"I've spent a lot of the last two years just waiting for the world to not be terrible": First-year undergraduate students' experience in a pandemic

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

Master of Health Science in
Psychology

at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand.

Siqi Liu

2022

Abstract

In New Zealand, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived soon after the 2020 academic year began, posing additional challenges for first-year students navigating the transition to university while adapting to the pandemic. This thesis explores the experience of first-year students as they navigate this dual challenge. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), three participants from Massey University Albany Campus were interviewed to describe the pandemic's impact on their wellbeing using the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, and its impact on their university experience and day-to-day learning.

Analysis revealed four themes. In Disruption, the participants struggled with the very concept of a pandemic, causing intangible losses and grief. Wellbeing focussed on the pandemic's impact on participants' physical and mental health. The participants demonstrated divergent pathways to mental ill-health over time. Lockdown with Others highlighted how lockdown brought the household members' different lifestyle needs into conflict and created distractions to the participants' studies. Lastly, Studying during the Pandemic covers the participants' initial adjustment to the university and their experience during Auckland's two lockdowns. The participants reported less collaboration with others and reduced motivation when studying online.

This thesis is the first to examine the collision of the pandemic and first-year university experience in New Zealand. The results highlight the pandemic's lasting impact on the participants' worldview. As with other research, the participants had unrealistic expectations of university. They attributed the failure to experience their idealised university life to the pandemic, perceiving their university experience as not a genuine one. Particular findings of note include the unintended impact of the university's grade-adjustment policy reducing student motivation for learning; the impact of sleeping patterns during the lockdown on

household dynamics; and the participants' framing of physical exercise during the lockdown as a space-claiming action.

Practice recommendations based on these findings include clear communication of academic expectations at university to first-year students; incorporating independent learning into the core first-year curriculum; and avoiding technology solutionism in online learning by positioning authentic relationships between faculty and students, and between the students, as the basis of the student experience.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Background and Acknowledgements

I started my undergraduate studies in July 2007, having to leave year 13 due to severe depression. University was the only acceptable alternative to dropping out of school. Starting in the second semester, I was plunged straight into university with no orientation, guidance, or any idea why I wanted to be there. My grades plummeted without the structure of high school, and my depression followed me across the country. For the next few years, I battled some dark times while trying to endure the necessary evil that was a tertiary education. My grades were always in the C-range, and academic success was an enigma that eluded me. I never approached university support services, and I don't believe the university was aware of my struggles either.

I graduated with an abysmal GPA and failed a quarter of the papers. I left with a bitter disdain for academia. It was through sheer tenacity (or stubbornness) that I somehow ended up in postgraduate studies. Despite the achievements, some days I still wonder whether I really understand the academic expectations at universities. Through my time as a teaching assistant, I saw myself in many other students—young people who were lost, confused, and frustrated at being unable to crack the university code. Despite their apparent intelligence, some students simply "didn't get" how to meet the assessment requirements. Like me, they failed not because of a lack of intellect or diligence but because they couldn't adapt to the new rules at the university. It spawned my interest in academic engagement and how to help students navigate the different academic requirements at university.

In 2019 a first-year student was found dead in a hall of residence at the University of Canterbury. He had lain undiscovered for weeks after death. This event highlighted the reality of many students' loneliness and isolation. It prompted me to reflect on my own university journey and ponder the pastoral care provided for young people at the university. I feel that universities have a laissez-faire attitude toward student wellbeing and downright

indifference at worst. I am glad that the universities are signalling a commitment to pastoral care, but also sceptical whether this would translate to an improved student experience.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic began, adding another complication to the first-year experience. Reflecting on my own journey, I wondered what it was like to start university in the middle of an extraordinary global event. The human experiences in this unprecedented event deserve to be documented. I hoped that learning about their challenges would shed light on how to support students in both ordinary and extraordinary times.

Studying at the postgraduate level was beyond my wildest dream. I am grateful for this opportunity. In a way, this thesis is a personal closure; reading the literature on disengaged students allowed me to reflect on how far I've come. What started off as a course requirement turned out to be incredibly healing. I hold personal and academic gratitude to the scholars who studied student engagement for paving the way for my thesis and normalising my experience. I am thankful for all the students I taught over the years, who showed me the many sides of the first-year university experience. I am grateful for the participants in this study who shared their stories. I can only hope that I did their stories justice. I thank my supervisor, Dr Ella Kahu, for her continuous encouragement. I thank my family, who supported me while studying. Lastly, I'm thankful for all the inspiring people along the way who showed me that it's never too late; things and people can and do change.

Introduction

The novel coronavirus variant 19 (COVID-19) emerged in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. By 11th March 2020, it was declared a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The world ground to a halt as drastic infection-control measures of stay-at-home orders and border closures were implemented. It plunged the world into a recession and led to a global wellbeing decline (Geirdal et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2020).

The first case of COVID-19 arrived in New Zealand on 28th February 2020. On 25th March, the country entered a nationwide lockdown (Ministry of Health, 2020). The pandemic's arrival and the lockdown coincided with the start of the university academic year. For first-year students, this means that they had to adjust to online learning while adjusting to university life itself. This thesis aims to learn how the collision of two significant events shaped the experience of the first-year students of 2020.

It is known that before the pandemic, university students were already experiencing worse wellbeing than the general population, and the pandemic exacerbated many existing stressors and introduced new ones. The *Literature Review* chapter reviews the current evidence on the first-year experience, student wellbeing, and how the COVID-19 pandemic affected both.

This research utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its methodology. A combined chapter, *Methodology and Method*, explains the philosophical foundation of IPA and the participant recruitment and interview. Another combined chapter, *Findings and Discussions* describes the findings from participant interviews in relation to existing knowledge. Lastly, the chapter *Conclusion* readdresses the research questions, provides practice recommendations, and describes the study's limitations.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter consists of a literature review around three topic areas— the first-year student experience, student wellbeing, and the pandemic's impact on university students. The first topic area is covered in *The First-Year Experience,* which focusses on the process first-year students undergo as they adjust to university. The second topic area begins with a broad review of the concept of wellbeing. It introduces the Te Whare Tapa Whā model used to frame wellbeing in this research, followed by literature on the state of wellbeing in the general university student population. There is limited research on the pandemic's impact on first-year students specifically, so the third topic area is broadened to the impact of the pandemic on the general university student population. Finally, the small number of research on the pandemic's impact on the first-year transition is reviewed, and gaps in knowledge are identified in the last section, *The Rationale for the Present Study.*

The First-Year Experience

This section reviews the literature on first-year students' university experience. The first part examines the theoretical models around the student transition at the university. For many, starting at university was described as a "culture shock" (Green, 2008, p.244). Students come to the university holding certain expectations that may not reflect reality, and the discrepancy can result in disappointment, stress, and even attrition (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Nelson et al., 2008). Two significant sources of students' discrepant expectations, independent learning and social isolation, are identified in the second part of this section.

The First Year as a Process

The conceptualisation of the first-year experience falls under two general categories: rite of passage and negotiation. A rite of passage consists of three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (Van Gennep, 1909, as cited in Palmer et al., 2009). Students

must first perform a physical and emotional detachment from their previous association (separation), they then begin to adopt the norms and behaviour of the new group (transition), and incorporation occurs when the student successfully becomes a member of the new group (Tinto, 1988). Tinto (1988) saw the transition to university as consisting of all three stages linearly. In contrast, Palmer et al. (2009) positioned first-year students mainly in the transition stage. Both Tinto (1988) and Palmer et al. (2009) recognise that during this process, a push-pull effect between the old and new is evident in the student. However, Tinto (1988) saw the process as unidirectional, whereas Palmer et al. (2009) recognised that negative experiences could reverse the process.

On the other hand, Ozga and Suhknandan (1998) argued that past research on student transition and attrition focussed solely on the student as the problem. Instead, they characterised the first year as a "process of student-institutional negotiation" (p. 319). In this conceptualisation, the responsibility is placed jointly between the student and the institution to facilitate the transition. Similarly, Braxton and Hirschy (2005) conceptualised the first-year transition as an interplay between the student's personal characteristics, external environment and the perception of institutional commitment to students. The attention on institutional influence in first-year transition parallels the focus on institutional influence in student retention (Tight, 2020). In the backdrop of universities' increasing reliance on student revenue and that a substantial proportion of attrition happens in the first year, facilitating students' successful transition to university became one of the approaches to minimising attrition.

Regardless of the conceptual framework, it is agreed that first-year students face a stressful time (Bowles et al., 2011). Qualitative studies show that it is a time of uncertainty and contradiction, with students both exhilarated and frustrated by the multiple challenges (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). Not all succeed in this transition, making first-year students

particularly susceptible to attrition (Tinker & Elphinstone, 2014). In New Zealand, first-year attrition accounts for over half of overall attrition rates in the standard three-year Bachelor's degree programmes (Education Counts, 2021). Approximately 10% of under-25 and 23% of over-25-year-olds embark on university studies but do not return for the second year (Education Counts, 2021). The overrepresentation of first-year students in the overall attrition rate shows this year as the "make or break" stage that determines subsequent success and retention at the university.

Expectations and Reality

Independent Learning.

Research shows that school leavers are often wholly unprepared for the learning requirements at the university (Field et al., 2014; Hockings et al., 2018; Peel, 2000). Many school leavers are experienced in dependent learning (Meyer et al., 2008) and found the independent learning approach at the university level to be a surprise. Meyer et al. (2008) characterised the following key differences: in dependent learning, the student is a passive recipient of knowledge from an authority figure (the teacher), whereas in independent learning, the student takes an active role in learning and can fuse knowledge without teacher intervention. Other definitions of independent learning similarly echoed the components of self-directed/self-regulated learning *and* the ability to make critical inquiries independently (Hockings et al., 2018; Zimmerman, 1986).

Dependent and independent learning are opposite ends of a continuum (Meyer et al., 2008). First-year students were often plunged into independent learning with little warning. Despite an awareness of the different learning requirements at the university, first-year students demonstrated very little *understanding* of the difference (Crisp et al., 2009; Peel, 2000). Most students only understood independent learning in its literal sense as learning on their own (Hockings et al., 2018); and specific expectations expressed by first-year students

still reflected the belief that university was a continuation of high school (Crisp et al., 2009; Peel, 2000). Additionally, independent learning expectations are not always communicated clearly to first-year students (Field et al., 2014). The discrepancy between their expectations and reality leads to frustration for both students and staff. Students feel "short-changed" (Hockings et al., 2018, p.148) by the low staff involvement at the university; while staff members are equally exasperated by the students' expectation of staff availability and their optimism of succeeding at the university without much private study (Crisp et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018).

The other aspect of independent learning, the ability to fuse knowledge without teacher intervention, is another source of anxiety for first-year students. Independent learning aims to increase the students' breadth and depth of understanding (Zimmerman, 1986). First-year students repeatedly report feeling overwhelmed by the breadth of knowledge and lacking confidence in their ability to delve deeply (Hockings et al., 2018; Levy & Petrulis, 2012). The lack of a readily available "right" answer is anxiety-provoking. The anxiety is further compounded by the weighting of the university assessment, low teaching staff involvement to offer timely guidance, and the long assessment cycles at the university (Hockings et al., 2018; Kantanis, 2000; Levy & Petrulis, 2012). Students report procrastination as a passive coping mechanism, whereas others turn their focus on meeting assessment requirements at the expense of deeper engagement (Hockings et al., 2018).

Some universities have created preparation programmes to facilitate students' transition to independent learning, but this is not a universal practice. Field et al. (2014) observed that many university curricula were designed with the assumption that the student is already competent at independent learning or relegates the teaching of learning skills to auxiliary support services. As a result, first-year students must adapt quickly to a brand-new pedagogical approach with little forewarning. While many students have adjusted their

expectations by the second year (Brinkworth et al., 2009), there is an inherent survivorship bias in surveying second-year students. Academic under-preparedness and an inability to adapt to the learning approach at the university are oft-cited reasons for first-year attrition (Kanji et al., 2022; Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998).

Belonging and Friendship.

Belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954). Yet, first-year students are inherently in a space of "placelessness" (p.38), lacking, and searching for a sense of belonging (Palmer et al., 2009). While students often cite academic reasons for discontinuing university, projective techniques revealed that loneliness and lack of belonging were significant yet often unexpressed reasons for leaving the university (Boddy, 2020).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) characterised a sense of belonging as affective and relational, requiring frequent interactions with others to establish; thus, highlighting the friendships and other relationships at the university in helping students to gain a sense of belonging. Ahn and Davis (2020) similarly developed four domains of belonging for university students: social (friendships), academic (course work), surroundings (campus location) and personal space (life satisfaction). While all domains contribute to a successful transition, students often credit social belonging as the most important to their transition to university (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Wilcox et al., 2005). Wilcox et al. (2005) aptly titled their article "it was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people" (p.707), demonstrating the precedence of friendships in facilitating and hindering student transition.

The importance of friendships in fostering a sense of belonging is evident in both Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Ahn and Davis (2020). First-year students firmly hold expectations of vibrant social life and ease of forming friendships (Denovan & Macaskill,

2013; Kantanis, 2000; Nelson et al., 2008). However, the reality is that over half of the students surveyed in Kantanis (2000) did not make any friends by the end of the semester, and similar results were reported by Nelson et al. (2008). In addition, the sheer size of the university creates feelings of anonymity, "just a number" (Kanji et al., 2022, p.171), and "nobody cares" (Peel, 2000, p.22) for the students. These feelings of anonymity prevent students from creating the interactions necessary to foster belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), while the feelings of institutional ambivalence can be perceived as a lack of institutional commitment to students (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005)

The rite-of-passage view of first-year transition theorises that the separation stage inherently disrupts many students' existing friendship circles, and friendships at university facilitate the students to achieve the incorporation stage (Buote et al., 2007; Kanji et al., 2022; Tinto, 1988). In qualitative studies, students spoke about how those friendships connected them with "people who are just like me" (Buote et al., 2007, p.685) and "people who are going through the same stuff" (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013, p.1016), demonstrating the effect of friendships in normalising the first-year challenges. Secondly, friendships represent social support, which offers tangible and psychological resources to help students navigate the challenges of the first-year environment. First-year students often lack awareness of available support services at the university, and their friends become the substitute for official support services (Kanji et al., 2022; Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998).

Summary

This section reviewed studies on the first-year experience. Starting at the university is an inherently stressful yet exciting time for students. The students arrive at the university underestimating the academic requirements while overestimating the social life. As a result, they have to adjust both sets of expectations quickly. Along with unmet expectations, the first year marks the beginning of their process of *becoming* university students. This process

involves a complex interplay between student characteristics and institutional influence. Unfortunately, not all succeed in this transition, making first-year attrition account disproportionately for the overall attrition.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a critical influence on university success for first-year students. Although the definition of wellbeing varies, it is widely accepted as a holistic construct, encompassing subjective feelings and objective indicators (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Kohli et al. (2013) stated, "wellbeing is a dynamic concept that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviours" (p.149). Dodge et al. (2012) conceptualised wellbeing as a balancing act between one's resources and challenges, again demonstrating the dynamic nature of wellbeing.

This study uses the Te Whare Tapa Wha (TWTW) model to conceptualise wellbeing. The following section briefly explains the model and the reason for using this model.

Te Whare Tapa Whā Model

Mason Durie (1985) first developed the TWTW model to conceptualise a Māori view of wellbeing and take a more holistic view of health and wellbeing beyond the mere absence of illness. As such, the TWTW model conceptualises wellbeing into four distinct yet interrelated aspects—taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha whānau (family health/social relationships health), and taha wairua (spiritual health). TWTW model is often depicted visually as a whare (house), with the four dimensions shown as panels that support the overall wellbeing construct, as shown in Figure 1. The four panels are interrelated and interdependent; weakening one aspect leads to unbalancing the remainder (Ministry of Health, 2017).

Figure 1

Te Whare Tapa Whā Model

Note. Adapted from *Wellbeing Hub* [figure], by Nuku Ora: An Active Wellington Region, 2022.

In the TWTW model, taha tinana and taha hinengaro are concepts that can be easily understood in a western mind-body dichotomy. Taha tinana and taha hinengaro also encompass both objective indicators of health, and subjective, hedonic feelings of emotional wellbeing. In taha whānau, the word "whānau" extends beyond the nuclear or extended family and includes those "who you care about and who you share your life with" (Health Navigator, 2021); in essence, a person's social network. The Taha Whānau dimension transcends the dichotomy of individual/social determinants of wellbeing, and recognises the role others play in shaping an individual's wellbeing (Rochford, 2004). Taha wairua is translated as spiritual wellbeing, a term often synonymous with religiosity in the western world (Berry, 2005). However, it also extends to one's sense of peace and balance (Ahuriri-Driscoll et al., 2012), relationship with the environment (Durie, 1985), one's self-esteem (Health Navigator, 2021), and "things that give you meaning" (Youth Service Ratonga Taiohi, n.d.).

This Māori model is unique to New Zealand, which best reflects the understanding of well-being in the local context. The TWTW model is holistic. It incorporates both eudaimonic/hedonic and subjective/objective aspects in its conceptualisation. Its interrelated dimensions also recognise wellbeing as a balancing act subject to change.

Student Wellbeing

Research has shown that university students report worse wellbeing than their non-student age cohorts (Auerbach et al., 2018; Cooke et al., 2006; Stallman, 2010), and this chapter reviews the influences on student wellbeing. The transition to university is inherently stressful, and the competitive, ability-focussed climate at university puts students under immense pressure to achieve (Wada et al., 2019). However, apart from the stress inherent to university studies, university students also face additional stressors in their lives that challenge wellbeing. This section first reviews statistics around student wellbeing, then it reviews two interrelated structural influences that pose additional challenges to university students. These structural influences are the neoliberal economic paradigm's framing of university education, and poverty among university students under the neoliberal reforms.

A High Prevalence of Distress

Despite increasing diversity, most university students still fall in the 18-24 age range (Education Counts, 2022). This age range corresponds to the prime years for the onset of mental health and substance use disorders (Martin, 2010; Storrie et al., 2010). In global surveys, 20-30% of university students met the diagnostic criteria for a mood disorder, substance use disorder, anxiety disorder, panic disorder or bipolar disorder, with most having pre-entrance onset (Auerbach et al., 2016; Auerbach et al., 2018). A few small-scale surveys in New Zealand found that just under 20% of students scored significantly on depression and anxiety scales (Samaranayake et al., 2014), while the 12-month prevalence of self-harming was reported as 13% (Fitzgerald & Curtis, 2017).

Despite the high prevalence of mental health challenges, students underutilise the counselling services available on campus (Auerbach et al., 2016; Sharp & Theiler, 2018). A lack of awareness and under-resourced services pose barriers to access (Stallman, 2012; van Ommen & Nazari, 2019). Students also report stigma around help-seeking (Giamos et al., 2017; Turosak & Siwierka, 2021). The competitive campus environment leads to students' self-stigma, blaming themselves for their distress; on the other hand, students also reported stigma and judgment from faculty for reaching out (Turosak & Siwierka, 2021; Wada et al., 2019). Left untreated, students with mental health challenges are more likely to have lower achievements and drop out (Auerbach et al., 2018; Stallman, 2010).

Structural Influences on Student Wellbeing

Some of the causative factors of depression and anxiety for students in Samaranayake et al. (2014) were increased debt burden and uncertainty of employment prospects. Those factors point to the neoliberal economic influence on the tertiary education sector, which is a structural factor that underlies many students' struggles. Under the neoliberal paradigm, university education is framed as an individual economic investment, which then allows the implementation of a user-pays system that favours loans over financial support (Beban & Trueman, 2018; Cooke et al., 2006). The expansion of education ostensibly improved accessibility while commodifying university education as a near-necessity in a competitive job market. The structural influences of financial pressure (loans and a lack of financial support), academic pressure (increased competition with other students, condensed workload) and, for many, the stress of navigating young adulthood create a potent mixture of stressors for university students (Martin, 2010; Storrie et al., 2010).

