigenous identity is relational and dynamic, rather than reducible to genetic measures. Although blood quantum emerged within colonial governance (Smith, 2012), Māori communities have been required, and in some contexts continue to engage with percentage-based criteria to secure recognition and political authority (Kukutai, 2004). This engagement reflects the pervasiveness of colonial regulation and the necessity of operating within imposed systems, even where such participation may appear as endorsement.

Challenging Contested Access examines how Indigenous belonging is regulated through overlapping systems of legitimacy testing. Symbolic inclusion through bicultural discourse, visual interpretation through racial legibility, and fractional measurement through blood quantum shape who is recognised as legitimately Māori. While operating through different forms of evaluation, these systems reflect the enduring influence of colonial frameworks that continue to regulate Indigenous identity. Regulation does not end at structural access. It extends into expectations around how Māori identity is expressed, shaping the boundaries of cultural authenticity.

Challenging Cultural Policing

Cultural authenticity can become subject to social and internal policing in response to the contested access outlined in the previous section, shaping how belonging is interpreted and enacted within Māori contexts. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this means that connection to Māoritanga is negotiated not only through colonial systems, but also through expectations within Māori spaces about how identity is expressed and recognised. These dynamics can influence who feels able to claim or enact cultural identity, and under what conditions.

Tradition Tension

Traditional Māori practices can, in some contexts, be treated as a reference point for measuring cultural connection (Mead, 2016; Mikaere, 2003; Walker, 2004). This framing can at times equate authenticity with the replication of inherited practices, positioning contemporary expressions as potentially vulnerable to being interpreted as cultural dilution. Such perspectives may shape how culture is understood, influencing how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience and are assessed in relation to cultural legitimacy.

Māori scholarship critiques interpretations of tikanga that treat it as fixed or prescriptive, suggesting that such framings may reflect colonial influence rather than Indigenous epistemology. Walker (2004) highlights that colonial governance rendered Māori culture more manageable by recasting it into simplified, static forms. These interpretations can inform internal benchmarks of cultural authenticity within some Māori contexts. Mikaere (2003) critiques the reduction of tikanga to prescriptive formats, emphasising its grounding in relational accountability and contextual responsiveness. Mead (2016) argues that the resilience of tikanga lies in its capacity to evolve in response to changing contexts. From this perspective, adaptation may reflect vitality rather than compromise.

These dynamics are particularly evident where access to mātauranga Māori has been unevenly maintained. Durie (2001) and Walker (2004) observe that colonial disruption of intergenerational knowledge transmission has contributed to variation in Māori lived experience. When measures of authenticity are applied without accounting for this variation, those reconnecting to culture may be positioned as lacking. These expectations can be embedded through implicit judgements about what constitutes sufficient Māori cultural immersion to be recognised as Māori (Borell, 2005; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005; Smith, 2012). Where authenticity standards are perceived as intimidating or difficult to attain, some may withdraw as a form of self-protection. In this way, expectations may unintentionally distance individuals from cultural connection, reflecting the enduring effects of assimilative conditions (Durie, 1998a; Walker, 2004).

The potential for apprehension toward adapting tikanga has emerged from historically informed concerns. Colonial assimilation policies influenced the reinterpretation of Māori epistemologies through translation into Western frameworks (Smith, 2012; Walker, 2004).

Maintaining clearer boundaries around tikanga can therefore function as a form of protection against further distortion. While the intentions behind more fixed interpretations of tikanga are understandable, more essentialised framings may, in some cases, reproduce colonial logics by positioning culture as fixed or unchanging, which may limit access for those unable to meet these expectations. This aligns with broader theoretical critiques of essentialism that highlight how fixed cultural definitions can constrain identity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). These tensions highlight potential limitations across approaches: unrestrained reinterpretation may risk detachment from cultural foundations, while more fixed applications may constrain tikanga's relevance across diverse Māori realities. Framing adaptation as grounded evolution rather than dilution allows tikanga to remain relationally intact while reflecting contemporary realities.

Cultural revitalisation adds further complexity to these tensions. While resurgence plays a critical role in restoring tino rangatiratanga (Durie, 1998a; Smith, 2012; Walker, 2004), it may, in some contexts, contribute to cultural markers being treated as symbols of survival, establishing boundaries to safeguard against misappropriation and support collective resurgence. As Borell (2005) suggests, protective strategies shaped by racialised histories can influence Indigenous belonging. When cultural recovery becomes closely tied to visible markers of authenticity, this may generate pressure to monitor cultural expression in ways that align with these expectations. In such contexts, space for personal nuance and adaptation can become more constrained. These tensions are further shaped by colonial transformations of gender relations, which influenced whose voices and authority were recognised within Māori cultural spaces.

Gendered Silencing

Colonial intervention unsettled Māori gender balance, reshaping systems of authority and knowledge through the embedding of patriarchal norms (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). Leadership and legitimacy were often shaped through male-centred ideologies, influencing the conditions under which wāhine leadership and voice were recognised.

Mana wāhine scholarship has been pivotal in examining how colonial power reshaped Māori gender relations. Pihama (2001) argues that colonisation introduced hierarchical gender norms that diverged from Māori relational worldviews, contributing to the marginalisation of

wāhine voices and authority. These changes reflected Victorian and Christian patriarchal ideals that positioned men as leaders and women as subordinate. This restructuring was further shaped through privileging written record-keeping and historiography over oral and relational modes of knowledge transmission (Smith, 2012). As colonial anthropologists documented Māori society through Eurocentric frameworks, wāhine knowledge, particularly in reproduction, menstruation, and childbirth, was often excluded from institutional records (Mikaere, 2003; Salmond, 1991; Smith, 2012). Silencing can therefore be understood as operating not only through overt removal, but also through the devaluing of wāhine knowledge that did not align with colonial criteria for preservation.

The legacy of this restructuring continues to shape contemporary tensions around gender balance in recognition and authority. Paringatai (2016) emphasises that wāhine participation within Māori cultural environments is shaped by tensions between te ao Māori gender perspectives and enduring colonial gender hierarchies in Aotearoa. For wāhine Māori, restoring leadership within cultural spaces may involve navigating colonially influenced expectations that shape how authority is interpreted and recognised. This can create uneven conditions, where wāhine authority is not always consistently acknowledged.

Western feminist movements further complicated Māori gender relations. While challenging male dominance within European societies, colonial feminism projected Eurocentric assumptions onto Māori contexts, overlooking Indigenous gender systems and reinforcing reductive narratives of wāhine authority (Mikaere, 2019; Smith, 2012). These framings often did not account for the diversity and complexity within Māori gender relations (Pihamā, 2001), contributing to ongoing debates over wāhine voice and authority in cultural and political spaces.

Māori scholarship cautions against reducing tikanga to an inherently patriarchal form (Mikaere, 2019; Smith, 2012). Evidence from diverse iwi and hapū contexts shows that wāhine have maintained leadership and decision-making authority. Rather than reflecting a consistently hierarchical structure, contemporary efforts to recover wāhine voice show that some traditions relating to gender were maintained while others were marginalised or lost. Within this terrain, broadening what is heard and recognised becomes an act of reclaiming mana and renegotiating wāhine positionality. Beyond shaping authority within cultural spaces, these dynamics also influence how Māori identity is monitored and evaluated in everyday contexts.

Authenticity Surveillance

Indigenous identity formation under colonial conditions can become a contested and policed terrain (Smith, 2012). As Māori culture has been appropriated and commodified through colonial processes, heightened attention to what counts as appropriate cultural expression can develop (Moon & Derby, 2018). While intended to safeguard cultural integrity, such monitoring can, in some contexts, become more regulatory, shaping who can claim belonging and how identity is expressed.

Authenticity becomes a key mechanism through which belonging is evaluated, shaping who is recognised as legitimate and who is excluded from social acceptance. Smith (2012) offers an Indigenous analysis of this process, noting that authenticity debates often emerge as Indigenous peoples seek to re-establish cultural autonomy within post-colonial contexts. However, these debates can remain entangled in colonial logics that hierarchise identity and perpetuate division. In this way, authenticity may shift from relational accountability to the assessment of worthiness, repositioning belonging from lived practice to monitored performance.

Authenticity surveillance is further shaped by the legacy of cultural appropriation. Moon and Derby (2018) highlight the selective adoption of Māori cultural forms within dominant institutions, often stripped of context and deployed to signal superficial inclusivity. Efforts to safeguard cultural integrity have, in some contexts, led to more focused monitoring of expression to differentiate meaningful engagement from commodified performance. Although necessary, these safeguards can make reconnection more daunting, particularly for those whose access to culture has been disrupted.

Within Māori spaces, recognition and validation can shape how authenticity is negotiated. Paringatai (2016) argues that participation in cultural practice does not automatically confer belonging. Belonging is mediated through the recognition of others within the community, shaped by hierarchy, perceived competence, and intent. Authenticity is therefore determined not only by cultural knowledge or engagement, but also by how one is read and received within a relational space. Because levels of cultural immersion vary among individuals with MPCH, this negotiation can involve heightened scrutiny. Efforts to engage may be interpreted not as learning in progress but as tests of legitimacy, particularly where presentation or partial knowledge falls short of perceived expectations. In such contexts, incomplete fluency may be interpreted as inauthenticity rather than part of reconnection.

Cultural policing often operates within contested cultural spaces, where visibility can amplify judgement regardless of intent. Moon and Derby (2018) show how foundational expressions of Māori culture can become sites of tension following their appropriation within institutional contexts. Pepeha, for example, has in some cases become a way of signalling support for Māori culture without necessarily reflecting relational depth or lived connection. This history of appropriation can narrow the space between respectful engagement and perceived entitlement, resulting in closer scrutiny of understanding and intention. Individuals with MPCH, positioned across varying levels of cultural connection, can be particularly exposed within these dynamics. This policing is not simply interpersonal but can also be understood as a response to histories of dispossession and survival (Pihama, 2001). Cultural surveillance has intensified in response to genuine threats to Indigenous continuity; however, when it extends beyond protective intent, it may risk undermining the resurgence it seeks to safeguard.

Challenging Cultural Policing reveals how Māori identity can become subject to layered forms of cultural regulation. Expectations around how Māoritanga should be expressed, gendered constraints on authority, and intensified authenticity surveillance shape the conditions under which belonging is recognised and enacted. While many of these mechanisms emerge from efforts to protect cultural integrity following histories of dispossession, they can also produce pressures that narrow the space for diverse Māori experiences. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, the capacity to question these expectations reflects ongoing processes of cultural engagement and redefinition, creating space for more self-determined expressions of identity.

Embodying Generational Continuity

Previous sections examined the structural and social forces that shape Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH). This section turns to how cultural identity becomes embodied across different life stages and contexts for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, focusing on early vulnerabilities, relational influences, and generational motivations that shape how cultural hybridity is lived and sustained.

Vulnerable Development

Early life stages such as childhood and adolescence are critical periods where cultural identity begins to take shape within broader social and environmental conditions (Durie, 1998a; Smith, 2012). Within Pākehā-dominant environments such as Aotearoa, these spaces do not always support the secure development of Māori dimensions of self, particularly in spaces where access to conditions that enable cultural expression and embodiment is limited. Identity formation can unfold in settings where Western norms are positioned as primary and Māori culture is rendered secondary or peripheral. When these dynamics persist, Indigenous belonging may be approached with caution rather than assumed as a foundation of identity, shaping Māori affiliation through a sense of vulnerability.

Education systems are a key site for identity formation in childhood and adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Smith (2012) highlights how schooling environments can privilege Western forms of knowledge over Indigenous forms, shaping the conditions within which cultural identity develops. Within these environments, Māori identity can become context-bound, acceptable only in limited forms, while Māori-centred frameworks sit outside the dominant norm. Children learn which aspects of themselves are socially rewarded (Bourdieu, 1977), which within Pākehā-dominant contexts may position prioritising Pākehā affiliation as a strategy for acceptance. For children with MPCH whose identities do not fit neatly within racialised categories, early categorisation within colonial institutions can constrain safe expression. Because part of their identity aligns with the dominant standard, blending into Pākehā social structures may become a form of self-preservation, particularly where supportive conditions are inconsistent.

Māori identity for children and adolescents is shaped not only through institutional regulation, but through everyday processes of racialisation. As Borell (2005) notes, Māori identity is often read through visible and behavioural cues, reinforcing assumptions about cultural legitimacy. During formative years, these readings influence emerging understandings of belonging. Repeated exposure to external judgement is a common feature of Aotearoa's racial landscape for some individuals. When these judgements are not buffered by affirming cultural connections (Durie, 1998b) or understood within broader power dynamics, they may be internalised, constraining secure integration. Over time, children learn to monitor their expression of Māoritanga and adjust their visibility according to context. This restraint reflects not disengagement from culture, but a prioritisation of safety within

environments that signal risk. Durie's model of Māori wellbeing (Durie, 1998b), extended by Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013), emphasises that without cultural grounding and collective affirmation in formative years, identity consolidation may remain fragile, shaping a cautious style of cultural connection.

Wāhine Māori may be particularly vulnerable within these dynamics. Pihama (2001) argues that colonial and patriarchal forces have shaped wāhine Māori voice, behaviour, and self-perception from a young age. For young wāhine Māori, intersecting racialised and gendered expectations can make the development of secure cultural and gender confidence more difficult during formative years (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). Gendered scrutiny can further weaken the foundations upon which cultural embodiment is later built. As individuals move beyond these environments, increasing autonomy may create opportunities to renegotiate cultural identity on more self-determined terms.

Self-Rangatiratanga

Cultural identity evolves across different life stages and contexts as individuals gain greater autonomy over the social and institutional domains they inhabit (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1990). Within MPCH, adulthood can represent a shift from identities shaped by external demands toward identities defined on one's own terms. This transition reflects expanded agency, allowing individuals to move from negotiating their MPCH identity to inhabiting it with greater intention.

Hall's (1990) conceptualisation of identity as a process of becoming provides a framework for understanding this cultural evolution. Identity is not anchored to a single moment but continually reformulated through social and relational contexts. Cultural confidence may strengthen in adulthood as individuals gain distance from environments that fragmented their identities and develop greater agency over the worlds they inhabit. This shift reflects increased autonomy within MPCH, enabling movement away from externally shaped identity toward more intentional embodiment.

MPCH identity integration is not automatically achieved in adulthood. Growing up within Western developmental contexts can fragment identity, meaning coherence is not automatically achieved with maturity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Research shows that some individuals continue to experience their cultural hybridity as conflicting rather than

compatible (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Although identity consolidation is associated with improved wellbeing, the capacity to achieve coherence remains shaped by access to supportive resources (Ward et al., 2018). Coherence may require individuals to navigate structural barriers, develop critical awareness of their environments, and seek out spaces that affirm and stabilise their MPCH. Identity integration is not the resolution of MPCH, but the capacity to embody it with intention.

Māori scholarship situates MPCH integration as a relational process enacted within enduring colonial inequity. Durie (1998b) emphasises that Māori wellbeing in bicultural contexts involves engaging across cultural worlds while maintaining cultural integrity. This engagement unfolds within contexts where access remains uneven, both between Māori and Pākehā and within Māori communities due to historical dislocation and disrupted cultural transmission. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, identity coherence in adulthood does not occur on equal footing. Unequal conditions within Aotearoa mean coherence may involve the intentional strengthening of Māori identity to counterbalance colonial asymmetry. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2013) argue that self-definition as Māori is central to wellbeing where identity continues to be shaped and evaluated. How MPCH is embodied under these conditions influences the extent to which identity can be lived with coherence. As coherence strengthens, identity expression may extend beyond self-definition toward responsibilities grounded in whakapapa and intergenerational continuity.

Whakapapa Accountability

Cultural embodiment can deepen through intergenerational responsibility, particularly as individuals step into parenting or caregiving roles (Durie, 1998b; Pihama, 2001). Cultural hybridity may begin with a search for external validation, shift toward intentional self-authorship as agency increases in adulthood, and evolve into a sense of responsibility to sustain culture beyond the self. This trajectory reframes MPCH as a lived practice grounded in accountability to future generations.

Motherhood, within mana wāhine scholarship, is a critical space of cultural responsibility. Pihama (2001) identifies the obligations wāhine Māori hold to nurture and protect whānau and the wider Māori community. This extends beyond biological reproduction to everyday practices that sustain identity and belonging. Motherhood can become a culturally embedded

responsibility that intensifies the imperative for embodied cultural connection. Simmonds (2011) frames mana wāhine as intrinsically relational, grounded in obligations to others rather than individual prioritisation. The convergence of motherhood and mana wāhine can heighten the drive for cultural immersion, grounded in commitment to whānau and future generations.

Māori philosophical and wellbeing frameworks clarify the intergenerational nature of this responsibility. Durie (1998b) conceptualises whakapapa as a living relational system upheld through collective accountability for cultural continuity. From this perspective, identity is not solely inherited or self-defined, but reinforced through engagement with ancestral legacies and responsibilities to future generations. He further emphasises that Māori wellbeing is closely connected to alignment with collective and intergenerational commitments within te ao Māori. These perspectives position individuals as cultural custodians accountable to both ancestors and descendants. Parenting can become a pivotal life stage where cultural identity is more deeply embodied and sustained.

Intergenerational responsibility may also operate as a mechanism of cultural repair and resurgence. Smith (2012) argues that Indigenous self-determination involves reclaiming narrative, where individuals shaped by disruption reconstruct their own stories. Within this framework, motherhood can become a site where disconnection is reworked into renewed commitments to cultural continuity. This aligns with mana wāhine scholarship that positions wāhine as central to relational resurgence and collective restoration (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). Custodianship may foster a desire to safeguard the next generation from assimilatory pressures. Decisions regarding cultural immersion for children can function as forms of resistance by challenging dominant norms and affirming Māori legitimacy (Durie, 2001). Cultural transmission becomes both a restorative and protective practice, grounded in accountability to sustain and uplift Māori culture.

Embodying Generational Continuity shows that culture is not simply inherited but actively carried forward through responsibility across generations. Vulnerable development, the emergence of self-rangatiratanga, and whakapapa accountability together shape how cultural identity is strengthened and carried forward. This positions wāhine to embody MPCH with authority, grounding cultural hybridity as a lived expression of mana wāhine within contemporary Aotearoa.

Embodying Hybrid Authority

Earlier sections examined how Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH) is shaped through invisibility, negotiated visibility, and contested belonging. This section turns to how cultural hybridity can be embodied as a form of authority grounded in lived experience, relational responsibility, and mana wāhine. It explores how wāhine Māori draw on mana wāhine frameworks, relational leadership, and self-determined identity to move cultural hybridity from a site of regulation toward a position of cultural authority and agency.

Innovative Māoritanga

Wāhine Māori are active agents in the resurgence and reinterpretation of contemporary Māori culture (Pihama, 2021; Simmonds, 2011). Mana wāhine theory places wāhine Māori at the centre of cultural reclamation, recognising their leadership as both resistance to colonial disruption and continuation of ancestral mana. Pihama (2021) explains that mana wāhine reaffirms the grounding of wāhine within tikanga, mātauranga, and te reo Māori across past, present, and future. Anchored in these foundations, mana wāhine enables adaptive responses to contemporary realities that remain culturally grounded while reflecting the lived experiences of wāhine today.

Mana wāhine resurgence is visible across multiple domains in Aotearoa society. Adapting traditional values to changing social landscapes is central to contemporary Māori leadership (Pihama, 2021). Across digital platforms, creative industries, education, and entrepreneurship, wāhine are reshaping where Māoritanga is enacted and expressed. The flourishing of tikanga within these domains can be understood as a form of decolonial cultural hybridity, where leadership does not abandon tradition to fit colonial structures, but reimagines how tikanga is upheld within spaces shaped by both Māori and Pākehā influence. Cultural innovation is a collective effort, but mana wāhine scholarship highlights that wāhine hold a distinct role, particularly within relational knowledge transmission and leadership.

Sacred symbols of Māori culture can function as sites of contemporary resurgence (Wana, 2022). The increased visibility of moko kauae and tā moko reflects renewed pride and self-determination to publicly embody Māoritanga. The resurgence of moko kauae illustrates how wāhine are reclaiming visible markers of identity, strengthening Indigenous identity and

leadership grounded in Māori values (Wana, 2022). While motivations for receiving tā moko vary, their growing presence signals adaptive continuity. The normalisation of these markers may soften scrutiny placed on those reclaiming culture, making embodied identity feel more accessible and less restricted. Traditional forms of expression grounded in whakapapa are mobilised within contemporary identity journeys, representing the living embodiment of tikanga.

The extension of mana wāhine into structural and constitutional domains further highlights the role of wāhine Māori in contemporary revitalisation. Mana wāhine authority has been enacted within political and institutional arenas, where wāhine Māori have challenged colonial governance while remaining grounded in tikanga. This work has not simply elevated wāhine Māori within hierarchical systems, but has also contributed to forms of authority that extend beyond colonial structures (Smith, 2012). The Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry (WAI 2700) before the Waitangi Tribunal represents a constitutional intervention where wāhine Māori call the Crown to account for historical and ongoing impacts on wāhine authority, status, and wellbeing in Aotearoa (Waitangi Tribunal, 2017). This inquiry affirms wāhine Māori as decision-making authorities and reinforces mana wāhine as both a relational strength and political force (Pihama, 2021; Simmonds, 2011). In this context, resurgence can be understood as a repositioning of wāhine authority within the constitutional realities of Aotearoa.

Mana Wāhine Leadership

Te ao Māori relies on wāhine leadership to maintain cultural continuity. Mana wāhine frameworks understand leadership as a relational and embodied practice enacted within everyday life rather than through formal ranking or recognition (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). This contrasts with Western hierarchies that emphasise positional power and status, instead prioritising care, memory, and emotional harmony as central forms of leadership.

Colonisation disrupted wāhine authority through patriarchal and marginalising impositions (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001), but wāhine have not been confined to lesser forms of leadership. Sustaining whakapapa continuity across relational domains remains a valued dimension of Māori society where wāhine hold leadership roles. Colonial governance narrowed what counted as authority, privileging formalised structures while discrediting

relational domains as secondary sites of power. Moewaka Barnes (2013) argues that Māori cultural endurance is sustained through relational and collective practices within everyday life. From this perspective, relational leadership is a primary source of mana enhancement and cultural adaptation grounded in intergenerational continuity.

Simmonds (2011) conceptualises wāhine leadership as relational responsibility, where ways of being wāhine such as caring, responsivity, and the maintenance of collective memory are also leadership qualities. Acts within domains where wāhine exercise cultural authority, such as kai preparation, whakapapa record keeping, pūrākau sharing, and modelling tikanga, operate as sites of cultural leadership led through presence rather than imposition. These practices position relational responsibility not as supportive labour, but as the core of mana-enhancing leadership.

For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, relational responsibility can take on additional layers that are neither automatic nor obligatory. Positioned between cultural worlds shaped by colonial disruption and reconnection (Smith, 2012), some act as conduits within their whānau, assuming leadership roles in the circulation and protection of mātauranga. The extent of this involvement depends on the forms of cultural hybridity within the family and differing levels of cultural connection across generations. Whānau dynamics and the wāhine's desire to extend her cultural journey into her wider family shape how much she wants to lead relational kaupapa within her context (Pihama, 2001). Everyday spaces such as kitchens, living rooms, and marae function as sites of knowledge transmission, resembling modern-day whare wānanga where knowledge is circulated and embedded into daily life (Durie, 1998b). Alongside these relational forms of leadership, embodying MPCH involves an internal shift toward intentional self-definition and agency.

Reclaiming Agency

For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, relational responsibility can take on additional layers that are neither automatic nor expected. Positioned between cultural worlds shaped by disruption and reconnection (Smith, 2012), some may act as conduits within their whānau, contributing to the circulation and protection of mātauranga. The extent of this involvement varies depending on whānau dynamics, levels of cultural connection across generations, and the wāhine's own orientation toward her cultural journey (Pihama, 2001). Everyday spaces such as kitchens,

living rooms, and marae can function as sites of knowledge transmission, resembling contemporary forms of whare wānanga where knowledge is shared and embedded in daily life (Durie, 1998b). Alongside these relational forms of leadership, embodying MPCH also involves an internal shift toward intentional self-definition and agency.