Despite university education being seen as a privilege, poverty is widespread amongst university students. In New Zealand, many students need to juggle payments for essential costs and forego necessities due to poverty (Clark et al., 2022), a trend mirrored elsewhere in

the world (Devlin et al., 2008; Gair & Baglow, 2018). For example, over 70% of the students surveyed by Clark et al. (2022) lived in substandard housing, unable to afford heating; and students reported skipping meals due to cost (Walsh, 2014). The immediate impact of poverty on students is worsening mental health and preventable illnesses (Clark et al., 2022; Gair & Baglow, 2018). In the long term, students facing poverty are more likely to defer or discontinue university studies (Bozick, 2007; Gallegos et al., 2014).

Lifeload refers to the sum of the pressure faced by students from their multiple roles and activities in life (Kahu, 2013). The increasing diversity in the student population means that some students, such as those with children, naturally have a heavier lifeload than others. However, younger students are also experiencing an increased lifeload through part-time employment, which is necessary to cover basic living costs. Twenty hours a week is the commonly accepted maximum a student can work without impairing academic performance (Bozick, 2007; Logan et al., 2016). This number does not consider whether the take-home pay covers the actual cost of living, nor does it account for the unpaid labour many students perform at home (Beban & Trueman, 2018). Students often take on much longer working hours to meet those costs (Devlin et al., 2008). The tension between survival and academic needs makes financial hardship an independent and significant risk factor for students' mental health. (Larcombe & Fethers, 2013; Sharp & Theiler, 2018).

University students are often stereotyped as leading unhealthy lifestyles. However, these behaviours can be explained through a poverty lens. Evidence from the general population shows that those under financial strain report less healthy behaviour, and the same contributing factors also exist for students. Beenackers et al. (2017) used a bandwidth analogy to explain the mechanism between poverty and unhealthy behaviour, which can also be applied to university students. Between working to meet survival needs and studying to meet academic needs, there is little room left for the cognitive effort to regulate health-

promoting behaviour. Additionally, limited financial resources restrict the ability to make healthy choices, as seen in Walsh (2014) and Clark et al. (2022).

Summary

This section began with an overview of wellbeing and explained Te Whare Tapa Whā model. It then reviewed literature on wellbeing in the university student population. Transitioning to university and studying are inherently stressful processes. As a result, university students report worse wellbeing than the general population and underutilise available support services. The section then reviewed the structural and institutional influences on student wellbeing. Under a neoliberal economic paradigm, university students face a precarious juggling act between competing demands that exert a blend of stressors on their wellbeing. In addition, the extent of poverty in university students is often unacknowledged yet drastically influences their health behaviours and wellbeing.

The Pandemic's Impacts on University Students

The pandemic led to a global deterioration of wellbeing (Geirdal et al., 2021). It was characterised as a complex traumatic event with three facets: the fear of infection, economic, financial-related stressors, and routine disruption (Kira et al., 2021). The pandemic exacerbated many existing stressors and introduced new ones. The first part of this section explores the pandemic's exacerbation of existing stressors. These include increased lifeload and reduced financial stability, negative impact on physical and mental health, and how the move to online learning exacerbated the inequity in accessing digital resources.

An estimated 87% of the global higher-education student population was affected by campus closures and the move to online/remote learning (de Oliveira Araújo et al., 2020). Online learning was brand-new for many students and faculty, and with it came challenges. The second half of the section discusses the impact of online learning on students' wellbeing

and learning experience. The concept of Zoom fatigue and its impact on student wellbeing is first described, followed by how the online medium affected independent learning for university students.

Existing Stressors Exacerbated

Lifeload

The pandemic plunged the world into a global economic recession (The World Bank, 2020). Low-skilled and casual-contract jobs, which many university students hold, were disproportionally impacted by the downturn (International Labor Organization, 2021). The exact number of student-held jobs lost in New Zealand is unknown, but 17% of Māori students surveyed by Akuhata-Huntington (2020) reported that lockdown stopped them from working, and 29% of students in Cameron et al. (2021) reported worrying about "personal finances" (p.15). Anecdotally, over 2000 students accessed the government's tertiary COVID hardship fund by June 2020, with many more seeking financial support from the universities' own general hardship funds and informally through family (Hope, 2020). Given the relationship between financial hardship and mental health in university students (Larcombe & Fethers, 2013), and given that students' employment was often to cover basic costs, this represents a significant challenge to the students' wellbeing.

A blurring of the home and work domains was observed during the lockdown. Many students reported inadequate set-up for university studies at home, insufficient space, and others serving as distractions, leading to a reduced concentration in class (Cameron et al., 2021; McKay et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). Additionally, for some, the home may not be a safe place. For example, two participants in Hagedorn et al. (2021) experienced a controlling atmosphere at home. They were not alone in experiencing this. A rise in family violence was reported in New Zealand during the lockdown (Every-Palmer et al., 2020), and university students would undoubtedly be present in the statistics.

The pandemic increased the lifeload of many students who may be juggling family and study commitments (Hagedorn et al., 2021; McKay et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, female students were already doing more unpaid labour at home, which is more emotionally draining and anxiety-provoking than paid work (Beban & Trueman, 2018). During the pandemic, a shift to more traditional gendered parenting roles was observed, meaning that female students more often took on home-schooling the children alongside their own studies (Cameron et al., 2021; Mize et al., 2021). The extra stress of balancing family and academic commitments led to feelings of anxiety and depression (Badri & Yunus, 2022; Cameron et al., 2021). Academic responsibilities can undermine family commitments. Alternatively, academic performance can be impacted by family commitments. Badri and Yunus (2022) found that students who experienced the former reported higher depression and anxiety than those who experienced the latter situation; this reflects the additional guilt many student-parents feel in prioritising their studies over family commitments.

Mental and Physical Health

The previous section outlined the financial-related stressors for university students, and this section focusses on how the fear of infection and disruption to routines impact university students' wellbeing.

Lockdowns were an omnipresent feature in the pandemic and were found to exacerbate many existing unhealthy behaviours. During the lockdowns, people were instructed to stay home, creating an extended period of confinement. As a result, physical activities naturally decrease during lockdowns, exacerbating the current public health crisis of obesity and physical inactivity (Bourion-Bédès et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Mazumder et al., 2021). In addition, the fear of COVID infection can prevent people from exercising outside (Alsalhe et al., 2020; Bösselmann et al., 2021; Meiring et al., 2021). As one student

explained in Akuhata-Huntington (2020), they felt "paranoid" (p.47) to venture out despite acknowledging the need for exercise to improve mental health.

Lockdowns, by nature, aim to reduce interpersonal contact. As people became physically isolated during the lockdown, loneliness and isolation also increased (Allen et al., 2021; Geirdal et al., 2021). Interestingly, students with previous busy social lives experienced worse mental health outcomes than students who were already depressed and socially isolated before the pandemic (Hamza et al., 2021; Ogawa et al., 2021). Evidence from previous epidemics showed a rise in mental distress post-epidemic, and the increase in mental health symptomology in previously healthy people led to concerns of a mental health epidemic following the pandemic (Hisham et al., 2021; Poulton et al., 2020). However, as the pandemic is still ongoing, the full extent and duration of its mental health fallout cannot be established.

Geirdal et al. (2021) demonstrated that although a global deterioration in wellbeing was found during April-May 2020, when most countries were in lockdown, the extent differed; severe psychological distress was reported in 74% of UK respondents compared to 50% in Norway. This is understandable given each country's unique disease trajectory and government response. For example, Fitzpatrick et al. (2020); Foa et al. (2022) found the increase of negative affect in New Zealand to be lower than the UK during each country's lockdown, and the magnitude of the increase was linked to COVID fatalities in each country. Each country's existing pre-pandemic social context also influences its pandemic experience. Ogawa et al. (2021) highlighted the prevalence of extreme social withdrawal in the Japanese society pre-pandemic as a possible reason for their finding; that those socially withdrawn individuals were habituated to extended confinement even before the pandemic. Similarly, living in urban areas was a protective factor against COVID-related anxiety in Cao et al. (2020) but not statistically significant in Bourion-Bédès et al. (2021); this was due to the

difference in urban-rural inequality between China in Cao et al. (2020) and France in Bourion-Bédès et al. (2021). Lastly, most studies were quantitative or mixed-methods with a short text-based answer (e,g, Cameron et al., 2021; Hagedorn et al., 2020). More in-depth qualitative studies of the students' lived experiences are needed to get a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on students' wellbeing

The Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the inequitable access to digital technology and its contents, which can be caused by a lack of infrastructure or affordability of the necessary equipment to access the internet (Unwin & de Bastion, 2009). The move to exclusive online learning and campus closure during the pandemic made reliable internet access a necessity that not everyone could access. In New Zealand, one university found that 6% of the students surveyed lacked the equipment, and 17% lacked adequate internet connection to access online teaching during the lockdown (AUT, 2020). In addition, some students reported experiencing financial difficulties due to the cost of obtaining technological devices to adapt to remote learning (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Hagedorn et al., 2021; Händel et al., 2020), whereas others lacked the infrastructure and resorted to parking outside friends' houses to complete university work (Hagedorn et al., 2021).

The digital divide during the pandemic exacerbated the existing inequities within university education. Experiencing the digital divide and attrition at the university share very similar risk factors: being Māori or Pasifika, having lower socioeconomic status, and having disabilities (Akuhata-Huntington, 2020; Brownfield et al., 2020; Digital Government, 2022). Whereas students could previously access digital resources via public facilities, this was impossible during the lockdown, effectively denying some students access to education.

Challenges to Online Learning

For several reasons, students found the move to online learning overwhelming, confusing, and stressful (Cameron et al., 2021; Hagedorn et al., 2021). First, the shift coincided with announcements of lockdown when the students were already experiencing significant disruptions and heightened anxiety. There was often a lack of uniformity in response in the haste to move online; and students struggled to keep track of the sheer number of platforms being used to deliver online learning (Hagedorn et al., 2021). Secondly, course syllabi and assessment requirements were modified to fit the online medium, disrupting the students' plans and routines. In courses requiring a practical component, these were often cancelled altogether, creating anxiety in students regarding their practical skills (Hagedorn et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2020; Shim & Lee, 2020). The many stressors outlined above created a particularly stressful time at the beginning of the online learning period.

The phenomenon of "Zoom fatigue" became widespread during the pandemic. It refers to a perception of increased fatigue and lack of user engagement during remote teaching, which is often facilitated via Zoom (Bailenson, 2021; Peper et al., 2021). Virtual meeting apps like Zoom present an unnatural social environment that disrupts the natural rhythms of social interactions, adding to the cognitive load for the participants to decipher and transmit social cues (Bailenson, 2021; Bullock et al., 2022; Peper et al., 2021). The mental exhaustion caused by Zoom fatigue not only leads to feelings of depression and anxiety (Peper et al., 2021; Salim et al., 2022), it also lowers the users' motivation to initiate healthy activities afterwards (Fauville et al., 2021). Salim et al. (2022) found Zoom fatigue positively correlated with irregular exercise in university students. Similarly, Zoom fatigue was linked to weight gain in Işıl and Ersoy Görkem (2022).

Relationships with staff and other students are an immediate influence on learning (Kahu, 2013), and these are often lacking in online learning. This was evident both in first-

year students who did not establish a foundational relationship before the move to online

learning (McKay et al., 2021), and in students who reported having previously good

relationships with others (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). In addition, students reported the

anonymity of online learning as a barrier to interaction with fellow students (Shim & Lee,

2020; Wilson et al., 2020). A lack of interaction was similarly reported on the student-faculty

side. Typical examples reported were no interactions with lecturers, lack of immediate

feedback, and difficulty in asking questions after class (Hagedorn et al., 2021; Shim & Lee,

2020). In addition, students perceive online learning to lack the spontaneity of in-person

learning and as a result, hesitate to approach teaching staff via electronic means due to its

perceived formality (McKay et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020).

Remote learning posed issues for students' motivation and accountability (Gonzalez-

Ramirez et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). While procrastination was a

common occurrence pre-pandemic, the monotony of days in lockdown and the availability of

material removed perceptions of urgency to study (Wilson et al., 2020). While crucial for

online learning, the internet also serves as a gateway to other distractions such as social

media (Shim & Lee, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

The dissatisfaction with online learning was so universal that no student indicated a

preference for it (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). For

many, the move to online learning disrupted a familiar learning environment, which in itself

is stressful (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). Coupled with the stressful timing, lack of

collaboration and challenges to motivation made online learning an experience students do

not look forward to repeating.

Summary

Studies consistently show that being younger, female and of lower income were risk

factors for lowered wellbeing during the pandemic (Bourion-Bédès et al., 2021; Every-

Palmer et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020), a demographic segment that overlaps with a large portion of the university student population. University students reported lower wellbeing than the general population before the pandemic, and the pandemic exacerbated many existing stressors through its various mechanisms. The lockdown and its associated online learning also created additional stressors in Zoom fatigue, loneliness, and a lack of engagement with learning.

The Rationale for the Present Study

The pandemic's arrival coincided with the beginning of the academic year for university students in the southern hemisphere, creating a collision between two stressful events. While first-year students experienced many similar challenges as other students, the pandemic so early in their university journey also presented additional challenges. This section first reviews the unique challenges first-year students experienced and then the present study's rationale.

Many first-year students come to the university expecting an on-campus experience. Regardless of whether it met their expectations, students from other cohorts experienced it, whereas the 2020 cohort felt that they were "robbed of the on-campus experience… everyone was talking about" (Moosa & Bekker, 2022, p. 11). For example, Monash University in Australia cancelled its Orientation programmes, which Kyne and Thompson (2020) identified as a missed opportunity for students to be formally introduced to the university; however, it would be a disappointment for the students given the many social activities during the Orientation. Furthermore, orientation is only part of the university experience. Face-to-face interaction was a significant component of the on-campus experience students felt was denied by the pandemic (McKay et al., 2021; Moosa & Bekker, 2022).

As reviewed in *The First-Year Experience* above, relationships are essential in facilitating the first-year transition. The pandemic posed a barrier for the students to form meaningful relationships with students and with staff due to the lack of face-to-face interactions. This was common among students who began their academic year online (Kyne & Thompson, 2020) and students whose education was moved online later in the semester (McKay et al., 2021). As a result, students report feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression (McKay et al., 2021; Moosa & Bekker, 2022). Although students of all years experienced isolation during the pandemic, Moosa and Bekker (2022) argued that isolation in first-year students could induce feelings of non-belonging, which subsequently affects the first-year transition.

The available research mostly came from southern hemisphere countries such as South Africa (Combrink & Oosthuizen, 2020; Moosa & Bekker, 2022) and Australia (Kyne & Thompson, 2020; McKay et al., 2021). The research interest from the southern hemisphere is due to the pandemic's rise coinciding with a crucial time of the first-year transition. Of these countries, New Zealand is in a unique position of experiencing relatively low case numbers in the first two years of the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2021). Although New Zealand was relatively untouched by COVID-19 at this stage, its population, including the university students, nevertheless experienced the hallmarks of the pandemic, such as lockdowns and online learning. At present, there are studies examining the experience of postgraduate medical students (Blattner et al., 2022), the general university population (Cameron et al., 2021), and Māori students (Akuhata-Huntington, 2020) during the lockdown in New Zealand; yet no studies examining the pandemic's impact on first-year students. McKay et al. (2021) examined the first-year student experience in Australia. Despite being New Zealand's closest neighbour physically and culturally, the different tertiary education

systems and the community spread of COVID-19 make the Australian experience of McKay et al. (2021) incomparable to New Zealand.

While quantitative research demonstrated that the pandemic negatively influenced students' mental health, it could not explain its day-to-day impact as the pandemic evolved. Another feature of quantitative research is that it is often researcher-led; researchers determine the area of focus in research which is then operationalised using standardised measuring instruments such as the GAD-7 (Cao et al., 2020) or Kessler-10 (Horita et al., 2021). Given the pervasive disruption of the pandemic on all aspects of people's lives, the quantitative research approach would only address a narrow set of areas of the pandemic's impact as determined by the researcher. Although some research in this chapter contained a qualitative component (Hagedorn et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020), those were often limited to short text-based answers. An entirely qualitative research methodology allows participants more freedom to explore the topic, eliciting a greater wealth of information (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

With the above considerations, the aim of the study was formulated as the following questions:

- How did the pandemic impact the first-year experience in New Zealand?
- How did the pandemic impact the first-year students' wellbeing?
- How did the students cope with the pandemic's impact on their wellbeing?

Chapter 2: Methodology and Method

This research utilises Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as Smith (1996) described. This chapter first explains the rationale for using a qualitative approach, particularly IPA. It then explains interpretivism, the *I* of IPA followed by its three philosophical pillars: phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics. Qualitative research requires reflexivity from the researcher, and so lastly, I will contemplate my position as a researcher on the topic.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, its impacts are slowly being revealed. Given the pervasive disruption of the pandemic on all aspects of people's lives, the quantitative research approach would only address a narrow set of areas of the pandemic's impact. Instead, I chose a qualitative approach for the diversity of information it could elicit (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By utilising a qualitative research method, I allow the participants to control the direction and content of the response. By using interviews, the participants could be probed to elaborate their answers.

I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research method to explore the areas of interest. IPA is known for its focus on the lived experience of individuals (Smith et al., 2009). It is a methodology deemed particularly useful for studying under-studied and complex topics, and topics only studied quantitatively before (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2012). All these features align closely with the research at hand—given the limited research on the pandemic's impacts on the first-year transition, it is undoubtedly an understudied topic. This research aims to understand the interplay between complex, multifaceted events, for which IPA is suitable. The philosophical basis of IPA is discussed in the following sections. IPA also closely aligns with my own ontological positioning, and this is explored in *Reflexivity*.

IPA as a Research Methodology

IPA is situated within the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism draws on existential philosophy to explore what it means to be human, and the meaning people attach to their experiences (Grant & Giddings, 2002). For the interpretivists, people seek to ascribe meaning to and make sense of the experience, making the world a place saturated with different systems of meaning (Grant & Giddings, 2002). "Reality" in interpretivism is subjective to the individual, shaped by one's lived experience. Therefore, interpretivism accepts the existence of multiple realities (Kelly et al., 2018). Unlike the positivist positioning of the researcher as an objective observer of reality, interpretivists see the researcher as an integral party that co-creates a shared reality with the participant (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

IPA aims to understand "what it's like to stand in the shoes" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8) of the participants. Therefore, it follows the interpretivism philosophy of multiple realities (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA consists of three theoretical pillars: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology was first proposed by Husserl (1913, as cited in Smith et al., 2009) to examine the human experience. Husserl (1913, as cited in Ashworth, 2015) stated the experience itself should be the starting point of inquiry and advocated removing any assumptions and hypotheses, making IPA an inductive enquiry. The phenomenological philosophy of IPA aims to "[let] things speak for themselves" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8), and any interpretation should stay true to the experience.

Hermeneutics refers to the act of interpretation. IPA consists of a double-hermeneutics process (Smith et al., 2009). This means that while the participant attempts to make meaning of their experience, the researcher also performs hermeneutics by interpreting how the participant makes sense of their experience. The researcher's interpretation within IPA is not linear but forms a "hermeneutic circle"—an iterative process where the researcher

goes back and forth within the data to extract meaning. Smith et al. (2009) described the hermeneutic circle as "[to] understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28); this indicates that the "whole" and the "part" in IPA are inseparable and contextual. This contextual approach to analysing pieces of data forms the final philosophical pillar of IPA, idiography.

Idiography refers to analysing an individual case within its unique context (Smith et al., 2009). Unlike quantitative approaches, where data from different sources or participants are aggregated and analysed as a collective entity, idiography examines the case in its entirety and within its unique context. Unlike positivism, where findings are generalised to an entire group/population, IPA examines a particular experience for a particular individual. An IPA researcher will analyse a piece of data (such as an interview) as an individual case study before moving on to the next piece of data/interview (Smith et al., 2009). This idiographic nature of IPA also means that the findings of this thesis should not be taken as a consensus amongst the first-year student population but the experiences of individual participants.

IPA is a qualitative research method known for its focus on the lived experience of individuals (Smith et al., 2009). Proponents of IPA deem the methodology particularly useful for studying complex, under-studied and unexplored topics (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2012). All these features align closely with the topic at hand—given the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on wellbeing is certainly under-studied and underexplored.

Reflexivity

Epistemologically, I have always been an interpretivist. As a member of a visible minority, I learned very early in life that the existence of certain things (for example, racism) depends on who is asked. Being a migrant, I was offered the natural vantage point of seeing the diversity of experience in society and how this shapes our reality—turned out, I was

familiar with the multiple realities in interpretivism before knowing its name. I believe that the quest for meaning is central to the human experience, and this quest is very much influenced by our social context. Given my interpretivist leaning and the research topic, using IPA became an obvious choice—this research arose from a simple curiosity about the first-year journey as experienced by the "COVID Cohort" (Kyne & Thompson, 2020, p. 3381). I wanted to sit with and understand their experience, as such, the phenomenological focus of IPA appealed to me as a researcher.

Self-hermeneutic comes naturally as an interpretivist, however, the double hermeneutic in IPA posed a challenge given the pandemic is a universal experience. The terms *insider* and *outsider* refer to the extent that the researcher identifies as a member of the group or culture being studied (Ross, 2017). Interpretivists argue that an insider researcher's shared understanding with the participants would allow a deeper understanding of the information (Ross, 2017; Saidin & Yaacob, 2017). However, an insider may also carry their lived experience and views into the research. In IPA, this could result in the researcher imposing their own theories rather than listening to the participants' stories (Hale et al., 2008).

Smith et al. (2009) suggest that the researcher must engage in reflexivity throughout the research process, and let their position be known to the reader. I consider myself somewhere between the in- and outsider extremes for this research. The COVID-19 pandemic was a global event, making me an insider in the shared experience of living through the pandemic. Like many people, I started university straight after high school. I too, have experienced the stress of juggling academic demands with the transition to adulthood, and this gave me an insider experience with the struggles of school-leaver undergraduate students. However, I am also an outsider in that being a thesis-only postgraduate student, I am an outsider to the experience of class disruption and remote teaching, a defining feature of

the student experience during the pandemic. I was working remotely well before the pandemic, and not taking taught classes meant no timetable disruptions, making my experience during the lockdown a very business-as-usual one.

This reflexive exercise demonstrated that the insider and outsider dichotomy simplified the complexity of my relationship with the inquiry. It revealed the multitude of identities and experiences a researcher holds, and similarly, it served as a reminder of the complexity of the participants' experiences. This reflexive exercise served as a reminder to consider the participants as individuals within their context (idiography). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) urged IPA researchers to "let things speak for themselves" (p. 8) and allow the participants' unique experiences to emerge. It also gave me an appreciation of the importance of *hearing* others' stories.

Method

This section describes the method used for research, starting from participant recruitment. Interview schedule development and reflections from the pilot interview are then described. Lastly, the data analysis process is explained.

Recruitment

Only students from Massey University Albany Campus were recruited. The Albany Campus is the largest campus of Massey University by student numbers (Massey University, 2021) and is also located in Auckland, the region most affected by COVID-19.

Inclusion criteria were domestic students over 18 years old who started their 100-level undergraduate studies in 2020. Exclusion criteria were undergraduate students who transferred from other tertiary institutions in 2020 and students whose English ability was insufficient for an in-depth interview.

For recruitment, the researcher placed physical flyers (Appendix 1) around the campus and posted the flyers on the "Massey University Psychology Students" Facebook group (Appendix 2) to reach potential participants. The physical flyers contained the researcher's contact details, while potential participants from the Facebook group could initiate contact with the researcher instantly via Facebook message. Snowball sampling was also used; existing participants were asked to let their friends know about the research and pass the researcher's details on to others interested.

In the initial contact, the researcher provided the information sheet and explained the study procedure briefly, including its recording and transcription. The potential participant was screened to ensure they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The potential participant was provided with the information sheet (Appendix 3) and consent form (Appendix 4) and was allowed to ask further questions. Once the potential participant agreed to participate, the researcher then arranged a time and place convenient to conduct the interview. The participants were given to option of a face-to-face meeting or a remote interview via the Zoom meeting app. The participants were sent a text reminder on the morning of the scheduled interview.

Purposive Sampling

Being a methodology that focusses on individual experiences, IPA is known for presenting single case studies of compelling experiences. For research using more than one case, the cases should be homogenous to capture the experience (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Due to its focus on exploring a particular experience rather than a diversity of experiences, participants in IPA are often sampled *purposively,* resulting in a relatively homogeneous sample (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Thus, only students who began their university studies at Massey University Albany in 2020 were sampled.

A limitation of research using purposive sampling is that it yields a non-representative sample (Robinson, 2014). This does not pose an inherent methodological limitation for this research, as it does not aim to generalise its findings to *all* students. The purposive sampling in this research also means that any recommendations generated do not represent a consensus among the student body. The results may provide insight for support services on the student experience, but no guarantee will be made regarding its generalisability among the thousands of students at Albany Campus.

Sample Size

IPA focusses on the *depth* of interpretation (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). However, IPA can also be used to discover convergent and divergent themes in lived experience in a small sample; and this was the goal of this research. Given the scope of this thesis, a balance needed to be reached between data saturation and the time constraint. Smith et al. (2009) suggested a sample size of three for a novice researcher, and this advice was followed for the thesis, which provides enough depth into the topic without data over-saturation.

Participants

Three participants were interviewed. They were given pseudonyms in alphabetical order in order of interviews.

Allison is in her 30s. She is from Australia and has no family in New Zealand. She began studying towards a Bachelor of Communications in February 2020. Allison lived with her partner during the pandemic.

Brittany is a 19-year-old who started in the second semester of 2020. Before starting at the university, she was working and saving towards a gap year. Brittany is studying psychology. She lived at home with her parents during the pandemic.

Carla joined the study via a referral by Brittany. Carla is similar in age to Brittany and also studying towards a degree in psychology. She started at Massey University at the beginning of 2020 after graduating high school. During the pandemic, Carla lived at home with her mother, stepfather, sister, and partner.

The three participants represented three typical pathways into the university—a school leaver, one who took a gap year, and a mature-aged student. They all began their first year of university as on-campus students in 2020, therefore they met the homogeneity requirement for the research topic.

Interview Schedule

An interview schedule (Appendix 5) was developed using the guidelines by Smith and Osborn (2012), who stated that the questions should be open-ended, neutral in tone, and avoid jargon. The interview questions were worded to reflect the research questions to maintain their openness. The questions began with "How did the pandemic affect your…", assuming that the pandemic impacted the participant. This seems to contradict Smith and Osborn's (2012) advice of avoiding value-laden questions, but it was deemed a reasonable assumption that the pandemic would have affected the participants.

The participants were free to reflect on the pandemic's impact on their first year at the university. A model diagram of the TWTW model was provided for the participants' reference. The dimensions in the TWTW model could be divided into distinct sub-questions when prompting was necessary. In addition, another question on factors not covered by the TWTW dimensions was added to capture any further impact.

The interview schedule aims to provide a framework for the researcher to interact comfortably with the topics at hand (Smith et al., 2009). As the research was a semi-structured interview, the order of the interview questions depended on the conversational

flow. The researcher also used probing questions such as "in what way was… good/bad?", "can you tell me a bit more about…?" as needed during the interview. Questions were skipped if the participant's answer to previous questions had already covered the topic.

A pilot interview with another student was conducted to seek feedback regarding the structure and content of the interview. The feedback from the pilot interviewee was positive; the questions were easy to understand, and the diagram of the TWTW model easy to comprehend. As such, the interview schedule was deemed appropriate to use.

Interview Procedures

Only one face-to-face interview occurred, which took place in a conference room in the Albany Campus library. The participant was given time to read through the information sheet and sign the consent form. The interview process began once the participant signed the consent form and signalled their readiness to begin.The face-to-face interview was recorded using the researcher's cell phone, which was placed in plain view of the participant. The researcher began recording when the participant indicated that they were ready to start the interview. After the interview, the researcher provided the participant with the debrief sheet with support services and offered a gratuity, which the participant declined.

The other two interviews took place virtually over Zoom. The participants were sent the information sheet and consent form via email before the interview. The participant was asked to send the completed consent form before the interview. Remote interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording function. After the interview, the gratuity was paid via bank transfer, and the debrief sheet and bank transfer receipt were sent to the participant via email.

The recordings of the interviews were uploaded onto Otter.ai, an automated transcription system. Otter.ai automatically assigned names to the speakers when transcribing, and the participants' pseudonyms were set at this stage. Next, the transcript was

checked for accuracy and any identifying features were removed before the transcripts was downloaded into a Word document. The researcher sent their transcript to each participant for comment. Once the participant indicated that they were happy with the transcript, the researcher began the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed using the steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). Although written linearly in this section, the actual data analysis process was an *iterative* process that only ended with the writing-down of the analysis (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

Given the central position of the participant's experience in IPA, the transcript was first read multiple times to fully immerse in the participant's experience. For reference, a timeline of their involvement with Massey University and the government's COVID-19 response was drawn to embed the participants' experience within the broader societal context.

The idiographic nature of IPA means that all transcripts were analysed as individual cases first. All coding was done manually on printouts of the transcripts. After reading the transcript a few times, coding began with "free coding" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.106) to note any emotional response, salient features, and the researcher's reflection. Then, a step of abstraction was performed, where codes of similar nature were grouped into themes. This step was done on EdrawMind, a mind-mapping software that allowed the researcher to organise the codes and themes and visualise their relationships freely. The themes were then clustered into superordinate themes.

For quality control, I documented my reflexivity process throughout the analysis. This allowed me to identify any assumptions that could influence the analysis process. The

analyses and reflections were given to the thesis supervisor to check for their fidelity to the participants' experience. I also frequently referred to the original transcript to ensure that the thematic categorisation was consistent with the context the data originated from.

Although primarily focussed on the individual experience, IPA can also be used to look for patterns across cases. Once all transcripts were analysed, the standalone analyses were read through to identify common and divergent themes across the transcripts. The common themes were grouped into superordinate themes, while the divergent themes were scrutinised for their relevance to the research questions. Some divergent themes enriched the analysis by providing contrasting phenomenology, while others were discarded due to not being relevant to the research questions (e.g., when a participant began talking about their work in 2021). This exercise broke the transcript into parts and rearranged to emerge as a new "whole" in the write-up, illustrating the hermeneutic circle in action (Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by Massey University's Ethics Committee, application number SOA 21/18. This section details the ethical risks that were identified during the study and how they were addressed.

Avoidance of Harm

The pandemic was still ongoing at the time of data collection. Therefore, it was imperative to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The participants were given the option of face-to-face or virtual interviews. For face-to-face interviews, the researcher followed government guidelines of scanning in, handwashing, maintaining physical distance, sanitising surfaces, and providing alcohol-based hand sanitiser for the participant's use.

Although New Zealand was relatively unscathed from the pandemic at the time of data collection, some students may have experienced significant hardship due to the

pandemic, making the experience potentially distressing. As a precaution, this study underwent a full ethics application. The interview was to stop immediately if the participant became distressed or if it was determined that the participant was likely to become distressed. However, this did not prove necessary. A list of available resources was provided to the participants to inform them of additional support (See Appendix 6).

Informed Consent

The participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the research and their rights as participants during the initial contact, and a written consent form was provided for the participants to sign before commencing the interview. The participants were allowed to ask questions regarding the research during the research process. Similarly, they were able to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity throughout the research process. At the transcription stage, all information identifying other people or entities was replaced with generic terms such as "classmate" or "lecture theatre".

The face-to-face interview was conducted in a pre-booked conference room on campus to protect the participants' privacy. Online interviews were done via Zoom meetings, and only those with the link could be admitted. Recordings were uploaded onto secure cloud-based storage for transcription.
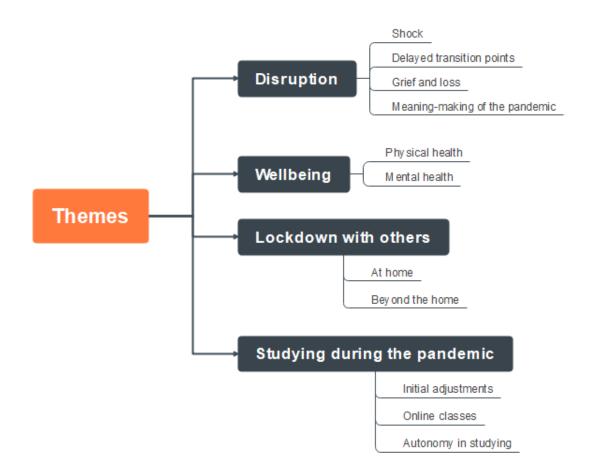
Te Tiriti

This research falls under *mainstream* research in the *Te Ara Tika guidelines* (The Pūtaiora Writing Group, n.d.). While it is not Māori-specific, students of Māori descent were welcome to participate. As the research used a Tikanga Māori framework as the basis of its conceptualisation for "wellbeing", the framework's whakapapa as an indigenous worldview

by an indigenous scholar need to be acknowledged. The model used in this study was Te
Whare Tapa Whā, created by Mason Durie (Durie, 1985). Given that this model is a Māori
intellectual taonga, its integrity should also be protected. The model did not undergo any
modification, the Māori terms for the dimensions of the whare remained with English
translations underneath, and the researcher referred to the dimensions by their Māori names.
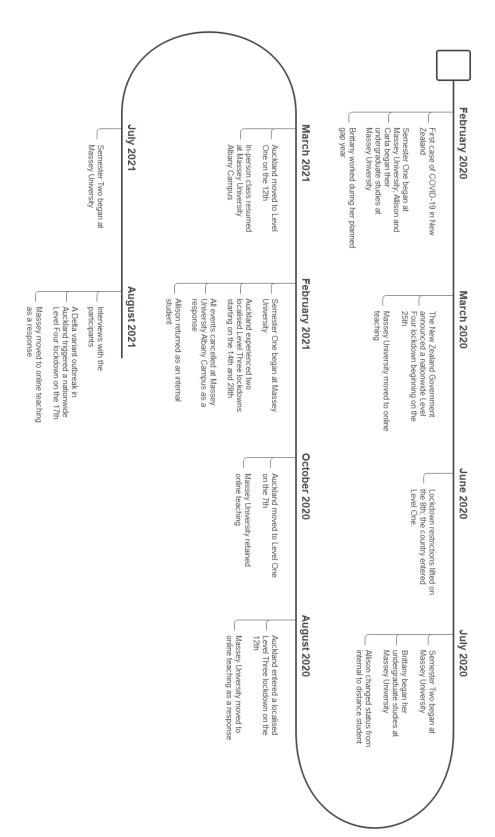
Chapter 3: Findings and Discussion

This chapter combines the findings from the participants' interviews and an in-depth discussion of these findings in relation to existing literature. The results are presented in four broad themes, shown in Figure 2. The first, *Disruption,* focusses on the participants' feelings towards the pandemic and its impact on their life; this corresponds to the taha wairua dimension of the TWTW model. *Wellbeing* focusses on the pandemic's impact on the participants' mental and physical wellbeing—their taha tinana and taha hinengaro in the TWTW model. These dimensions are discussed in conjunction as the participants linked their physical and mental health. In *Lockdown with others,* the participants' taha whānau is examined in its two subthemes: *at home* and *beyond the home*. Lastly, the pandemic's impact on the participants' university journey is presented in *Studying in a pandemic*.

Figure 2

Themes and Subthemes

A timeline of the participants' time at Massey University and the COVID responses in New Zealand is presented in Figure 3. The chronology of the participants' experience becomes very apparent in the theme *Wellbeing*, where a progressive change in their mental health can be observed.

Figure 3

A timeline of the pandemic in New Zealand, Massey University academic dates and the participants' time at Massey.

February 2020
- First case of COVID-19 in New Zealand
- Semester One began at Massey University, Allison and Carla began their undergraduate studies at Massey University
- Brittany worked during her planned gap year

March 2020
- The New Zealand Government announced a nationwide Level Four lockdown beginning on the 25th
- Massey University moved to online teaching

June 2020
- Lockdown restrictions lifted on the 8th, the country entered Level One.

July 2020
- Semester Two began at Massey University
- Brittany began her undergraduate studies at Massey University
- Allison changed status from internal to distance student

August 2020
- Auckland entered a localised Level Three lockdown on the 12th
- Massey University moved to online teaching as a response

October 2020
- Auckland moved to Level One on the 7th
- Massey University retained online teaching

February 2021
- Semester One began at Massey University
- Auckland experienced two localised Level Three lockdowns starting on the 14th and 28th
- All events cancelled at Massey University Albany Campus as a response
- Allison returned as an internal student

March 2021
- Auckland moved to Level One on the 12th
- In-person class resumed at Massey University Albany Campus

July 2021
- Semester Two began at Massey University

August 2021
- Interviews with the participants
- A Delta variant outbreak in Auckland triggered a nationwide Level Four lockdown on the 17th
- Massey moved to online teaching as a response

Disruption

The first theme is structured with four subthemes: *Shock,* which focussed on the participants' response to the pandemic. The pandemic disruption led participants to feel unable to undergo specific turning points in life, which are explored in *Delayed transition points*. *Intangible loss* explored the intangible loss and grief experienced by the participant due to the pandemic. Lastly, *Meaning-making of the pandemic* focusses on how the participants attempted to make sense of the pandemic.

Shock

The pandemic itself was an unprecedented global event, and the participants expressed disbelief over the fact that they were living through it. Carla struggled with the very concept of a pandemic, describing it as "*Something that I never thought would happen.*" Carla explained:

> *"It seems like when you think into our history, all these plagues and stuff and how*
>
> *they like riddled countries. Kind of just seems like such an old thing to have, like a*
>
> *pandemic, or something that you see on like, the sci-fi movies, and you know, there's*
>
> *aliens and zombies and stuff like that now just quite... quite taken back."*

The above statement was illustrative of Carla's feelings of disbelief. She equated historical bubonic plagues and science-fiction as realms where pandemics could be a possibility. Over 18 months since COVID reached New Zealand, Carla still framed the pandemic as: "*Some days, I wonder if I'm like living in a sci-fi world? If I'm in a movie*", demonstrating an ongoing sense of surrealism and detachment.

Allison similarly expressed disbelief over the pandemic: "*how quickly this one thing has affected like, basically the world… Such a large-scale event to happen*". This is a very valid observation given that the country went from having its first case of COVID-19 to a total lockdown within a month. The shock over the speed of events unfolding also framed

Allison's view on her parents' mortality, discussed in the subtheme *Beyond the Home* in *Lockdown with Others*. Both participants expressed similar disbelief over the concept of a pandemic and its speed and scale of effect.

Delayed Transition Points

The pandemic was the very reason that Brittany chose to study at university. Her initial plan for 2020 was "*doing a gap year… gonna work for the first six months and then I was gonna go travelling the last six months",* but instead, "*given the pandemic and everything. It was probably a good time to upskill and not be unemployed.*" Young adulthood is a time when people explore independence, as seen in Brittany's plans to travel. Instead, the pandemic disrupted this key point through stay-at-home orders and the economic impacts, disproportionally affecting younger people (International Labor Organization, 2021; Weaver et al., 2021).

Brittany now has committed herself to studying psychology to the postgraduate level, concluding that the pandemic "*kind of changes the trajectory of what you thought your adult life would be like*." Her observation of "trajectory" was similar to Life Course Theory. Life Course Theory examines how social changes and global events shape individuals' life trajectories from birth to death (Elder et al., 2003). Using this theory, Weaver et al. (2021) hypothesised that the pandemic disrupts young adults' life trajectories by disrupting crucial transition points. The significance of Brittany's planned gap year as a transition point can be seen in her lament that "*you can't be 18 again… you can't redo that*", associating being 18 years old with the "*'free-spirited, just finished high school, nothing really matters' stage in life.*" Although overseas travel will resume post-pandemic, the timing of this gap year after "*just finished high school*" signified it as a transition point, which Brittany could never recover.