Reclaiming Agency highlights how wāhine Māori–Pākehā embody MPCH as a form of relational authority grounded in mana wāhine. Leadership is enacted not through formal recognition, but through everyday practices that sustain whakapapa, mātauranga, and collective wellbeing. Within this framework, cultural hybridity is not a site of limitation, but a position from which wāhine can exercise agency, contribute to cultural continuity, and shape the conditions under which Māori identity is lived and expressed.

Embodying Hybrid Authority shows that cultural identity is not only carried forward but actively expressed through everyday practices of leadership and care. These experiences show how wāhine Māori–Pākehā come to enact their identities with growing confidence and authority through intentional engagement with culture. This positions wāhine to embody MPCH as a lived expression of mana wāhine within contemporary Aotearoa.

Empirical Landscape of Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Having outlined the key theoretical contributions shaping understandings of the lived experience of wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this section turns to the empirical landscape of Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH). It begins with a brief overview of relevant scholarship across cultural hybridity theory, Māori–Pākehā identity research, and mana wāhine perspectives, before focusing in greater depth on the limited research that directly centres wāhine Māori–Pākehā experiences.

Global and Gendered Cultural Hybridity

Global cultural hybridity scholarship conceptualises identity as relational and negotiated across cultural worlds (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990; Pieterse, 2001). Empirical research extends this by examining how individuals navigate multiple cultural affiliations, highlighting the role of perceived compatibility, context, and external recognition in shaping identity and wellbeing (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Ward et al., 2018). Feminist scholarship

further shows that these experiences are gendered, with women navigating additional layers of expectation and visibility (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Within Aotearoa, scholarship on Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity situates these processes within settler-colonial histories and relational dynamics. Early conceptual work highlights cultural hybridity as challenging colonial binaries (Meredith, 1998), while research in this area shows how Māori identity is negotiated within contested systems of recognition. This work demonstrates that Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity is shaped by both structural expectations and everyday relational experiences.

Mana Wāhine

Mana wāhine scholarship provides a critical lens for understanding how gender shapes Māori identity and cultural authority. This work highlights how colonial patriarchy disrupted wāhine roles while also emphasising pathways of reclamation grounded in relationality, intergenerational knowledge, and cultural continuity (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). However, this literature primarily centres wāhine Māori, with limited attention to how these dynamics intersect with cultural hybridity.

Wāhine Māori–Pākehā

The centring of wāhine Māori–Pākehā experiences has received limited attention within scholarship. Broader research has examined aspects of this multilayered experience through cultural hybridity theory, MPCH scholarship, and mana wāhine research; however, their convergence within wāhine Māori–Pākehā remains underexamined. One of the earliest and most impactful empirical examinations of wāhine Māori mixed identity is Moeke-Maxwell's (2005) qualitative narrative study of bi/multiracial Māori women in Aotearoa. Drawing on interview narratives, her research centres wāhine whose identities span Māori and non-Māori cultural worlds, showing that cultural hybridity is experienced as an ongoing relational process shaped by expectations of belonging and legitimacy. Participants described occupying an in-between space, where lack of full affiliation to either Māori or non-Māori

worlds can expose them to external evaluations of authenticity. This space is both constraining and generative, as wāhine respond to shifting environments while developing a sense of self. Moeke-Maxwell's findings also highlight the potential for agency, with wāhine engaging in cultural reclamation and developing strategies to navigate expectations while maintaining authenticity.

While this work provides an important empirical foundation, relatively little scholarship has followed with a specific focus on wāhine Māori–Pākehā. Existing research often examines cultural hybridity across broader Māori or mixed-identity contexts, with limited attention to this particular intersection. Given that Māori–Pākehā identity is shaped within Aotearoa's settler-colonial context, further research is needed to understand how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience and interpret their cultural hybridity.

Synthesis and Research Gaps

This literature review has examined scholarship on cultural hybridity across global frameworks, Māori–Pākehā identity research, and mana wāhine perspectives. This body of work demonstrates that cultural identity is not fixed but a relational process shaped through historical context, social recognition, and power structures. In Aotearoa, these dynamics are shaped by the enduring effects of settler colonialism, which continue to structure how Māori and Pākehā identities are interpreted within contemporary society.

While each field provides insight into aspects of cultural identity, they rarely converge to examine how these dynamics are experienced within the lives of wāhine Māori–Pākehā. The intersection of cultural hybridity, Māori–Pākehā identity, and mana wāhine perspectives remains underexamined, with these fields largely developing along separate trajectories. Cultural hybridity research often remains broad, Māori–Pākehā scholarship has tended to underexplore gender, and mana wāhine literature centres wāhine Māori without engaging hybrid identity in depth. Few studies bring these strands together.

The development of MPCH across formative life stages is also underexplored. Existing research tends to capture identity at a single point in time, offering limited insight into how cultural hybridity evolves. This gap is particularly significant during formative stages, where identity is most dynamic. Greater attention to these transitions would deepen understanding

of how wāhine Māori–Pākehā move through processes of navigating, challenging, and embodying their cultural hybridity.

This thesis addresses these gaps by examining how wāhine Māori–Pākehā interpret and experience cultural hybridity in contemporary Aotearoa, with attention to how these experiences develop across different stages and contexts. In doing so, it contributes to MPCH scholarship while bringing cultural hybridity theory, Māori–Pākehā identity research, and mana wāhine perspectives into dialogue.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this research. It begins by presenting the Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine philosophical and theoretical foundations that underpin the study. The chapter then outlines the processes of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Attention then shifts to the role of researcher reflexivity and ethical considerations that were used to ensure research rigour. These components come together to provide a clear account of how the research was conducted and how meaning was developed from the data.

This research is underpinned by a methodological approach that is relational and interpretive, grounded in Kaupapa Māori principles and mana wāhine perspectives. This approach shaped how the research was conducted and how participants' lived experiences were understood and interpreted. Reflexive engagement and ethical practice supported a considered and transparent research process, alongside attention to rigour. These methodological foundations position the research to engage meaningfully with the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH). The following chapter builds on this approach by presenting findings that explore how these experiences are lived, negotiated, and expressed.

Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations

Kaupapa Māori Influences

This research is informed by Kaupapa Māori principles that prioritise research approaches grounded in Māori worldviews and knowledge systems (Smith, 2012). Kaupapa Māori research is built on principles of reciprocity, emphasising relational engagement and accountability to the communities from which knowledge is shared. These principles align with broader Māori understandings of self-determination and collective responsibility within whakapapa relationships (Durie, 1998b). As a wāhine Māori–Pākehā researcher, these principles shaped how I approached the research process, which required ongoing reflexive engagement with my own positionality and responsibilities within the research space. This influenced how relationships were formed, how interviews were conducted, and how knowledge was interpreted. This study remained grounded in these principles through the prioritisation of participant pūrākau as the central source of data, understood as a way of sharing lived experience through narrative forms grounded in Māori ways of knowing. This was supported by relational interview approaches grounded in whakawhanaungatanga, alongside a commitment to upholding participant mana and lived realities throughout the research process.

Mana Wāhine Theory

Mana wāhine perspectives are also drawn upon within this research, centring wāhine Māori and their lived experiences of identity and authority. Mana wāhine theory sheds light on the intersection of gender and indigeneity, foregrounding the distinct ways wāhine Māori contend with the effects of colonisation and patriarchy within the contexts that shape their lived experience (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). These perspectives challenge deficit-based framing by emphasising the strength and resilience of mana wāhine, supporting the reclamation of cultural space and authority (Simmonds, 2011). This lens shaped both the focus and interpretation of this research, guiding attention toward the agency and strength of wāhine Māori–Pākehā and their lived realities, without positioning their experiences through limitation or lack. Mana wāhine perspectives are reflected in this research's focus on wāhine Māori–Pākehā, recognising wāhine as active agents who shape their own cultural connections and influence the cultural worlds around them. This also informed how participant narratives

were engaged with, ensuring their voices were centred and interpreted in ways that upheld their authority and lived experience.

Recruitment and Participants

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through social media and personal networks using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). This approach was considered appropriate, as it enabled efficient access to wāhine Māori–Pākehā with relevant lived experience through existing networks, where a strong level of engagement and response was expected. This approach proved effective in generating sufficient participation, with alternative recruitment strategies being available if required.

An advertisement containing the research recruitment poster (see Appendix A) was shared on the researcher's Facebook page and reposted within the researcher's wider networks.

Individuals who saw the advertisement and met the eligibility criteria were invited to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating. Once potential participants expressed interest and were confirmed as eligible, they were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) outlining the study and the expectations of participation, including their rights as participants. Those who agreed to participate were then sent a consent form (see Appendix C) prior to the interview being scheduled. Interviews were arranged once consent forms were returned, ensuring participants were fully informed about the research and their involvement before data collection began.

Participants received a \$50 Prezzy Card as Koha in recognition of the time and knowledge they contributed to the research. Koha was provided either in person or sent electronically following the interview.

Participants

Participants in this research were wāhine who self-identified as having both Māori and Pākehā whakapapa. Pākehā identity was not explicitly defined and was instead understood broadly in relation to settler or European ancestry. Māori identity was not formally verified,

as this would be inconsistent with the relational and self-determined approach underpinning the research.

Eligibility criteria required participants to identify as wāhine Māori–Pākehā, be between the ages of 18–30, and be willing to share their lived experiences of MPCH. Some participants were known to the researcher prior to the interviews through broader social and community connections. A total of six participants were included in the final dataset. Although one participant (Natalie) did not personally whakapapa Māori–Pākehā, she was purposively included because her experiences as a Pākehā mother raising Māori–Pākehā children alongside her Māori husband provided valuable contextual insight into the relational and intergenerational dimensions of Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity. Seven interviews were initially conducted; however, one interview was excluded from the final analysis due to technical issues that affected the reliability of the transcript.

Snowball sampling proved particularly effective, likely due to the relational nature of this approach, where existing connections helped support participant engagement. While participants were known to the researcher, these relationships were not immediate or familial, but reflected broader social and community networks. This was carefully managed through clear discussion of the research purpose and the use of participant data, with particular attention to principles of data sovereignty. The use of relational recruitment also meant that participants' cultural identities were not entirely unknown within these networks, shaping both access to participants and the context in which their experiences were shared.

Participants were located across Auckland, Waikato, and Manawatū-Whanganui regions of Aotearoa. Although all participants shared Māori–Pākehā whakapapa, their individual experiences of cultural hybridity and cultural connection varied depending on their upbringing, family environments, social contexts, and phenotypical appearance.

An unanticipated shared characteristic of the participant group was that five of the six wāhine were mothers. While motherhood was not a recruitment criterion, discussions surrounding parenting and intergenerational cultural connection emerged as a meaningful aspect of several participants' stories.

Data Collection

Data for this research were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with wāhine Māori–Pākehā participants, a method commonly used in qualitative research to explore lived experience in depth (Charmaz, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviewing was chosen as it allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words while still providing sufficient structure to guide the conversation toward the research aims.

An interview schedule (see Appendix D) was developed to guide discussion around MPCH, cultural identity, belonging, and experiences of cultural connection. This provided a flexible framework that allowed interviews to remain responsive to emerging topics while maintaining alignment with the research aims. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences through storytelling and pūrākau and to introduce topics they felt were meaningful. This approach aligned with Kaupapa Māori principles by privileging participant voice and supporting the expression of lived experience through narrative.

At times, the researcher shared personal reflections where appropriate to support relational engagement and rapport, particularly given existing relationships with several participants and the personal nature of the topics discussed. This contributed to a more conversational and relational interview environment, while requiring ongoing reflexive awareness to ensure that the researcher's input supported rather than shaped participants' narratives.

Participants shared their experiences through detailed storytelling and reflection, often drawing on personal memories and lived moments to explain their perspectives. This created a rich and layered interview environment, where meaning was constructed through narrative rather than direct questioning and required careful listening and interpretation to ensure participants' experiences were represented accurately.

Each participant included in the final dataset completed one primary interview. One interview was cut short due to time constraints, and the participant later provided follow-up written responses to clarify and complete aspects of the discussion. This flexibility supported the inclusion of participant voice while maintaining continuity of the dataset.

Interviews were conducted between October 2024 and March 2025 following ethics approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika committee (Application OM2

24/29). Participants were given flexibility to choose the interview format and setting that felt most comfortable. Due to geographical constraints, four interviews were conducted online via Zoom and two were conducted in person at participants' homes.

The use of both formats supported accessibility and participant comfort, although each presented distinct challenges. Interviews conducted in person occasionally involved interruptions, including pauses to attend to children and, in one case, a need to conclude the interview early due to unforeseen circumstances. One in-person interview was also affected by technical issues, where environmental conditions resulted in a partial recording. This was managed through follow-up communication to ensure continuity of the data. While Zoom interviews reduced these practical interruptions, they presented challenges in establishing rapport and relational depth through a screen. These limitations were managed through whakawhanaungatanga and a flexible, conversational approach, which supported participant engagement across both formats.

Time was spent engaging in whakawhanaungatanga prior to each interview to establish relational connection and support a comfortable conversational environment. For participants known to the researcher, this involved reconnecting before the formal interview began. For those not previously known, the interview began with discussion of the research purpose and their interest in participating. This process supported participant comfort and openness, while also requiring careful navigation to maintain appropriate boundaries within the research context. This approach reflects Kaupapa Māori principles that emphasise relationships, trust, and mutual respect within the research process.

Questions were adapted where necessary to align with each participant's experiences and the direction of the conversation. Participants were able to introduce topics that were meaningful to them, and discussions often extended beyond the initial interview schedule as additional experiences emerged. While this flexibility enriched the depth of the data, it required ongoing reflexive awareness to ensure that discussions remained aligned with the research aims.

All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent. Interviews conducted via Zoom were recorded using the Zoom recording function and transcribed in real time using the Otter.ai transcription service. In-person interviews were recorded using the Otter.ai mobile application. Following each interview, transcripts were generated through the transcription software and then manually reviewed and corrected by the researcher to ensure accuracy.

Participants were provided with the opportunity to review their transcripts and approve the content prior to analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and identifying information was removed to protect confidentiality. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely in accordance with ethical requirements.

No written notes were taken during the interviews in order to maintain a natural conversational flow and minimise disruption. Brief reflective notes were taken following each interview to capture initial impressions and emerging ideas, supporting ongoing reflexive engagement throughout the research process.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity, understood as ongoing awareness of how the researcher's background and experiences shape the research process, is a key component of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). In this research, reflexivity was not treated as a separate stage but as an ongoing practice embedded throughout the research process. I engaged with my positionality through reflexive awareness and sustained immersion in the data, with transparency maintained in how interpretations were developed.

This research was conducted during a period of significant personal cultural development. I am a wāhine with both Māori and Pākehā whakapapa, and my engagement with this research unfolded alongside a developing understanding of my own cultural identity and sense of belonging. This broader context shaped my motivation for undertaking this research and the lens through which participants' narratives were interpreted.

My participation in Te Rau Puāwai, a Māori psychology scholarship programme at Massey University, acted as both a catalyst for this research and an ongoing point of connection to my Māori identity throughout the research process. Early experiences within this space were accompanied by uncertainty in how I understood and embodied my whakapapa. These experiences brought the focus of this research into clearer view and informed my sensitivity to themes of cultural connection within participants' accounts.

Experiences across personal and relational contexts also informed my understanding of MPCH. As the research progressed, I became aware that everyday interactions were being viewed through the lens of this research. Sharing the focus of this research within my wider

networks appeared to further shape these experiences, as conversations around cultural identity became more frequent. The research both drew from and contributed to an intensified period of cultural engagement and development in my own cultural identity.

My relationship to the research topic shaped the relational dynamics of the interviews. Several participants were known to me prior to the study, and our shared experience of identifying as Māori–Pākehā appeared to support openness when discussing sensitive aspects of identity and belonging. At the same time, I remained aware of the power dynamics within the researcher–participant relationship and how my positionality may have shaped these interactions.

Ongoing awareness of how my positionality shaped both the research process and the interpretation of findings supported careful and considered engagement with participants' narratives and pūrākau. This required active reflection to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than shaped solely by my own perspective. Rigour was further supported through sustained engagement with the data, with interview transcripts revisited multiple times to allow patterns of meaning to develop across participants' accounts. Transparency in the research process also contributed to this, with data collection procedures and analytic processes clearly outlined to show how interpretations were developed.

Ethical Considerations

This research was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2 (Application OM2 24/29). Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of recruitment and data collection, and all procedures adhered to the ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

Ethical considerations in this research were grounded in established procedural practices. Prior to participation, individuals were provided with a Participant Information Sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and their rights as participants (see Appendix B). Written informed consent was obtained using a consent form prior to interviews (see Appendix C). Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline questions or withdraw from the study prior to data analysis without consequence.

Ethical considerations in this research extended beyond procedural requirements and were guided by relational ethical principles (Smith, 2012). Confidentiality and participant privacy were prioritised throughout the research process. Pseudonyms were assigned, and identifying information was removed from transcripts to protect anonymity. Participants were also given the opportunity to review and approve their transcripts before inclusion in the analysis. However, confidentiality was not understood as a purely technical process. Participants' narratives reflected personal experiences and relationships, meaning that anonymity required careful and ongoing consideration of participants' identities. Within the context of MPCH, sharing experiences of belonging and disconnection carried potential vulnerability, particularly in relation to identity negotiation. This required a relational approach to ethics, where participants' stories were engaged with respectfully and with attention to how they may be understood beyond the research context.

All interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. These procedures ensured that participant information remained confidential and was managed in accordance with approved ethical requirements. In the findings, participants were represented through brief narrative descriptions and the inclusion of AI-generated imagery. These images were developed to support a sense of personhood within the findings and were based on themes, moments, and environments described within participants' narratives, rather than representing specific individuals. Care was taken to ensure that images did not depict identifiable features and were used as interpretive visual representations to complement participants' pūrākau while maintaining participant anonymity.

As a research project informed by Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine perspectives, ethical considerations were also shaped by the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This included a commitment to respect, partnership, and protection throughout the research process, ensuring that participants' voices were upheld and their experiences were represented with care and integrity.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis approach. This qualitative approach was chosen as it allowed for a flexible and

interpretive method for identifying patterns of meaning within the data, while maintaining sufficient structure to guide the analytic process. It was well suited to exploring the lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā, as it supports the development of themes grounded in participants' narratives while recognising the researcher's role in interpreting and constructing meaning.

While reflexive thematic analysis guided the overall analytic process, participants were encouraged to share their experiences through pūrākau, with themes developed from the meanings conveyed within these stories. This use of pūrākau was informed by a narrative orientation, although a full narrative analysis was not undertaken. Rather than analysing the structure of narratives, as outlined by Riessman (2008), the focus remained on the meanings and themes conveyed through participants' stories and how these experiences were expressed across contexts. This supported attention to both shared patterns across participants and the depth of individual narratives, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences.

The analysis broadly followed the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019).

The first phase involved familiarisation with the data. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to support deep engagement with participants' narratives. Initial readings highlighted the length and complexity of the interviews, with conversations often moving across multiple topics and tangents. While this initially presented as challenging to navigate, it became clear that these moments were integral to the relational approach taken, allowing participants the space to express their experiences in depth. These moments often gave rise to more nuanced insights, which became important in shaping the analysis. Preliminary notes were recorded following each interview to capture initial reflections and emerging ideas. Early engagement with the data also prompted reflection on my own positionality, including moments of connection with participants' experiences, as well as instances where differences in cultural confidence and understanding became apparent. These reflections were revisited and refined throughout the analytic process, with understanding continuing to develop across multiple readings of the data.

The second phase involved generating initial codes through close engagement with the interview transcripts. Coding began with an inductive approach, where key ideas and experiences were identified and summarised without the use of a predetermined coding structure. While some patterns were immediately visible, the coding process involved moving back and forward, starting broadly and becoming more focused over time. Determining what was most significant within the data required ongoing engagement, particularly as similar ideas were expressed differently across participants depending on their level of awareness and engagement with MPCH. My own experiences influenced the initial areas of attention, particularly as interview questions were shaped by my understanding of the topic. However, as coding progressed, new ideas and patterns emerged that extended beyond these initial expectations. Codes were revisited and adapted throughout the process, with increasing clarity developing as patterns became more apparent across the dataset.

The third phase involved examining and grouping these patterns into potential themes. The development of themes required careful consideration of how different ideas related to one another. Early groupings were not always clear, with some themes overlapping or not fitting neatly within initial structures. This required ongoing refinement, with patterns revisited and reorganised as understanding of the data developed. Greater clarity emerged when themes were considered as part of a broader process of cultural development rather than as discrete categories. Recognising this relational movement across participants' experiences supported the organisation of themes in a way that reflected progression, variation, and complexity within wāhine Māori–Pākehā.

The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they accurately represented the dataset. This phase required returning to the transcripts and assessing whether the developing themes meaningfully reflected participants' experiences. The process involved moving back and forward between transcripts, codes, and themes, with adjustments made to strengthen coherence and depth of interpretation. Rather than fitting data into fixed categories, themes were refined through repeated engagement with participants' narratives, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in their lived experiences. This iterative process supported a more nuanced understanding of how themes connected and interacted across the dataset.

The fifth phase involved finalising and clearly naming the themes. Naming the themes involved balancing conceptual depth with clarity. Theme titles were developed to capture the

essence of participants' experiences while also being immediately meaningful and engaging. This required ongoing refinement, with names adjusted to reflect both the content of the data and the broader interpretive direction of the research. At this stage, the relational connections between themes became more clearly defined, contributing to the development of a more cohesive conceptual structure.

The final phase involved producing the written analysis. This process began with the development of participant narratives, which foregrounded each wāhine's pūrākau and supported a grounded understanding of their experiences prior to thematic interpretation. Writing these narratives enabled sustained engagement with participants' stories and ensured that their voices remained central throughout the analytic process. As the findings were developed, these narratives acted as an ongoing point of reference, supporting a return to participants' accounts to maintain alignment between interpretation and lived experience. The process of writing also contributed to further interpretation, with new insights continuing to emerge as themes were developed. Themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing scholarship on cultural hybridity, Māori identity, and mana wāhine perspectives. Through this process, a broader relational pattern became evident in how participants described their experiences, reflecting a movement toward increasing cultural confidence. This pattern informed the development of the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework, presented in the discussion chapter as an interpretive model for understanding the relational development of wāhine Māori-Pākehā.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the overall findings of this research in two parts. First, it presents the participant narratives, shared through a pūrākau approach to centre lived experience and storytelling. Each narrative offers insight into how wāhine Māori–Pākehā understand and express their cultural hybridity within their everyday lives. These stories are not presented as analysis but as lived accounts that reflect the complexity and fluidity of cultural hybridity.

These pūrākau then inform the second part of the chapter, which moves into interpretive analysis to identify shared patterns and themes across participants' experiences. This analysis draws attention to points of convergence and divergence across the narratives, tracing how experiences of belonging, tension, and transformation are shaped through different contexts and relationships.

Participant Narratives

This section shares the participant narratives through pūrākau, centring their lived experiences in their own words. The narratives are presented in no particular order, beginning with Sonya, followed by Hana, Natalie, Lexi, Leah, and Rahera. Each pūrākau offers insight into how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experience and make sense of their cultural hybridity across different stages of life, relationships, and environments.

Alongside each narrative is a visual representation created by the researcher. These images reflect key aspects of each participant's pūrākau, capturing the elements that stood out and offering another way of engaging with their stories. These are presented as Figures 1–6 alongside each narrative.

Sonya



Figure 1. Conceptual illustration of participant Sonya, derived from her pūrākau.

Sonya is a devoted mother to a spirited two-year-old son. Born into a family with strong wāhine Māori, she raises her fair-skinned child alongside her Pākehā partner, navigating the balance between her son's Māori and Pākehā worlds.