A deviation from socially-accepted transition points can lead to individuals struggling with their self-concept (Eliason et al., 2015). Allison's talk of "*feeling quite insecure about being older*" at the university reflects the common assumption that university students should be younger than her three decades of age, representing university study as a transition point indicative of an earlier life stage. The pandemic also hindered her ability to approach the other transition points with her partner: "*We couldn't make any life choices… like buying a house or considering children, if we get married, what's that gonna look like with family…*". In this statement, Allison listed some of the transition points included in what is known as the "big five" (leaving school, moving out of parental home, finding a job, marriage, having children) markers of adulthood (Serido & Shim, 2017; Settersten et al., 2015). In countries with high homeownership rates, property acquisition also becomes a transition point (Fuster et al., 2019). Allison was already stressed about approaching a transition point that she felt herself too old for, and the pandemic frustrated her attempt to approach three other transition points, demonstrating pervasive stunting of life course due to the pandemic.

Loss and Grief

The participants' identified several intangible losses in *Delayed Transition Points*. Intangible losses are losses that cannot be easily defined or recognised (Boss et al., 2011). Brittany was very vocal about her intangible losses. Her planned gap year was a tangible loss, and the quote "*you can't be 18 again… you can't redo that*" signified the timing of this gap year as an intangible loss. Brittany then experienced another intangible loss in not having the desired university experience: "*we all have idealised visions of what university will be like. And Zoom wasn't really a part of that schema for me*". In coping with the intangible loss of her gap year, it spawned further intangible losses. Brittany lamented, "*I've spent a lot of the last two years just waiting for the world to not be terrible… I didn't expect to spend most of it*

sitting in my house". This represents the intangible loss of two years' worth of excitement and experiences.

Another intangible loss can be seen in the disorientation participants felt in *Shock*. The pandemic challenged participants' knowledge of their world and reality. Parkes (1971) termed this concept the assumptive world, which is "the only world we know and it includes everything we know or think we know. It includes our interpretation of the past and our expectations of the future, our plans and our prejudices." (p. 103). Carla spoke about the loss of her assumptive world:

> "*After we come out of lockdowns, and we go back to like a level one setting. I don't really take it for granted, being able to go out and do these things, like going out with all my friends, like going to nightclubs and stuff like that… Stuff that other countries haven't been able to do for a few years... Yeah, I think that would be just like once we come out of lockdown, really appreciating everything we have in life.*"

The phrase "take it for granted" indicates an assumptive world. The term "new normal" was often used to describe life during and post-pandemic (e.g., Controller and Auditor General, 2021). The implication that the pre-pandemic life of "old normal" is no longer "*the* normal" suggests the collective loss of an assumptive world. In Carla's case, the pre-pandemic norm of going clubbing is no longer guaranteed due to the pandemic, leading to her appreciation of a once-normal activity. Carla also acknowledged the contrast between New Zealand's relaxed gathering restrictions, that she could go clubbing while people in other countries could not.

Parke (1971) argued that the downward comparison of seeing others in more dire situations helps individuals adjust to the loss of an assumptive world. This can be seen in Carla's comparing herself to people from other countries. Brittany also adopted the downward comparison, repeating variations of "*it could be worse*" when discussing the

impact of the pandemic. Yet she still admitted that the past two years were "*something that is hard to grapple with sometimes*," suggesting underlying grief over the losses. The loss experienced by Brittany was intangible and unrecognised, and the grief following such loss was also intangible and unrecognised, termed disenfranchised grief (Weaver et al., 2021). Brittany observed similar feelings in her friends, suggesting it may be a shared experience in young people. The concept of linked lives in life course theory examines the impact of global events on a cohort's collective identity. The experience of a significant event in a cohort's formative years often creates a lasting legacy in their collective psyche as well as carrying lifelong impacts on their economic and health outcomes (Weaver et al., 2021). Brittany and Carla's cohort spent most of their adulthood so far in a global event. As a result, they experienced intangible loss and grief over the usual experimentation in young adulthood. How this collective experience could shape the socio-political landscape as this cohort grows older remains to be seen.

Meaning-making of the pandemic

Following a disruption in their assumptive world, people need to reconstruct their assumptive world by incorporating the stressful event into this reconstruction. This recovery involves appraising and understanding the event to assign meaning to it (Cann et al., 2011; Park, 2010). During uncontrollable events such as a pandemic, meaning-making becomes an important determinant of psychological wellbeing (Eisenbeck et al., 2022; Updegraff et al., 2008).

Meaning-making consists of two forms: comprehensibility and meaning as significance (Dransart, 2013; Janoff-Bulman, 2004). Comprehensibility refers to attempting to gain an explanation/attribution to the event (Dransart, 2013). This is reflected in the participants' questioning the *why* of the pandemic. Allison's meaning-making of the pandemic was: "*maybe this is the world telling us all to slow down*," assigning a supernatural

cause to the pandemic. This explanation could be informed by Allison's frantic struggle with adjusting to university before the pandemic: "*I found myself stressed very early on… my mental health at that point was already a bit, you know, I realised I'm really gonna have to look after myself*", then her enjoyment of the slower pace of life during the lockdown, discussed in the theme *Wellbeing,* and her improved mental health during the lockdown. Therefore, it is understandable for Allison to interpret the pandemic as a message to slow down, given her experience with the stress before and the sense of inner peace she experienced during the lockdown.

In contrast, Carla could not find meaning in the pandemic. She initially sought meaning via organised religion:

> "*I looked into Christianity for quite a bit. And I couldn't really find real answers in there about pandemics. It was kind of stuff like 'God hated us. Someone's done something wrong to make Him really angry. And He was punishing the whole world.'*"

The interpretation of the pandemic being a divine punishment is a form of comprehensibility meaning-making as it provides a causal explanation. Carla could not relate to this and needed to find other meanings for the pandemic. According to Janoff-Bulman (2004), "it is through wrestling with these questions of comprehensibility that [people] turn to questions of value or significance in their lives" (p. 33). Individuals tap into the existential quests of values and purpose when faced with life's incomprehensibility and absurdity, a term Janoff-Bulman (2004) refers to as "meaning as significance" (p. 33). Carla was experiencing this absurdity in her beliefs. On one hand, the pandemic was so beyond her comprehension that she compared it to sci-fi movies and zombies; on the other, she was "*accepting that this is happening. This is how life is for now, accepting that we're not going to have a degree of*

normality." The term "normality" points to Carla's understanding that she was indeed in incomprehensible times. Therefore, Carla focussed on values instead:

> "*I've never really had the answer. I've never been able to ask myself what I think the meaning of life is even for myself, just wanting to be successful and make a difference… as long as I'm working towards that, whether there's a pandemic or not, then that part of my spirituality will be in check*".

. Carla's meaning-making process encapsulated Janoff-Bulman's (2004) meaning as significance; instead of grappling with the meaning *of* life and the pandemic, she began creating meaning *in* life through her values. Focusing on her values and creating meaning allowed her to cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic. Her values remain unchanged and serve as an anchoring point regardless of the state of the pandemic.

Brittany's meaning-making was somewhere between comprehensibility and meaning-as-significance. She stated:

> "*I do actually think* [the pandemic] *made me more passionate about psych as a field. Because I have seen so many people be very mentally unwell during this time, and not able to reach support… I've always wanted to help people, which is why I went into psychology. So it's definitely given me a bit more passion to get there… seeing how much struggle there really is.*"

Given that Brittany only chose to study due to the pandemic, this statement could be seen as comprehensibility meaning-making—the pandemic was the *cause* of her journey to becoming a psychologist. But, on the other hand, it strengthened her existing drive of "*[wanting] to help people*." and provided her with the personal value to persist through the pandemic.

Summary

The theme of disruption relates to the taha wairua dimension in the TWTW model. Although most participants equated taha wairua with organised religions and struggled with answering questions around this dimension due to their lack of religious affiliations. When the focus of taha wairua is expanded beyond organised religion, the pandemic's impact on the participants' taha wairua becomes apparent.

The pandemic affected the participants' taha wairua by causing a seismic disruption to their assumptive worlds. It changed the world as the participants knew it and the world they thought would be, and with it, their relationship to this world. Similarly, the intangible losses caused by the pandemic could lead to unresolved grief, which affects taha wairua (Durie, 1994). Anecdotally, Brittany has observed grief in herself and others. However, as the pandemic is still ongoing, the long-term impact of the grief remains to be seen.

The TWTW model recognises wellbeing as a dynamic, fluid process. While the pandemic disrupted the participants' taha wairua through its disruption and grief, it also strengthened their taha wairua. The peacefulness during the lockdown replenished Allison's taha wairua. In contrast, the pandemic experience provided Brittany with a sense of purpose and strengthened Carla's sense of purpose.

Wellbeing

This theme focusses on the pandemic's impact on the participants' physical and mental wellbeing—taha tinana and taha hinengaro. Their discussions of physical and mental health were often intertwined.

Mental Health

The first subtheme explores the pandemic's impact on the participants' mental health. A picture of deteriorating mental health over time emerges. Allison felt the impact of the

pandemic earlier than the other two participants, but all three experienced adverse mental health as the pandemic progressed. Brittany and Carla initially saw the lockdown as a novelty, believing the March lockdown to be a one-off event. This can be seen in Carla's talk around the announcement to end the lockdown: "*we won lockdown. We'll get rid of all the cases then we'll go back to normal*", demonstrating her belief in the one-off nature of the March lockdown. Therefore, during the March 2020 lockdown, Brittany and Carla did not experience severe mental health impacts. They spoke with fondness of the carefree time they spent during this lockdown. Brittany recalled: "*I wasn't at uni, but I was not at work either. And I think a lot of people were in the same situation… So, we had more time to socialise.*" Carla equally spoke of a carefree time "*just being at home, eating a lot, not really doing much. So it's just kind of like chilling out watching Netflix just snacking all day.*"

Allison's mental health was already under pressure in early 2020, and the March lockdown gave her a reprieve from the stress: "*I found myself stressed very early on… my mental health at that point was already a bit, you know, I realised I'm really gonna have to look after myself… and then COVID hit*". Allison was feeling "*quite insecure around these other people* (her classmates)" at university, then "*managed to have these really beautiful pockets of feeling peace and relaxed*" during the lockdown. The slower pace of life during the lockdown was an oft-cited silver lining of the pandemic in other studies (Cornell et al., 2020; Every-Palmer et al., 2020). For Allison, the lockdown improved her mental health by removing the triggers for insecurity (the presence of her classmates) and giving her a sense of control over her days: "*it was good because I did have my own sort of schedule to run by. I didn't have to be here at this time and whatever.*" Whereas before the lockdown, Allison was frantically keeping up with the demands of university, the lockdown allowed her the autonomy to structure her days. The impact of this autonomy is further discussed in the theme *Studying in a pandemic.*

Allison was the first to struggle with mental health after the March lockdown. She found it challenging to adjust to life post-lockdown, stating that the lockdown "*put me in a bubble that I struggled to get out of.*" It was challenging to adjust to "*everything being normal again, like going out a bit more and louder noises and more people talking around you.*" As a result, Allison chose to study via distance in Semester Two 2020:

> "*I only did distance* [study] *for the second semester. And I was grateful for that at the time because I was like, 'I cannot face coming into uni.' But it was not a good thing. I regretted that… sadly, it did not solve my anxiety issues… it made me feel a bit down like I was abnormal because I'm not living life how I used to live it and how I thought I should be living it.*"

The statement shows that Allison was one of the many who experienced more significant psychological challenges post-lockdown than during it. In New Zealand, 57% of young adults surveyed by Poulton et al. (2020) reported anxiety or depression post-lockdown, with 10% whose experience was classified as severe. Although Allison acknowledged the necessity of distance study at the time, feeling like she was "*abnormal*" revealed a negative self-evaluation. Distance study was an attempt to escape external triggers of anxiety, but ultimately created a more unpleasant reality that challenged her self-concept.

For Brittany and Carla, the realisation that the pandemic would be ongoing and lockdowns a regular occurrence drove a sense of uncertainty and hopelessness. Carla clearly stated its impact on her mental health:

> "*it's made me quite anxious…the degree of uncertainty. I like having things planned out. I like knowing what's happening… and what I need to do… So not knowing when we're going to go back to level three or level two is quite scary for me.*"

Brittany had suffered from depression "*for quite a long time*" which she described as "*ebbs and flows*", implying it was episodic. She took "*SSRI medication*" (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) for the dperession. In the August lockdown, she was deep in hopelessness:

> "*I just was sleeping all day. I couldn't really be bothered to get dressed to get on the zoom call… I can't be bothered doing any of it because it just got to a point where it felt like we had no out to the pandemic because we still hadn't gotten the vaccines or anything like that… I was really flat all the time and found the motivation really hard to find.*"

Using a diathesis-stress lens, Brittany was already susceptible to depression, as evidenced by her antidepressant use and past depression. By August 2020, Brittany had begun the stressful process of the first-year transition. It was over six months since COVID-19 reached New Zealand, the novelty of the lockdown had worn off with no solution (symbolised by the vaccine) in sight. Brittany had experienced the intangible losses of both the gap year and the idealised university experience. Socially, she could not tap into many in her social network due to the "*social media detox*" trend (discussed in *Lockdown with Others*). The many stressors collided during the August lockdown, culminating in her state of hopelessness stated above.

To cope with the impact on her mental health, Brittany "*had* [her antidepressant] *dose doubled*". To cope with her feelings of hopelessness and having "*no out to the pandemic*", Brittany sought out government information:

> "*Once you hear more government advice on things that are getting better, like, we have this many people vaccinated, we have the strategy going on, the country's opening back up… it's a little easier to not freak out as much, and feel like there's an end goal for you.*"

The term "end goal" denotes hope, a light at the end of the tunnel, achievable by the government's "strategy". The importance of open communication in easing COVID-related anxiety can be seen in this statement. The effectiveness of the New Zealand government's COVID-19 response was lauded worldwide. Its transparency and framing of COVID-19 as a health issue to avoid politicisation ensured New Zealand's low infection rates and high social cohesion in the first year of the pandemic (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Croucher et al., 2021). Brittany's usage of government advice as a coping mechanism also demonstrates the mental health-boosting impact of clear, transparent communication.

Brittany and Carla were self-described "extroverts" and "social butterflies". They were frustrated by the lack of social gatherings during the lockdown. Carla spoke about the mental health impact:

> "*I had never really struggled before with my mental health and wellbeing… So the pandemic really impacted me in that way, and not being able to go out whenever I wanted and stuff like that, being able to see who I want*".

Carla admitted that the pandemic "*has made me more anxious in general*", acknowledging the negative impact on her mental health, and identified social restrictions as one of the causes of her mental health struggle. Her experience was similar to the findings by Ogawa et al. (2021) and Hamza et al. (2021), who found that students who led more socially active lives pre-pandemic reported more depressive symptoms during the lockdown.

The two lockdowns in 2020 had vastly different impacts on the participants. This can be linked to the theme *Disruption*—the March lockdown was seen as a one-off measure to rid the country of infections, a temporary suspension of the assumptive world. Subsequent lockdowns established the pandemic as a permanent change to the assumptive world, and the participants' mental health deteriorated as the "new normal" set in. Carla's initial reaction of "we won lockdown" and a year later, "living in a sci-fi world" encapsulated the different

frame of mind as the pandemic progressed. This is similar to the findings by Rogowska et al. (2021), who found lower wellbeing in *subsequent* waves of the pandemic. It also points to the gradual exhaustion of coping resources over time. Recalling the conceptualisation of wellbeing as a balancing act (Dodge et al., 2012), as the pandemic wore on, the accumulation of stressors outpaced the coping resources, leading to a gradual decrease in mental wellbeing over time.

Physical Health

Weight gain was the only impact that exclusively affected the participants' taha tinana. Brittany and Carla stated they "*gained quite a bit of weight*" during the March lockdown. The cause of the weight gain could be deduced from the participants' talk about their daily activities. For Carla, it consisted of "*just being at home, eating a lot… chilling out watching Netflix just snacking all day*". Whereas Brittany spent her days online "*fraternising*" with friends, this likely means via social media or phone calls; again, primarily sedentary activities. For the August lockdown, Carla made a concerted effort to stay physically active: "*now I try and go for walks and even doing simple things like yoga and stuff, just to try and move my body*", and Brittany similarly reported that she had "*managed to keep it off*" when discussing the physical impact of the August lockdown.

In comparison, the participants' talk of physical and mental health impacts were often intertwined. Allison stated: "*I feel like I got more physically active actually through lockdown, but I also ate a lot more rubbish food. And that really made me mentally lazy.*" Allison's experience was the opposite of many studies' findings, which reported an improvement in dietary patterns but decreased physical activity level (Chopra et al., 2020; Flanagan et al., 2021). The increased physical activity could be due to her taking frequent walks as an escape from the confines of home (discussed in theme *lockdown with others*), but her diet of "rubbish food" offset the benefits of these walks. The overall impact on her

physical health led to mental "laziness", which could point to brain fog, lethargy, or lack of motivation. Allison's mental "laziness" would undoubtedly be unwelcomed as a student.

Brittany's depressive episode during the August 2020 lockdown had physical symptoms, "*I just found it really hard to get out of bed every morning*", "*sleeping all day*", and "*can't be bothered getting dressed*". It was these physical activities that Brittany targeted to cope with her mental health: "*just being active… getting up at the right time, making sure I'm out of bed doing things, I think is the best way to cope for me… and sporadic exercise where I can be really helpful as well*". Although Brittany made no direct link between her mental and physical *ill*-health, she recognised that improving her physical health can improve her mental health.

Summary

The participants' recollection of the pandemic's impact on their physical and mental wellbeing mainly focussed on the lockdowns. This was understandable given the salience of the lockdowns. As Brittany stated, life between the lockdowns was "*fairly normal*", therefore the participants may experience recall bias for the non-lockdown times during the pandemic due to its perceived normalcy.

Two distinct profiles of mental health impacts emerged in the participants. Using the "social butterfly" metaphor, lockdown restrictions were like a bell jar to extroverts like Brittany and Carla and a cocoon to Allison. Allison found solace in lockdown and struggled to adapt to life post-lockdown. On the other hand, Brittany and Carla struggled with the social restrictions and were eager to return to life post-lockdown. The pandemic negatively impacted all participants' mental health to a certain extent, but the causes and timing of its emergence also differ. The pandemic's impact on the participants' physical health also differed between the first and second lockdown of 2020. Two participants spoke of noticeable weight gain during the March lockdown but not the subsequent ones. For the second

lockdown, the participants' talk of physical health was often intertwined with their mental health.

Interestingly, none of the participants expressed fear of contracting COVID-19. Fear of contracting COVID-19 is reported to be high in other literature and a known contributor to anxiety and distress during the pandemic (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2021; Ogawa et al., 2021). Fitzpatrick et al. (2020) found that the fear of contracting COVID-19 correlated with the number of local infections. The participants' apparent lack of fear of contracting COVID-19 could be a testament to the relatively low case numbers in New Zealand at the time of the research.

Lockdown with Others

The third theme focusses on the impact of the lockdown on the participants' taha whānau. This theme is broken down into two subthemes: *At home,* which discusses the challenges of navigating physical space and daily schedules with other household members. This section then goes beyond the home's four walls and explores the pandemic's impact on the participants' extended social network.

At Home

Negotiating space

All participants lived with others during the lockdown, and how to successfully meet each household member's needs within the confines of the home posed a challenge. Tension and conflicts invariably arose. Allison was new to cohabiting with her partner when the lockdown was announced, and she was apprehensive of the lockdown's impact on her relationship:

> *"We'd only been living together for about four or five months before the pandemic… and when we went into lockdown, like, I definitely thought to myself, 'this is going to*

be the real test, you know, where we're going to be around each other…there's no

going anywhere now. So I was really relieved that it brought us together and not the

opposite, because I know quite a few people in relationships that had tense times and

squabbles and got sick of each other but we did okay."

The phrase "*no going anywhere now*" summed up the difficulty of being confined

with others. According to the frustration-aggression hypothesis, if one's goal-directed

behaviour is thwarted, this frustration can lead to aggression and conflicts (Berkowitz, 1989).

Lockdown's severe restriction on daily activities removed many regular emotional outlets

and thwarted many goal-directed behaviours (Berkowitz, 1989). Allison observed "tense

times" in other households, which indicates conflicts. Carla's household dynamic was an

example of frustration turning into aggression:

"*It's kind of challenging, being together 24/7. We're all very busy people. We like*

doing our own things like going out… everyone's usually out of the house, very rare

to have us all home together at once. So there's lots of butting heads".

This statement positioned thwarted goal-directed behaviour (unable to go out) as the

cause of "*butting heads*", which points to disagreements and arguments. Through this

experience, Carla learned the importance of giving space in resolving family conflicts:

"*Learning that sometimes people just need a break away from each other. That's just*

them going to sit on their own for a bit or going for a walk by themselves… learning

more about each other and how we all function in different ways."

Given the confinement of lockdown, giving others the "*break away*" requires

negotiation over space under heightened emotions. The thwarting of goal-directed behaviour

results in "butting heads". Through repeated "butting heads", Carla had learned to allow her

family members to perform other goal-directed behaviour as a problem-solving strategy.

Apart from physical space, people can also take up space through their presence. Allison's partner had a large presence through his "loud phone voice", which posed a distraction in their small house.

> "*It's a one-bedroom unit… not a huge home, and he has quite a loud phone voice. And so even if he went outside, which quite often he ended up doing… I could still hear him. And that, for me, is just like, really distracting. Under normal circumstances, that's fine. But studying, it was just next to impossible… it wasn't great at the time, the fact that he's got a lot of friends. So a lot of phone calls were coming through…*"

Allison described her partner as so loud that neighbours could hear him down the street. This volume would feel quite overwhelming in a small flat. Allison's tolerance of this "*under normal circumstances*" to contrast when she was "*studying*" implied that she did not usually study at home, and the lockdown introduced a clash between her academic needs and her partner's social needs. Having to negotiate these needs when no alternative venues exist during the lockdown could lead to "tense times" as Allison observed in others, and Allison was relieved that conflicts did not arise during the lockdown.

To cope with the confinement, the participants took frequent walks. While the benefits of physical exercise cannot be disputed, it was the escapism of leaving the house that the participants spoke about; for example, Allison explained the walks as "*just an excuse to get out of the house*". Similarly, Carla's suggestion of allowing others to "*go for a walk by themselves*" also shows walking as a space-claiming action. Walking is an intentional, goal-directed activity, one of the few permitted outside activities during the lockdowns of 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2021). At a time when other goal-directed behaviours were restricted, and the participants were kept indoors with limited means of self-regulation, walking became a liberating act to reclaim space, albeit temporarily.

Negotiating schedules

Apart from space, the participants had to negotiate different lifestyles during the lockdown. While the participants continued to study through the lockdown, others in their households worked at reduced capacity or stopped working altogether. The participants' regular university schedules and their household members' increased leisure time often led to a clash of lifestyles.

Allison's partner stopped working during the lockdown: "*he was doing a lot of catching up on shows and just relaxing, putting his feet up. And that was another distraction I had… it's just really hard to not get in bed next to him and… waste time*".

This statement shows both a conflict between space (Allison's studying space and her partner's entertainment space) as well as a clash between Allison's business-as-usual university timetable and her partner's relaxed lifestyle: "*It was so easy to want to sleep in more and stay in bed more and watch TV and lie next to my partner and be lazy*." This statement shows the pull of her partner's laidback lifestyle on Allison's motivation to study and productivity, and its impact on her academic life will be discussed in *Autonomy*. In other literature, students often spoke of chores and family commitments as the causes of distraction during lockdown (Hagedorn et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). Allison's experience shows that sometimes just the presence of another person going about their daily activities at home can be a distraction during a lockdown.

Similarly, Carla's partner worked at reduced capacity during the lockdown, and his increasing time spent at home was bittersweet for Carla:

"*It's been nice to actually have him at home all the time. So yeah, I've just been appreciating the time that we have… But definitely getting on each other's nerves a bit more now. Just being constantly around each other. I know he gets annoyed*

> *because I'm like, 'Let's get up, let's do something. Let's go for a walk!'. But he's like*
>
> *'No, I just want to sleep!' just two opposites.*"

Carla described their different activity levels and circadian rhythms as "*two opposites*". It can be deduced that Carla was more energetic and in a positive mood when she woke up, whereas her partner was not. A shift to nocturnal preference and increased sleep disturbance were often reported by people in lockdown (Allen et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2021; Kaparounaki et al., 2020). The effects of sleep disturbance on mood and interpersonal relationships are well established (Ben Simon et al., 2020; Brissette & Cohen, 2002). In Carla's case, she acknowledged that the mismatch in their sleeping patterns was a cause of friction, though it is unclear whether she attempted to address the tension. Existing literature often focussed on household members' attempts to negotiate space (e.g., Hagedorn, 2021; McKay et al., 2021). Carla's experience showed a potential for conflict when household members effectively lived in a different "time zone" during the lockdown.

Beyond the home

In the TWTW model, taha whānau refers to one's social connectedness extending beyond the immediate household (Durie, 1994). This section focusses on the impact of the pandemic on the participants' wider social network. The lockdown prevented the participants from connecting physically with their extended whānau and friends, as well as prevented new relationships from forming at the university. During the lockdown, when physical gatherings were prohibited, social media became ubiquitous in facilitating the participants to keep in touch with others.

The pandemic and border closure prompted Allison to realise her parents' mortality. Allison's parents live in Australia:

> "*They're mid-60s hopefully still have 20 years left in them. But it is getting to that*
>
> *point where you never know... you don't know what's going to happen from here on in.*

And what the pandemic for me has done is kind of put this sense of importance on family. So I haven't been able to see them. I haven't seen them in years anyway. But I have that sense of urgency to get over there and see them because things could change drastically. I might not get to."

The pandemic shook Allison's belief in her parents' longevity, as evidenced by the contradiction between "*still have 20 years left*" and "*you don't know what's going to happen*". Given her shock over the speed of the pandemic's spread, Allison drew a parallel with her parents' longevity with "*things could change drastically*".

Carla similarly could not see an extended family member due to the pandemic: "*I've got an auntie that has breast cancer. And not being able to see her for quite a while. It's quite hard. My mum really struggles with that as well. But we know that that's not worth breaking the rules. Because, you know, if we had the virus it would affect her and wouldn't be any good.*"

Carla hypothesised a situation where her family would unknowingly infect her aunt if they "*had the virus*"—showing an assumption that COVID-19 infection would be unnoticeable to the healthy family members but devastating for her aunt. Their decision to adhere to infection-control measures was centred around the aunt's health more than their own. Carla framed the decision as a sacrifice where protecting her aunt's taha tinana cost everyone's taha hinengaro and taha whānau.

Apart from extended family, friendship also forms one's taha whānau. Both Brittany and Carla held high expectations of the social life at the university. Brittany stated: "*a lot of people around me who had like older siblings…going to uni, there was always like the idea of like, party life and the social lifestyle.*" Carla similarly expressed: "*you see…on the movies, and on TV, they* [the university students]*… will have these crazy, unique experiences, making*

so many friends and all this". Their expectations were very similar to other first-year students
in literature, and so was their disappointment. Brittany stated:

> "*you don't really get that when you're in level three. So it kind of took away a lot of
> the social aspects of university to start with. Especially that first semester… I think we
> had a few weeks and then we went straight back into level three… about halfway
> through the semester. So pretty much the whole rest of my semester was online, I
> didn't really have any friends at uni. It was just kind of like another task in the
> lockdown bubble.*"

Brittany expected a *lifestyle* at the university, which implies a commitment that
encompasses aspects of her life. Instead, she did not make any friends and without the crucial
ingredient of friendships, university became a task. Despite starting the semester during
COVID-response alert level one, "level three" dominated Brittany's talk, demonstrating the
lockdown's influence on her recollection.

Carla only made "*one proper friend*" since starting university. The term "proper"
implies a certain quality someone must meet to be considered a friend. Unfortunately, the
pandemic foiled Carla's attempts at turning others into "proper friends":

> "*I seem to have [a] close-knit group of a couple of people, but yeah, just like, going to
> uni bars and stuff. Every time we make a plan to go, it seems like 'Oh, look, we're into
> level two, we're into level three', and stuff like that*".

In literature, other first-year students spoke about spending time together as a critical
factor in fostering friendship growth through the opportunity to discover mutual interests and
to develop trust and intimacy (Buote et al., 2007). For Carla, going to on-campus bars served
as an occasion to spend time with potential friends, and the changing alert levels hampered
this during the pandemic. While Carla's expectation of the "*crazy, unique experience*" may
not be realistic, she did not experience the typical familiarisation trajectories like the students

in Nelson et al. (2008) due to the pandemic's continual presence. As such, she still held the expectations of vibrant social life and attributed the lack of friendships formed solely to the pandemic.

Social media

Unsurprisingly, the participants used social media extensively during the lockdown to connect with existing friends and find support from strangers. This was in line with findings by existing literature (Fu et al., 2020; Teater et al., 2021). Brittany used an app called House Party, where up to ten people can video chat and watch movies together: "*I had a few friends who had, like birthday parties via House Party. So that we can still sort of hang out and connect and have a chat without having to put each other at risk*". Brittany turned 18 years old during the pandemic, and her friends are likely of similar age; the House Party app allowed Brittany to celebrate this transition point virtually, facilitating the sharing of experience without physical contact.

Carla's experience-sharing went beyond the friendship circle. She began to practice mindfulness and meditation, which she claimed to be:

> "*something I picked up during [the lockdown]... it might have been on TikTok about how other people were coping with the pandemic. It was something like the whole world was going through. And people were responding to it in different ways. Then I saw someone post about it, and I was like, 'Oh, that's interesting. Maybe I should do some more research into it.'*"

Given Carla's disbelief over the pandemic, the shared experience on social media seemed to normalise the pandemic for her, proving that she was living through an actual event that "*the whole world was going through*" and not living in a "movie" or "sci-fi world". Furthermore, it provided a sense of solidarity in that "*the whole world*" could share their experience and coping strategies with others. Social media has been criticised for spreading

misinformation during the pandemic (Ahmed Siddiqui et al., 2020). Brittany and Carla's experiences were a reminder of the "social" in social media and its ability to bring people together when they are physically apart. Carla's experience especially demonstrated the utility of social media in promoting positive coping.

While the participants spoke of social media's positive influence on their wellbeing, its usage during the pandemic has also been linked to poorer psychological wellbeing (Geirdal et al., 2021). Brittany observed a backlash against social media in others during the pandemic: "*a lot of people I know don't really use social media as much as they used to, since the whole social media detoxing last year* (2020)." She experienced loneliness due to her friends' detox: "*it was hard to keep in touch with a lot of people… I only live with my parents. They can only do so much for me… Sometimes just no one to talk your ear off about stuff.*" Social media was associated with lower loneliness for those experiencing isolation during the lockdown (Qian & Hanser, 2021; Teater et al., 2021). Brittany was isolated during the lockdown, given her household makeup, but at a time when she could benefit from the support offered by social media, it was unavailable due to the detox.

Summary

The lockdown's very purpose of limiting social contact affected the participants' relationships with others in significant ways. The lockdown brought many otherwise external activities such as studying into the home. The convergence of household members' different needs for extended periods without the usual external venues to accommodate these needs placed intense pressure on household members to negotiate with each other. The participants experienced conflicts and cooperation between household members. Not all negotiations were successful. Despite the "butting heads" and distraction, the participants were ultimately appreciative of spending the lockdown with their families, stating that the experience "*brought us together*" (Allison) and "*I'm so glad it's my family all together*" (Carla).

The participants experienced worries for their loved ones beyond the home, which was understandable as the lockdown did not sever whānau relationships. Their loved ones were vulnerable to COVID-19 infections. Protecting whānau's physical health came at a detriment to the participants' taha whānau. Social media became the de-facto method to contact their social circle during the lockdown. However, the pandemic frustrated Carla's attempt to form friendships and put some of Brittany's friendships on hold, negatively affecting their taha whānau.

Studying in a pandemic

This final theme focusses on the impact of the pandemic on the participants' university experience, with a particular focus on their academic learning. All three participants experienced a brief period of normal university operation before entering lockdown, and this section describes their initial adjustment to university in this brief period.

This theme then discusses the participants' experience with online learning, one of the hallmark characteristics of university during the pandemic. With online learning and lockdown, the participants had much more freedom over their studies. The impact of this increased autonomy on their study habits is discussed in the last subtheme, *Autonomy*.

Initial adjustments

The participants' experience at university in the short time before the country entered lockdown was typical of the first-year experience reported in the literature. Brittany and Carla both held high expectations of a vibrant social life (Nelson et al., 2008; Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). However, the participants also reported uncertainty around academic expectations. Allison stated: "*I thought I was prepared, but didn't really understand the full uni process*." Carla was the only participant who attended the university orientation programme. While she was given a physical tour of the campus: "*being shown around the campus and showing*

where our classes would be and like meeting people that would be studying in the same college as us." Yet she was still confused by the academic expectations at the university: "*I didn't know… what type of work I was supposed to be producing.*" Carla's confusion shows that participating in orientation did not thoroughly prepare incoming students for the reality of academic life at university.

The participants that came from non-conventional backgrounds had doubts about their abilities. Allison stated, "*I haven't studied for 15 years, and I never finished high school. So it was quite a daunting thing to take on.*" Brittany also did not finish high school, gaining entry via discretionary entrance. She initially did not see herself as university material: "*I think it was for people who were a lot more intelligent than I am... Yeah, so I sort of like convinced myself that I wasn't good enough to go to uni*." Once started, Brittany found that her fears were unfounded: "*once I got to uni, I sort of realised that the bar is not as high and I thought, 'I'm pretty capable of getting through it!'*" Whereas Allison's self-doubt persisted, culminating in her "*stressed very early on*" (Discussed in *Mental Health*).

The participants were still adjusting to the university environment when the lockdown was announced. Carla described the upheaval following the announcement as:

"*We were thrown into lockdown. And all this information was coming at us, what's happening with each class and I found it quite hard to keep up to date with like, what was happening for each single class? Because some of them you know, it was just watching videos for it. Others had zoom lectures, and then they will have drop-in sessions. Yeah, and due dates were all changing.*"

The confusion during this time was evident in the description. Internal students like the participants typically have very predictable class delivery in format (lecture/tutorials) and timetable. This predictability was upended by the inconsistent content delivery adjustments across different courses and further complicated by inconsistency in the quality of the

pandemic response by individual lecturers. Carla observed that "*some lecturers are definitely a lot better with the pandemic than others are.*", citing one specific example:

> "*One lecturer has been a bit slack...We usually have this class on Thursday morning and [the lecturer] said, 'I will have a video up by that time.' And I don't think it was posted until like, Friday night or Saturday, and there was no further emails from them or anything. And then they sent out an email. I think on the Sunday, 'we're gonna organise a zoom catch up for that week.' They said 'I will organise it for Friday morning', but I was like, 'Friday? It's just been...'*"

Prompt communication from teaching staff is linked to student interest and engagement (Mazer, 2013; Xerri et al., 2018). The unreliable communication was frustrating for the students' progress through course content. It could also add stress to students to keep up with the lecturer's ever-shifting deadlines. Lastly, the lecturer served as a powerful role model; their tardiness in correspondence could be interpreted by the students as disinterest, permitting students to follow their example and be "slack". This experience was acknowledged by Carla as an extreme, remarking that "*overall, it's been pretty good, I would say.*" The difference between Carla's overall evaluation of Massey's teaching COVID-response and this lecturer shows the variation in the quality of the response. The implication of the lecturer's tardiness in an online learning environment is discussed in the next section.

Online learning

All three participants initially enrolled as internal students and expected to experience university life on campus. The move to online teaching came as a disappointment. Carla wondered: "*what's happening with uni? Like, whether you're going to have an actual experience as a uni student?*" The implication of her question showed that she did not consider her experience so far to be a genuine one. Brittany's statement that "*Zoom wasn't*

really a part of that schema for me" also showed her disappointment over having to study online when she signed up to experience university on-campus.

The participants reported some dissatisfaction with online learning, and the causes of their dissatisfaction were identical to the ones reported in the literature: the lack of collaboration between students and lack of communication from staff (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

Both Allison and Brittany reported less collaboration with classmates during online teaching, but for different reasons. For Allison, it was due to the lack of attendance: "*I found that those classes were so small in comparison to groups, like one of my classes, for three of the sessions, I was the only person turning up.*". Collaborative learning could not happen without other students. However, Allison did benefit from being the sole student in her classes: "*it actually turned out to be better than the groups because you get this one-on-one training.*" In an era of increasing class sizes, Allison experienced the rare luxury of the lecturer's undivided attention and individualised class content during the pandemic.

In contrast, for Brittany, the lack of collaboration was caused by self-consciousness: "*It's a lot more natural to be able to have a discussion in the class between the lecturer or the tutor and the classmates… a little like more naturally than on Zoom, it's almost impossible for everyone to not feel awkward or be talking over each other and things like that. … I think nonverbal social cues are almost impossible to decipher on Zoom. So people do find that quite difficult. And it might not come across the right way.*"

Allison explained the importance of collaboration between students: "*Being able to bounce ideas off of other people, and hear other people's ideas just sparks so much more and adds so much more to the learning experience.*" Allison's explanation touched on the recognised benefits of collaborative learning; by "*bouncing ideas off*", students engage in

meta-cognition and gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge by discussing with each other (Freeman et al., 2014; Jeffery & Bauer, 2020). Neither Allison nor Brittany experienced these benefits during online learning. Their contrasting experience highlighted that student collaboration does not happen automatically within a group of students.

Zoom fatigue was a likely cause of Brittany's online classroom experience. Brittany explained: "*I was on Zoom for four days a week, almost nine to four. So that was quite a lot on my battery and my social battery as well.*" It is reasonable to expect other students to feel the same after all-day Zoom sessions. Her comment about "*nonverbal social cues*" highlighted the added cognitive load to decipher and transmit social cues (Bailenson, 2021; Peper et al., 2021). Zoom fatigue was linked to increased depression and anxiety (Peper et al., 2021). Brittany was already deep in depression (discussed in *Mental Health*), and she was unlikely to be alone in feeling depressed. Depression and anxiety lead to social withdrawal, neither of which would be conducive to collaborative learning (Vittengl & Holt, 1998).

Brittany used the discussion board feature in her learning management platform to compensate for the lack of collaboration in Zoom classes. Interestingly, Brittany found the discussion board to be "*able to somewhat imitate what we could get in* [in-person] *class*". Given Brittany's reservations around misinterpreting social cues on Zoom, it is surprising that the discussion board, being a wholly written medium, made a closer approximation of an in-person class than its video-conferencing counterpart. This could be due to the discussion board, being an asynchronous communication (the responses are not usually instant), removing the cognitive load to decipher the social cues under time pressure, or the written medium removed the expectations of non-verbal social cues altogether. Hence, although Brittany found the discussion board more collaborative than Zoom lectures, it was still only a just-acceptable alternative given the lockdown restrictions.

Carla perceived online learning to make seeking feedback difficult. She stated:

"*Not being able to meet face to face with like lecturers or tutors or anything like that to discuss my work, let me know how I was doing. You know, we've got like, a little comment section at the end of like our assignments and stuff, but doesn't tell you really in depth how you're going and what you need to do better and stuff like that*."

The "*comment section at the end of assignments*" would undoubtedly inform Carla of her progress and areas for improvement. Yet, she expected a more in-depth and interactive form of feedback via face-to-face meetings. Carla displayed an expectation typical of first-year students as reported in the literature (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Crisp et al., 2009). While Carla did not go so far as to feel "short-changed" (Hockings, 2018, p.149) by the experience, she nevertheless desired more feedback than in the comment section. Like her unmet expectations regarding the friendships formed at the university (in *Lockdown with others*), Carla's expectations regarding feedback were unlikely to be met regardless of the pandemic. She solely attributed this to online learning rather than realising that her expectations were unrealistic in the first place. It was unclear whether Carla attempted to seek face-to-face feedback via virtual means such as Zoom. Existing literature reported that students often hesitated to reach out to teaching staff during online learning due to its perceived formality (McKay et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020). Carla's experience with the tardy lecturer also highlighted another possibility: some teaching staff may simply be unreachable during the lockdown.