Sonya's journey begins with a moment of cultural clarity. When asked how she exists as Māori, she replies simply that she is Māori. She enacts tikanga practices with an effortless instinct, such as not cutting her hair while pregnant and speaking te reo Māori with her son at home. Raised by her mother following her parents' separation, her Māori identity has been shaped primarily through the guidance of her tūpuna wāhine.

Her cultural confidence did not emerge without resistance. From a young age, she learned to navigate dual cultural identities. The connectedness she felt during whānau hui at her marae in Wairoa was contrasted with the judgement she experienced when joining high school kapa haka. She recalls feeling compelled to defend her authenticity, to prove she was not just 'a white girl', by naming Māori waiata passed on from her nanny. In Pākehā spaces, she remembers considering road cycling but immediately withdrawing, thinking they would question her presence: "What is this Māori doing here?"

In one of her early teaching roles, anything Māori was devalued. At the time, she did not respond. Over time, she has moved into a work environment that embraces tikanga and celebrates her mātauranga.

Sonya's identity journey has deepened since stepping into motherhood. Having a son with her Pākehā partner has strengthened her commitment to cultural connection, with tikanga becoming an embedded part of her parenting. This includes saying karakia before meals and

using te reo Māori not only with her son but within everyday conversation. Her partner shares this commitment, using phrases such as “haere mai, let’s have some kai” with ease. As Sonya explains, “he can hear me saying it, see me doing it – he knows it is something I am passionate about”.

Sonya embraces both sides of her cultural identity, Māori and Pākehā, with a growing sense of clarity and acceptance.

Hana



Figure 2. Conceptual illustration of participant Hana, derived from her pūrākau.

Hana was guided to develop strong whakapapa roots by her late nanny. As her nanny’s memory began to fade, an intentional handover of knowledge was shared from elder to descendant. Hana was entrusted as the caretaker of her whānau’s mātauranga.

Living as a wāhine whose identity is read differently across contexts, Hana reflects on her ability to move between both Māori and Pākehā spaces. While she sees her ability to code-switch as a privilege, she also acknowledges the emotional burden and external stigma that come with being labelled ‘half-caste’. This includes adopting a ‘white voice’ at work, monitoring her behaviour to avoid ‘angry Māori girl’ labels, and being required to defend her whakapapa. She has found moments of ease within her local softball community, where she can exist without needing to explain or justify her identity. While Hana’s connection to te ao Māori is strong, her marae, once a place of belonging, has become a site of pain since the passing of her nanny. Complex whānau dynamics, including adoption, have contributed to tensions around land and inheritance. Hana continues to embody her nanny’s kōrero, navigating these tensions while maintaining her connection to culture.

At the heart of Hana’s story is the role of motherhood. Her son has become both a mirror and a motivator in her cultural journey. Seeing his growing curiosity for te ao Māori has reignited her desire for learning, with a vision of walking alongside him in Māori empowerment and confidence. Together, they meditate to recordings of her nanny speaking te reo Māori, read bilingual affirmation cards, and maintain a thriving, pesticide-free māra kai. Hana also extends this care outward, supporting other mothers during the newborn stage by sharing the load of parenting so they can rest and reconnect.

Hana continues to shape a path grounded in an authentic expression of mātauranga Māori.

Natalie



Figure 3. Conceptual illustration of participant Natalie, derived from her pūrākau.

Natalie, a Pākehā woman raised in the South Island, and her husband, Daniel, a Māori man with deep ancestral knowledge, are raising three boys. Their whānau relocated to the Waikato to support their shared vision of stability and legacy for their children.

During the early stages of their relationship, Natalie engaged with Daniel’s culture with respect and humility. She recognised the complex perceptions of Pākehā women entering Māori environments, shaped by intergenerational colonial trauma. Rather than remain an outsider, she leaned in with intention, learning tikanga, attending whānau events, and approaching each encounter with sincerity and openness.

Natalie and Daniel’s relationship has revealed cultural contrasts, particularly in their perspectives on marriage, finances, and inherited traditions. Natalie was raised with the belief that owning a home provided a financial legacy for her family, whereas Daniel was raised in alignment with tikanga Māori, with less emphasis on material wealth. While these differences were initially challenging, time, open communication, and mutual sacrifice allowed them to

align their values and strengthen their family unit. Although their perspectives on the importance of marriage differed, they found common ground in a union that felt right to them.

As a proud *māmā* to three boys, Natalie's values are reflected in her parenting, where *whakapapa* and wellbeing are central. Her children represent a culturally hybrid family, ranging from caramel-toned skin to fair complexions. She acknowledges commentary on her children's appearances, recalling the surprise of others when they see that one of her sons has a lighter complexion than his brothers. Natalie challenges the belief that one must 'look Māori' to be Māori. For her, being Māori is defined by *whakapapa* and cultural connection rather than skin colour. She ensures her children develop this same understanding, affirming them equally as strong Māori men.

Natalie embodies the spirit of *tautoko*, living alongside *te ao Māori* with purpose. She engages with *te ao Māori* with humility, compassion, and confidence in her own identity. Together, Natalie and Daniel have built their *whānau* on shared values, mutual compromise, and a commitment to raising their boys to embrace their blended cultural heritage.

Lexi



Figure 4. Conceptual illustration of participant Lexi, derived from her *pūrākau*.

Lexi, a mother of two daughters, was adopted by a loving Pākehā family at a young age. She and her brother grew up without a strong connection to their cultural heritage. Her early years were shaped by tension between her internal and external sense of self; regarded as Māori by others due to her appearance, while feeling aligned with Pākehā culture. Although her *whakapapa* was not entirely out of reach, it was not something she actively engaged with, leaving her without a grounded sense of cultural identity. While she is grateful to have moved

beyond the insecurities of her earlier experiences, she has only recently begun to confront the impact of intergenerational trauma.

Though her childhood began with hardship, loss, and disconnection, it shifted to a story of human kindness and unconditional love through her adoptive family. She mourned the absence of cultural knowledge that her Māori peers expressed with ease, grounded in a version of identity that she envied. In her view, this absence was shaped by the choices of her birth relatives. She held a complicated mix of gratitude for the life those choices allowed and resentment for the cultural birthright she felt she had been denied.

While Lexi went on to create an adult life grounded in stability and family, her brother chose a different path. His search for belonging led him to reconnect with their birth family in later life.

Motherhood marked the beginning of cultural reclamation in Lexi's journey. The birth of her first daughter brought a new outlook on life. She no longer felt tethered to the past, instead focusing on building a positive future for her whānau. During pregnancy and early parenting, Lexi intuitively embraced practices such as co-sleeping. Unaware that these choices were grounded in Māori tradition, her parenting values naturally aligned with those of Māori parenting as a māmā. Motherhood also reshaped her understanding of her birth mother's story. She developed compassion for the pain her birth mother may have experienced, while still recognising the need to protect her own wellbeing.

Now settled in a coastal town with her daughters and partner, Lexi is building a life grounded in connection to culture. While she continues to experience feelings of unworthiness in Māori spaces due to cultural dislocation, she is now ready to face these barriers and explore her whakapapa. Through her parenting, learning, and reflection, Lexi is reclaiming her cultural agency. She is writing her own pepeha and creating a whānau where cultural belonging is a birthright, not a battle.

Leah



Figure 5. Conceptual illustration of participant Leah, derived from her pūrākau.

Leah, a recent master's graduate and social worker, has a first-generation English mother and a Māori father. Her upbringing on Auckland's North Shore was largely disconnected from her Māori heritage. Growing up in a predominantly Pākehā environment meant returning to her whenua was often the only opportunity to explore her Māoritanga. While her light complexion allowed her to move between cultural worlds, it often came with questions about her belonging.

Adulthood introduced opportunities to reframe her cultural identity. Her postgraduate studies and professional mahi allowed her Māori identity to be recognised as a strength. Being in Māori spaces enabled Leah to experience a worldview aligned with her wairua. She now lives with a growing sense of confidence in both sides of her cultural identity.

Leah approaches cultural hybridity with introspection and intentional engagement. She understands the complexities of living with dual cultural identities and accepts that uncertainty remains part of her identity journey. Being raised by a strongly English mother, Leah can locate parts of her identity within an English worldview. She notices herself slipping into English ways of being around her mum, reflected in subtle shifts in how she presents herself. She finds peace in her mother's genuine engagement with Māori culture and has chosen to transform the pain of her cultural past into a tool within her mahi.

An older cousin on Leah's father's side became an influential presence in her journey to cultural connection. During whānau hui, Leah looked to her cousin as a holder of whānau knowledge and a role model. Although their time together was limited, her cousin helped plant seeds of cultural reclamation.

Beginning a career in social work brought the tensions of Māori inequity to the surface. Because of her ability to move between cultural spaces, Leah often found herself confronted by views that lacked awareness of the historical oppression of Māori. She began to learn when it was appropriate to challenge these opinions and when to remain an observer in those moments. Leah intends to strengthen her cultural certainty through continued immersion in te ao Māori.

Leah moves forward with an intentional approach to cultural connection. She is choosing to uplift her Māori identity, not as a rejection of her Pākehā heritage, but as an acknowledgement that her Indigenous roots have had limited space to thrive.

Rahera



Figure 6. Conceptual illustration of participant Rahera, derived from her pūrākau.

Rahera is a wāhine raising her two children with her British-Irish high school sweetheart, Allen. Raised in a town with limited cultural engagement, her determined Māori father challenged local norms to ensure his children were raised with strong cultural immersion. She now raises her own children with a deep commitment to honouring their whānau.

Rahera's childhood was culturally rich in te ao Māori, an anomaly within her Pākehā-dominant hometown. Her father prioritised cultural immersion, ensuring their whānau remained connected to their Māori community. While she is now grateful for this, as an adolescent she quietly resented it. Many of her friends were Pākehā and were not expected to participate in these activities, which led her to feel isolated and singled out.

This sense of isolation was compounded by subtle experiences of racism during high school. Although she was recognised as a high-achieving student, she often felt her success was attributed to diversity rather than her own effort. Her adolescence deepened the tension of

feeling too white to be Māori or too Māori to be white. At a time when experimentation was common among her peers, Rahera chose to abstain from these behaviours, a decision she continues to uphold.

Today, Rahera is committed to weaving Māoritanga into all facets of her whānau's life. Having excelled in Māori tertiary studies, she has built a career in Māori consultancy. She links her success to both her academic ability and her capacity to navigate Pākehā systems, developed from a young age. She embraced Māori tikanga relating to pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Rahera and Allen are raising their children with strong cultural foundations, including Māori names, education through Te Kōhanga Reo, and plans to continue through Kura Kaupapa.

A key focus for Rahera is ensuring her children grow as confident te reo Māori speakers. Her experiences of stigma associated with loss of te reo have strengthened her commitment to Māori learning environments. Despite systemic barriers such as underfunding and limited access, they remain committed to this path.

Rahera and Allen bring their cultural backgrounds together with intention and respect. With British-Irish heritage, Allen understands the experience of navigating multiple cultural worlds. Together, they are creating a whānau grounded in shared values and cultural identity.

Interpretive Analysis: Patterns Across Participant Pūrākau

The participant pūrākau presented above illustrate the lived realities of wāhine Māori—Pākehā, reflecting the complexity and fluidity of cultural hybridity. Across these narratives, shared experiences of belonging, tension, and transformation emerge. These patterns are explored through three interconnected movements: navigating, challenging, and embodying cultural hybridity, which reflect the evolving and relational nature of cultural identity. Together, these movements inform the development of the NCE framework, which is explored further in the discussion chapter.

Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) captures the process of negotiating belonging and survival across multiple cultural worlds. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this involves ongoing awareness and adaptation within a society shaped by colonial power dynamics that continue to privilege fixed and binary understandings of identity. Cultural Limbo highlights the tensions of living between Māori and Pākehā worlds, while Cultural Chameleon explores the adaptive strategies used to maintain belonging and visibility. Together, these subthemes illustrate the ongoing work of balancing identity with cultural expectations, as wāhine Māori–Pākehā navigate these demands within contexts that often require alignment with one world over another.

Cultural Limbo

Cultural Limbo explores the unsettled space participants experienced as they moved across Māori and Pākehā worlds, which were often intertwined rather than separate. This was expressed through feelings of being both nowhere and everywhere, where belonging was rarely secure. While this experience reflects broader discussions of a ‘third space’, where new forms of identity can emerge, participants more often described it as tension rather than possibility. It also appeared as an internal tug of war, reflecting tension between different parts of self and whakapapa. External assumptions added further strain, with labels reducing the complexity of their identities. At its heart, this subtheme asks: what does it mean to belong when you live between worlds?

Nowhere and Everywhere

Participants describe moving across Māori and Pākehā spaces as a process of constant reassessment. Their identity is often subject to the evaluation of others, rather than fully their own.

For Hana, the pressure of labels forced an unwanted negotiation of self:

“I don't like labels. I don't like people saying that I have both because sometimes even that feels untrue. I'm just me; I can't change it... you get a bit of a stigma with being half-caste as well.” — *Hana*

Hana's rejection of labels highlights the misalignment between societally imposed concepts and her own lived, fluid sense of self. The pressure attached to being a 'half-caste' reveals the burden of stigma and the expectation to conform to simplified identities. Hana's experience reflects the tension of holding an identity that resists simplification in a world that demands it.

Like Hana, Sonya experiences the persistent unease of partial belonging, particularly when moving between environments:

“There have been periods in my life where one identity shines brighter than the other... In high school, for example, I went to join the kapa haka group, and they weren't very welcoming... but also there were times where I was like 'yeah I'm gonna do road cycling' and they would think 'oh what's this Māori doing here?'" — *Sonya*

Sonya's experience of navigating different environments shows that establishing a sense of belonging often means putting one's sense of self on the line. If there was any doubt of authenticity, her place within both Māori and Pākehā spaces was viewed with suspicion. This created an ongoing anticipation that her belonging could be questioned rather than assumed, reinforcing the sense of existing nowhere and everywhere.

Nowhere and Everywhere highlights the experience of moving between spaces without firm belonging. This speaks to the instability at the heart of Cultural Limbo, where existing across Māori and Pākehā worlds does not guarantee recognition. Participants noticed a gap between how they wished to be seen and how society perceived them, often striving for acceptance or autonomy. This ongoing reassessment also created tension within different parts of self and whakapapa, setting the stage for the next expression of this experience: a deeper internal tug of war.

The Tug of War Within

Participants expressed that persistent attempts to be forced into fixed social categories affected their self-esteem over time. Hyperaware of the likelihood that their MPCH would be misunderstood or judged, they developed a sense of dissonance toward their cultural identities.

Hana gave voice to this internal conflict, describing her daily shifts in identity acceptance:

“Some days I am really strong in wanting to use my Māori, some days I wish I wasn’t Māori at all.” — *Hana*

Hana’s words capture the internal tug of war experienced by those with MPCH. Her experience reflects the pressure to downplay parts of herself, often her Māoritanga, to be accepted, or face scrutiny about her cultural legitimacy. This tension reflects Aotearoa’s bias toward Eurocentric, singular identities and the power dynamics that make those identities easier to inhabit than more relational and fluid ways of being.

While Hana’s kōrero reveals the internal cost of this tension, Leah points to the broader conditions that shape MPCH:

“If you don’t work to identify as Māori and to embrace your Māori side, the dominant side will just take over.” — *Leah*

Leah’s words highlight how Western ways of being are deeply embedded within Aotearoa’s social framework, reinforced through everyday systems and norms. Māori ways of knowing and engaging with the world are present, but are not always as readily supported or visible within these environments. For those with MPCH, this can shape how different parts of identity are expressed across contexts, with engagement in Māoritanga often requiring more intentional space and support.

Leah extends this kōrero by noting this imbalance as not only social and structural, but rooted in historical trauma:

“When we are talking about colonisation, I am both. I’m both the colonised and the coloniser... It’s that disconnect between, you want to hate the British for what they’ve done... but then at the same time, I have family there too.” — *Leah*

Leah’s kōrero reveals the systemic roots of this internal tug of war. Her whakapapa is tied to both sides of Aotearoa’s colonial past, reflecting intergenerational harm and resistance. This tension extends beyond the individual, as she navigates connections to histories marked by both loss and survival. Her reflections suggest that feelings such as guilt, sadness, and uncertainty can emerge when holding these histories together. These experiences highlight the complexity of living in a society that does not easily accommodate MPCH.

For Lexi, this tug of war manifested in how she saw herself, questioning the balance between her appearance and her internal experience:

“For my first seven years of life right up to high school, I had this weird feeling of my skin’s brown, but I don’t feel brown. I looked Māori, but I would tell people I’m like an Oreo, white on the inside. My skin colour was my only connection to Māori culture, so other than that I felt Pākehā. It wasn’t until I would walk into shops and people would follow me to make sure I wasn’t stealing. I would question ‘why are they following me?’ then I have these moments of remembering.” — Lexi

Lexi’s kōrero highlights the impact of MPCH on self-image, with her description of herself as an ‘Oreo’ reflecting the cultural language available to make sense of the dissonance between how she was seen and how she understood herself. This framing acted as both a strategy for social acceptance and a distancing from parts of her identity, while the ‘moments of remembering’ she describes represent aspects of that identity resurfacing, seeking recognition and reconciliation. At times, this tension remained unresolved, with reconnection not yet fully within reach.

Tug of War Within captures the exhaustion of negotiating complex identities in a world that demands simplicity. Within Cultural Limbo, this internal tension reflects the strain of existing in an in-between space where belonging is uncertain and identity is continually negotiated. For those with MPCH, the pressure to dim cultural identity or conform to colonial divides created confusion and conflict. Over time, this tension could feel unresolved, shaping how participants related to their MPCH. This internal struggle was further intensified by the external weight of assumptions explored next.

The Weight of Assumptions

A particularly painful aspect of living in this in-between space was the way others projected assumptions onto participants, reducing their identity to surface-level traits or perceived entitlements. These assumptions, often subtle or unspoken, contributed to a deeper sense of cultural dissonance.

Rahera described a moment during school where her efforts were overshadowed by assumptions of unearned advantage:

“In high school, I didn’t interact much with the Māori girls because I felt too white, so I had a lot of white friends. But now looking back, I didn’t notice it at the time, but

there was a lot of subtle racism within my friend group. During a conversation about university options, I remember my friend saying, ‘You don’t have to worry Rahera, you’ll just get all the Māori scholarships.’ At the time I didn’t register, but now I wonder if she meant I would not get a scholarship on my own effort but only because I was Māori.” — *Rahera*

Rahera’s experience shows the harm caused by assumptions of unearned entitlement. The idea that she would ‘just get all the Māori scholarships’ not only undermines her hard work but dismisses the barriers Māori students face. This kōrero reflects a wider pattern of marginalisation of wāhine Māori–Pākehā within Western systems. These assumptions are also gendered, with their abilities questioned and their achievements reduced to tokenism or external advantage. They are frequently underestimated across these identities, with success often dismissed as the result of diversity quotas rather than hard work.

Hana illustrated how these assumptions can extend into everyday life, where external perceptions limited the ability to express herself:

“In the summer, when my skin would be a bit darker... there were so many stigmas I felt I had to avoid... I couldn’t get too angry, because then I’d be marked as the Māori angry girl. I can’t be in fights, or I’ll be the troubled Māori girl.” — *Hana*

Hana’s experience gives voice to the tension she navigates when assessing how she is perceived in Western-dominant environments. Deciding how to speak, act, or even exist becomes a strategic internal negotiation, shaped by the risks associated with being visibly Māori. In her kōrero, expressions of anger were not neutral, but carried the risk of being read through racialised and gendered stereotypes, often framed as irrational or unstable. Managing these perceptions added another layer of strain, where prioritising safety could take precedence over authentic self-expression.

Lexi vulnerably shared how the weight of assumptions influenced how she came to view her own culture:

“I had this kind of hate towards Māori... if that’s what they were all like, I didn’t want to be associated with that part of myself.” — *Lexi*

Lexi’s kōrero reveals the impact of encountering negative stereotypes about Māori while also living through the realities from which those stereotypes are drawn. Without the broader

context of colonisation and its role in shaping these circumstances, it can become easy to associate that pain with Māori culture as a whole. This is a tension many Māori face, regardless of direct experience with intergenerational trauma. When these narratives are left unchallenged, they can become the lens through which Māori–Pākehā wāhine come to see themselves, and at times, wish to reject.

The Weight of Assumptions reveals how stereotypes, labels, and inherited beliefs fracture self-image and self-worth. As another expression of Cultural Limbo, participants carried the impact of being reduced to categories of skin tone or difference, rather than recognised in their full complexity. Without space to hold MPCCH on its own terms, life became an ongoing effort to survive within systems shaped by colonial power dynamics that resist the in-between.

Cultural Limbo is more than identity ambiguity; it is a space shaped by pain and dislocation, where resilience is necessary for survival. Participants reveal the dichotomy of existing in between, being both nowhere and everywhere, caught in a tug of war within, and weighed down by external assumptions. These experiences broadened perspectives and deepened relational understanding, but they also carried an emotional and political toll. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, celebration and survival coexisted, with cultural hybridity experienced as both freeing and exhausting. Cultural Limbo reveals this strain while also setting the stage for the adaptive strategies explored in Cultural Chameleon.

Cultural Chameleon

Cultural Chameleon focuses on the adaptive strategies participants used to move across Māori and Pākehā worlds that were often overlapping and relationally entangled. This adaptability was expressed through experiences of privilege and pressure, where shifting or blending identity could offer access but also carried emotional and spiritual costs. It also appeared in reading the room, the instinctive assessment of how their cultural identity would be perceived within different spaces, and responding to the room, the deliberate choices about whether to conceal, blend, or assert their cultural hybridity. This process was not only about identity expression, but about navigating different relational expectations and ways of engaging within each space. The question that emerges is: What is gained and what is lost in the constant act of adaptation?

Privilege and Pressure

Participants spoke of the ability to choose how they blended or revealed their MPCH depending on the space they were in. This adaptation could be used to access social or material advantage, but it also came with emotional and relational costs.

Leah reflected on how her appearance often dictated how others judged her professionalism:

“If I go into WINZ with a whaiora, I get more respect than some of my Māori colleagues who look more Māori.” — *Leah*

Leah’s experience illustrates how being viewed as Pākehā can open doors of legitimacy in environments that have traditionally met visibly Māori people with prejudice and distrust. Aotearoa has historically measured professionalism through a Pākehā lens, aligning credibility with Western external presentation. Her perceived whiteness gives her a professional advantage that others may not have access to. This advantage is not due to differences in capability, but reflects institutional bias that favours Pākehā presentation.

Rahera shared how proximity to both Māori and Pākehā spaces has shaped her ability to access opportunities from both sides:

“I’ve had a lot of opportunities that other Māori people do not... like going to a high decile school, university, but also having family that is so supportive and motivated to keep me in Māori spaces... I have had my privileges because of that dual identity, because I have also been able to navigate a Pākehā world.” — *Rahera*

For Rahera, exposure to opportunities in Pākehā spaces allowed her to flourish in environments where Western ideals of success dominate. Aotearoa’s benchmark for achievement exists within a Pākehā context, meaning those without similar access may find it more difficult to navigate and succeed within these spaces. The lack of equitable opportunities for Māori and the devaluation of te ao Māori knowledge remain a legacy of colonisation. Those with cultural hybridity may be able to side-step some of these barriers through their foothold in the Pākehā world. This also reflects a subtle tension, where the skills developed through navigating Pākehā systems become central to success within Māori professional and academic spaces.

Hana spoke on how the ease or difficulty of navigating daily life depended on her shifting appearance:

“In the winter months, I’m a lot fairer... If I walk into a shop in winter, I don’t get followed around. If I walk into the shop in summer, I get followed.” — *Hana*

Hana’s *kōrero* illustrates the conditional nature of acceptance in Pākehā spaces, where her value shifts with her appearance and racialised assumptions based on skin tone. She is aware that her seasonal complexion grants access to Pākehā privilege, giving her the option to better meet social expectations. Yet the need to monitor her appearance reflects the inequities of a system that favours Pākehā presentation.

For Natalie, this pressure was felt when her Pākehā identity prompted feelings of mistrust in Māori spaces:

“I had to make his family realise that I’m laid back... I would always remind them just because I’m Pākehā doesn’t mean I’m any different.” — *Natalie*

Natalie speaks to the emotional strain of proving authenticity when her Pākehā presentation prompts mistrust, showing that cultural hybridity carries pressure in both Māori and Pākehā spaces. In her account, this mistrust is shaped by broader historical and social tensions, where assumptions about both Māori and Pākehā identities can influence how individuals are perceived. For those with MPCH, moving between worlds means navigating this tension from either side.

Privilege and Pressure illustrates that, within Cultural Chameleon, belonging was rarely a given but continually assessed through others’ eyes. Access to different spaces brought opportunity, but also required proof of authenticity and management of mistrust. These shifting conditions prompted wāhine to read each room with care and respond to the power dynamics at play.

Reading the Room

To navigate shifting privilege and pressure, participants described instinctively assessing how their cultural identity would be received within particular power relations. Power dynamics

and social expectations shaped this process, as participants balanced avoiding unwanted attention with being themselves.

Hana shares how reading the room called for a decision to reveal or hide her Māori identity:

“I’m a lighter-skinned Māori, so there is a stigma. I must decide if I’m comfortable enough to say that I’m Māori, or do I just say that I’m white? Sometimes just saying you’re white is easier than having that conversation.” — *Hana*

Hana’s kōrero shows how this assessment often begins with an internal crossroads, where she must decide whether to reveal her MPCH and face questioning, or hide it and align with Pākehā norms that dominate many spaces. Her lighter complexion grants access to these spaces, but comes with the ongoing decision of living in alignment with her identity or conforming to externally imposed expectations.

Leah reflected on the covert pressures that could arise when her cultural identity was assumed as Pākehā:

“Say if I’m at like, head office for the day doing stuff and I’m in the lunchroom or something and, you know, someone’s talking about a particular political bill, sometimes people, I think, expect me to kind of collude with them or agree with them because I look white.” — *Leah*

In Leah’s kōrero, reading the room is subtle but heavy. Her whiteness grants access to conversations that other Māori may not be privy to, along with opportunities to build rapport. Their comfort signals an unspoken invitation to complicity, forcing her to decide whether to assert her Māoritanga or maintain the status quo. For those with MPCH, these moments involve weighing the professional and relational costs of addressing prejudice.

Sonya’s experience was more explicit, recognising that her Māori identity would not be accepted in her professional environment:

“I’ve worked in a workplace where they were like ‘ugh, not this Māori crap’. From that, you think, ‘okay, that’s my workplace, they are racist...’” — *Sonya*

Sonya’s assessment required no guesswork. In contrast to Leah’s quiet coercion, she could immediately read that this environment would reject her Māori identity. Her MPCH meant she was present for comments that a visibly Māori person may not hear so openly, a form of

racism rooted in assumed Pākehā identity. These moments carry the added burden of deciding whether to confront racism. When positions are this clear, the assessment becomes less about negotiation and more about personal protection.

Reading the Room highlights a practised skill at the heart of Cultural Chameleon. Participants engaged in ongoing assessment of safety, exclusion, and potential hostility as they navigated spaces where belonging remained conditional. The next challenge became deciding how, or if, to respond.

Responding to the Room

After reading the room, participants chose how to respond, either expressing their MPCH or concealing parts of it to suit the space. These moments may seem straightforward on the surface, but they reflected a blend of identity styles, balancing their inner identity with what would best serve them in that moment.

Hana's response to one situation required her to modify her presentation to meet the expectations of the room:

“Sometimes I will need to act Pākehā, so I put on what my mates call my ‘manager voice’... my mates hear me and be like ‘who is this?!’” — *Hana*

Hana's need to put on a ‘manager voice’ reflects her awareness that certain ways of speaking and presenting are more readily recognised as professional within these environments. In this context, credibility appeared tied to more Western and male-coded forms of communication, shaping how she chose to present herself at work. Her friends' reaction highlights the contrast between her professional and informal identities, making clear the adjustments she felt necessary. This moment shows how her response can shift depending on context, becoming a strategic choice about where different parts of herself are expressed.

Natalie experienced this act of negotiation through her responsibility as a mother:

“So that's why for Louis, on every form that I fill out I make sure to tick Māori. He's not going to be treated any differently than his brothers because of the colour of his skin.” — *Natalie*

Natalie's stance is a choice to embrace full cultural visibility, regardless of how others may view her son. By ticking Māori on official documents, she refuses to let his identity be diminished due to his lighter complexion. Her actions align with the role of motherhood in the intergenerational transmission of Māori cultural knowledge. This choice establishes a foundation where her son does not need to 'play the game' to have worth in Aotearoa. He can be himself while still embodying qualities not traditionally associated with being Māori. This approach supports a shift toward a future where being Māori is an unquestioned part of identity.

Leah's more introspective view is shaped by a lifetime of speaking out within different cultural spaces:

"I like to think that I'll always challenge racism... there's always going to be situations where it might be dangerous to challenge, or someone's in a much higher position... I also judge on how well I think people will receive it... is it worth it?" — *Leah*

Leah's kōrero highlights the reflective nature of responding to the room, where decisions do not end in the moment but continue to be carried and considered afterward. Her reflection shows how she has learned, over time, to navigate when and how to respond within different environments. In her experience, moving through these spaces involved balancing the desire to challenge racism with the need to maintain personal safety and wellbeing. These moments were not only about outward action, but about making sense of how to show up in ways that felt both safe and true to herself.

Responding to the Room shows the deliberate negotiation at the centre of Cultural Chameleon. Whether through full expression or strategic concealment, participants made choices that safeguarded mana and wellbeing. These decisions formed part of a broader cultural toolkit for navigating life in Aotearoa.

Cultural Chameleon is more than social flexibility. It reflects how participants moved across spaces in ways that were responsive to context. Participants described how adaptability unfolded through experiences of privilege and pressure, the instinctive process of reading the room, and the intentional choices involved in responding to the room. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, these experiences were also shaped by expectations tied to gender and how they were perceived by others. While adaptation could open doors, each shift required awareness and

adjustment. Cultural Chameleon shows that navigating MPCH involves responding to different environments while staying connected to who they are.

Cultural Limbo and Cultural Chameleon show that navigating MPCH is a lived experience that requires constant awareness and adjustment within spaces that rarely offer unconditional acceptance. These navigations carry both strength and burden, revealing that living in between is an intentional process shaped by survival. Navigation alone does not capture the full complexity of wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience, as these movements were also shaped by broader power relations and assimilative pressures. Participants engaged in daily acts of blending or resisting, but the extent to which they recognised and asserted agency against marginalising forces formed the foundation for their navigation. The next theme, Challenging MPCH, shifts from navigation to critique, exploring how participants confronted and questioned the systems that define belonging.

Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) moves beyond negotiating belonging to examine the power dynamics and historical forces that shape and restrict cultural legitimacy. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this involves questioning and pushing back against the conditions placed on their identity. What is Māori Enough? explores the pressures of conditional belonging, while The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori examines expectations around authenticity and cultural practice. These subthemes show the work involved in confronting imposed standards, as wāhine Māori–Pākehā questioned these expectations and asserted the right to define their own identities.

What is Māori Enough?

What is Māori Enough? investigates the pressures participants faced when their belonging was continually tested and measured against narrow conditions. These pressures appeared in the gap between bicultural ideals and lived experience, where progressiveness often proved fragile in practice. They were also evident in the way appearance was used as a flawed test of legitimacy, and in how colonial ideas of whakapapa framed MPCH as dilution. This subtheme asks the question: Do I belong?

The Illusion of Progressiveness

Participants described a disconnect between Aotearoa's reputation as a bicultural nation and their lived realities. Although often presented as a place built on partnership, their experiences revealed biculturalism to be a performative façade that did not hold under closer scrutiny.

Leah reflects on the different comfort levels she feels between cultural spaces:

“In Māori spaces, I never feel uncomfortable... You get it from Pākehā that you look too white, but never from Māori.” — *Leah*

Leah's kōrero shows how acceptance in Pākehā spaces can be conditional, shaped by expectations of how she should present and exist. Whiteness operated as the benchmark with anything outside of it diminished, limiting the expression of her Māori identity. This reflects how bicultural ideals sit alongside the continued prioritisation of Pākehā norms as the standard of legitimacy. Inclusion operates within boundaries that protect dominant comfort rather than support equitable partnership.

This tension was not confined to interpersonal interactions. Rahera observed how institutional spaces such as schooling environments reproduced similar patterns under the guise of progress:

“I remember hearing that the statistics for Māori achievement for one year I was at school were amazing. It felt like the school just flaunted these stats for reputation and funding opportunities.” — *Rahera*

Rahera's kōrero shows how institutional recognition of Māori success can function as symbolic capital rather than genuine commitment. Her school's celebration of achievement appeared tied to reputation and opportunity, rather than bicultural equity for Māori students. In her experience, this created a disconnect between how biculturalism was presented and how it was lived in practice. This gap highlights how recognition did not always translate into meaningful support for Māori students. For those with MPCH, this disconnect could be felt on a personal level, shaping how they experienced belonging within these spaces.

As Rahera continued her education, she not only noticed the superficial recognition of Māori success but also the negative outcomes it created for Māori learners:

“I noticed at university for my Māori papers, the Māori students that came on the first day, slowly, by the end of the course, had dropped out. It's not that they didn't know the language, because they were fluent. That was their first language. That part would have been easy as for them. It's just being in that western system, the education system, the knowledge was delivered in a way that didn't align with them... they probably knew everything that was being taught, but the way that they had to achieve the achievement standard was not aligned with them.” — *Rahera*

Rahera's kōrero shows that participation within bicultural institutions does not equate to structural equity. Her experiences across school and university reveal systems that celebrate Māori presence when it serves reputation, while continuing to centre Pākehā frameworks of knowledge and success. These contradictions expose the illusion of progressiveness, where inclusion is claimed but remains defined on colonial terms.

The Illusion of Progressiveness exposes how, within *What is Māori Enough?*, belonging was shaped not only by interpersonal experience but by broader national claims of bicultural harmony that remained structurally uneven. While institutions claimed inclusivity, access was often measured against terms that maintained dominant comfort. This tension set the stage for the next layer of scrutiny, where belonging became tied to appearance.

Skin Deep Standards

Participants' experiences showed that external appearance operates as a shallow but powerful measure of belonging, reducing relational identity to surface-level assumptions. Māori appearance often carried expectations of cultural knowledge, while anything outside of that brought pressure to prove legitimacy within different environments. These assumptions undermined whakapapa as a marker of belonging, deepening barriers to connection and, at times, pushing wāhine Māori–Pākehā toward aligning more closely with Pākehā spaces.

For Lexi, the assumption of knowledge tied to her skin tone became a source of anxiety, particularly in Māori spaces where she felt expected to already hold cultural understanding:

“It’s intimidating, especially as someone who looks like she should know what she’s talking about.” — *Lexi*

Lexi’s kōrero captures this tension, showing the pressure created by assumptions tied to appearance. This pressure operates on multiple levels for those whose cultural connections have been disrupted. It includes a sense of needing to know because of whakapapa, expectations from others based on appearance, and anxiety about being judged if they do not ‘know enough’. This makes the step toward reclamation and engagement more daunting.

This tension also operated within Māori spaces. Sonya described feeling compelled to establish her legitimacy upon entering kapa haka:

“When I joined kapa haka, I felt I had to prove to them how Māori I was by sharing that I learnt the songs they were singing with my nanny growing up.” — *Sonya*

Unlike Lexi’s experience of internalised expectation, Sonya’s account reflects how this pressure is enacted to secure legitimacy. She felt the need to prove her cultural standing by demonstrating Māori knowledge, using recognised markers of belonging to reduce doubt. This shows how belonging can be shaped by implicit tests of authenticity, where acceptance depends on meeting certain expectations. Māori gatekeeping can be understood as a response to colonisation and mistrust, but the need for those with MPCH to still negotiate entry reveals the limits of Aotearoa’s claims to progressiveness.

Natalie described how these appearance-based expectations extended to her children:

“When we first had Louis, it was the talk of the town... Why do all of our babies have to take after Daniel? I’m their mother, you realise?” — *Natalie*

Natalie’s experience reflects the opposite tension. Despite deep whakapapa connections, her children were scrutinised for not fitting expected appearance standards. Her lighter-skinned son’s identity was still questioned, showing how phenotype can overshadow lived connection and force MPCH to defend what should not be doubted.

Rahera illustrated the opposite end of this spectrum through a public example:

“David Seymour, he’s Māori. He’s an example of completely putting that identity aside... But doing that takes a toll on your sense of self... A quote for this situation that I love is ‘he is Māori in blood, but he is not Māori in heart.’” — *Rahera*

Rahera's kōrero reflects one way of making sense of how Māori identity is seen and judged, where the visibility and expression of Māoritanga become key markers of authenticity. At the same time, understandings of what it means to be Māori are not fixed and can differ across individuals, contexts, and political positions. Rather than pointing to a single way of being Māori, this example highlights how expectations of authenticity can be unevenly applied across the spectrum of cultural connection. While Lexi and Natalie faced pressure due to misaligned appearance expectations, this contrast reflects the perception that less visible expressions of Māoritanga may not attract the same level of scrutiny. In this way, cultural identity is often interpreted through external markers rather than whakapapa alone.

Skin-Deep Standards shows how belonging became a visual test. Appearance acted as a flawed gatekeeper of authenticity, overshadowing whakapapa and lived experience. This focus on visibility reveals deeper tensions around whakapapa and inheritance.

Bloodlines and Burdens

Participants' experiences suggest that belonging was not only challenged at structural and personal levels, but also extended to the whakapapa they inherited and the ways it was interpreted. Their kōrero illustrates how colonial logics of blood quantum and fractional belonging continue to shape understandings of who is considered 'Māori enough'. This reduction of whakapapa to percentage-based thinking appeared in some participants' accounts, while others actively questioned and resisted it.

Sonya described her whakapapa using fractional language, viewing her identity as an integration and dilution of generational relationships:

“We would have, going back generations, been full Māori. But then, when all the Pākehā started coming in on the boats and the ships to come work here, a lot of the Māori women had enough of the Māori men, and so they married white men... And then that's where the Māori started trickling down. So that's how I become a third and Mum is a third point something...” — *Sonya*

For Sonya, speaking about her whakapapa in this way felt natural and logical, an inherited language she expressed with certainty. She spoke of her Māori identity with wholeness and pride throughout her pūrākau, suggesting her explanation was not a dilution of identity, but a way of tracing how she came to be. Her use of this language reflects the influence of colonial ways of categorising identity, rather than traditional Māori understandings of whakapapa. Her

comment ‘that’s how I became a third’ highlights the fine line within blood quantum logic. If treated as a measure of legitimacy, it risks positioning her as not ‘Māori enough’. Sonya’s narrative reflects a secure sense of identity, but this language can carry different consequences for others, where fractional thinking may be internalised as limitation rather than description.

Rahera highlighted the reduction of whakapapa to numbers as a form of colonial control over indigenous identity:

“People ask me ‘what percentage of Māori are you?’. That has been, and still is, a tool used by the colonial powers to say because you don’t fit that box, you can’t have this. I think about the Hawaiian funeral process they use to dictate who gets land. You have to be a certain percentage of Indigenous Hawaiian to access your land... with globalization, as we become more intertwined, percentage is going to just disappear, right? So then when you’ve got no high percentage Hawaiians left, who takes ownership then?” — *Rahera*

Rahera’s kōrero shows how this seemingly casual question frames whakapapa as something to be calculated or verified. It highlights the contrast between colonial fraction-based measures of identity and Māori understandings of whakapapa as holistic and indivisible. By asking what happens to land ownership “when you’ve got no high percentage Hawaiians left”, she points to the long-term effects of this logic, where belonging becomes tied to standards that cannot endure over time. Her reflection connects personal experiences of being reduced to fractions with wider Indigenous struggles, showing how these ideas continue to shape social norms and undermine cultural continuity.

Hana shows how colonial ideas of blood belonging have seeped into Māori spaces, working against traditional understandings of whakapapa:

“My nanny was the last of our whānau line, so she was in charge of the whānau land. So now that gets handed down to my mum and my uncle, her brother, both of which are adopted... it has been in dispute since then... because they’re not blood... people at the marae believe they are not worthy of inheritance. Which is weird because back when Māori lived on the pā, the reason we have so many relatives is because we didn’t go by blood.” — *Hana*

For Hana, this conflict shows how whakapapa can become a site of exclusion, reinforced within both colonial systems and her own marae. Her nanny and koro raised her mum and uncle from birth, yet their right to inherit is disputed because their connection is not recognised as blood lineage by some within the marae. Questions of descent have shifted from connection to legitimacy. Hana interprets this tension as shaped by colonial ideas of blood belonging, reflecting how she understands these dynamics to operate within her whānau context. Her reflection points to ways of understanding belonging that extend beyond biological measurement alone, grounded in relationships and responsibility, while still connected to kinship structures that shape roles and obligations. Her reminder that ‘we didn’t go by blood’ highlights how her understanding of belonging is being expressed in contrast to colonial framings, while also simplifying a more complex reality in which whakapapa and kinship have always been significant, but not reducible to biological measures alone.

Hana resisted this logic further, asserting the enduring nature of whakapapa:

“Your whakapapa is your whakapapa, it’s not going to change overnight, you can’t change your blood.” — *Hana*

Hana’s use of blood language, despite earlier rejecting it, reflects the complexity of expressing belonging within colonial frameworks. This apparent contradiction shows how participants may draw on imposed language while reshaping its meaning. By saying ‘you can’t change your blood’, she reclaims the concept to affirm the endurance of whakapapa. Her kōrero highlights both the persistence of colonial logic and the ways wāhine Māori–Pākehā rework it to affirm their identity.

Bloodlines and Burdens shows how, within *What is Māori Enough?*, whakapapa could act as both connection and constraint. Blood quantum logic disrupted belonging by shifting it toward ideas of purity rather than relationship. Participants’ kōrero also showed efforts to hold onto relational understandings of whakapapa, even as these tensions persisted.

‘What is Māori Enough?’ permeates every layer of identity, exposing the continual testing of legitimacy. From the illusion of progressiveness that masks inequities, to skin-deep standards that reduce whakapapa and lived connection to appearance, and the framing of bloodlines as dilution, participant pūrākau show how cultural legitimacy shapes structural, social, and personal experience. The result is a society that makes it easier to move through the world as Pākehā, while other identities remain more heavily scrutinised under the illusion of bicultural

harmony. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, legitimacy remains conditional and is rarely freely given. These tensions carry into The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori, where belonging shifts into questions of authenticity and practice.

The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori

The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori? explores the expectations placed on participants once belonging was assumed. Tradition came under scrutiny as participants described experiences where tikanga was felt as rigid or contested. Wāhine described a long struggle to have their voices heard within patriarchal structures, while expressions of identity were often judged against narrow standards of authenticity. This raises the question: If I belong, am I doing it correctly?

Tradition on Trial

Participants challenged interpretations and applications of tikanga that, in their experiences, were enacted in rigid or limiting ways, advocating for approaches that better reflected their lived realities. This involved negotiating respect for tikanga while questioning how expectations were applied and experienced within particular contemporary contexts.

Hana offered her view on the expectations that have arisen with the reclamation of tikanga:

“I don’t want to fit their mould. I feel like the more that Māoridom is coming back, the more that they’re pushing that we have to fit this mould. And I don’t think that’s okay. Let us live the way that we live... I feel like tikanga has a role in everything that we do, but to a point.” — *Hana*

Hana’s kōrero highlights the tension between honouring tikanga and encountering forms of it that felt constraining in practice. Her reference to “they” reflects particular environments where expectations felt enforced, rather than a universal Māori experience. She acknowledges the importance of tikanga passed down from tūpuna, while questioning how it is sometimes applied as a fixed standard that does not align with diverse lived realities. Her kōrero reflects the complexity of engaging with tikanga within contemporary contexts, where resurgence can bring both affirmation and pressure. She points to the risk that, in some

settings, tikanga can be experienced as a boundary to entry when it is applied in ways that feel rigid or exclusionary. By stating ‘let us live the way we live’, she calls for engagement with tikanga that allows for lived expression alongside its enduring purpose. Her reflection captures the tension between respecting tikanga and navigating how it is enacted across different contexts.

Hana illustrated how this tension affected her during a time of grief:

“When my nanny passed away, I wasn’t supposed to leave the marae until she left. But I had to put my mental health first and left to take a time out. I came back and got in trouble, but I said ‘I don’t care, I know my nanny would have been fine with it.’” — *Hana*

Hana’s kōrero provides a lived example of this tension, where expectations within the marae context, shaped by tikanga, were experienced as rigid within a marae context during a time of grief. She was criticised for leaving before her nanny, yet her decision reflected a need to prioritise her wellbeing. Trusting that her nanny would have supported her, she chose to step away despite knowing it would be judged. This moment highlights how, in this context, expectations around practice were experienced as constraining rather than supportive.

Rahera also pushed back against the uncompromising potential within tikanga:

“Traditional Māori existence has its history and is amazing, but it's not stagnant. I think people forget that... You can't fit Māori into one box.” — *Rahera*

Rahera presents a fluid and dynamic view of tikanga, pushing back against fixed expectations about how Māori identity should be expressed. Her kōrero reflects the diversity of Māori lived realities, ranging from deeply embedded cultural connection to more disrupted or limited engagement shaped by colonial assimilation. She highlights that engagement with tikanga is not experienced evenly, and that navigating it can be more challenging in some contexts than others. Her reflection emphasises the importance of tikanga remaining responsive to the people who carry it.

Tradition on Trial shows how expectations of what is the ‘right way’ to be Māori were not fixed, but actively questioned and reshaped by participants. This involved navigating respect for mātauranga alongside questioning how these expectations were applied in their lived

contexts, particularly in the context of cultural resurgence. This tension carries into the next theme, where wāhine described the ongoing struggle to have their voices heard.

The Long Fight to Be Heard

Participants shared experiences of the intergenerational silencing of wāhine voices and knowledge, recognising how colonisation was understood to have reshaped Māori structures through a patriarchal lens. They described how, in their experiences, certain expectations and practices were influenced by histories that devalued wāhine contributions.

Rahera described how colonisation reshaped gender dynamics within te ao Māori:

“Colonisation forced a gender hierarchy that didn’t exist... in the Western world, men were at the top, very patriarchal society. Women were beneath... A lot of wāhine Māori history and traditions has been lost totally because it was seen as not as important as male history. They didn’t think we would need to write down and record these traditions or knowledge about things like menstruation or other women-specific things. Think about Māori gods. You can easily think of male Māori gods. Wāhine Māori gods exist, they’re not out there as much. Because a female god fights that narrative of patriarchy.” — *Rahera*

Rahera’s kōrero reflects her understanding of how colonisation has shaped both Māori social structures and the ways they are interpreted and understood. Her focus on areas such as menstruation and birth highlights forms of knowledge she perceives as having been less prioritised or recorded. She points to the shift from oral to written forms of knowledge as contributing to this, where certain perspectives became more visible than others. Her observation that atua wāhine are less visible than atua tāne reflects her interpretation of how these patterns extend into spiritual domains, influencing how cultural narratives are remembered and shared.

Hana’s experience offered a counterpoint to the idea that all tikanga is patriarchally tainted:

“I went to a marae in Waikato where the women were the leaders. Women walked onto the marae first and spoke first... For them, women are the most important... I’m moulded by the tikanga that I’ve known all my life, that the males are the leaders.” —

Hana

The Waikato marae that Hana observed highlights that wāhine leadership is an active and visible reality within some expressions of tikanga. Seeing a marae led by wāhine exposed her to a way of organising that unsettled her prior understanding of leadership within Māori contexts. This experience illustrates the diversity of tikanga, which is shaped by the values and practices of different iwi, hapū, and whenua. By witnessing wāhine in leadership roles, Hana was offered more than an alternative view of leadership. It showed her that the long fight to be heard is not only about reclaiming voice and knowledge, but also about recognising the diversity of practices that already exist.