Interestingly, network issues, usually the number one complaint for students studying online (Hagedorn et al., 2021; Shim & Lee, 2020), was absent in the participants' recollection. While participants would undoubtedly have experienced connection issues, it was the lack of collaboration they focussed on. This may reflect the participants' acceptance of network issues as an inherent part of online learning. However, it could also reflect the centrality of relationships in learning and engagement (Lee et al., 2021; Sarder, 2014).

Autonomy

This theme covers two types of autonomy—autonomy over independent learning, and autonomy over the structure of their days during the lockdown. The participants had more freedom to structure their days during the lockdown. While this freedom came as a relief from the pace of university, it also hindered the participants' move to independent learning by encouraging procrastination and loafing.

Allison was very vocal about the improved mental health that came from having "*my own sort of schedule to run by. I didn't have to be here at this time* and *whatever*" (discussed in *Mental Health*). Brittany's preference of autonomy centred around sitting examinations remotely:

"*I don't like sitting in a cold exam hall… we're able to bring in a lot more supplementary materials into an online exam…none of them have been closed-book. A lot of them have had timers and things like that… and I do prefer it, I think I'm able to create a better quality of work when I'm not under a 'three-hour limit, write three essays', rather, I can have like a day to write three essays and edit them and things like that.*"

As part of COVID-response, many universities have moved traditional paper-based examinations to online options. The move to online exams lowered students' test anxiety, as evidenced by Brittany's talk of the lower pressure when sitting exams remotely. Test anxiety is a common experience for students that can negatively impact their academic achievements (Rana & Mahmood, 2010; Zeidner, 1998). Brittany's description of the traditional exam format being "*three-hour limit, write three essays*" covered some well-known situational factors that influence test anxiety—time pressure and cognitive complexity (Zeidner, 1998). Time pressure is particularly detrimental to female students' performance (de Paola & Gioia, 2016; Kellogg et al., 1999). The description of "*write three essays*" showed the cognitive

complexity of Brittany's exams—she needed to retrieve knowledge, synthesise the recalled knowledge, and present arguments in a logically written format, all within tight time constraints. Brittany's observation about the "cold exam hall" also pointed to the environment influencing test anxiety. In traditional exams, the students are often allocated to unfamiliar rooms, grouped with random strangers, and with invigilators supervising, all of which contribute to test anxiety (Zeidner, 1998).

In comparison, students who were given more control over their testing situation often reported lower test anxiety (Gharib et al., 2012; Zeidner, 1998). Online exams allowed students to control many anxiety-provoking factors; they can create a comforting environment rather than a "cold exam hall", the relaxed timeframe gave students more control over their pace through the exam. It is therefore unsurprising that Brittany preferred online exams.

A key difference between high school and university studies is the reliance on independent learning; the university learning centres and peers facilitate this transition to a certain extent (Field et al., 2014; Hockings et al., 2018). The timing of the lockdown so soon after the start of the semester gave students little time to become familiar with university support and form relationships with peers, rendering them primarily self-reliant during the lockdown.

Both Allison and Carla spoke about spending minimum efforts on assessment and aimed for passing grades rather than excellence. For Allison, this was habit-forming:

> "*I'm a shaky studier regardless of things being smooth or not, you know, I'm a bit of a last-minute crammer… I get into distractions easily, so I would say* [the distractions] *put me behind. I was doing everything last minute. But to be fair, I'm still like that now. It's almost like that happening has formed a habit for me. Because I know I can get away with that behaviour and pass.*"

Allison identified herself as someone who struggles with independent study by nature. Studying during a lockdown posed additional distractors from her partner, which were discussed in *Lockdown with others*. Allison's focus on "passing" as a goal showed a tendency to surface learning. Surface learning refers to the approach to learning that requires minimal engagement, learning that relies on memorisation and "usually an intention to gain a passing grade" (Smith & Colby, 2007, p. 206). Receiving satisfactory grades after all the distractions reinforced the surface-learning behaviour, and Allison showed no motivation to change.

In contrast, deep learning refers to a high-engagement approach where the student actively tries to make connections between concepts, trying to understand the "big ideas" (p. 206) within the text, and deriving intrinsic interest in learning and obtaining knowledge (Smith & Colby, 2007). Carla's experience was one of disengagement from studies to engagement, surface to deep learning. She spent her March lockdown "*watching Netflix and snacking all day*", and her studies at the time consisted of:

> "*I was like, 'Oh, there's no rush. I'm not going anywhere.' There's nothing, I don't need to rush into it. And I was leaving things to the last minute. I'm not really caring about it. Especially because they said that they were bumping us up grades, due to the pandemic. And I was like, 'Oh, it doesn't matter if I do poorly on it, they'll bump me up a little bit. So won't be too bad.'*"

The perception that "*there's no rush*" lowered the urgency of attending to her studies. Carla became ambivalent about her studies due to interpreting the university's policy response to accommodate for COVID disruptions as a message of leniency. As a result, she "*kind of lost motivation completely in the first semester. And kind of just trying to pass more so than anything.*" This statement shows the unintended consequence of the university's COVID response of stripping Carla of her accountability. Carla perceived the university as

guaranteeing adequate grades through their "grade-bump", leaving her with no incentive to engage deeply with course content when a desirable outcome was already secured.

Carla then regained her motivation to study in Semester Two 2020. She stated:

"*In the second semester, I was like, 'No, I need I need to really focus on this... this is something that I really want to do.' And I started engaging more with the course content, and really enjoying it and enjoying what I was learning definitely made a difference. I wanted to do the work, I wanted to do more research into it, I wanted to know more so I was quite motivated to do it*.".

Recalling Carla's belief after the first lockdown that "*we'll get back to normal*", by Semester Two 2020, the believed one-off lockdown was over. The temporary suspension of normality and the added leniency of the COVID-related grade adjustments were no longer present. Carla was now solely responsible for her academic performance, which prompted a renewed desire to engage with course content. Her utilisation of deep learning is evidenced in her deriving pleasure from the process of learning ("*I started engaging more… and really enjoying it*"). Carla's experience in the second semester could be characterised as an example of how "engagement breeds engagement" (Kahu, 2013, p.767). Without the security of a "grade-bump," she was forced to dedicate more effort to study; and in doing so, she found her passion and enjoyment in the content again.

Summary

The participants in this study were no different to the reported literature when they encountered the academic expectation at university. The pandemic disrupted their adjustment process and plunged the participants into independent study sooner and perhaps to a greater degree—without the pandemic, they would have formed friendships with other students to navigate the transition together, but the timing of the lockdown prevented the participants from forming these friendships.

During the lockdown, the participants struggled with accountability to study. This was not surprising, given that their only experiences were high school's highly structured days (Hockings et al., 2018). Allison formed a habit of last-minute effort for assessments as a result, whereas Carla regained the motivation to engage with the course content following the removal of the "grade bump".

Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the pandemic's impact on the participants' overall wellbeing, and then its impact on their journey as first-year students. Some findings were similar to existing literature; such as the pandemic's toll on mental health despite it also relieving some existing anxieties. Physically, the participants reported worse dietary behaviour during the lockdown. Academically the participants' experience with online learning was also similar to existing literature. Some new insights covered in this chapter include the participants' use of walks as a space-claiming action, conflicts arising in the household due to household members' different daily schedules and activity levels, and the unintended consequence of universities' COVID-response policy on student motivation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the first-year student experience under a pandemic. Three participants were interviewed, representing the three typical pathways to university—one a school-leaver, one who planned to take a gap year, and a mature-age student. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the interviews revealed the collision of pandemic stress and the usual first-year adjustment stress. As far as I know, this thesis was the first of its kind in New Zealand and one of the few existing studies on the pandemic's impact on first-year university students. The participants' recollection painted a chronological picture of their wellbeing and university experience as the pandemic progressed and shed light on their inner experience as events unfolded. These findings would not be possible with a quantitative study and tapped into the human experience behind the labels like "COVID cohort" and "first-year student".

This chapter consists of the concluding remarks from the present study. The findings and contribution of this thesis are discussed first. Then, policy recommendations based on the results are made. Finally, this chapter ends with a reflection on the limitations and future research directions.

Summary of Findings

The research set out to explore three topics, which were:

- How did the pandemic impact the first-year experience in New Zealand?

- How did the pandemic impact the first-year students' wellbeing?

- How did the students cope with the pandemic's impact on their wellbeing?

This section summarises the research's finding to address each of the above topics. It also highlights this research's contribution to the existing knowledge.

The First-Year Experience

An immediate observation from the participants' journey to university was Brittany's decision to study was motivated by the border closure and economic downturn; this highlights the pandemic's direct influence on university enrolment. The participants began with typical expectations of first-year students as reported in literature. Despite their diverse backgrounds, all admitted to being academically underprepared. The younger participants were excited about the social life at university. Their expectations were informed by popular culture and older students. This shows the role of media and folklore in creating and maintaining the "idealised visions" that first-year students hold about university.

For the participants, the move to online learning introduced a new set of adjustments while they were still adjusting to university. Like many first-year students, the participants struggled with independent learning and studying online during lockdown involved independent learning at its most extreme. All participants struggled with motivation during this time. Their struggles were caused by external distractions such as other people at home and the university's grade-adjustment policy which inadvertently removed incentives to expend effort. The participants' experiences with online classes were mixed, but a lack of collaboration was a common missing component in their online learning experience.

The participants in this study enrolled as on-campus students but spent most of their first year at university during a pandemic. Consequently, the younger participants did not consider their time so far as a genuine university experience; this is a common feeling reported by other first-year students in literature. It can be argued that they did not have the "genuine" university experience of recognising their unrealistic expectations. The pandemic simultaneously deprived them of an on-campus experience they expected while keeping them ignorant of the reality of their expectations.

Wellbeing

None of the participants had contracted COVID-19 at the time of the interviews. Weight gain was the only standalone aspect of the pandemic's impact on participants' taha tinana. The participants readily identified snacking and a sedentary lifestyle during the March lockdown as the causes of their weight gain and acted to prevent it in the subsequent lockdowns.

Two participants disclosed mental health challenges that pre-date university entrance, but all experienced worse mental health as the pandemic progressed. Prominent feelings identified were confusion, hopelessness, and anxiety. Chronologically, the participants found the slow pace of the March lockdown enjoyable. Following the March lockdown, two distinct profiles of mental health impact emerged. The anxious participant struggled with returning to normal post-lockdown, while the other two were frustrated by repeated lockdowns and their associated hopelessness. This highlights the different mechanisms that the pandemic could affect mental health and the possible role of personality in influencing mental health during the pandemic.

All participants lived with others during the pandemic and found the experience to strengthen their taha whānau. However, their day-to-day lives were not without conflict, which often arose from catering to the different household members' needs in a limited space. The contrast between their daily experience and overall gratitude towards family shows the contradiction between the lived experience (phenomenology) and meaning-making (hermeneutic) of the experience. Beyond the immediate family, the participants spoke about worries for their extended whānau members' health, frustration at not making friends at the university and losing contact with existing friends due to the "digital detox".

The participants were initially unable to identify impacts on taha wairua due to their secular background. However, a closer examination of their talk showed the pandemic's disruption of their self-esteem and sense of peace and balance with the world. The participants found the very concept of a pandemic unfathomable, and its presence upended their beliefs about the world. Signs of grief were evident in the participants as they spoke about the time and opportunities lost due to the pandemic.

Coping

The participants utilised several coping strategies to address the various impacts of the pandemic. Acceptance and personal values were used to manage the feelings of confusion and disbelief. The participants also employed downward comparison to normalise their pandemic experience. The downward comparison, especially to other countries, showed New Zealand's privileged position of relatively lower pandemic impact.

Practical activities the participants employed to cope with the pandemic include mindfulness and meditation, using social media to facilitate social gatherings, and utilising the discussion board of the online learning system to overcome the lack of engagement in online learning. In addition, going out for walks became a space-claiming action during this time. Despite its obvious physical and mental health benefits, it was the escapism that the participants sought. These walks were also used as a conflict-resolution strategy, it was offered as a goal-directed behaviour when few alternatives were available.

Limitations and Reflection

IPA often employs a homogenous sample. The participants achieved the desired homogeneity in their first year at university being 2020. The uniformity in their gender and ethnicity (Caucasian females), living situations and enrolment in arts (two in psychology, one in creative writing) were unintentional. The homogeneity in gender and ethnicity reflected the

inherent demographic of the university (Massey University, 2021), two participants lived in parental homes, and this was likely a reflection of the high cost of living. The heavy presence of psychology students in this sample stemmed from snowball sampling via Brittany. On the other hand, the participants were diverse in their age and life experience before university study, and their pre-university life undoubtedly influenced their university experience, this represented a possible deviation from the homogeneity desired in IPA studies.

The quality of information elicited depends on the interviewer's skills (Kvale, 2007). I consider myself an adequate conversationalist but struggled to balance a pre-set interview schedule with the conversational flow. It wasn't until I read the transcripts that I realised some pertinent conversation threads were left unexplored. Additionally, two of the interviews were conducted online via Zoom. As Brittany stated, non-verbal social cues were difficult to decipher over an online platform. In interpretivism, the researcher co-creates a shared reality with the participant (Grant & Giddings, 2002). This co-creation was challenging to establish without the natural authenticity of face-to-face interaction. Therefore, the small Zoom screens were a barrier for the participants and me to immerse in the experience fully.

Similarly, IPA as a methodology was brand new to me as a researcher. Although I understood the philosophical positioning of IPA, how to put this into practice was less clear. Smith et al. (2009) cautioned that novice researchers' analyses often remain descriptive rather than interpretative, and I challenged myself to venture beyond the descriptive. On the other hand, how to remain faithful to the participant's experience during the double hermeneutic without veering into speculation also became a delicate balancing act. This was especially difficult during the August 2021 lockdown when I was writing about the lockdowns while living through one. The parallel between research and real life made bracketing those assumptions difficult. The participants were offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the initial analysis, but none took up the offer. Instead, I referred to the original transcript as

the analysis process became more abstract to ensure that all interpretations were based on the participants' phenomenology, and the research supervisor read the analyses for quality control. I hope that I did an adequate job of describing the participants' experiences, interpreting their interpretations and communicating my interpretation.

Practice Recommendations

A discrepancy between the learning approaches of secondary schools and tertiary education is well documented in literature (Green, 2008; Hockings et al., 2018). The participants' experience showed that the confusion over academic requirements was shared among all students, and Carla's experience showed that the university orientation did not thoroughly address this. Massey University could consider running seminars dedicated solely to communicating the academic expectations during the orientation. Setting aside a dedicated time conveys the importance of the topic to students. It would also provide sufficient time to provide a detailed explanation of what learning at university does and does not look like to avoid future grumbles of wanting "*in-depth feedback*".

Green (2008) pointed out that independent learning skills were either not taught or relegated to axillary services such as learning support. Considering its central role to university success, independent learning should be taught as a part of the core curriculum. At the present, Massey University offers "230.111 Tu Kupu: Writing and Inquiry" as a compulsory course for Bachelor of Communication students, but no similar compulsory courses are prescribed for psychology students (Massey University, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Furthermore, this course is taught during semester time concurrently with other academic courses. Instead, Tu Kupu should precede other courses given its foundational nature. Combrink and Oosthuizen (2020) presented a case of first-year seminar as a summer school course, the students would be taught the necessary skills for university success before the academic year starts. This, coupled with dedicated seminars during Orientation for the

latecomers, would equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to tackle independent learning.

Due to the necessity of online teaching during the pandemic, adapting learning to be technology-mediated without compromising student engagement and achievement became a pressing topic. Several authors have suggested ways to increase student engagement in online learning. Lee et al. (2021) especially cautioned against technology solutionism in online learning—the tendency to use simple, technology-mediated solutions for complex phenomena such as student engagement. Regardless of the online or offline learning environment, it should be remembered that authentic relationships still form the basis of student engagement (Lee et al., 2021; Sarder, 2014).

Direction for Future Research

The profiles of mental health impact observed in the participants seemed to be linked to personality. While existing research such as Hamza et al. (2021) and Ogawa et al. (2021) studied the link between personality and lockdown experience, this research shed light on how personality differences could influence the post-lockdown experience. A more comprehensive study on personality and mental health post-lockdown will allow for more targeted mental health intervention post-lockdown.

Many studies on life in lockdown explored the household members' need to negotiate over space, and this study uncovered another potential source of conflict—different sleeping patterns. A shift to nocturnal preference was reported during the lockdown (Evans et al., 2021; Kaparounaki et al., 2020). Not all are susceptible to this shift, leading to conflicts arising due to sleep disturbances. The impact of being in lockdown with someone who effectively lives in a different "time zone" at home remains an unexplored area of research.

Brittany and Carla entered adulthood during the pandemic, and they spent most of their adulthood so far living through an extraordinary global event. Brittany recognised its

impact on her "life trajectory" so far. The long-term effect of the pandemic on this cohort's life course remains to be seen. According to the Life Course Theory, coinciding a global event with a cohort's transition points would profoundly impact this cohort's life course (Weaver et al., 2021). So far, Brittany has observed grief anecdotally in herself and others. The impact of their collective grief in the coming years is an area for further study.

Similarly, the participants were a unique cohort of students whose undergraduate years almost entirely consisted of online learning in the pandemic's shadow. Unlike other cohorts, they battled multiple stressors such as prolonged "emergency" online learning, COVID-related anxiety, COVID-related job losses, and for others, juggling studying and working in essential services. The impact of this multitude of stressors on this cohort's retention and academic achievement remains to be seen and needs to be researched as they progress.

Lastly, none of the participants in this study disclosed family commitments during the pandemic. Female students were found to spend a significant amount of time on unpaid labour, such as household chores pre-pandemic (Beban & Trueman, 2018), and the pandemic worsened the existing gender gap in unpaid household labour (Fortier, 2020). While existing literature studied the impact of the lockdown on parents, it is unclear whether the same happens with childless women in cohabiting relationships or for adult daughters living with parents.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlined the findings and contributions of this research, then its limitations before making suggestions for future research and practice recommendations. This research was the first of its kind in New Zealand and highlighted the pandemic's impact on the first-year students of 2020. The research painted a chronological picture of the participants' inner experience as their pandemic and university journeys evolved. Their

experiences were a juxtaposition of contradictions—accepting the existence of a pandemic despite feeling surreal; their gratitude towards being in lockdown with their loved ones despite the tension and conflicts in the day-to-day lockdown life; grieving for the life plan lost due to the pandemic while embracing the new life trajectory… their experiences showed the dialectical nature of the human experience. For many, including the participants, the pandemic was an incomprehensible time. Yet despite the confusion they soldiered on, sometimes in inventive ways. Ultimately, the participants recounted personal growth and gratitude from their pandemic experience. Their relationships strengthened. Some found a calling. The pandemic's effect on the participants was profound, but they emerged from its aftermath, finding new meaning in their experience.

Appendix 1. Recruitment Flyers

Appendix 2. Social Media Recruitment Post

Appendix 3. Information Sheet

The COVID-19 University Student Wellbeing Study

Information Sheet

Researcher Introduction

Hi there, thank you for your interest in this study. My name is Siqi Liu, I am a psychology student in the Master of Health Science programme. I am based in Auckland and this research forms part of my thesis for the Master programme.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

I am looking for students who started their first-year undergraduate studies at Massey University Albany Campus in the 2020-2021 academic year. You can be a full- or part-time student, as long as 2020-2021 academic year was your first year at uni.

A $50 gratuity will be given to recognise the time and effort for you to participate in this research. You can decline this offer or have it donated to a nominated charity.

Project Description and Invitation

This study is about university students' experience with the COVID-19 pandemic—how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your sense of wellbeing, and how did your wellbeing affect your studies.

Simply put, wellbeing is a good life. Everyone has a different idea of what is a "good life", and this study is interested in finding out how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your sense of wellbeing. The interviewer will provide you with an image to help you think about what your idea of a "good life" is, and how it was impacted by COVID-19.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your input is invaluable in improving the university experience for other students like you. Please get in touch with me if you would like to participate, and I will arrange for a consent form for you to sign to begin the process.

Project Procedures

This study will involve an interview to discuss your experience of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected your sense of wellbeing, how your wellbeing affected your studies, and you dealt with this.

This interview will take around an hour, depending on your answers. You can choose between face-to-face or interview via Zoom.

Data Management

The interview will be recorded with a voice recorder or by the zoom software. The recording will be transcribed and analysed by me.

For face-to-face interviews, a QR poster will be displayed for you to scan using the NZ COVID Tracer app. I can also record your details manually for contact tracing purposes. The details will only be used if health workers need to perform contact tracing during a COVID-19 outbreak, and the data from the NZ COVID Tracer app will be deleted automatically after 60 days.

After the interview, the recording will be stored securely according to university procedure such that only the researcher can access it. This recording and transcript will be kept for 12 months from the day of the interview. Quotes from your interview may be included in the

thesis or other research publications, but you can choose or be given a pseudonym to protect your privacy. Your involvement in this study will be confidential to other students and Massey University.

Participant's Rights

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

- ask for the recording to be stopped at any time during the interview;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time during the interview, and up to a month after the interview;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- anonymity—you will be given a pseudonym in the thesis to protect your privacy;
- have your involvement in the study remain confidential to Massey University and other students;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

Researcher: Siqi Liu   siqi.liu.3@massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr Ella Kahu   e.r.kahu@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 21/18. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Negar Partow, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 04 801 5799 x 63363, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix 4. Consent Form

The COVID-19 University Student Wellbeing Study

Participant Consent Form

I have read, and I understand the Information Sheet attached.

I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time during the interview, and I may withdraw from the study up to a month after the interview's conclusion.

- o I agree to the interview being sound recorded.
- o I agree to be contacted after the interview to edit, amend, and remove details from the transcript.
- o I wish/do not (please circle one) wish to have my recordings returned to me.
- o I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- o I wish/do not (please circle one) wish to receive a summary of research finding.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.
     [print full name]

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix 5. Interview Schedule

1. Could you please tell me a bit about yourself?

   - Prompt: age, current degree/s of study, extracurricular activities.

     i. What do you like to do for fun?

     ii. What made you decide to study [the degree/s]?

2. Could you please tell me a bit about your first-year experience at uni?

   - Prompt: a chronological recount of their time at the university.

     i. What made you decide to study at Massey?

     ii. What made you decide to study [the degree/s]?

     iii. What were the classes like for you?

3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your wellbeing?

   - Prompt: divide the TWTW model into separate divisions as sub-questions.

     i. How did it impact your physical/mental/social/spiritual wellbeing?

4. How did the pandemic impact your time at uni?

   - Prompt: break down the aspects of the university experience.

     i. How did it impact your classes?

     ii. How did it impact your relationship with your peers?

5. How did you cope with the pandemic's impact on your wellbeing?

   - Prompt: divide the TWTW into separate divisions as subquestions. Follow up with the participant's answer to Question 3.

     i. How did you cope with the impact on your physical/mental/social/spiritual wellbeing?

     ii. You mentioned… before, how did you cope with that?

Appendix 6. Debrief sheet

Thank you for participating in this research.

Sometimes issues can arise from participating in research that make people distressed. If this happens to you, you can reach out to these free, confidential services. These services are run by trained professionals who are here to help.

Massey University Health Clinic—Auckland	(09) 213 6700
Massey University Health Clinic—Manawatu	(06) 350 5533
Massey University Health Clinic—Wellington	(04) 979 3030
*Lifeline	0800 543 354 or free text 4357
*Need to talk?	Free call or text 1737
*Samaritans	0800 726 666

* Indicates an independent organisation (not run by Massey University)

Call 111 or go to the nearest hospital if in an emergency

References

Ahmed Siddiqui, M. Y., Mushtaq, K., Mohamed, M. F. H., Al Soub, H., Hussein Mohamedali, M. G., & Yousaf, Z. (2020). "Social media misinformation"-an epidemic within the COVID-19 pandemic. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, 103*(2), 920-921. https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0592

Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2020). Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(3), 622-634. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902

Ahuriri-Driscoll, A., Hudson, M., Bishara, I., Milne, M., & Stewart, M. (2012). *Ngā Tohu o te Ora: traditional Māori healing and wellness outcomes* [Report]. Esr. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/9479

Akuhata-Huntington, Z. (2020). *Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Māori University Students*.

Allen, S. F., Stevenson, J., Lazuras, L., & Akram, U. (2021). The role of the COVID-19 pandemic in altered psychological well-being, mental health and sleep: an online cross-sectional study. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2021.1916963

Alsalhe, T. A., Aljaloud, S. O., Chalghaf, N., Guelmami, N., Alhazza, D. W., Azaiez, F., & Bragazzi, N. L. (2020). Moderation effect of physical activity on the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and general distress: a pilot case study in Arabic countries. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.570085

Angosto, S., Berengüí, R., Vegara-Ferri, J. M., & López-Gullón, J. M. (2020). Motives and commitment to sport in amateurs during confinement: a segmentation study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(20), 7398. https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/20/7398

Ashworth, P. (2015). Conceptual foundations of qualitative psychology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 4-24). SAGE.

Auerbach, R. P., Alonso, J., Axinn, W. G., Cuijpers, P., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., Hwang, I., Kessler, R. C., Liu, H., Mortier, P., Nock, M. K., Pinder-Amaker, S., Sampson, N. A., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Al-Hamzawi, A., Andrade, L. H., Benjet, C., Caldas-de-Almeida, J. M., Demyttenaere, K., Florescu, S., de Girolamo, G., Gureje, O., Haro, J. M., Karam, E. G., Kiejna, A., Kovess-Masfety, V., Lee, S., McGrath, J. J., O'Neill, S., Pennell, B. E., Scott, K., Ten Have, M., Torres, Y., Zaslavsky, A. M., Zarkov, Z., & Bruffaerts, R. (2016). Mental disorders among college students in the World Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys. *Psychological Medicine, 46*(14), 2955-2970. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291716001665

Auerbach, R. P., Mortier, P., Bruffaerts, R., Alonso, J., Benjet, C., Cuijpers, P., Demyttenaere, K., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., Hasking, P., Murray, E., Nock, M. K., Pinder-Amaker, S., Sampson, N. A., Stein, D. J., Vilagut, G., Zaslavsky, A. M., & Kessler, R. C. (2018). WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project: Prevalence and distribution of mental disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 127*(7), 623-638. https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000362

AUT. (2020). *Getting students online during lockdown*. https://news.aut.ac.nz/around-aut-news/getting-students-online-during-lockdown

Badri, S. K. Z., & Yunus, W. M. A. W. M. (2022, 2022/01/02). The relationship between academic vs. family/personal role conflict and Malaysian students' psychological wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46*(1), 76-88. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1884210

Bailenson, J. N. (2021). Nonverbal overload: a theoretical argument for the causes of Zoom fatigue. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.1037/tmb0000030

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Beattie, A., & Priestley, R. (2021, 2021/01/01/). Fighting COVID-19 with the team of 5 million: Aotearoa New Zealand government communication during the 2020 lockdown. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 4*(1), 100209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100209

Beban, A., & Trueman, N. (2018). Student workers: The unequal load of paid and unpaid work in the neoliberal university. *New Zealand Sociology, 33*(2), 99–131. https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.952547514231502

Beenackers, M. A., Oude Groeniger, J., van Lenthe, F. J., & Kamphuis, C. B. M. (2017). The role of financial strain and self-control in explaining health behaviours: the GLOBE study. *European Journal of Public Health, 28*(4), 597-603. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckx212

Ben Simon, E., Vallat, R., Barnes, C. M., & Walker, M. P. (2020, 2020/06/01/). Sleep Loss and the socio-emotional brain. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 24*(6), 435-450. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.02.003

Berkowitz, L. (1989). Frustration-aggression hypothesis: Examination and reformulation. *Psychological Bulletin, 106*(1), 59. https://doi.org/10.1037%2F0033-2909.106.1.59

Berry, D. (2005). Methodological pitfalls in the study of religiosity and spirituality. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 27*(5), 628-647.

Blattner, K., Miller, R., Smith, M., & Lander, J. (2022, 2022/03/04). Doing without the residential component of a blended postgraduate rural medical programme during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand: student perspectives. *Education for Primary Care, 33*(2), 77-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2021.2011626

Boddy, C. (2020). Lonely, homesick and struggling: undergraduate students and intention to quit university. *Quality Assurance in Education, 28*(4), 239-253. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-05-2020-0056

Boss, P., Roos, S., & Harris, D. L. (2011). Grief in the Midst of Ambiguity and Uncertainty: An Exploration of Ambiguous Loss and Chronic Sorrow. In R. L. Neimeyer, D. L. Harris, H. R. Winokuer, & G. F. Thornton (Eds.), *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society*. Routledge.

Bösselmann, V., Amatriain-Fernández, S., Gronwald, T., Murillo-Rodríguez, E., Machado, S., & Budde, H. (2021, 2021-May-03). Physical activity, boredom and fear of covid-19 among adolescents in Germany [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.624206

Bourion-Bédès, S., Tarquinio, C., Batt, M., Tarquinio, P., Lebreuilly, R., Sorsana, C., Legrand, K., Rousseau, H., & Baumann, C. (2021, 2021/01/01/). Psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on students in a French region severely affected by the disease: results of the PIMS-CoV 19 study. *Psychiatry Research, 295*, 113559. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113559

Bowles, A. B., Dobson, A., Fisher, R., & McPhail, R. (2011). An exploratory investigation into first year student transition to university. In K. Krause, M. Buckridge, C. Grimmer, & S. Purbrick-Illek (Eds.), *Research and Development in Higher Education: Higher Education on the Edge* (Vol. 34, pp. 61-71). Griffith University.

Bozick, R. (2007). Making it through the first year of college: the role of students' economic resources, employment, and living arrangements. *Sociology of Education, 80*(3), 261-284. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452709

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research : a practical guide for beginners*. SAGE. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat00245a&AN=massey.b2778109&site=eds-live&scope=site

Braxton, J., & Hirschy, A. (2005). Theoretical Developments in College Student Departure. In A. Stedman (Ed.), *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (pp. 67-87). Praeger.

Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., Matthews, C., & Nordström, K. (2009, 2009/08/01). First year expectations and experiences: student and teacher perspectives. *Higher Education, 58*(2), 157-173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9188-3

Brissette, I., & Cohen, S. (2002). The contribution of individual differences in hostility to the associations between daily interpersonal conflict, affect, and sleep. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*(9), 1265-1274. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672022812011

Brownfield, N., Thielking, M., Bates, G., & Morrison, F. (2020). Does poverty impact student academic outcomes and wellbeing in Australian universities? A systematic review. *Journal of Social Inclusion, 11*(2), 4-19.

Bullock, A., Colvin, A. D., & Jackson, M. S. (2022). Zoom fatigue in the age of COVID-19. *Journal of Social Work in the Global Community, 6*(1), 2.

Buote, V. M., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Wintre, M. G. (2007). The importance of friends: friendship and adjustment among 1st-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 22*(6), 665-689.

Cameron, M., Fogarty-Perry, B., & Piercy, G. (2021). *The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education students in New Zealand*.

Cann, A., Calhoun, L. G., Tedeschi, R. G., Triplett, K. N., Vishnevsky, T., & Lindstrom, C. M. (2011, 2011/03/01). Assessing posttraumatic cognitive processes: the Event Related Rumination Inventory. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 24*(2), 137-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2010.529901

Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J., & Zheng, J. (2020, 2020/05/01/). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Research, 287*, 112934. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934

Chopra, S., Ranjan, P., Singh, V., Kumar, S., Arora, M., Hasan, M. S., Kasiraj, R., Suryansh, Kaur, D., Vikram, N. K., Malhotra, A., Kumari, A., Klanidhi, K. B., & Baitha, U. (2020, 2020/11/01/). Impact of COVID-19 on lifestyle-related behaviours- a cross-sectional audit of responses from nine hundred and ninety-five participants from India. *Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews, 14*(6), 2021-2030. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dsx.2020.09.034

Clark, I. K. H., Chun, S., O'Sullivan, K. C., & Pierse, N. (2022). Energy poverty among tertiary students in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Energies, 15*(1), 76. https://www.mdpi.com/1996-1073/15/1/76

Combrink, H. M., & Oosthuizen, L. L. (2020). First-year student transition at the University of the Free State during COVID-19: challenges and insights. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 8*(2), 31-44.

Controller and Auditor General. (2021). *Planning ahead: Living with Covid-19 in the new normal*. https://oag.parliament.nz/blog/2021/planning-ahead

Cooke, R., Bewick, B. M., Barkham, M., Bradley, M., & Audin, K. (2006, 2006/11/01). Measuring, monitoring and managing the psychological well-being of first year university students. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 34*(4), 505-517. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880600942624

Cornell, S., Nickel, B., Cvejic, E., Bonner, C., McCaffery, K. J., Ayre, J., Copp, T., Batcup, C., Isautier, J., Dakin, T., & Dodd, R. (2020). Positive outcomes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia, n/a*(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.494

Crisp, G., Palmer, E., Turnbull, D., Nettelbeck, T., Ward, L., LeCouteur, A., Sarris, A., Strelan, P., & Schneider, L. (2009). First year student expectations: Results from a university-wide student survey. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 6*(1), 16-32.

Croucher, S. M., Nguyen, T., Pearson, E., Murray, N., Feekery, A., Spencer, A., Gomez, O., Girardelli, D., & Kelly, S. (2021, 2021/03/15). A comparative analysis of Covid-19-related prejudice: the United States, Spain, Italy, and New Zealand. *Communication Research Reports, 38*(2), 79-89. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2021.1885371

de Oliveira Araújo, F. J., de Lima, L. S. A., Cidade, P. I. M., Nobre, C. B., & Neto, M. L. R. (2020). Impact of Sars-Cov-2 and its reverberation in global higher education and mental health. *Psychiatry Research, 288*, 112977.

de Paola, M., & Gioia, F. (2016, 2016/04/01/). Who performs better under time pressure? Results from a field experiment. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 53*, 37-53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2015.12.002

Denovan, A., & Macaskill, A. (2013). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of stress and coping in first year undergraduates. *British Educational Research Journal, 39*(6), 1002-1024.

Devlin, M., James, R., & Grigg, G. (2008, 06/01). Studying and working: a national study of student finances and student engagement. *Tertiary Education and Management, 14*, 111-122. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583880802053044

Digital Government. (2022). *Digital inclusion and wellbeing in New Zealand*. https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/161~digital-inclusion-and-wellbeing-in-new-zealand/html

Dodge, R., Daly, A. P., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L. D. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International journal of wellbeing, 2*(3).

Dransart, D. A. C. (2013). From sense-making to meaning-making: Understanding and supporting survivors of suicide. *British Journal of Social Work, 43*(2), 317-335. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct026

Durie, M. (1994). *Whaiora: Māori health development*. Oxford University Press.

Durie, M. H. (1985). A Māori perspective of health. *Social Science & Medicine, 20*(5), 483-486.

Education Counts. (2021). *New Zealand statistics: Tertiary qualification completion, direct progression and attrition rates (PACE)*. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/achievement-and-attainment

Education Counts. (2022). *Domestic students by ethnic group, age group and qualification type/NZQF level 2012-2021* https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/excel_doc/0006/76659/Provider-based-Enrolments-2012-2021.xlsx

Eisenbeck, N., Carreno, D. F., Wong, P. T. P., Hicks, J. A., María, R.-R. G., Puga, J. L., Greville, J., Testoni, I., Biancalani, G., López, A. C. C., Villareal, S., Enea, V., Schulz-Quach, C., Jansen, J., Sanchez-Ruiz, M.-J., Yıldırım, M., Arslan, G., Cruz, J. F. A., Sofia, R. M., Ferreira, M. J., Ashraf, F., Wąsowicz, G., Shalaby, S. M., Amer, R. A., Yousfi, H., Chukwuorji, J. C., Guerra, V. M., Singh, S., Heintzelman, S., Hutapea, B., Béjaoui, B., Dash, A., Schlosser, K. K., Anniko, M. K., Rossa, M., Wongcharee, H., Avsec, A., Kocjan, G. Z., Kavčič, T., Leontiev, D. A., Taranenko, O., Rasskazova, E., Maher, E., & García-Montes, J. M. (2022, 2022/01/01/). An international study on psychological coping during COVID-19: towards a meaning-centered coping style. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology, 22*(1), 100256. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2021.100256

Elder, G. H., Johnson, M. K., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course* (pp. 3-19). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-306-48247-2_1

Eliason, S. R., Mortimer, J. T., & Vuolo, M. (2015, 2015/09/01). The transition to adulthood: Life course structures and subjective perceptions. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 78*(3), 205-227. https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272515582002

Evans, S., Alkan, E., Bhangoo, J. K., Tenenbaum, H., & Ng-Knight, T. (2021, 2021/04/01/). Effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on mental health, wellbeing, sleep, and alcohol use in a UK student sample. *Psychiatry Research, 298*, 113819. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113819

Every-Palmer, S., Jenkins, M., Gendall, P., Hoek, J., Beaglehole, B., Bell, C., Williman, J., Rapsey, C., & Stanley, J. (2020). Psychological distress, anxiety, family violence, suicidality, and wellbeing in New Zealand during the COVID-19 lockdown: A cross-sectional study. *PLOS ONE, 15*(11), e0241658. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0241658

Fauville, G., Luo, M., Queiroz, A. C., Bailenson, J. N., & Hancock, J. (2021). Zoom exhaustion & fatigue scale. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports, 4*, 100119.

Field, R., Duffy, J., & Huggins, A. (2014). Independent learning skills, self-determination theory and psychological well-being: strategies for supporting the first year university experience. *Proceedings of the 17th International First Year in Higher Education Conference.*, 1-10. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/73556/

Fitzgerald, J., & Curtis, C. (2017). Non-suicidal self-injury in a New Zealand student population: demographic and self-harm characteristics. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology, 46*(3), 156-163. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12652

Fitzpatrick, K. M., Harris, C., & Drawve, G. (2020). Fear of COVID-19 and the mental health consequences in America. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12*(S1), S17-S21. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000924

Flanagan, E. W., Beyl, R. A., Fearnbach, S. N., Altazan, A. D., Martin, C. K., & Redman, L. M. (2021). the impact of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders on health behaviors in adults. *Obesity, 29*(2), 438-445. https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.23066

Foa, R. S., Fabian, M., & Gilbert, S. (2022). Subjective well-being during the 2020–21 global coronavirus pandemic: Evidence from high frequency time series data. *PLOS ONE, 17*(2), e0263570. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263570

Fortier, N. (2020). COVID-19, gender inequality, and the responsibility of the state. *International journal of wellbeing, 10*(3). https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v10i3.1305

Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M. P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111*(23), 8410. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1319030111

Fu, W., Wang, C., Zou, L., Guo, Y., Lu, Z., Yan, S., & Mao, J. (2020, 2020/07/09). Psychological health, sleep quality, and coping styles to stress facing the COVID-19 in Wuhan, China. *Translational Psychiatry, 10*(1), 225. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41398-020-00913-3

Fuster, N., Arundel, R., & Susino, J. (2019, 2019/05/28). From a culture of homeownership to generation rent: housing discourses of young adults in Spain. *Journal of Youth Studies, 22*(5), 585-603. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1523540

Gair, S., & Baglow, L. (2018, 04/03). 'We barely survived': Social work students' mental health vulnerabilities and implications for educators, universities and the workforce. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work, 30*(1), 32-44. https://doi.org/10.11157/anzswj-vol30iss1id470

Gallegos, D., Ramsey, R., & Ong, K. W. (2014, 2014/05/01). Food insecurity: is it an issue among tertiary students? *Higher Education, 67*(5), 497-510. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9656-2

Geirdal, A. Ø., Ruffolo, M., Leung, J., Thygesen, H., Price, D., Bonsaksen, T., & Schoultz, M. (2021, 2021/03/04). Mental health, quality of life, wellbeing, loneliness and use of social media in a time of social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak. A cross-country comparative study. *Journal of Mental Health, 30*(2), 148-155. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2021.1875413

Gharib, A., Phillips, W., & Mathew, N. (2012). Cheat sheet or open-book? a comparison of the effects of exam types on performance, retention, and anxiety *Journal of Psychology Research, 2*, 469-478.