Building on the insight she gained from the Waikato marae, Hana challenged gendered tikanga expectations in her daily cultural life:

“I struggle with that because I am a masculine-ish woman, I'm very strong... so I struggle when the old fellas are trying to dig the hang pit, and I'm like, “move, I'll do it”. And they're kind of looking at me and say “no, you don't have to help”. And I'm like, “move, you're taking forever, I want to eat today!” — *Hana*

Though playful, Hana's response challenges the expectations she encountered around women's roles within that marae context. In calling herself ‘masculine-ish’ and ‘very strong’, she points to the tension between her capability and what was expected of her in that moment. Her kōrero suggests that, despite her willingness and ability to contribute, certain roles were not open to her, even when this created practical delays. Hana uses humour as a way to navigate this tension, allowing her to question these expectations without escalating conflict. Beneath this humour is a more grounded critique, reflecting her experience of gendered expectations that did not align with how she understood her place within her own marae context. In this context, these expectations felt as though they sustained a colonial narrative of hierarchical gender roles, creating tension between her lived reality and her growing awareness that these gendered expectations are not consistent across marae contexts.

The Long Fight to Be Heard reveals how the question of being ‘heard’ sits within broader expectations about how Māori identity should be expressed and validated. Wāhine voices were shaped by both loss and persistence, with leadership remaining present but uneven, contested, and still being reclaimed. Even as voices strengthen, another layer remains in the form of policing authenticity.

Policing Authenticity

Participants described how their efforts to connect with Māori identity were often scrutinised by others within their social and cultural environments, including both Māori and Pākehā spaces. They also spoke to how this scrutiny was intensified by experiences of disrupted cultural connection beyond their control. Within this context, authenticity was frequently policed, creating a risk of being read as tokenistic or a ‘convenience Māori’.

Hana felt this scrutiny to be most volatile within topics such as moko kauae:

“I love moko kauae and mata ora, but I think you should only get a moko kauae when you know who you are and where you’re going. If you’re going to wear it, be ready for the questions that will come your way.” — *Hana*

Hana shows that visible expressions like moko kauae are never neutral and come with scrutiny and responsibility. Her kōrero makes clear that aligning outwardly with Māori identity carries a weight of expectation. These expectations can come from a desire to protect te ao Māori, but in some contexts they may also be experienced as gatekeeping. She speaks directly to the pressure of ‘getting it right’ before asserting identity.

Rahera felt a similar level of scrutiny within her journey of reclaiming te reo Māori:

“I know a lot of people, especially adult learners of te reo Māori, and I can speak to this myself... the years of fear to use the language and being judged by other Māori people... there is always the worry of being judged for making a mistake.” — *Rahera*

For Rahera, te reo Māori, often seen as a pathway of reconnection, became a site of cultural surveillance. Her kōrero suggests that mistakes in pronunciation or comprehension could be read as signs of inauthenticity, potentially positioning her as an outsider. In this way, te reo became a visible site where ideas of being ‘Māori enough’ were reinforced. This experience highlights how engaging with te reo, while meaningful, can also carry pressure depending on the context and relationships involved.

Hana noted that online forums amplify the divisive public discourse around authenticity:

“There’s a big drama online at the moment about a creator who has a moko kauae, who doesn’t speak Māori... She is trying to teach Māori... The way she’s doing it is against a lot of tikanga, so a lot of people are upset... There’s a collective of Māori

women that are willing to help, but then there's a collective... that are just angry.” —

Hana

Hana describes a public case of identity being policed in an online Māori community. The creator received both support and critique, with some wāhine offering guidance and others calling out misrepresentation. The intentions behind her actions are open to interpretation, reflecting differing views on how Māori identity should be expressed and upheld. This level of scrutiny can lead those still building confidence to avoid engagement as a form of self-protection. Rather than pointing to a single ‘right way’ of engaging, these responses highlight the range of expectations that can exist across different contexts, where approaches to protecting and supporting cultural expression are not always aligned.

Policing Authenticity shows how expectations around the ‘right way’ to be Māori remained under negotiation, even after belonging was established. Visible expressions of identity, from te reo to moko kauae, were often judged rather than celebrated, leaving wāhine hesitant and exposed in their cultural expression.

The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori reveals that even once belonging is established, practice remains under watch. Participants described tensions where tikanga was experienced as rigid, alongside silenced voices and ongoing judgement about how Māori identity should be lived. For some participants, these pressures made cultural practice feel like a test of compliance rather than a space of connection. Colonial and patriarchal expectations continued to shape what was seen as acceptable, limiting how MPCH could be expressed. Within these constraints, wāhine Māori–Pākehā began carving their own ways of being that honoured both their strength and complexity.

What is Māori Enough? and The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori? show that challenging legitimacy and practice are closely intertwined. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, belonging was often uncertain and could be shaped by factors such as appearance, whakapapa, and colonial expectations. Even when belonging was acknowledged, participation could still be constrained by patriarchal structures and narrow definitions of authenticity. These themes suggest that MPCH is shaped not only by internal identity work but also by external forms of regulation, requiring wāhine to navigate both who they are allowed to be and how they are expected to live that identity. Yet Challenging MPCH alone does not complete the story. The next theme, Embodying MPCH, turns toward reclamation and renewal, showing how wāhine move beyond questioning to live MPCH as a source of agency and cultural pride.

Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) moves from scrutiny and resistance toward living identity with confidence and intention within the relational realities of everyday life. It builds on what was learned through navigating and challenging, as wāhine Māori–Pākehā begin to actively inhabit their identities through growth and reclamation, shaping how they express who they are. The Growth of Cultural Confidence traces how identity is strengthened as wāhine Māori–Pākehā build relationships and develop a stronger sense of self. Modern Day Mana Wāhine examines how wāhine Māori–Pākehā reshape culture through how they lead, care, and take up space in contemporary contexts. These subthemes show how hybridity becomes something lived, as wāhine Māori–Pākehā reclaim it as a source of balance and belonging.

The Growth of Cultural Confidence

The Growth of Cultural Confidence traces how wāhine Māori–Pākehā gradually came to embrace their hybrid identities across different contexts and stages of life. It begins with fragile beginnings, where childhood and adolescence were shaped by pressure to conform and the concealment of Māoritanga. It then moves into connection on your terms, where adulthood opened space to reclaim identity through newfound agency and supportive relationships and environments. This continues into raising culture, where motherhood deepened cultural responsibility and inspired intergenerational transmission. This subtheme asks: How does cultural confidence take shape over time?

Fragile Beginnings

Across childhood and adolescence, participants described needing to manage their hybrid identities during a stage when identity formation felt most crucial. Within Pākehā dominant spaces, expressions of Māoritanga often attracted judgment, while Pākehā-aligned behaviours were normalised or left unchallenged.

Rahera reflected on how the cultural affirmation she experienced in her early years was dependent on context:

“I was lucky to attend a primary school with a bilingual class... Middle school was my first experience of feeling othered... When I got to high school, I resented my Māori side... It was too hard to be the other.” — *Rahera*

Rahera’s kōrero follows a clear developmental shift. She moves from early empowerment within a bilingual classroom, to exclusion in Pākehā-dominant environments, to retreating from Māori identity as a survival strategy. What began as safety and affirmation shifted to exclusion and ‘othering’, showing her identity was accepted on a conditional basis. By high school, the exhaustion of being questioned for her difference bred resentment, not toward Māoritanga, but toward the hardship attached to it. Her words show that cultural confidence in formative years is shaped less by personal agency and more by environments that validate Māori identity within Pākehā dominance.

This was echoed by Hana, who pointed to the stereotypes that reinforced this burden:

“Being any kind of Māori was always seen as bad when I was growing up.” — *Hana*

Hana’s kōrero reveals the persistence of stigma. What was condemned was not specific actions, but the idea of being Māori itself. Her identity became divided. Her Pākehā side was treated as standard, while her Māori side was marked as less than. During a vulnerable stage of identity formation, this shaped the expectations of her upbringing. Knowing her Māori identity would be judged meant it had to be monitored rather than expressed, limiting the growth of cultural confidence.

Leah shared a memory that highlights how authoritative figures influence the early shaping of cultural confidence:

“I had to tick an ethnicity box... I asked my teacher, ‘Which one do I select?’ She said, ‘European Pākehā because you’re white.’ That’s always stuck with me.” — *Leah*

Leah’s experience shows how an influential figure can stifle cultural confidence by imposing a Western-biased worldview on a young, impressionable mind. As a teacher, this became a clear message. Māori identity held value only when it aligned with external visibility. For someone still forming identity, this was more than exclusion. It reinforced that identity must

fit singular, binary frameworks, and crossing them carried consequences. These experiences restrict cultural confidence, replacing affirmation with caution and hesitation.

In contrast to these limiting circumstances, Hana offered an example that supported the growth of her cultural confidence:

“My nanny made sure we had our voices heard, that we were an active part of our whānau and the marae. I learnt everything I know because of her and her giving me the confidence to ask questions.” — *Hana*

Hana’s kōrero highlights how particular relational dynamics can foster cultural confidence, creating spaces where identity is affirmed and participation is encouraged. Her nanny affirmed her place by ensuring she was heard, included, and supported to engage, reflecting a way of holding knowledge and authority that is grounded in guidance rather than control. This nurtured cultural confidence through immersion and encouragement, showing how identity can grow when it is recognised as a strength. Her experience also reflects the role of elders in the intergenerational transmission of mātauranga Māori. In this context, her nanny was not only safeguarding identity but actively passing on mana wāhine through relational practice. The marae became a space where this form of engagement supported continuity across generations. By nurturing both knowledge and the confidence to question, her nanny equipped her to navigate and respond to the pressures she encountered beyond this space.

Rahera reflected on the role of positive support networks in determining life trajectories:

“Some of my cousins chose a much different, more negative life path than I did... I think the difference between them and me was the support I had... I had support from my dad and my teachers... they were willing to help me when I struggled.” — *Rahera*

Rahera’s perspective shows that cultural confidence flourishes when grounded in whanaungatanga and strengthened through manaaki. The support of her father and teachers provided stability, creating relational spaces where her Māori identity was affirmed and valued. This highlights how vital cultural support networks are in protecting young people’s cultural confidence, reinforcing a secure sense of identity that helps them navigate and respond to experiences of bias within Pākehā-dominant contexts. In contrast, her cousins’ lack of similar support meant they did not have access to the same relational grounding, leaving them more exposed to experiences of marginalisation. With this support, Rahera was able to embrace her MPCH as a source of strength that shaped her path.

Fragile Beginnings shows how The Growth of Cultural Confidence often began under conditions of conditional belonging and binary norms. Some experiences constrained identity, while others grounded in whanaungatanga nurtured strength, laying the foundation for how participants later reclaimed belonging on their own terms.

Belonging on Your Own Terms

Adulthood offered participants the agency to shape their cultural identity in ways that felt authentic and aligned. Moving from childhood obligations into adult autonomy, they could choose people and places that supported their MPCH. Belonging on their own terms became a key determinant of growing cultural confidence.

For Sonya, belonging on her own terms began with recognising its absence:

“When you're fresh out of study and you're new to the workforce, and you don't know how to do the job just yet, you're just trying to get a pay check at the end of the week. But that workplace helped me at the time. It was for a purpose. I learned that's not who I am and that's not what I stand for.” — *Sonya*

Sonya's experience shows that even disempowering environments can provide clarity. In her previous workplace, her MPCH was not supported, leaving her to engage as a means to an end rather than from purpose. Despite this, she found value in the experience. She gained clarity about the foundations she needed to thrive, learning that belonging could not be found in culturally narrow environments. Her statement, ‘I learned that's not what I am and that's not what I stand for’, acts as resistance, setting boundaries that prioritise her values over societal expectations. Her terms of belonging were shaped not by affirming spaces, but by those that denied her identity. This became a catalyst for the growth of her cultural confidence.

Hana's pursuit of belonging involved finding spaces where her MPCH could live naturally:

“When I'm at softball. I don't feel like I have to put on a face. I don't have to put on an act. I can be me without having to be like, ‘I'm Pākehā and I'm Māori.’ Like our team is so diverse that we can all be ourselves, and it not be an issue.” — *Hana*

Hana describes a rare sense of belonging, unburdened by the usual negotiations placed on those with MPCH. Her softball team created an environment where diversity was normalised, allowing her identity to exist without heightened scrutiny. This kind of relational space reduced the need to fragment or protect parts of herself, supporting the growth of cultural confidence. Rather than being marked as ‘other’ or ‘less than’, her MPCH was accepted as part of the collective dynamic of the team. The experience of no longer ‘putting on an act’ reflects how belonging can emerge through environments that allow people to engage more fully as themselves. This shaped how Hana understood the kinds of spaces in which she felt able to participate more openly.

Leah discovered belonging on her own terms through education and collective resistance:

“I’d say quite proud currently is with everything that’s going on in the government... there’s been a very strong sense of community, and so that’s been really nice. And definitely over the last couple of years doing my Master’s, that’s when I really accepted that side of myself.” — *Leah*

Leah found strength in Māori spaces, where belonging emerged through reclaiming aspects of her identity that had not always been supported in other environments. In contexts where Māori identity was affirmed, the part of herself that had been less recognised within Pākehā-dominant spaces was able to take a more central place. Pride in the tino rangatiratanga movement strengthened her cultural confidence, as she saw herself reflected within a collective movement for cultural self-determination. She explained that when her Māori identity had space to breathe, ‘that’s when I really accepted that side of myself’. This reflects how movement across different spaces shaped her sense of belonging, as she came to engage more deeply with environments that supported Māori identity, pride, and growth.

Belonging on Your Own Terms highlights the next stage in The Growth of Cultural Confidence, as participants moved from externally defined belonging toward self-determined engagement. Through agency and supportive relationships, belonging became an ongoing practice rather than a fixed state. This shift enabled participants to extend their cultural connection beyond themselves and into future generations.

Raising Culture

For many participants, motherhood brought urgency and purpose to connecting with their MPCH. Becoming a parent prompted reflection not only on themselves, but on the cultural identity they hoped to raise in their children.

For Lexi, the spark of motherhood was a turning point in redefining her connection with identity and whakapapa:

“I reckon when I found out I was pregnant with Olive, I was like, ‘Whoa, I have this whole side of me I know nothing about, and I’m bringing a baby into the world. I need to go on this self-discovery journey to figure out who I am and what my culture is... When I had my daughters, for me, this is where my bloodline starts... I feel like this is my family. This is where my pepeha begins.’” — *Lexi*

Motherhood introduced a new sense of responsibility and space of possibility for Lexi. Pregnancy prompted her to begin reshaping the narrative of intergenerational transmission she had inherited. The cultural disconnection of her upbringing was something she refused to pass on. She was driven to reconnect to her Māori identity in ways that reflected the future she was building for her daughters. This renewed connection shaped how she wanted to raise her daughters, with a sense of identity she had missed out on. She described her daughters as the place where her bloodline begins. While Māori culture had carried trauma, the birth of her daughters became a turning point, allowing her to move beyond her past and toward a more aligned cultural life. Motherhood gave her the power to reframe her cultural story, anchoring belonging in her children and reclaiming identity on her own terms. For Lexi, motherhood became both a return and a new beginning.

Sonya shared how motherhood carried a heavy yet empowering responsibility of shaping her son’s cultural identity:

“Since having a child with a Pākehā man, it’s my responsibility in our relationship to pass down what has been passed down to me, because it’s not something that he identifies with. So that’s probably where I feel my strongest disconnect... when you look at Bohdi, he is very Pākehā, very white, white hair, blue eyes... but it’s also where I feel my biggest strength. Because there’s so much mana and there’s so much happiness.” — *Sonya*

Sonya's experience captures both the pressure and power placed on parents raising children with MPCH. She carries the weight of being responsible for upholding her son's Māori identity as the parent with whakapapa. This was further shaped by her son's appearance. Knowing society would read him as Pākehā, she recognised the challenge of nurturing his MPCH both at home and beyond. This created a sense of disconnect, raising MPCH in a world that often expects him to be Pākehā. At the same time, she described this responsibility as her 'biggest strength'. Passing on what has been gifted is both a duty and a privilege within te ao Māori. She takes pride in affirming her Māoritanga while nurturing her son's MPCH. For Sonya, upholding whakapapa carried weight and purpose.

Natalie's kōrero shows how everyday openness is as important as knowledge when raising culture:

"I walk into school to pick up my boys, and I'm so proud to pick them up, to talk to the kapa haka teacher, and I'm fully immersed in what's happening with my children. People realise that even as a Pākehā mum, I'm interested and I'm open to learning..." — *Natalie*

Natalie shows that how motherhood is approached shapes children's connection to culture, even without full knowledge or whakapapa ties. As a Pākehā mother raising Māori-Pākehā children, she is clear about her role. She does not claim to have all the answers, but her openness shows her children that their MPCH matters. Everyday acts of engagement signal to her boys that they are supported in exploring who they are. While others were driven by their own experiences, Natalie was motivated by a commitment to nurturing every part of her children's identity. Together with her partner, they create a whānau environment where their children can grow confident in their MPCH.

For Hana, cultural connection is a reciprocal journey with her son:

"My son comes home and wants to speak in reo, which means I have to pick up my game a bit. It's cool, he is pushing me to want to be stronger in my Māori." — *Hana*

Hana's kōrero shows that motherhood drives cultural connection not only through maternal responsibility, but through reciprocal exchange with tamariki. By nurturing this pride early and creating a space that allowed her son to grow curious and confident in his MPCH, she equipped him to explore his identity without shame. As he grew his knowledge, he returned it

to the whānau through practices like speaking te reo. This reciprocity encouraged Hana to deepen her own connection, strengthening cultural confidence together as whānau.

Rahera's protective approach to raising culture extended beyond the home:

“Kōhanga is whānau driven, so if parents aren't wholeheartedly involved, things can slip... My non-Māori family don't understand this... But my kids having deep cultural immersion at this stage of their lives is so important to me.” — *Rahera*

Rahera's stance extends beyond schooling and highlights the protective role of motherhood in sustaining cultural connection. She recognised that kaupapa Māori approaches such as kōhanga may not align with Pākehā ways of living and can be misunderstood by those outside these frameworks, including members of her own family. Rather than viewing this as a burden, Rahera chose this path as a deliberate commitment to her children's cultural grounding. She prioritised kōhanga even when questioned, reflecting a refusal to compromise their connection to Māoritanga for the ease of alignment with dominant norms. Her stance shows how motherhood can deepen cultural engagement, with raising culture understood as creating the conditions for her children to grow into confident MPCH individuals.

Raising Culture shows how The Growth of Cultural Confidence extended beyond the self and into intergenerational care. Through parenting and everyday practice, wāhine Māori–Pākehā actively shaped how culture is carried forward, embedding identity within their whānau and reshaping legacy.

The Growth of Cultural Confidence traces how wāhine Māori–Pākehā moved from silence to assurance, with MPCH becoming a source of pride and belonging. Across life stages, confidence was nurtured through growing autonomy and intergenerational care, showing identity as both personal and collective. Each act of reclamation extended beyond the individual to help shape how others could stand in their identities. This growth laid the groundwork for Modern Day Mana Wāhine, where cultural confidence becomes lived through action and care.

Modern Day Mana Wāhine

Modern Day Mana Wāhine examines how wāhine Māori–Pākehā embody leadership and cultural responsibility in contemporary contexts. Their kōrero show that mana wāhine is not

confined to ancestral stories or historic struggle, but lived daily through adaptive resistance. This was expressed through the reimagination of culture, where participants were creative with cultural connection through digital spaces and embodied practice. Wāhine were also found to be cultural carriers, where their important relational roles preserved and reshaped cultural knowledge. Release, acceptance, and action became a process of letting go of fear while holding on to values. This subtheme asks: How is mana wāhine carried and expressed in the realities of modern life?

Culture Reimagined

Participants reimagined what it means to live as wāhine Māori–Pākehā in modern times, drawing on contemporary contexts to make culture feel authentic and accessible for themselves. Through digital platforms and new pathways of access, they reshaped culture in ways that meet their needs and support future generations.

For Sonya, online spaces help her maintain whakapapa connections:

“Facebook’s a great thing. Everyone adds you so you keep in contact. You still see what everybody’s up to. I haven’t been to Whangārei in so long, but the connection is still quite strong because we have things like the internet.” — *Sonya*

Sonya’s kōrero shows that digital connection can be whakapapa maintenance in a contemporary form. Traditionally, these connections were nurtured through returning to whenua and gathering as whānau. These practices remain important, but urbanisation and economic pressures can make them less accessible, especially for those living far from ancestral lands. Digital platforms bridge this distance, keeping connections alive when returning in person is difficult. This does not weaken connection but shows how tikanga and whakapapa adapt to modern realities, creating space for tikanga to evolve and grow. By embracing this, Sonya validates digital spaces as a way of strengthening cultural connection.

Lexi built on this digital theme, comparing the silence of her early years to the online cultural visibility of today:

“I honestly feel that growing up, I didn’t hear enough about this kind of stuff and I think maybe that’s why I was so in my head about it because no one really spoke about it. ... I think that could be really beneficial for other children that are going

through the same thing ... having people talk about it. Because I feel like there is this side of social media where they are really firm in knowing who they are in terms of their cultural identity.” — *Lexi*

Lexi’s reflection speaks to more than a generational shift. It shows how silence around MPCH reinforces self-doubt and uncertainty. Growing up without these conversations left her to internalise questions of identity in isolation. When these conversations are absent or treated as taboo, Māori identity is pushed further from view. Social media disrupts this by giving MPCH a visible platform. MPCH can now be discussed, debated and affirmed within communities of like-minded people. These spaces allow wāhine Māori–Pākehā to speak openly, breaking silence so future generations can grow confident in their MPCH.

Leah extended Lexi’s kōrero by offering advice for the next generation based on her own cultural journey:

“Yeah, my advice is you have to actively engage with it. And I wish I had actively engaged with it earlier. Be open to learning about it right from the get-go, because I missed out on so much by not opening myself up to it, or by thinking I had to label myself as one or the other... You can be both, and you can learn about both.” — *Leah*

Leah reframes MPCH as a call to action, urging early engagement as it helps to build a stronger foundation for cultural confidence. Her reminder that ‘you can be both’ disrupts the colonial binary and supports more flexible ways of understanding culture. She encourages the next generation to take ownership of their identity and redefine culture in ways that feel authentic.

Hana made culture in motion visible through a modern reinterpretation of traditional cultural symbols:

“My cousin Mereana, she is 23 and she's had her moko kauae since she was 22... watching her become the woman that she is has been a very beautiful journey, but she felt that she couldn't enter that journey without her moko kauae. So that was her lift... that was her reason to say I'm going to stop doing drugs. I'm going to stop, you know, mucking around and partying all the time. That was her way of signifying that this is my new journey, and this is how I'm going to do it.” — *Hana*

Hana's kōrero makes culture reimagined tangible through a contemporary expression of enduring cultural practice. Receiving a moko kauae affirmed her cousin's Māoritanga while marking a significant shift in her life. Rather than representing something entirely new, this reflects how cultural practices such as moko continue to carry meanings of commitment and transformation. In this context, moko kauae became an anchor, grounding her in whakapapa while supporting a change in direction. Hana's perspective highlights how culture is not static, but continues to be lived and expressed in ways that remain connected to its relational and historical foundations. Seeing culture expressed in this way supports cultural confidence and can open space for others to engage with Māoritanga through lived example.

Culture Reimagined shows how Modern Day Mana Wāhine was expressed through adaptation as much as preservation. Through digital connection and everyday practice, participants reshaped culture in ways that felt accessible and authentic, reflecting how mana wāhine continues to evolve across time and context.

Wāhine as Cultural Carriers

Participants recognised wāhine as central to their journey of cultural connection. The wāhine around and before them were vital to preserving and transmitting knowledge, revealing the weight of their own position as mana wāhine. Wāhine kept cultural memory alive through everyday actions, showing participants that their MPCH was supported and guided. Recognising this allowed participants to understand their own role as cultural carriers and embody their MPCH with confidence.

Leah found the bond with her cousin to be a formative site for cultural connection:

“My only cousin on my Māori side of the family is a female, and she lives up north near our whānau hapū and marae... We'd go up and stay with them, and she'd come down and stay with us... My sister and I thought she was the most amazing person ever... I think because of that connection between us, we learned a lot from her... she was always in the kitchen with all the wāhine, and that's where she learned everything. That's where she learned all the songs and the knowledge and the family stories... I'm so grateful that I was able to get that from her.” — *Leah*

Leah's kōrero highlights wāhine relationships as channels of cultural transmission, where admiration and closeness create informal spaces for knowledge to be passed on. These bonds showed Leah that she could be proud of her MPCH. Gender shaped this nurturing through both her relationship with her cousin and the spaces available to her on the marae. In this context, the marae kitchen became a whare wānanga, where she absorbed mana wāhine through whanaungatanga, pūrākau, kōrero, waiata, and tikanga. Her gratitude highlights the power of informal spaces and wāhine relationships in sustaining mana wāhine, marking the beginning of her MPCH pride.

Rahera acknowledges the challenges that wāhine face in rebuilding their mātauranga after colonisation:

“As a whole for Māori women, I think it's just been a lot harder ... that's when you need to work backwards and talk to those kind of knowledge holders and try to piece together the puzzles.. It's like starting from scratch... A really good example is that... we have all these other words for period, like waiwhero, or īkura. Those words actually kind of have a bit of whakapapa in their meaning... So why is there such a negative connotation associated with something that allows you to give life?” —
Rahera

Rahera's kōrero highlights the importance of wāhine as cultural carriers. Because wāhine knowledge has been devalued through colonisation and ongoing Western hierarchies, wāhine are now seen to hold a vital role in reframing and revitalising this lost knowledge. By reflecting on kupu like waiwhero and īkura, Rahera shows that language carries whakapapa. These words reveal menstruation as honoured and sacred, a view disrupted by colonial stigma. This work is not only recovery, but restoration of mana, reframing practices like menstruation as sites of pride rather than shame. Wāhine move from passive inheritance to active carriers of mātauranga Māori. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this becomes a collective responsibility that extends beyond personal reclamation.

Leah reflects on the persistence and endurance of wāhine, despite being overlooked and undermined through a colonial lens:

“As a kid on the marae, I always saw it as the women being the masterminds behind it all... It's the woman who sits behind and takes notes and remembers everything that happened and kind of pays attention to what's actually going on.” — *Leah*

Leah's observations reflect how wāhine roles, while often less visible, remain central to the continuation of mātauranga. Even when not in front-facing positions, wāhine carry processes that hold power and influence. Her kōrero points to the impact of colonial ideas that have shaped how these roles are valued. Continuing as carriers requires resisting pressures that undermine wāhine contributions. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this role reflects both reclamation and resistance to structures that sustain disconnection.

Hana also reflected on the resilience of wāhine, sharing the intergenerational ways wāhine carry culture despite colonial disruptions:

“Every morning we meditate to a voice recording of my nanny speaking Māori... Her reo was very broken, but it is her voice...” — *Hana*

From nanny to Hana to her son, this shows the intergenerational power of wāhine as cultural carriers. Hana's reflection shows the bravery required to carry culture. In recording a message for her mokopuna, her nanny resisted silence and spoke despite her broken te reo. By speaking te reo despite limited fluency, she resisted colonial silencing and cultural inadequacy. Through acts like this, wāhine safeguard mātauranga and inspire future generations. Their courage shows that this legacy can be carried forward through MPCH.

Wāhine as Cultural Carriers highlights another expression of Modern Day Mana Wāhine, where cultural continuity was sustained through relational care and responsibility rather than preservation alone. Through everyday acts of teaching, remembering, and nurturing, wāhine held and reshaped mātauranga Māori.

Release, Acceptance, Action

Participants spoke about the moment refusal shifted into renewal, where embodying MPCH became a deliberate choice rather than a response shaped by external expectations. Moving forward involved working through anger and fear, accepting that healing unfolds in its own time, and taking steps to embody their MPCH. Through this process, participants stepped into their power as culturally hybrid mana wāhine.

Hana spoke on the importance of releasing the anger that stems from colonial wounds before it begins to erode one's sense of well-being:

“It's horrible that we have to accept what happened and move on. But you have to just accept it. If you stay angry, all that is going to do is just like put raruraru in your heart... I look at wāhine who are just angry all the time and I'm just like, sis, what happened? What do you need?” — *Hana*

Hana's kōrero reflects a relational and ongoing process of working through intergenerational harm. She recognises that while anger can be a valid response to experiences of oppression, holding onto it can shape how people relate to themselves and others over time. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, engaging with these emotions involves navigating tension while making space for different ways of being. This does not dismiss the impacts of trauma, but reflects an effort to live alongside it without allowing it to define identity or wellbeing. Her kōrero shows how experiences of hardship can be responded to in ways that support continued growth, rather than remaining fixed in pain.

Rahera provided a gentle reminder that the process of releasing cannot be rushed:

“I understand why some wāhine haven't dealt with it.” — *Rahera*

Rahera's words reflect a relational approach to healing, grounded in understanding rather than judgement. Her stance recognises that wāhine move through experiences of disconnection in different ways, shaped by their own histories and circumstances. Rather than positioning healing as something that should be resolved, she holds space for others in ways that resist pressure or expectation. Although Māori identity is more visible in contemporary Aotearoa, pathways to reconnection remain uneven, and not all wāhine begin from the same place. What may be interpreted as avoidance can instead be understood as a form of care and readiness. In this way, gentleness becomes part of the reclamation process, where engaging with identity unfolds over time through relational support rather than urgency or control.

Hana also spoke on her desire to reconnect despite the emotional challenges that may arise:

“I want to be able to speak te reo Māori. I want to be able to walk on a marae and not feel lost.” — *Hana*

Hana's kōrero shows how release and acceptance create space for reconnection. She has released some of the weight of her identity while recognising there are still barriers to navigate. Acknowledging she does not want to 'feel lost' reflects both readiness to reconnect and awareness of the challenges involved. Her words hold vulnerability alongside

determination, marking a shift where growth becomes possible. This moment also opens up future possibilities for how she might live and express her MPCH, beyond the limitations shaped by earlier experiences. By expressing this desire, she shows that reclamation is not about fluency, but a willingness to engage. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, moments like this reflect turning points where choosing culture also creates space for what is yet to come.

Leah built upon this progression by showing that what must follow release and acceptance is action:

“You don't have to justify being Māori... It's not a percentage thing, it's not a blood quantum thing, it's about identity and how you identify... If you have that ancestry and you get involved, you are Māori. You're Māori regardless of whether you get involved or not, but to be confident in your identity, I think you have to be involved and make an effort.” — *Leah*

Leah brings this full circle, showing that release and acceptance must be followed by action. Her words show that identity extends beyond inheritance and is strengthened through effort and involvement. While whakapapa affirms belonging, showing up and contributing strengthens confidence. She shows that many reach release and acceptance without knowing how to move forward. She asserts that being Māori–Pākehā is not passive, but requires active participation. Through this, release and acceptance become action, where identity is embodied and lived.

Release, Acceptance, and Action shows how Modern Day Mana Wāhine was also embodied through emotional and cultural agency. Letting go of inherited fear and anger created space for reconnection, while acceptance allowed participants to move forward on their own terms. Through action, wāhine Māori–Pākehā stepped into their identities with intention, transforming MPCH into a lived source of balance and strength.

Modern Day Mana Wāhine brings the journey full circle, showing how wāhine Māori–Pākehā live their cultural hybridity through leadership and intergenerational responsibility. Through reimagining culture, carrying knowledge forward, and practising emotional release, participants embodied mana in everyday life. Their kōrero show that MPCH is not a state to reconcile, but a way of living shaped by resilience and agency. Their actions help to reshape what it means to nurture and lead culture in modern Aotearoa.

The Growth of Cultural Confidence and Modern Day Mana Wāhine show that embodying MPCH is not about resolving identity, but learning to live within it. Participants moved beyond fragmentation, shifting toward a way of being shaped by confidence and a clearer sense of who they are. MPCH was no longer something to question or defend, but something enacted through everyday choices and relationships. In this way, embodiment reflects a shift from negotiating identity to living it. This movement sets the foundation for understanding MPCH as a source of strength rather than tension.

Across these narratives, the lived realities of wāhine Māori–Pākehā show that cultural hybridity is not a static identity, but an ongoing, embodied process. The participant pūrākau foreground the complexity of this experience as it is lived, while the subsequent analysis traces shared patterns across these accounts. Together, they reveal how wāhine navigate belonging, challenge colonial definitions of legitimacy, and embody cultural confidence. These experiences highlight that cultural hybridity is shaped not only by external systems of power, but also through the relational ways wāhine move within different cultural contexts. Across the data, this reflects a movement from negotiating survival toward greater self-definition, where wāhine Māori–Pākehā reshape experiences of fragmentation into forms of connection and strength. The following discussion builds on these insights, situating participants' experiences within broader theoretical and cultural frameworks to further examine how cultural hybridity operates as both tension and transformation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research question and wider literature. It begins by interpreting the findings through the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework, which provides the structure for this discussion. Each movement is explored through two conceptual subthemes that draw on key patterns across participants' narratives. It then introduces the NCE framework more directly as an interpretive lens for understanding the relational development of wāhine Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity (MPCH). The discussion then considers the implications of this research for cultural hybridity theory, mana wāhine and Indigenous scholarship, and broader conversations about cultural identity and reconnection in Aotearoa. It concludes by outlining the limitations of the study and directions for future research. While participants shared lived experience as wāhine Māori–Pākehā, MPCH did not unfold uniformly. Variation in participants' experiences was shaped by social, cultural, and relational conditions. These differences highlight that MPCH does not follow a single pathway, but develops through multiple relational trajectories, explored through the movements of Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying.

Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity



Figure 7. Conceptual representation of Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

This Navigating section centres how wāhine Māori–Pākehā made sense of their identities within social environments that did not always recognise or reflect them, as illustrated in

Figure 7. Participant experiences show that this involves early and ongoing processes of navigating both visibility and invisibility, explored through Cultural Limbo and Cultural Chameleon.

Cultural Limbo: Invisibility

Cultural Limbo captures how wāhine Māori–Pākehā described experiences of invisibility within their everyday lives. Invisibility is not simply about being overlooked within Aotearoa’s social structures, but an outcome of being positioned within spaces that struggle to recognise and include the complexity of their cultural identity. Invisibility can exist as an enduring state of in-betweenness, where cultural hybridity is only partially affirmed and partially rejected, leaving wāhine Māori–Pākehā in an uncertain position of social acceptance.

This finding is linked to liminality, where individuals exist between socially recognised categories without being fully incorporated into either (Turner, 1969). For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, this positioning can be intensified within Aotearoa’s colonial context, where Māori and Pākehā identities are interpreted through binary expectations rather than relational understandings of identity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990; Mikaere, 200; Smith, 2012). Invisibility does not represent the absence of identity, but reflects the difficulty of locating MPCH within social structures that privilege singular forms of cultural belonging. This positioning suggests that cultural hybridity does not simply complicate identity categories but exposes the limits of frameworks that rely on fixed and mutually exclusive understandings of belonging.

Across the data, liminal positioning unfolded in everyday life for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, as they inhabited both Māori and Pākehā worlds without feeling fully anchored or accepted in either. For example, Hana’s rejection of labels and Sonya’s reflections on having her identity questioned in both Māori and Pākehā environments showed that belonging within Aotearoa’s binary social landscape could become conditional for those with MPCH. Instead of existing comfortably within both worlds, to which participants have rightful access, they described discomfort in environments shaped by clear and singular cultural expectations. These experiences showed that cultural hybridity could sit uneasily against the categorical expectations through which cultural identity is interpreted within Aotearoa. Wāhine Māori–

Pākehā seeking acceptance within particular spaces may encounter partial recognition, where their presence is tolerated alongside an undercurrent of judgement or questioning.

Scholarship on belonging within colonial societies identifies belonging as selectively granted to those who align with dominant expectations (Borell, 2005; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). This is consistent with the findings of this research, suggesting that belonging becomes less a stable entitlement grounded in whakapapa and more a conditional status shaped by those positioned as cultural gatekeepers.

Participant experiences also showed that the tensions associated with wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity could become internalised over time, as expectations around identity generated a persistent sense of conflict within the self. For example, Hana’s fluctuating relationship with her Māoritanga, Leah’s reflection that without actively nurturing her Māori identity it could feel as though her Pākehā side was “taking over,” and Lexi’s early attempts to justify her legitimacy in dominant spaces through language such as being “white on the inside” showed the strain of balancing identities framed as incompatible. These accounts suggested that tensions within MPCH were not only external, but could become embedded within how individuals understood their identity. When social frameworks reinforce the idea that Māori and Pākehā identities are mutually exclusive, individuals may begin to internalise this as a personal shortcoming rather than a consequence of hierarchical identity structures.

Scholarship on internalised identity conflict shows how repeated experiences of marginalisation and misrecognition shift structural pressure into psychological conflict (Anzaldúa, 1987; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Fanon, 2008; Ward et al., 2011). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how wāhine Māori–Pākehā experienced misrecognition of their hybrid identity in ways that could become internalised over time.

At the same time, these tensions were reinforced through external processes of stereotyping, where partial recognition did not exempt wāhine Māori–Pākehā from racialised assumptions. For example, Rahera’s academic success being attributed to an assumed Māori advantage, Hana’s awareness that expressions of anger could become racial targets, and Lexi’s internalisation of derogatory narratives surrounding Māori culture showed how participants were interpreted through colonial stereotypes despite only partial recognition of their Māori heritage. These accounts highlighted a contradiction in which wāhine Māori–Pākehā could be positioned as insufficiently Māori in some contexts while still being read through racialised assumptions of their Māori identity in others. Partial recognition did not mean exemption

from stereotyping but added complexity to how identity was interpreted. Scholarship on conditional belonging and stereotype threat helps explain this tension and the heightened self-monitoring marginalised individuals develop in response to the risk of negative judgement (Steele & Aronson, 1995; hooks, 2014). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how these contradictions reflect the ongoing influence of colonial racial frameworks in shaping how Māori identity is interpreted, even for those with MPCH.

Cultural Limbo illustrated how invisibility within dominant structures shaped the social positioning of wāhine Māori–Pākehā within this research. These findings reinforce existing scholarship on the gendered dynamics of cultural representation within colonial contexts. Access to both Māori and Pākehā worlds did not necessarily broaden belonging. MPCH could produce a diluted form of recognition, where acceptance within dominant environments remained partial and open to evaluation by those seen to hold full cultural membership. For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, these dynamics also unfolded within a gendered history that has shaped how wāhine Māori are expected to represent culture within colonial society (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). Cultural Limbo highlights that the difficulty of living between worlds is not a personal deficit, but a consequence of social systems that fail to recognise MPCH. Invisibility becomes less an absence of identity and more a reflection of the limited capacity of dominant frameworks to recognise relational and hybrid forms of belonging.

Cultural Chameleon: Visibility

Cultural Chameleon illustrated how individuals with MPCH became socially visible by foregrounding or muting aspects of their identity to align with dominant expectations. While Cultural Limbo showed how MPCH could become socially invisible, visibility introduced a different form of negotiation where identity became a tool used to meet shifting thresholds of legitimacy. Visibility could place individuals in a dilemma where acceptance within dominant environments depended on moderating or reshaping more authentic expressions of MPCH. Individuals with MPCH in this research found that validity was more readily granted when aspects of their identity aligned with dominant expectations of behaviour and presentation. Scholarship on hybrid identity shows that individuals with multiple cultural affiliations adjust the visibility of identity markers in response to contextual pressures and social expectations (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). This is consistent with the findings of this

research, showing how Cultural Chameleon reflected a form of social navigation in which individuals shifted between cultural expressions to maximise safety and acceptance, often at the expense of more authentic expressions of identity. This dynamic suggests that visibility within colonial contexts functions less as a pathway to belonging and more as a conditional form of recognition dependent on alignment with dominant norms.

The findings showed that increased visibility within dominant contexts could produce privileges that remained marginalising, as they were tied to inequities associated with proximity to whiteness rather than individual merit. For example, Leah's observation that she was treated with greater respect than her colleagues because of her perceived alignment with Pākehā identity showed how alignment with Pākehā norms could confer credibility within institutional environments. Rahera similarly recognised that her ability to move between Māori and Pākehā environments provided access to educational and social opportunities not equally available to others. Hana's reflection on being treated differently depending on the depth of her skin tone highlighted the conditional nature of acceptance within colonially structured spaces. Scholarship on white normativity shows that proximity to whiteness can provide increased credibility within Western environments, although this access remains conditional on adherence to dominant norms (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 1989; Tatum, 1997). This further supports the findings of this research within the specific context of Aotearoa, where institutional structures continue to privilege Pākehā identities and ways of being (Came et al., 2021). The advantages associated with visibility did not signal equality of belonging but revealed how colonial racial hierarchies shape which identities are granted credibility within institutional environments.

Across the data, being socially visible within dominant contexts required the organisation of MPCH in response to social pressure, with a quick assessment of the surrounding environment before deciding how openly aspects of cultural identity could be expressed. For example, certain contexts, such as Sonya's workplace experiences, highlighted explicit hostility toward Māori identity, while others reflected more subtle attitudes. Leah's encounters with derogatory political discourse toward Māori among colleagues showed how perceived Pākehā alignment could create an unspoken expectation of complicity. Variation in these experiences suggested that assessing how their MPCH would be received involved ongoing situational interpretation, where individuals evaluated the surrounding cultural stance and potential social and relational consequences of expressing their identity.

Scholarship on situational ethnicity and adaptive identity strategies shows how these assessments become routine responses within familiar contexts (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997; Okamura, 1981). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how navigating visibility became a learned and effortful relational skill shaped through interaction with environments structured by unequal cultural power.

Once they had assessed how their MPCH was likely to be received, individuals made decisions about how to position themselves within social interactions. These responses ranged from openly asserting Māori identity to temporarily foregrounding Pākehā-aligned traits in order to maintain safety within colonial spaces. For example, Natalie's decision to consistently identify her son as Māori on official documents showed how identity could be deliberately asserted where cultural hybridity might otherwise be overlooked. Hana's use of a "manager voice" and the distinction between her professional and relational identities showed a strategic adjustment to maintain credibility within Western professional environments. These variations, whether through integrated coherence or strategic compartmentalisation, reflected an adaptive organisation of identity, where individuals recalibrated their expression of self in response to perceived risks and opportunities. These patterns align with scholarship on multicultural identity negotiation, which identifies hybrid and alternating identity styles as ways of organising identity across different contexts (Ward et al., 2018). Identity modulation can operate not as cultural inconsistency but as an adaptive strategy for maintaining safety and credibility within environments shaped by colonial expectations.

Cultural Chameleon illustrated how visibility within colonial contexts did not resolve the tensions of MPCH but made them more apparent in everyday experience. These findings extend existing scholarship on identity negotiation by showing how identity expression becomes contingent on ongoing assessments of social and relational contexts, reflecting an adaptive response to conditions where belonging remains conditional and shaped by dominant expectations. MPCH was not only lived but actively negotiated within environments structured by conditional recognition. Wāhine Māori-Pākehā were positioned not simply as navigating identity, but as engaging with the limits of the frameworks that define belonging. This leads into the next movement, Challenging MPCH, where these frameworks are more directly questioned and resisted.

Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity



Figure 8. Conceptual representation of Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

The Challenging section centres how wāhine Māori–Pākehā began to question and challenge the expectations shaping their identities within social environments, as illustrated in Figure 8. Participant experiences show that this involves processes of confronting and resisting dominant definitions of belonging and cultural legitimacy, explored through *What is Māori Enough?* and *The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori*.

What is Māori Enough?: Contested Access

What is Māori Enough? captured the point where MPCH moved beyond navigation into a space where belonging could be challenged. Earlier sections examined how MPCH was navigated through invisibility and shifting visibility, while this section shifted toward questioning how cultural identity was regulated and politicised within Aotearoa. Scholarship on bicultural governance, racial categorisation and fractional measures of identity shows that belonging is often shaped through colonial frameworks that inadequately assess Māori identity (Harris et al., 2012; Kukutai, 2004; Smith, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how wāhine Māori–Pākehā may be repeatedly confronted with the question of whether they were ‘Māori enough’, positioning their cultural legitimacy as something continually debated rather than affirmed through whakapapa and relational commitment. The question of “Māori enough” does not only reflect personal uncertainty but also reveals the continued influence of colonial frameworks that categorise and regulate Indigenous identity.

Aotearoa's global reputation as a bicultural haven has been critiqued as misrepresenting the everyday realities of Māori within institutional and relational spaces (Bell, 2006; Smith, 2012). Bicultural inclusion can give the appearance of progress while deeper colonial structures of authority remain unchanged. For example, Rahera's reflections on education systems celebrating Māori achievement as a sign of cultural equity, while failing to integrate Māori ways of being and remaining Western-centred, highlighted how observable inclusion could function as a performative sign of progress without changing how power and authority are distributed. This aligns with longstanding critiques within Māori scholarship that argue biculturalism in Aotearoa is often incorporated in ways that appear inclusive while leaving colonial power structures that privilege Western epistemologies and governance largely untouched (Bell, 2006; Mikaere, 2003; Smith, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how symbolic inclusion can coexist with structural continuity, allowing colonial systems of authority to remain intact despite outward gestures toward cultural recognition.

Across the data, structural conditions extended into the everyday interpretation of Māori identity, where acceptance could be informally assessed through colonial visual expectations that shaped how identity became legible to others. For example, Lexi's intimidation at the assumption that she should possess extensive Māori cultural knowledge because she "looks Māori" reflected the pressure created when appearance became a primary determinant of legitimacy. Sonya's experience of feeling compelled to prove her Māori identity within a kapa haka space similarly showed how belonging could become entangled with appearance and expectations of cultural fluency. These experiences are supported by scholarship on socially assigned ethnicity, which shows how visible characteristics influence how identity is interpreted and categorised (Harris et al., 2012; Hokowhitu, 2004). This extends the findings of this research, highlighting how individuals with MPCH may attract heightened scrutiny as they challenge the visual assumptions through which belonging is assessed. Appearance becomes a mechanism through which colonial identity frameworks determine whose belonging is recognised and whose legitimacy remains open to question.

Participant experiences also showed that cultural belonging could be interrogated through fractional understandings of Indigenous identity, where whakapapa could be interpreted through the language of blood quantum measurement, evident in everyday questions about 'how much Māori' someone was. For example, Sonya's description of her whakapapa

through percentages showed how colonial systems of identity measurement had become entrenched in everyday explanations of cultural heritage. Rahera's commentary on Māori percentage highlighted how casual inquiries could translate whakapapa into quantifiable measures that have functioned as colonial tools for regulating Indigenous legitimacy and access to rights and resources. Hana's reflections on inheritance disputes further showed how these colonial logics could shape interpretations of belonging within Māori contexts. Scholarship on Indigenous identity argues that blood-based systems reduce relational understandings of whakapapa into simplified measures of cultural authenticity (Barker, 2011; Kukutai, 2004; Mikaere, 2003). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how these framings recast Māori belonging as a calculable measure, displacing its relational foundations in collective responsibility. These measurement logics highlight how colonial governance continues to shape understandings of Indigenous identity by translating relational whakapapa into quantifiable categories of authenticity.