Giamos, D., Lee, A. Y. S., Suleiman, A., Stuart, H., & Chen, S.-P. (2017, 12/20). Understanding campus culture and student coping strategies for mental health issues in five Canadian colleges and universities. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 47*(3), 136-151. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v47i3.187957

Gonzalez-Ramirez, J., Mulqueen, K., Zealand, R., Silverstein, S., Reina, C., BuShell, S., & Ladda, S. (2021). Emergency online learning: College students' perceptions during the covid-19 crisis. *College Student Journal, 55*(1), 29-46.

Grant, B. M., & Giddings, L. S. (2002). Making sense of methodologies: a paradigm framework for the novice researcher. *Contemporary nurse, 13*(1), 10-28. https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.13.1.10

Green, A. (2008, 2008/10/01). Straddling the gap: how second-year peers empower first-year students to participate in a community of independent learning by means of the educative. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 13*(3), 241-249. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596740802346449

Hagedorn, R. L., Wattick, R. A., & Olfert, M. D. (2021, 2021/05/11). "My entire world stopped": College students' psychosocial and academic frustrations during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09948-0

Hale, E. D., Treharne, G. J., & Kitas, G. D. (2008). Qualitative methodologies II: A brief guide to applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in musculoskeletal care. *Musculoskeletal Care, 6*(2), 86-96. https://doi.org/10.1002/msc

Hall, G., Laddu, D. R., Phillips, S. A., Lavie, C. J., & Arena, R. (2021, Jan-Feb). A tale of two pandemics: how will COVID-19 and global trends in physical inactivity and sedentary behavior affect one another? *Progress in cardiovascular diseases, 64*, 108-110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcad.2020.04.005

Hamza, C. A., Ewing, L., Heath, N. L., & Goldstein, A. L. (2021). When social isolation is nothing new: A longitudinal study on psychological distress during COVID-19 among university students with and without preexisting mental health concerns. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 62*(1), 20-30. https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000255

Händel, M., Stephan, M., Gläser-Zikuda, M., Kopp, B., Bedenlier, S., & Ziegler, A. (2020). Digital readiness and its effects on higher education students' socio-emotional perceptions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 1-13.

Hassel, S., & Ridout, N. (2018). An investigation of first-year students' and lecturers' expectations of university education. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02218

Health Navigator. (2021). *Te whare tapa whā and wellbeing*. https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/t/te-whare-tapa-wh%C4%81-and-wellbeing/

Hefferon, K., & Boniwell, I. (2011). *Positive psychology: Theory, research and applications*. McGraw Hill Open University Press.

Hisham, I. N., Townsend, G., Gillard, S., Debnath, B., & Sin, J. (2021). COVID-19: the perfect vector for a mental health epidemic. *BJ Psych Bulletin, 45*(6), 332-338. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjb.2020.60

Hockings, C., Thomas, L., Ottaway, J., & Jones, R. (2018, 2018/02/17). Independent learning – what we do when you're not there. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(2), 145-161. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1332031

Hope, S. (2020). *Jobless students left in cold over COVID wage subsidy*. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/300083945/jobless-students-left-in-cold-over-covid-wage-subsidy

Horita, R., Nishio, A., & Yamamoto, M. (2021, 2021/01/01/). The effect of remote learning on the mental health of first year university students in Japan. *Psychiatry Research, 295*, 113561. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113561

International Labor Organization. (2021). *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefing note/wcms_767028.pdf

Işıl, U., & Ersoy Görkem, E. (2022). A new exhaustion emerged with COVID-19 and digitalization: a qualitative study on Zoom Fatigue. *OPUS Journal of Society Research, 19*(46), 365-379.

Janoff-Bulman, R. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Three explanatory models. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*(1), 30-34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447198

Jeffery, K. A., & Bauer, C. F. (2020, 2020/09/08). Students' responses to emergency remote online teaching reveal critical factors for all teaching. *Journal of Chemical Education, 97*(9), 2472-2485. https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00736

Kahu, E. R. (2013, 2013/06/01). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(5), 758-773. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.598505

Kanji, Z., Pidgeon, M., & Nilson, M. (2022, 2022/03/15). Enhancing post-secondary student retention: lessons learned from stories of former first-year students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 59*(2), 165-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1835670

Kantanis, T. (2000). The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first-year of university. *Journal of Institutional Research, 9*(1), 100-110.

Kaparounaki, C. K., Patsali, M. E., Mousa, D.-P. V., Papadopoulou, E. V. K., Papadopoulou, K. K. K., & Fountoulakis, K. N. (2020, 2020/08/01/). University students' mental health amidst the COVID-19 quarantine in Greece. *Psychiatry Research, 290*, 113111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113111

Kellogg, J. S., Hopko, D. R., & Ashcraft, M. H. (1999, 1999/11/01/). The effects of time pressure on arithmetic performance. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 13*(6), 591-600. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185(99)00025-0

Kelly, M., Dowling, M., & Millar, M. (2018). The search for understanding: the role of paradigms. *Nurse Researcher, 25*(4), 9-13. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2018.e1499

Kira, I. A., Shuwiekh, H. A. M., Rice, K. G., Ashby, J. S., Elwakeel, S. A., Sous, M. S. F., Alhuwailah, A., Baali, S. B. A., Azdaou, C., Oliemat, E. M., & Jamil, H. J. (2021, 2021/04/03). Measuring COVID-19 as traumatic stress: Initial psychometrics and validation. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 26*(3), 220-237. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1790160

Kohli, S., Malik, A., & Mamta. (2013). Academic anxiety and wellbeing amongst rural and urban adolescents. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(1), 148-152.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews*. SAGE Publications, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208963

Kyne, S. H., & Thompson, C. D. (2020, 2020/09/08). The COVID cohort: Student transition to university in the face of a global pandemic. *Journal of Chemical Education, 97*(9), 3381-3385. https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00769

Larcombe, W., & Fethers, K. (2013, 01/01). Schooling the blues? An investigation of factors associated with psychological distress among law students. *University of New South Wales Law Journal, 36*, 390-436.

Larkin, M., & Thompson, A. R. (2012). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Mental Health and Psychotherapy Research. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy* (pp. 99-116). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch8

Lee, K., Fanguy, M., Lu, X. S., & Bligh, B. (2021, 2021/01/02). Student learning during COVID-19: It was not as bad as we feared. *Distance Education, 42*(1), 164-172. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2020.1869529

Levy, P., & Petrulis, R. (2012, 2012/02/01). How do first-year university students experience inquiry and research, and what are the implications for the practice of inquiry-based learning? *Studies in Higher Education, 37*(1), 85-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.499166

Logan, J., Hughes, T., & Logan, B. (2016). Overworked? An observation of the relationship between student employment and academic performance. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 18*(3), 250-262. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115622777

Lyons, Z., Wilcox, H., Leung, L., & Dearsley, O. (2020). COVID-19 and the mental well-being of Australian medical students: impact, concerns and coping strategies used. *Australasian Psychiatry, 28*(6), 649-652. https://doi.org/10.1177/1039856220947945

Martin, J. M. (2010). Stigma and student mental health in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 29*(3), 259-274.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality* (1st ed. ed.). Harper. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat00245a&AN=massey.b10 16798&site=eds-live&scope=site

Massey University. (2021). *Annual report 2020*.

Massey University. (2022a). *Bachelor of Communication - BC*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/all-qualifications-and-degrees/bachelor-of-communication-UBCMM/

Massey University. (2022b). *Psychology - Bachelor of Arts*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/all-qualifications-and-degrees/bachelor-of-arts-UBART/psychology-UBART2JPSYC1/

Massey University. (2022c). *Psychology - Bachelor of Science*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/all-qualifications-and-degrees/bachelor-of-science-UBSCN/psychology-UBSCN2JPSYC1/

Mazer, J. P. (2013, 2013/07/01). Student emotional and cognitive interest as mediators of teacher communication behaviors and student engagement: an examination of direct and interaction effects. *Communication Education, 62*(3), 253-277. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2013.777752

Mazumder, A., Bandhu Kalanidhi, K., Sarkar, S., Ranjan, P., Sahu, A., Kaur, T., Kaur, D., Bhattacharya, A., Priyadarshini Suna, S., Prakash, B., Deb, K. S., & Wig, N. (2021, 2021/01/01). Psycho-social and behavioural impact of COVID 19 on young adults: Qualitative research comprising focused group discussion and in-depth interviews. *Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews, 15*(1), 309-312. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dsx.2020.12.039

McKay, L., O'Bryan, S., & Kahu, E. R. (2021). "My uni experience wasn't completely ruined": The impacts of COVID-19 on the first-year experience. *Student Success, 12*(3), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.1762

Meiring, R. M., Gusso, S., McCullough, E., & Bradnam, L. (2021). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic movement restrictions on self-reported physical activity and health in New Zealand: A cross-sectional survey. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(4), 1719. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041719

Meyer, B., Haywood, N., Sachdev, D., & Faraday, S. (2008). *What is independent learning and what are the benefits for students* (Department for Children, Schools and Families Research Report, Issue.

Ministry of Health. (2017). *Māori health models – Te Whare Tapa Whā*. https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha

Ministry of Health. (2020). *History of the COVID-19 alert system.* https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/history-of-the-covid-19-alert-system/

Ministry of Health. (2021). *New Zealand COVID-19 Alert Levels*. https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/tables/COVID-19-Alert-Levels-detailed-table.pdf

Mize, T. D., Kaufman, G., & Petts, R. J. (2021, 2021/01/01). Visualizing shifts in gendered parenting attitudes during COVID-19. *Socius, 7*. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231211013128

Moosa, M., & Bekker, T. (2022). Working online during COVID-19: accounts of first year students experiences and well-being [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.794279

Nelson, K., Kift, S., & Clarke, J. (2008). Expectations and realities for first year students at an Australian university. Proceedings of the 11th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Hobart.

Nuku Ora: An Active Wellington Region. (2022). *Wellbeing Hub*. https://www.nukuora.org.nz/active-health-and-wellness/wellbeing-hub/

Ogawa, T., Shiratori, Y., Tachikawa, H., Sodeyama, N., Ota, M., Midorikawa, H., & Arai, T. (2021, 2021/11/01/). Association between depressive state and behavioral changes induced by the state of emergency for Coronavirus disease 2019: Evidence from university students in Japan. *Acta Psychologica, 221*, 103445. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2021.103445

Ozga, J., & Sukhnandan, L. (1998). Undergraduate non-completion: developing an explanatory model. *Higher Education Quarterly, 52*(3), 316-333.

Palmer, M., O'Kane, P., & Owens, M. (2009, 2009/02/01). Betwixt spaces: student accounts of turning point experiences in the first-year transition. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(1), 37-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802601929

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: an integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 257. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018301

Parkes, M. C. (1971, 1971/04/01/). Psycho-social transitions: A field for study. *Social Science & Medicine, 5*(2), 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-7856(71)90091-6

Peel, M. (2000). 'Nobody cares': The challenge of isolation in school to university transition. *Journal of Institutional Research, 9*(1), 22-34.

Peper, E., Wilson, V., Martin, M., Rosegard, E., & Harvey, R. (2021). Avoid Zoom fatigue, be present and learn. *NeuroRegulation, 8*(1), 47-56. https://doi.org/10.15540/nr.8.1.47

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal, 20*(1), 7-14.

Poulton, R., Gluckman, P., Menzies, R., Bardsley, A., McIntosh, T., & Faleafa, M. (2020). *Protecting and promoting mental wellbeing: Beyond COVID-19* (The Future is Now, Issue. https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Protecting-and-Promoting-Mental-Wellbeing.pdf

Qian, Y., & Hanser, A. (2021, 2021/01/01). How did Wuhan residents cope with a 76-day lockdown? *Chinese Sociological Review, 53*(1), 55-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2020.1820319

Rana, R., & Mahmood, N. (2010). The relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement. *Bulletin of Education and Research, 32*(2), 63-74. http://ssrn.com/abstract=2362291

Robinson, R. S. (2014). Purposive Sampling. In A. C. Michalos (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (pp. 5243-5245). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337

Rochford, T. (2004). Whare Tapa Wha: A Māori model of a unified theory of health. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 25*(1), 41-57.

Rogowska, A. M., Ochnik, D., Kuśnierz, C., Chilicka, K., Jakubiak, M., Paradowska, M., Głazowska, L., Bojarski, D., Fijołek, J., Podolak, M., Tomasiewicz, M., Nowicka, D., Kawka, M., Grabarczyk, M., & Babińska, Z. (2021, 2021/12/15). Changes in mental health during three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic: a repeated cross-sectional study among polish university students. *BMC Psychiatry, 21*(1), 627. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03615-2

Ross, L. E. (2017). An account from the inside: examining the emotional impact of qualitative research through the lens of "insider" research. *Qualitative Psychology, 4*(3), 326-337. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000064

Saidin, K., & Yaacob, A. (2017). Insider researchers: challenges & opportunities. *Proceedings of the ICECRS, 1*(1). https://doi.org/10.21070/picecrs.v1i1.563

Salim, J., Tandy, S., Arnindita, J. N., Wibisono, J. J., Haryanto, M. R., & Wibisono, M. G. (2022, 01/19). Zoom fatigue and its risk factors in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Medical Journal of Indonesia, 31*(1). https://doi.org/10.13181/mji.oa.225703

Samaranayake, C. B., Arroll, B., & Fernando, A. T., 3rd. (2014, 1). Sleep disorders, depression, anxiety and satisfaction with life among young adults: a survey of university students in Auckland, New Zealand. *The New Zealand Medical Journal, 127*(1399), 13-22.

Sarder, M. D. B. (2014). Improving student engagement in online courses. 2014 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition,

Serido, J., & Shim, S. (2017). *Approaching 30: Adult financial capability, stability and well-being* (Arizona Pathways to Life Success for University Student (APLUS), Issue. https://www.aplushappiness.org/s/APLUS_WAVE4.pdf

Settersten, R. A., Ottusch, T. M., & Schneider, B. (2015). Becoming adult: Meanings of markers to adulthood. In R. A. Scott & S. M. Kosslyn (Eds.), *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 1-16). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0021

Sharp, J., & Theiler, S. (2018, 2018/09/01). A review of psychological distress among university students: pervasiveness, implications and potential points of intervention. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 40*(3), 193-212. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-018-9321-7

Shim, T. E., & Lee, S. Y. (2020, 2020/12/01/). College students' experience of emergency remote teaching due to COVID-19. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 105578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105578

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and health, 11*(2), 261-271.

Smith, J. A., Larkin, M. H., & Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: theory, method and research*. SAGE.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (pp. 53-80). Sage.

Smith, J. A., & Shinebourne, P. (2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological.* (pp. 73-82). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-005

Smith, L., Jacob, L., Yakkundi, A., McDermott, D., Armstrong, N. C., Barnett, Y., López-Sánchez, G. F., Martin, S., Butler, L., & Tully, M. A. (2020, 2020/09/01/). Correlates of symptoms of anxiety and depression and mental wellbeing associated with COVID-19: a cross-sectional study of UK-based respondents. *Psychiatry Research, 291*, 113138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113138

Smith, T. W., & Colby, S. A. (2007, 2007/05/01). Teaching for deep learning. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 80*(5), 205-210. https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.80.5.205-210

Stallman, H. m. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: a comparison with general population data. *Australian Psychologist, 45*(4), 249-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/00050067.2010.482109

Stallman, H. M. (2012, 2012/12/01). University counselling services in Australia and New Zealand: Activities, changes, and challenges. *Australian Psychologist, 47*(4), 249-253. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1742-9544.2011.00023.x

Storrie, K., Ahern, K., & Tuckett, A. (2010). A systematic review: students with mental health problems—a growing problem. *International journal of nursing practice, 16*(1), 1-6.

Teater, B., Chonody, J. M., & Hannan, K. (2021, 2021/05/19). Meeting social needs and loneliness in a time of social distancing under COVID-19: A comparison among young, middle, and older adults. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 31*(1-4), 43-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2020.1835777

The Pūtaiora Writing Group. (n.d.). *Te Ara Tika guidelines for Māori research ethics: A framework for researchers and ethics committee members*. Health Research Council of New Zealand. Retrieved February 3rd from https://www.hrc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-06/Resource%20Library%20PDF%20-%20Te%20Ara%20Tika%20Guidelines%20for%20Maori%20Research%20Ethics_0.pdf

The World Bank. (2020). *COVID-19 to plunge global economy into worst recession since World War II*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii

Tight, M. (2020, 2020/05/27). Student retention and engagement in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44*(5), 689-704. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1576860

Tinker, S., & Elphinstone, B. (2014). Learning engagement: The importance of meaning, belonging and academic momentum. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 5*, 93-105.

Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student leaving. *The Journal of Higher Education, 59*(4), 438-455. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981920

Turosak, A., & Siwierka, J. (2021, 2021/07/03). Mental health and stigma on campus: Insights from students' lived experience. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 49*(3), 266-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2019.1654264

Unwin, T., & de Bastion, G. (2009). Digital Divide. In R. Kitchin & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 191-197). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00090-0

Updegraff, J. A., Silver, R. C., & Holman, E. A. (2008). Searching for and finding meaning in collective trauma: results from a national longitudinal study of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*(3), 709.

van Ommen, C., & Nazari, V. (2019, 12/01). "It's an important thing and can change someone without you realising": New Zealand students' views of university mental health services. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology, 48*, 52.

Vittengl, J. R., & Holt, C. S. (1998). A time-series diary study of mood and social interaction. *Motivation and Emotion, 22*(3), 255-275. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022388123550

Wada, M., Suto, M. J., Lee, M., Sanders, D., Sun, C., Le, T. N., Goldman-Hasbun, J., & Chauhan, S. (2019, 2019/06/01/). University students' perspectives on mental illness stigma. *Mental Health & Prevention, 14*, 200159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mph.2019.200159

Walsh, K. (2014). *Understanding students' accessibility and barriers to nourishing food*. https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/media/documents/brochure/sustain/StudentFoodProjectReport.pdf

Weaver, R. H., Srinivasan, E. G., Decker, A., & Bolkan, C. (2021). Young adults' experiences with loss and grief during COVID-19. *Death Studies*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2021.1984339

Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie‑Gauld, M. (2005, 2005/12/01). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first‑year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(6), 707-722. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036

Wilczyńska, D., Li, J., Yang, Y., Fan, H., Liu, T., & Lipowski, M. (2021). Fear of COVID-19 changes the motivation for physical activity participation: Polish-Chinese comparisons. *Health Psychology Report, 9*(2), 138-148. https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2021.105007

Wilson, K., & Lizzio, A. (2008). *A 'just in time intervention' to support the academic efficacy of at-risk first-year students* 11th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Hobart.

Wilson, S., Tan, S., Knox, M., Ong, A., & Crawford, J. (2020). Enabling cross-cultural student voice during COVID-19: A collective autoethnography. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 17*(5), 1-21.

World Health Organization. (2020). *Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen

World Health Organization. (2021). *WHO coronavirus disease (COVID-19) dashboard*. https://covid19.who.int/

Xerri, M. J., Radford, K., & Shacklock, K. (2018, 2018/04/01). Student engagement in academic activities: a social support perspective. *Higher Education, 75*(4), 589-605. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0162-9

Youth Service Ratonga Taiohi. (n.d.). *Taha wairua: spiritual wellbeing*. Ministry of Social Development. https://www.youthservice.govt.nz/wellbeing/taha-wairua/

Zeidner, M. (1998). *Test Anxiety: The State of the Art*. Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-47145-0_7

Zimmerman, B. J. (1986, 1986/10/01/). Becoming a self-regulated learner: which are the key subprocesses? *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11*(4), 307-313. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-476X(86)90027-5