For wāhine Māori–Pākehā, the question of what is “Māori enough” became a point of tension where multiple forms of evaluation and scrutiny converged. These findings suggest how symbolic inclusion, visual evaluation of identity, and fractional understandings of whakapapa continue to shape how Māori identity is recognised in Aotearoa. Dynamics such as this can produce a persistent pressure to prove cultural legitimacy. The question of whether one is ‘Māori enough’ exposes the continued influence of colonial measurement logics that displace relational understandings of whakapapa and maintain systems of social control. Wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience reveals the limitations of colonial classificatory systems, extending existing scholarship by exposing tensions between fractional identity regulation and whakapapa-based relational understandings of belonging. These tensions do not reflect a deficit within hybrid identities but expose the inadequacy of colonial classificatory systems for recognising relational and whakapapa-based forms of belonging.

The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori: Cultural Policing

The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori illustrated how recognition of Māori identity did not necessarily resolve questions of belonging. Earlier sections examined how MPCH was negotiated through invisibility, shifting visibility, and contested legitimacy. Even when membership was acknowledged, this acceptance could introduce expectations around how

Māoritanga should be expressed and who defined the ‘right way’ to be Māori. Indigenous identity has often been interpreted through colonial regulatory logics that privilege markers of authenticity aligned with a broader colonial agenda, such as framing culture as fixed rather than responsive to changing contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990; Smith, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how these logics tie Indigenous belonging to how closely cultural expression aligns with fixed standards of legitimacy. Once recognised, wāhine Māori–Pākehā may encounter additional pressures as their cultural participation becomes subject to heightened evaluation of whether they are engaging with Māoritanga in the ‘correct’ way. After gaining recognition for their hybrid Indigenous identity, new expectations around how they should be Māori introduced another layer of negotiation.

Across the data, these tensions arose from fixed interpretations of tikanga that could frame Māori traditions as a fixed template that legitimacy had to align with. Within contemporary contexts shaped by disrupted cultural continuity, such expectations could create barriers for those whose access to cultural knowledge had been interrupted. For example, Hana and Rahera’s critique of the expectation to fit a prescribed cultural mould showed that while cultural resurgence is empowering for the revitalisation of te ao Māori, it could also generate pressure to replicate historical forms of practice rather than allow Māoritanga to evolve. This does not reject tikanga, but challenges the assumption that strict adherence to fixed expressions of Māoritanga is the only way to be authentically Māori. Wider scholarship supports this through debates about whether tikanga should be static and prescriptive, or relational and responsive to changing social contexts (Mead, 2016; Mikaere, 2003; Walker, 2004). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how debates surrounding authenticity reflect the ongoing influence of colonial histories of cultural dislocation in shaping expectations of legitimate Māori identity.

Histories of gender authority reshaped through colonial processes further complicated what the ‘right way’ to be Māori was by producing expectations about the ‘right way’ to be wāhine. For example, Rahera’s account of the disappearance of wāhine-centred knowledge reflected broader scholarship showing that colonial systems of record-keeping operated through a patriarchal lens that privileged male perspectives while disregarding wāhine knowledge (Mikaere, 2003; Smith, 2012). This aligns with mana wāhine scholarship, which argues that colonial patriarchy reorganised Māori gender balance by repositioning wāhine

authority from respected positions to more marginalised roles within social structures (Pihama, 2001). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how the persistence and revitalisation of wāhine leadership within contemporary Māori contexts acted as resistance to prescriptive expectations of what the ‘right way’ to be wāhine was. From a wāhine perspective, debates about authenticity became multilayered, involving cultural expectations and historical struggles over the recognition of knowledge and leadership within Māori communities.

Participant experiences also showed that hypervigilance around correct expression of Māoritanga could be particularly noticeable in environments shaped by colonial restructuring. Visible cultural signifiers such as te reo Māori or tā moko, including moko kauae and mataora, could invite heightened evaluation of whether their use reflected authentic expression or a tokenistic gesture. For example, Rahera’s reflections on the anxiety experienced by learners of te reo Māori at the beginning of their journey showed how mistakes may be interpreted as evidence of inauthenticity rather than part of cultural reconnection. Hana similarly observed online debates surrounding moko kauae, showing how visible cultural signifiers became focal points for public scrutiny of cultural legitimacy and entitlement. The intensification of scrutiny in these environments is reflected in scholarship that suggests authenticity surveillance has emerged in response to the trauma of cultural appropriation and commodification (Moon & Derby, 2018; Smith, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of this research, demonstrating that while often motivated by safeguarding cultural integrity, this surveillance can reproduce colonial assimilative mechanisms by defining cultural expression so narrowly that participation outside these boundaries is met with suspicion. This could discourage the cultural engagement that assimilation historically sought to suppress. Authenticity may shift away from relational accountability grounded in whakapapa toward a colonially imposed form of cultural monitoring, where identity expression is subject to external evaluation.

The findings showed that questioning the ‘right way’ to be Māori shaped how cultural participation for wāhine Māori–Pākehā was experienced through layered forms of cultural regulation. Expectations around the expression of tikanga, debates over wāhine authority, and heightened scrutiny of authenticity influenced how cultural belonging was engaged and enacted. While cultural protection often motivates these dynamics following histories of colonial dispossession, such conditions can narrow the space for Māori experiences to remain

responsive to contemporary realities. These tensions do not reflect deficiencies within MPCH but expose the limitations of rigid cultural standards for recognising evolving and relational expressions of Māoritanga, extending existing scholarship by highlighting how these dynamics shape contemporary experiences of cultural participation. Challenging MPCH shifted from questioning belonging to rethinking the conditions through which it was defined. This created space for the next movement, where wāhine began to embody cultural identity with greater confidence, agency, and relational grounding.

Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity



Figure 9. Conceptual representation of Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity

The Embodying section traces how wāhine Māori–Pākehā come to embody their cultural identities with greater confidence and intention, as illustrated in Figure 9. Participant experiences show that this involves the development of a more grounded and self-defined sense of belonging, as cultural identity becomes lived, expressed, and carried forward through relational responsibility. This is explored through The Growth of Cultural Confidence and Modern Day Mana Wāhine.

The Growth of Cultural Confidence: Generational Continuity

The Growth of Cultural Confidence illustrated how MPCH evolved across the life course into a more grounded and embodied sense of cultural hybrid pride. In this research, cultural confidence referred to a more grounded and self-assured relationship with cultural identity, where wāhine Māori–Pākehā felt able to express, engage with, and carry their Māoritanga in

ways that aligned with their own values and lived experiences. Lived experiences within Māori–Pākehā identity shaped a gradual shift from early misrecognition and confusion toward stronger cultural confidence and a deeper commitment to intergenerational responsibility. Identity development scholarship asserts that cultural identity is never fixed but shaped through internal and external experiences (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1990). Māori frameworks similarly understand identity as relational, grounded in whakapapa and collective responsibility rather than isolated self-definition (Durie, 1998a). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how cultural confidence for those with MPCH developed through lived experience rather than a single moment of clarity, shaped by hardship, agency, and responsibility beyond the self.

Across the data, when culturally affirming environments were fragile in early life, cultural confidence became more vulnerable to disruption. These findings suggest that schooling and social contexts can position Pākehā norms as the standard against which belonging is measured, while expressions of Māoritanga are treated as secondary. For example, Rahera’s recollection of feeling culturally safe in her bilingual primary school before transitioning to a European-dominant intermediate school, where she began feeling isolated from her Māori identity, showed how cultural confidence could fluctuate across formative environments. Leah’s recollection of being told by her teacher to identify as “European Pākehā” because it matched her appearance showed how educational environments shaped by colonial assumptions influenced identity formation. Hana’s reflection that during childhood “being any kind of Māori was always seen as bad” showed how the devaluation of Māori identity within Aotearoa’s colonial social climate could become internalised. These experiences align with scholarship showing that colonial contexts shape identity by validating Eurocentric expressions and marginalising Indigenous ones (Borell, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977; Smith, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how environments that affirm Māori identity can counterbalance these pressures and support the development of cultural confidence, even within restrictive contexts.

Adulthood created opportunities for wāhine Māori–Pākehā to reconnect with their MPCH beyond externally imposed expectations and form belonging on their own terms. Greater independence allowed environments and relationships to be chosen more intentionally, aligning external contexts with internal identity motivations so Māori dimensions of identity could be expressed in ways that felt supported. For example, Sonya’s reflection that working

in a racially prejudiced workplace no longer reflected “who I am and what I stand for” showed how cultural misalignment could clarify personal boundaries around prioritising supportive environments. Hana and Leah’s celebration of supportive spaces in adulthood highlighted the importance of contexts where MPCH did not require justification and where immersion strengthened cultural confidence. Hall’s (1990) conceptualisation of identity as a process of becoming supports these experiences, with scholarship suggesting MPCH becomes more integrated once individuals gain the agency to shape their lives in ways that reconcile multiple cultural affiliations (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Ward et al., 2018). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing that as life progressed, cultural confidence became grounded in the capacity to define belonging on one’s own terms.

Participant experiences also showed that motherhood was a stage where cultural confidence became a greater priority, as Māori–Pākehā identity shifted from a personal journey toward the responsibility of transmitting culture to the next generation. For example, Lexi described pregnancy as a moment of clarity where she needed to better understand herself and her culture, showing how motherhood could prompt deeper engagement with whakapapa in preparation for passing on cultural knowledge. Hana’s son developing a desire to speak te reo Māori at home showed how cultural engagement within motherhood could become reciprocal, with tamariki reinforcing connection within the whānau. Rahera demonstrated this commitment by enrolling her children in kōhanga reo despite resistance from non-Māori family members, showing how choices in motherhood could involve resilience and cultural protection. Mana wāhine scholarship supports these experiences by positioning wāhine Māori as central to the nurturing and transmission of culture within whānau and communities (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). These accounts align with Māori understandings of whakapapa as a living system sustained through obligations to both ancestors and future generations (Durie, 1998a). Motherhood shifted cultural confidence from a personal journey to an intergenerational responsibility, where MPCH could become a pathway for sustaining cultural continuity.

The Growth of Cultural Confidence illustrated how MPCH evolved across the life course from early vulnerability toward a more intentional form of cultural confidence. These findings extend existing scholarship by showing how opportunities for cultural reconnection and intergenerational responsibility became more visible as individuals gained agency in adulthood. Cultural confidence emerged across the life course as early environments,

growing agency, and intergenerational responsibility reshaped how MPCH was understood and lived.

Modern Day Mana Wāhine: Hybrid Authority

Modern Day Mana Wāhine marked a shift away from histories of oppression and marginalisation toward a more embodied expression of cultural authority. This section illustrated how wāhine Māori–Pākehā began to express their cultural identity with greater confidence, agency, and relational grounding. While the lived experience of wāhine Māori–Pākehā contained challenges, it could also become a source of creative reclamation of mana disrupted through colonial histories. Rather than framing cultural hybridity as something requiring resolution, wāhine Māori–Pākehā could reshape how Māoritanga was expressed within contemporary contexts to reflect modern wāhine realities. Mana wāhine scholarship positions wāhine Māori as central to cultural resurgence, recognising their authority as both a continuation of ancestral mana and a response to colonial disruption (Pihama, 2021; Simmonds, 2011). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how wāhine leadership often emerged in nuanced ways that sustained mātauranga Māori through everyday practice.

Across the data, modern forms of Māori cultural expression emerged within contemporary contexts, reflecting the responsive nature of Māoritanga. These findings suggest that engagement with culture today often occurs within contexts that reflect contemporary realities. For example, Sonya’s maintenance of connections with whānau through digital platforms showed how technological environments functioned as spaces for whakawhanaungatanga by extending geographic boundaries. Lexi similarly observed that social media had increased awareness of MPCH by creating spaces where MPCH could be more openly discussed. Hana’s reflections on her younger cousin’s modern approach to receiving a moko kauae showed how traditional symbols retained cultural value while taking on new interpretations. The evolution of tikanga alongside social change, rather than remaining fixed, aligns with wider Māori scholarship (Pihama, 2021). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how mana wāhine scholarship positions wāhine as key agents in this process through their ability to reinterpret cultural expression in ways grounded in whakapapa while responding to contemporary realities.

Participant experiences also showed that the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge within whānau was a key strength of wāhine Māori. Leah's recollection of building cultural knowledge in her marae kitchen alongside her cousin and other wāhine showed how everyday spaces acted as sites of cultural transmission. Such informal environments reflect Durie's (1998b) emphasis on everyday settings for the circulation of cultural knowledge. For example, Rahera's emphasis on recovering wāhine knowledge, including kupu such as waiwhero and īkura, showed the work required to reclaim knowledge disrupted through colonisation and how language carries whakapapa that requires active preservation. Hana's daily meditations to a recording of her nanny speaking te reo showed how fragments of language and memory sustained cultural connection across generations. Mana wāhine scholarship recognises the value of relational practices led by wāhine within Māori communities, including caregiving, storytelling, and memory keeping (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). This is consistent with the findings of this research, highlighting how relational practices within whānau acted as key sites for sustaining and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.

A more intentional and future-oriented sense of cultural self-definition began to emerge for wāhine Māori–Pākehā. Moving away from defensive positioning allowed wāhine Māori–Pākehā to develop a more deliberate relationship with their identity that acknowledged past hardships while reshaping those narratives. Hana's prioritisation of releasing anger associated with colonial harm highlighted the emotional labour of cultural reclamation and her concern that remaining consumed by anger could undermine wellbeing and cultural confidence. For example, Rahera extended this by emphasising patience and compassion for both self and others navigating cultural reconnection. Hana's desire to strengthen her cultural connection showed a shift from resentment toward renewed engagement with Māoritanga, while Leah's assertion that such engagement must be actively pursued reinforced this movement toward intentional participation. Scholarship that conceptualises cultural hybridity as a site of generative possibility rather than deficiency supports these experiences (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994). This is consistent with the findings of this research, showing how this movement from reaction to action reflected a more agentic engagement with identity. It also aligns with mana wāhine scholarship, which centres the reclamation of wāhine authority over cultural identity and participation (Pihama, 2001).

Modern Day Mana Wāhine illustrated the evolving potential of wāhine Māori–Pākehā as a contemporary expression of mana wāhine authority. These findings showed that MPCH could become a source of strength rather than limitation through the capacity to access new and responsive forms of cultural expression within their own identities, extending existing scholarship on mana wāhine and cultural hybridity. These findings further suggested that rather than diluting Māoritanga, MPCH contributed to and expanded its ongoing revitalisation within contemporary Aotearoa. Embodying MPCH moved toward a more grounded and self-defined relationship with cultural identity, where belonging was no longer negotiated through external validation but expressed through lived connection and relational responsibility.

This section interpreted these findings by positioning MPCH, as lived by wāhine Māori–Pākehā, as a relational process shaped by shifting conditions of recognition rather than a stable identity. Movement across navigating, challenging, and embodying was understood as more than progression, instead reflecting how wāhine engaged with the frameworks that define and regulate belonging. Through this interpretation, cultural hybridity exposed the limits of fixed cultural categories and revealed belonging as something continually negotiated and redefined. The following section introduces the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework as a way of conceptualising this process.

The NCE Framework: Interpreting Relational Development in Wāhine Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity



Figure 10. Conceptual representation of the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework

This research puts forward the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework as a way of understanding the relational development of wāhine Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH). It conceptualises wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity as a dynamic lived experience shaped through three interconnected movements: Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (summarised in Figure 10). Each movement is articulated through two themes that illustrate lived experiences and identity negotiation. The NCE framework offers a lens for understanding how wāhine Māori–Pākehā negotiate identity across changing social environments, while reflecting how they come to understand and inhabit their cultural identities within the gendered positioning of Māori womanhood (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001).

Although all participants shared Māori–Pākehā whakapapa, their experiences of cultural hybridity emerged from different relational starting points. Differences in phenotypical presentation, family environment, cultural immersion, and social context shaped how their identities developed. Wāhine did not move through cultural hybridity from a shared starting point or along a single pathway. Across the data, MPCH was experienced as a relational process shaped through embodiment, environment, and access to culture, reinforcing the need for a framework that accounts for diverse identity trajectories.

The NCE framework is not intended to represent linear developmental stages. Navigating, challenging, and embodying function as relational processes that ebb and flow across the life course, shifting as wāhine Māori–Pākehā come to understand and inhabit their MPCH. Within this research, navigating appeared most clearly in earlier identity environments, while challenging became more prominent as participants developed critical awareness of the expectations shaping their identities. Embodying emerged more strongly in later phases, where participants expressed their MPCH with increasing confidence through relational engagement and intergenerational cultural responsibility linked to wāhine roles within whānau and community. These movements may be more prominent at certain moments, but wāhine Māori–Pākehā drew on all three throughout their lives. The framework is best understood as describing overlapping relational processes rather than sequential stages.

Navigating

Navigating Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) is articulated through Cultural Limbo: Invisibility and Cultural Chameleon: Visibility, which capture how wāhine Māori–Pākehā negotiate recognition across different social environments. Cultural Limbo: Invisibility captures experiences where MPCH does not fit within binary expectations, creating a sense of existing between cultural worlds where identities are not fully recognised. Cultural Chameleon: Visibility illustrates how aspects of MPCH are strategically expressed in response to environments where recognition and reception shift.

The NCE framework conceptualises navigating as a developing awareness of how MPCH is read across social environments and how individuals move between these contexts. Within this research, it appeared most clearly in earlier identity environments, particularly during childhood and adolescence when belonging was still being interpreted. It remains an ongoing process that may re-emerge when wāhine Māori–Pākehā enter unfamiliar contexts or when environments shift in ways that alter how their cultural identity is received, requiring MPCH to be renegotiated.

Challenging

Challenging Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) is observed through *What is Māori Enough?: Contested Access* and *The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori: Cultural Policing*, which reveal how expectations of cultural authenticity and legitimacy are confronted and negotiated. *What is Māori Enough?: Contested Access* centres on situations where entitlement to Māori identity or participation in cultural spaces is questioned or disputed. *The ‘Right Way’ to Be Māori: Cultural Policing* draws attention to the scrutiny placed on expressions of Māoritanga according to socially constructed expectations of legitimate cultural practice.

The NCE framework conceptualises challenging as the process through which wāhine Māori–Pākehā begin to interrogate and resist expectations that regulate Māori identity. It emerges through growing awareness of the colonial conditions shaping how cultural authenticity is defined, prompting wāhine Māori–Pākehā to question restrictive expectations of Māori identity. Within this research, this process became more visible during periods of increasing critical awareness, when broader cultural and political contexts came into view. These expectations may be encountered earlier, but it is through increasing awareness that the dynamics sustaining them become conscious and open to questioning. Challenging may re-emerge when cultural legitimacy becomes contested, from interpersonal encounters through to institutional and societal environments where Māori identity is interpreted and evaluated.

Embodying

Embodying Māori–Pākehā Cultural Hybridity (MPCH) is expressed through *The Growth of Cultural Confidence: Generational Continuity* and *Modern Day Mana Wāhine: Hybrid Authority*, which together show how MPCH becomes more unified through lived identity and relational engagement with culture. *The Growth of Cultural Confidence: Generational Continuity* reflects deepening connections with culture and an expanding sense of responsibility for cultural knowledge and intergenerational continuity. *Modern Day Mana Wāhine: Hybrid Authority* highlights the emergence of confident cultural expression, where MPCH is embraced as a legitimate and contemporary form of Māori identity.

The NCE framework conceptualises embodying as the process through which MPCH becomes more cohesively inhabited and expressed through everyday cultural engagement. It

reflects a shift away from negotiating identity in response to external expectations toward expressing cultural identity grounded in whakapapa and lived experience. Within this research, it **became** most visible in moments where cultural confidence and relational responsibility were expressed through relationships with whānau and wider community life, showing how wāhine Māori–Pākehā carry cultural knowledge across generations. It is not a final endpoint but a process that deepens over time while remaining interconnected with navigating and challenging MPCH.

The Value of the NCE Framework

These three movements illustrate how MPCH is negotiated, questioned, and inhabited across changing social environments and life circumstances within the Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework developed in this research. Navigating reflects the interpretive work required to move between contexts where cultural hybridity is recognised in different ways. Challenging captures the interrogation of expectations that regulate Māori identity and cultural legitimacy. Embodying describes the growing integration of cultural identity through engagement with culture, whānau, and everyday practice.

This framework recognises the interconnected nature of navigating, challenging, and embodying across the life course, despite their prominence at different moments. These movements do not function as separate stages but operate in relationship as wāhine Māori–Pākehā encounter changing environments and shifting expectations of Māori identity. The NCE framework understands the lived experience of wāhine Māori–Pākehā not as a linear sequence but as a relational process through which MPCH is continually interpreted and inhabited across time. Having outlined the NCE framework, the next section considers the wider implications of this research. These implications extend to cultural hybridity theory, mana wāhine and Indigenous scholarship, and broader discussions of cultural reconnection and identity in Aotearoa, highlighting the relevance of MPCH beyond the immediate findings.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This section considers the wider implications of this research, drawing on these findings to extend cultural hybridity theory, mana wāhine and Indigenous scholarship, and broader discussions of cultural identity in Aotearoa.

Cultural Hybridity Theory

This research contributes to cultural hybridity scholarship by offering a relational, lived-experience account of how MPCH is negotiated by wāhine Māori–Pākehā. Foundational scholarship conceptualises cultural hybridity as a condition that disrupts fixed cultural categories (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). This research extends these insights by showing how cultural hybridity is lived and negotiated within everyday social environments.

The findings suggested that MPCH was not a straightforward identity position but an ongoing relational process shaped through social contexts surrounding Māori identity. The Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework developed in this research extends cultural hybridity theory by drawing on lived experiences of wāhine Māori–Pākehā to show how hybrid identity is interpreted, questioned, and integrated across contexts. Rather than presenting cultural hybridity as a fixed identity category, the framework conceptualises it as a relational process through which identity is continually negotiated across changing social environments, aligning with and extending existing understandings of identity as fluid and contextually shaped (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990).

Although focused on wāhine Māori–Pākehā, the NCE framework offers insights for broader cultural hybridity theory by demonstrating the value of grounding scholarship in lived experience, responding to calls within the literature for more contextually grounded and relational accounts of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990).

Mana Wāhine and Indigenous Scholarship

This research contributes to mana wāhine and Indigenous scholarship by highlighting the relational leadership of wāhine Māori–Pākehā in the development of cultural identity and the transmission of culture. Mana wāhine scholarship emphasises the role of wāhine as holders of

cultural knowledge whose leadership within whānau and community contributes to the evolution of cultural practice and identity (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011).

The findings showed that wāhine Māori–Pākehā navigated and sustained cultural identity through responsibilities connected to whakapapa and intergenerational continuity. These experiences suggest that MPCH contributes to evolving expressions of mana wāhine, where wāhine bring lived insights that inform conversations about Māori identity.

The findings also showed how wāhine Māori–Pākehā acted as relational connectors across social and familial contexts. Colonial framings have positioned MPCH as a dilution of identity, yet existing scholarship critiques these deficit framings and instead emphasises the strength and resilience of Indigenous identity in response to colonial disruption (Pihama, 2001; Smith, 2012). These findings align with existing scholarship, showing how MPCH positions wāhine as bridges between cultural worlds, supporting cultural continuity within whānau and community life. These experiences further suggest that MPCH operates as a source of relational connection and cultural resilience within contemporary expressions of Māoritanga.

Cultural Reconnection and Identity in Aotearoa

Building on these contributions, this research has implications for broader discussions of cultural reconnection and identity in Aotearoa.

Pathways to Māori cultural connection are diverse and shaped by individual life circumstances and relational environments, often emerging within contexts of intergenerational disconnection created through colonisation and social change (Durie, 1998a; Smith, 2012). Cultural reconnection often emerges through family relationships, community involvement, education, and personal exploration of whakapapa and identity.

The findings suggested that Māori identity is lived and evolving rather than measured against rigid expectations of authenticity, aligning with scholarship that understands identity as relational and shaped through lived experience (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). Recognising diverse pathways may support more inclusive approaches to contemporary Māori identity development.

The findings also highlighted the impact of cultural gatekeeping within discussions of Māori identity. Expectations of legitimate expressions of Māoritanga shape how individuals experience belonging within cultural spaces. Reducing authenticity policing within cultural settings may create more supportive conditions for MPCH individuals to explore and express their identities. Cultural protection has played an important role in safeguarding Māori knowledge and identity, but these findings suggest that reducing unnecessary barriers may encourage greater engagement with Māoritanga. These dynamics are consistent with scholarship on authenticity and cultural regulation, which highlights how boundaries around legitimate identity are often shaped through processes of inclusion and exclusion (Mikaere, 2003; Smith, 2012). Recognising MPCH as a legitimate expression of contemporary Māoritanga may support more inclusive approaches to cultural belonging while maintaining the visibility and vitality of Māori identity.

These implications highlight how MPCH offers a more relational and lived-experience lens for understanding cultural hybridity, mana wāhine, and contemporary Māori identity in Aotearoa.

Limitations

While this research offers important theoretical and practical contributions, several limitations should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study prioritised qualitative depth over breadth. The research was based on a small number of participants, allowing in-depth exploration of wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experiences. This enabled close examination of how participants interpreted and negotiated their identities across social contexts. However, the small sample means the findings should not be interpreted as representative of all wāhine Māori–Pākehā experiences. The findings provide one interpretive perspective on how MPCH is experienced and negotiated within specific relational and social environments.

Second, the age range of participants highlights an important limitation. All participants were aged 18–30, meaning the findings primarily reflect wāhine Māori–Pākehā experiences up to early adulthood. While participants reflected on childhood and adolescence, these processes may continue to evolve across later stages of life. Future research may explore how these

processes develop as life progresses and individuals encounter new responsibilities and expectations.

Participants also shared a broadly similar generational context. Wāhine within this research grew up during a period of increasing Māori cultural revitalisation within Aotearoa, including greater acceptance of te reo Māori and Māori cultural practices in public life. Earlier generations who experienced more intense cultural suppression or intergenerational disconnection may hold different perspectives on MPCH and cultural reconnection. Exploring these differences may offer further insight into how historical contexts shape wāhine Māori–Pākehā lived experience.

Finally, the findings are situated within the cultural and historical context of Aotearoa and focus on wāhine Māori–Pākehā. The NCE framework should therefore be understood as grounded in Aotearoa, rather than assumed to transfer directly to other cultural settings.

Future Research

Two key directions for future research emerge from this research: examining how wāhine Māori–Pākehā identity develops across time and generations, and expanding the scope and application of this research.

Further exploration of wāhine Māori–Pākehā across the life course may offer insight into how these identity processes evolve over time. The findings primarily reflect experiences up to early adulthood, as participants were aged 18–30 and had not yet moved into later life stages. Longitudinal research across life stages may offer a deeper understanding of how the processes identified in the NCE framework develop as life circumstances change.

Comparative studies across generations may provide insight into how wāhine Māori–Pākehā who grew up during periods of cultural suppression or disconnection interpret MPCH differently from younger generations raised during Māori cultural revitalisation.

Expanding the scope of participants and the application of this research offers further directions. Future research could explore how similar identity processes are experienced by tāne Māori–Pākehā or individuals with diverse gender identities, as this research focused on wāhine Māori–Pākehā. The NCE framework may also hold value within applied contexts.

Exploring how this framework informs practice in areas such as mental health, wellbeing, or community support may support more culturally responsive approaches to identity and belonging in Aotearoa.

Concluding Reflections

This research explored how wāhine Māori–Pākehā in Aotearoa made sense of their cultural hybridity, and how cultural identity was experienced and developed across different life stages and contexts. The findings showed that Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity was not a fixed identity, but an evolving and relational process shaped through lived experience and shifting social conditions. The findings also showed that for wāhine Māori–Pākehā, identity was continuously navigated, challenged, and embodied within Aotearoa’s colonial social landscape. This was evident in participant narratives of invisibility and visibility, contested belonging, and cultural policing. These experiences, and the non-linearity of movement across them, highlighted how identity was shaped through ongoing negotiation. At the same time, they also reflected movement toward greater self-definition, where cultural connection became more intentional and grounded in relational and intergenerational contexts.

The Navigating, Challenging, and Embodying (NCE) framework provides a way of understanding this process. Rather than representing fixed stages, these movements reflect overlapping relational processes through which wāhine Māori–Pākehā come to interpret and inhabit their cultural hybridity. This positions identity as an ongoing process of becoming, shaped through context, experience, and agency.

The findings also highlighted the ongoing influence of colonial structures in shaping how cultural belonging is recognised, while demonstrating the capacity for cultural hybridity to operate as a site of strength and transformation. Through everyday practices of connection, resistance, and reclamation, wāhine Māori–Pākehā contributed to the ongoing expression and evolution of Māoritanga. This research showed that Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity was not a limitation to be resolved, but a dynamic space through which identity was continually redefined. Wāhine Māori–Pākehā did not simply exist between cultures, but actively shaped how these cultures were lived and carried forward.

Overall, this research contributes to existing scholarship by offering a wāhine-centred and relational understanding of Māori–Pākehā cultural hybridity within Aotearoa. It highlights the limitations of binary frameworks of identity and demonstrates the need for more nuanced approaches that reflect the complexity of contemporary Māori realities.

References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Barker, J. (2011). *Native acts: Law, recognition, and cultural authenticity*. Duke University Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., Shapiro, J. P., & Tice, D. M. (1985). Two kinds of identity crisis. *Journal of Personality*, 53(3), 407–424. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1985.tb00373.x>
- Bell, A. (2006). Bifurcation or entanglement? Settler identity and biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 20(2), 253–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310600641786>
- Benet-Martínez, V., & Haritatos, J. (2005). Bicultural identity integration (BII): Components and psychosocial antecedents. *Journal of Personality*, 73(4), 1015–1050. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00337.x>
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Borell, B. (2005). *Living in the city ain't so bad: Cultural diversity of South Auckland rangatahi* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. Massey Research Online. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/5812>
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Came, H., Baker, M., & McCreanor, T. (2021). Addressing structural racism through constitutional transformation and decolonization: Insights for the New Zealand health sector. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 18(1), 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10008-1>
- Camilleri, C., & Malewska-Peyre, H. (1997). Socialization and identity strategies. In J. W. Berry, Y. H. Poortinga, & J. Pandey (Eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology* (2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 41–67). Allyn & Bacon.

- Carter, M., & Torabully, K. (2002). *Coolitude: An anthology of the Indian labour diaspora*. Anthem Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Derby, M. (2011, March 22). Māori–Pākehā relations – Māori urban migration. *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-pakeha-relations/page-5>
- Durie, M. (1998a). *Te mana, te kāwanatanga: The politics of Māori self-determination*. Oxford University Press.
- Durie, M. (1998b). *Whaiora: Māori health development* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Durie, M. (2001). *Mauriora: The dynamics of Māori health*. Oxford University Press
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1952)
- Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Harris, A. (2004). *Hīkoi: Forty years of Māori protest*. Huia Publishers.
- Harris, R., Cormack, D., Tobias, M., Yeh, L.-C., Talamaivao, N., Minster, J., & Timutimu, R. (2012). The pervasive effects of racism: Experiences of racial discrimination in New Zealand over time and associations with multiple health domains. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(3), 408–415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.11.004>
- Hill, R. S. (2010). *Raupatu: The confiscation of Māori land*. Victoria University Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
- Hokowhitu, B. (2004). Tackling Māori masculinity: A colonial genealogy of savagery and sport. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 16(2), 259–284.

- hooks, b. (2014). *Black looks: Race and representation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743226>
- Keenan, D. (2021). *Wars without end: New Zealand's land wars: A Māori perspective*. Penguin.
- Kukutai, T. (2004). The problem of defining an ethnic group for public policy: Who is Māori and why does it matter? *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 23, 86–108
- Kukutai, T. (2013). The structure of urban Māori identities. In E. Peters & C. Andersen (Eds.), *Indigenous in the city: Contemporary identities and cultural innovation* (pp. 311–333). UBC Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, 49, 10–12.
- Mead, H. M. (2016). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values* (Rev. ed.). Huia Publishers.
- Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2012). How does interculturalism contrast with multiculturalism? *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 33(2), 175–196.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2011.618266>
- Meredith, P. (1998, July 7–9). Hybridity in the third space: Rethinking bicultural politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand [Conference paper]. Te Oru Rangahau Māori Research and Development Conference, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Meredith, P. (2015, February 17). Urban Māori – Urbanisation. *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/urban-maori/page-1>
- Mikaere, A. (2003). *The balance destroyed: Consequences for Māori women of the colonisation of tikanga Māori*. International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education.
- Mikaere, A. (2019). Colonisation and the imposition of patriarchy: A Ngāti Raukawa woman's perspective. In L. Pihama, L. T. Smith, N. Simmonds, J. Seed-Pihama, & K.

- Gabel (Eds.), *Mana wāhine reader: A collection of writings 1999–2019* (Vol. II). Te Kotahi Research Institute.
- Moeke-Maxwell, T. (2005). Bi/multiracial Māori women's hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(4), 497–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500319779>
- Moewaka Barnes, H., McCreanor, T., & Moewaka Barnes, A. (2013). The impact of racism on Māori wellbeing and inequality. *MAI Journal*, 2(1), 63–77.
- Moon, P., & Derby, M. (2018). Playing cultures. *Te Kaharoa*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v11i1.217>
- Okamura, J. Y. (1981). Situational ethnicity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 4(4), 452–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1981.9993351>
- Orange, C. (2012). Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi. *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://www.teara.govt.nz/en/te-tiriti-o-waitangi-the-treaty-of-waitangi>
- Paringatai, K. (2016). Māori identity development outside of tribal environments. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 26(1), 47–58. <https://doi.org/10.11157/anzswj-vol26iss1id54>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Pieterse, J. N. (2001). Hybridity, so what? *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(2–3), 219–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327640101800211>
- Pihama, L. (2001). *Tīhei mauri ora: Honouring our voices – Mana wāhine as a kaupapa Māori theoretical framework* (Doctoral thesis, University of Auckland).
- Pihama, L. (2021). Mana wāhine: Decolonising gender in Aotearoa. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 35(106), 351–365.
- Pihama, L., & Cameron, N. (2012). Kua tupu te pā harakeke: Developing healthy whānau relationships. In W. Yellow Bird & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *For Indigenous minds*

- only: *A decolonization handbook* (pp. 231–244). School for Advanced Research Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Ruwhiu, P. A. (2009). *Ka haere tonu te mana o ngā wāhine Māori: Māori women as protectors of te ao Māori knowledge* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. Massey Research Online. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/1793>
- Salmond, A. (1991). *Two worlds: First meetings between Māori and Europeans 1642–1772*. Viking.
- Simmonds, N. (2011). Mana wāhine: Decolonising politics. *Women's Studies Journal*, 25(2), 11–25.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797–811. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race*. Basic Books.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine.
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1909)
- Walker, R. (2004). *Ka whawhai tonu mātou: Struggle without end* (Rev. ed.). Penguin.
- Wana, S. (2022). Moko wāhine: A framework for guiding and nurturing Māori women leaders. *MAI Journal*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2022.11.1.6>

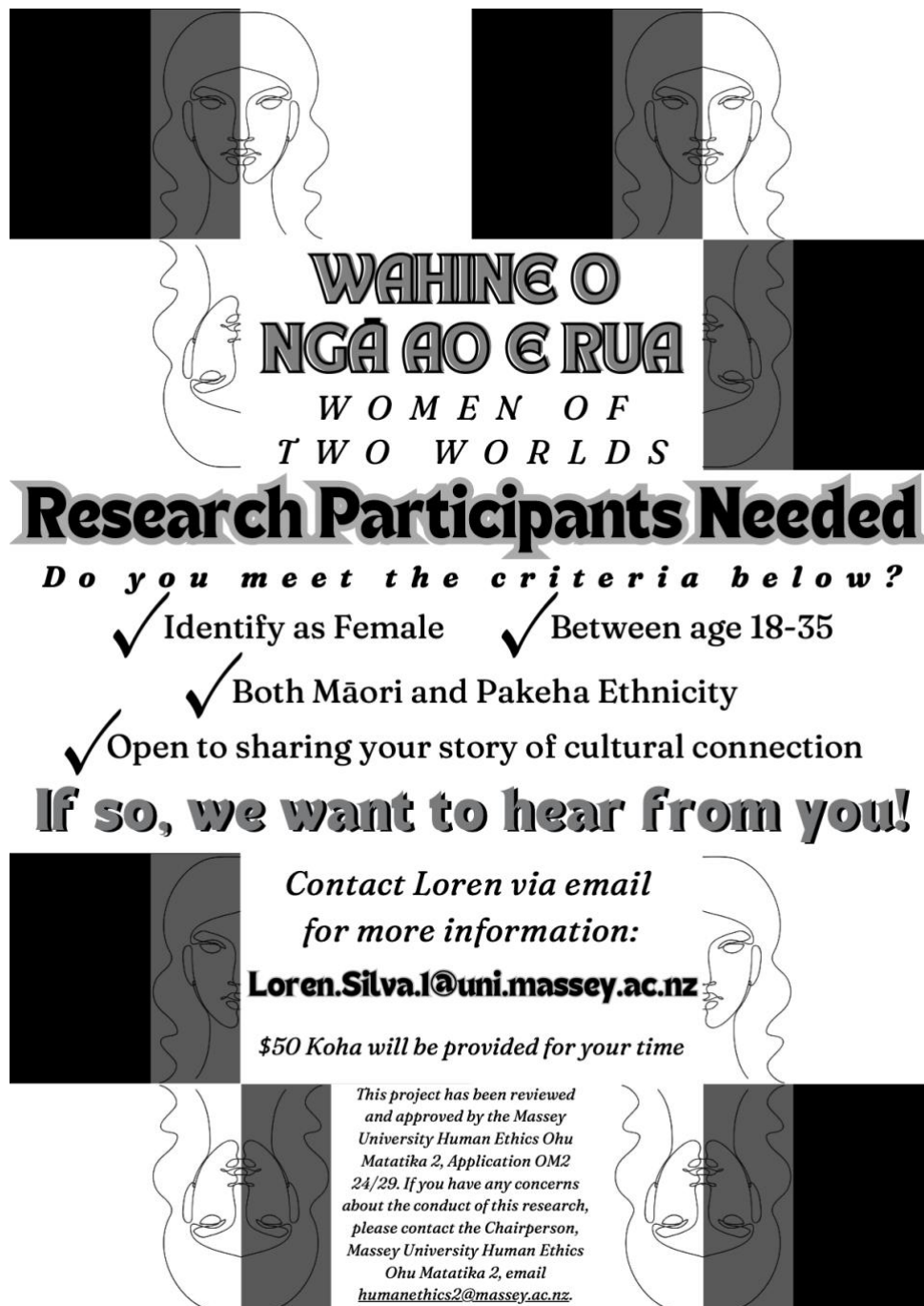
- Wanhalla, A. (2009). *In/visible sight: The mixed-descent families of southern New Zealand*. Bridget Williams Books.
- Waitangi Tribunal. (2017). *Mana wāhine kaupapa inquiry (WAI 2700)*.
<https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/en/inquiries/kaupapa-inquiries/mana-wāhine—>
- Ward, C., Ng Tseung-Wong, C., & Bhowon, U. (2018). Hybrid and alternating identity styles as strategies for managing multicultural identities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 49(9), 140–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022118782641>
- Ward, C., Stuart, J., & Kus, L. (2011). The construction and validation of a measure of identity conflict. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(4), 462–473.

Appendices

Note: The title of the research has been updated since these documents were distributed. The content and scope of the study remain unchanged.

Appendix A

Research Recruitment Poster



**WAHINE O
NGĀ AO E RUA**
WOMEN OF
TWO WORLDS

Research Participants Needed

Do you meet the criteria below?

- ✓ Identify as Female
- ✓ Between age 18-35
- ✓ Both Māori and Pakeha Ethnicity
- ✓ Open to sharing your story of cultural connection

If so, we want to hear from you!

*Contact Loren via email
for more information:*
Loren.Silva.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

\$50 Koha will be provided for your time

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



WAHINE O NGĀ AO E RUA

Women of Two Worlds

Exploring the lived experience of Wahine with Māori/Pakeha
Cultural Hybridity and their journey of cultural connection

Participant Information Sheet

Kia ora koutou,

Ko Maungatautari tōku maunga
Ko Waikato tōku awa
Ko Tākitimu tōku waka
Ko Ngāti Kahungunu o te Wairoa tōku iwi
Ko Whākirangi tōku marae
No Kemureti ahau
Ko Loren Silva tōku ingoa

My name is Loren Silva. I am currently completing a thesis as part of the Master of Arts in Psychology with Massey University. You are invited to participate in a research project that explores the lived experience of Wahine with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity and their journey to cultural connection. This study seeks to understand how women with both Māori and Pakeha ethnicities have chosen to connect with their multiple cultural backgrounds. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read this information sheet and ask any questions that arise before deciding whether to participate.

Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this project is to highlight the key themes that arise when discussing cultural connection for Wahine with both Māori and Pakeha ethnic backgrounds.

Who can participate?

We are seeking individuals who:

- Identify as female
- Are of both Māori and Pakeha ethnic backgrounds
- Are willing and able to be interviewed for up to 90 minutes (potentially over multiple occasions) in English

What will participation involve?

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



- Participate in a conversational interview with me, the researcher, lasting approximately 60 – 90 minutes. There may be instances where I will request participation in follow up conversational interviews that will also last approximately 60-90 minutes. You may decline participating in a follow up interview. During any interview you participate in, I will be asking open ended questions pertaining to your lived experience as a Wahine with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity.
- Optionally, you will be given the opportunity to read the transcript and make any changes you need regarding your wording to ensure your experiences are portrayed accurately.
- The total possible participation time required of you is between 1 – 5 hours.
-

Your safety and comfort are of utmost importance to me. I want these interviews to be relaxed and comfortable. If there is anything I can do to help achieve this, please let me know. Additionally, due to the cultural diversity that will exist between each participant, please let me know if there are any specific cultural considerations or Tikanga practices you would like me to adhere to during the interview process. A koha of up to \$50 per participant will be provided to compensate for your time.

Confidentiality

All information will remain confidential. Any identifiable information will be removed, and the transcripts will be stored securely. When you have approved the transcript, the audio files will be deleted. All deidentified data collected will be stored on a password protected computer and only my supervisor and I will have access to this data. This data will be erased five years after the study has been completed. Deidentified data may be disseminated in journal articles and conference presentations.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Your participation will contribute valuable insights into the knowledge of Wahine with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity. This development of insight may consequentially enhance the bicultural landscape of Aotearoa, New Zealand. There are minimal risks associated with this study, however, discussing personal experiences of cultural disconnect or cultural hybridity may be distressing for some. If you experience discomfort of any sort, you can take a break or stop the interview at any time.

Support Services

Should you need any support during or after your participation, we recommend going to the Te Hiringa Mahara 'where to get support' website page (<https://www.mhwc.govt.nz/where-to-get-support/>) and accessing one of their multiple specialised national hotlines. A great option from this webpage is the Need To Talk hotline (free call or text 1737).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study up to two weeks after your interview;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact:

- Researcher Name: Loren Silva
- Email: Loren.Silva.1@uni.massey.ac.nz
- Supervisors Name: Kathryn McGuigan
- Email: k.mcguigan@massey.ac.nz
- Phone: 09 414 0800 ext 43115

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. Your experiences and insights are invaluable in helping us understand Wahine with Māori Pakeha Cultural Hybridity.

Ngā mihi nui,

Loren Silva

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C

Consent Form

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



WAHINE O NGĀ AO E RUA

Women of Two Worlds

Exploring the lived experience of Wahine with Māori/Pakeha
Cultural Hybridity and their journey of cultural connection

Consent Form: Participation in Academic Research Project

Researcher: LorenSilva

University: MasseyUniversity

Department: Schoolof Psychology

Supervisor: KathrynMcGuigan

Contact Information: Loren.Silva.1@uni.massey.ac.nz | k.mcguigan@ac.nz

1. Purpose of Study

Ihaveread and understood the information sheet about the research project titled: WAHINE ONGĀ AO E RUA (Women of Two Worlds) Exploring the lived experience of Wahine with Māori/Pakeha Cultural Hybridity and their journey of cultural connection. I understand that thepurpose of the study is to investigate the importance of cultural connection for individuals withboth Māori and Pakeha ethnic backgrounds.

2. Voluntary Participation

Iunderstand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I can withdraw from thestudy at any given time without any consequences.

IfIchoose to withdraw, I can decide whether my data collected up to that point will be retained and utilised within the research project or destroyed.

3. Confidentiality

Iunderstand that all information I provide will be kept confidential. My identity will not be revealed in any reports or publications resulting from this research.

Datawill be stored securely and only be accessible by the research team.

4. Participant Involvement

Youwillneed to complete an initial screening questionnaire about your background.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a conversational interview with me, the researcher, lasting approximately 60 – 90 minutes. There may be instances where I will request participation in follow up conversational interviews that will also last approximately 60-90 minutes. You may decline participating in a follow up interview. During any interview you participate in, I will be asking open ended questions pertaining to your lived experience as a Wahine with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



- Optionally, you will be given the opportunity to read the transcript and make any changes you need regarding your wording to ensure your experiences are portrayed accurately.
- The total possible participation time required of you is between 1 – 5 hours.

5. *Recording of Interviews*

I consent to having the interviews audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information collected. I understand that these recordings will be used solely for this research and will be destroyed once the research is completed.

6. *Risks and Benefits*

I understand that there are minimal risks associated with this study, and discussing my lived experiences may be distressing.

I can take a break or stop the interview at any time if I feel uncomfortable.

I understand that there are no direct benefits for me, but my participation will contribute valuable insights for supporting individuals with Māori Pakeha Cultural Hybridity.

7. *Support Services*

I have been informed about the support services available should I need assistance during or after my participation.

8. *Consent*

By signing this form, I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understood the information provided
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study
- I consent to the audio recording of the interview

Participant name:

Researcher name:

Signature:

Signature:

Date:

Date:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix D

Interview Schedule

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



WAHINE O NGĀ AO E RUA

Women of Two Worlds

Exploring the lived experience of Wahine with Māori/Pakeha
Cultural Hybridity and their journey of cultural connection

Note to ethics panel:

This is a semi-structured interview, these questions will be a guideline for the interview, however, actual questions will be based off the answers and the direction/flow of the interview.

Rapport Building

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your whānau?
2. Do you have any special interests? Tell me about them?

This will be balanced with me sharing experiences about myself and my own life.

Cultural/Feminine Identity

Cultural

1. How would you describe your cultural identity?
2. Can you tell me about your Māori identity?
 - How do you exist as a Māori person...
3. Can you tell me about your Pakeha identity?
4. How does having more than one cultural identity impact your life?
5. Are there times in your life where you feel either your Māori or Pakeha identity take the lead?
6. Are there times in your life where you feel ashamed of either your Māori or Pakeha identity?
7. Are there times in your life where you feel both identities coexist?

Feminine

8. How do you think being a female has shaped your identity?
9. Describe your experiences as a Māori wahine
10. Describe your experiences as a Pakeha female
11. Do your experiences of being female and having both Māori and Pakeha backgrounds ever intersect?

Cultural Connection

12. Can you describe any Māori cultural practices you engage in?
13. Can you describe any Pakeha cultural practices you engage in?
14. How often do you engage in these cultural practices?
15. How important/unimportant are they to you?
16. If you do not engage in cultural practices from either your Māori or Pakeha ethnicity, can you tell me why?

The journey towards Cultural Connection

17. What does cultural connection mean to you?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

1

School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102-904
North Shore
Auckland 0745
Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116
Fax +64 9 441 815



18. Do you currently feel culturally connected? 19. Have you ever felt culturally disconnected? 20. Is cultural connection important to you? Why/Why not? 21. Has being a female impacted your connection to culture? 22. Has having multiple ethnic backgrounds impacted your connection to culture?

Reflections and Recommendations

- 23. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give other wahine with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity?
- 24. What do you think could be improved in our society when building our knowledge on women with Māori Pakeha cultural hybridity?

Closing

- 25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or suggestions for this research?
- 26. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview if needed?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/29. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

2