eXceptional and INcluded; *Tuawāhine in waka ama*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of five exceptional wāhine with a passion for waka ama. It draws on a Māori lens to understand the experiences of tuawāhine living with differing abilities or impairments, participating in a sporting context that is inclusive. The research is centred on kaupapa Māori and tikanga principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga. The inclusive methodology, Participatory Action Research approach, was selected for this rangahau. It is the ideal tool to empower groups that live on the borders because it facilitates, in a genuine and authentic way, the expression of marginalised perspectives (Smith, 2021).

The rangahau captured the voices of the tuawāhine and exposed ngā piki me ngā heke, the triumphs and the setbacks. The ups of being included in sport that connects them culturally and relationally, the benefits that have uplifted the wairua and provided wellness to their hauora and a platform for social justice. The downs expressed were the control from political ideologies and western paradigms that continue to oppress them.

All of those do not detract however from the tuawāhine enjoying life to its fullest. Their zest is inspiring and their laughter is infectious. Waka ama has been the mechanism for these tuawāhine, in our communities to be more visible. It has provided opportunities for people living with differing abilities to participate in sport, which has in turn created exposure, both are important in creating a society that is accessible to all.

Mihi

I would like to acknowledge all of the whānau that have supported me during this journey. Firstly, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and aroha to the tuawāhine; Hine Karoro, Jo, Mel, Nickylee and Rehutai for which this kaupapa is about. Without your voices this rangahau would not have been possible. Also to my kaumātua and mentor Val Irwin who started this entire adventure. Without you my eyes would not have been opened and I am eternally grateful to you. Nui te aroha ki a koutou katoa.

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To all of my wider whānau and hoa who have kept me honest and on track, all your little messages of wisdom and cheer meant a lot and I appreciate you all. With a kaupapa that held special significance to me, your prompts have helped me to “keep swimming” and afloat.

I am forever indebted to my tamariki Puhiwahine, Pareputiputi, Te Wai a Tauranga, Nukuroa, Nukutai, our hunaonga Kane who have given us three beautiful mokopuna, Āio Mangaera, Maruke Te Kanawa and Te Urukāraerae-Mihiata. Thank you for helping me to pursue this rangahau. The responsibility of representing the voices of others was a heavy weight and oftentimes I was an absent māmā and nānā. Last but not least to my hoa rangatira, Myk, thank you for continuously supporting me in my adventures. E kore te aroha e mimiti.

Pepeha:

Ki te taha o tōku māmā:

Ko Maungaroa, ko Whareorino ngā maunga

Ko Marokopa, ko Waikawau ngā awa

Ko Mirumiru te marae

Ko Ngāti Kinohaku, ko Ngāti Te Kanawa ngā hapū

Ko Ngāti Maniapoto te iwi

Ko Tūpāhau te rangatira

Ko Doreen Kete tōku māmā manaaki

Ko Ronald Archer tōku pāpā, he Pākehā ia

Ko Myk Nuku tāku hoa tāne

Ko Roni Nuku ahau

Tēnā tātou, tēnā tātou, tēnā tatou katoa

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Prologue

Figure 1: Adaptive Racing. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2015.

Jan 17, 2015, Lake Karāpiro at the National Waka Ama Sprint Championships, waves of a deafening roar wash the waka as it surges down lane two of the 500m course. Hoariri on our left, hoariri on our right. All eyes are focussed within our waka. As our hoe pummels the water in unison, I am blinded in my seat from the love being exalted from shore and the empowered statue of our adaptive whānau. This moment shows nothing of the "old medicalised images of disability, inferiority and separateness" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 184) but replaces it with whanaungatanga and athleticism. Normality.

Before heading out into the oceans unknown, to learn the perspectives of five wahine Māori living with impairments who compete in waka ama, there are a few things I would like to draw the reader's attention to; the configuration of the thesis title, the preferred terminologies of impairment and differing abilities versus disability, and the use of reo Māori.

The title of this thesis is configured purposefully to bring to the attention a few cues regarding the kaupapa of this research. Firstly the shape is likened to the hull of a waka not only as a topic of this rangahau but because of what it represents symbolically; a vehicle designed to transport people from point to point, as a movement of progression to meet our ever growing needs. To perhaps seek new boundaries and new beginnings

or a hope for better horizons. Culturally, the waka ties us to the kōrero and voyages of our tūpuna. An acknowledgement of the ancestral expertise in all things navigational that is our heritage. The letters X and IN are emphasised to contrast each other and emblematic of how impaired people experience life socially. More often than not, they are X-cluded or barred from activities and absent from social consciousness whereas all they wish is to be is IN-cluded or considered. The capital X has a second less obvious meaning. The X correlates to the qualities or abilities that adaptive paddlers hold; an extra something, an X-factor. Tikao et al. (2009) argues that in days of old, whānau members with impairments were seen to hold super powers. So it is with the members of the X-Men, the adaptive paddlers too have a super power that we as coaches have been fortunate to witness; seeing them for the X-ceptional and X-traordinary people they are.

In the spirit of empowerment, within this thesis the terms 'differing abilities' and 'impairment' are used against the framing of 'disabled' to recognise personal dignity and humanity as seen with the implementation of the expression 'whaikaha' (Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People, 2021). Labels are tricky to navigate especially when they have been used to define, confine and oppress. Identity is complex and is explored in Chapters One, Three and Five. Differing abilities is the preferred phrase which recognises that every person has value, while impairment refers to the physicality of a person unable to perform an activity. In contrast disability covers mental and or physical conditions (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2016). This term has and may still carry stigma and negative connotations.

The majority of the Māori terms that are used throughout this thesis are not italicized and not translated to exemplify the natural language of the participants and the researcher, and maintains the mana and integrity of the context in which it was used. A glossary is provided at the end of the document.

Huahuatau

A waka must be able to withstand treacherous conditions to remain afloat and to carry its passengers safely to their destination. This requires meticulous construction and a continuing relationship and understanding of the forces acting upon it. An ideal metaphor for a rangahau of high importance.

A waka ama and its various parts is used to describe the layout of this rangahau. Chapters One & Two refer to the basic structure of the hull: Takere (spine), Katea (ribs) and Kōhiwi (hull). They are the foundation. Chapter Three explains the stabilising components: Ama (outrigger), Aukaha (rigging), and Kiato (arms). These enable the waka to manage and counter any conditions. Finally Chapters Four, Five & Six discuss the features that provide additional strength to the structure: Paemanu (seats), Rauawa (gunwale), Taumanu (thwarts), Parewai (wave deflector), Ihuwaka (bow), and Kei (stern). These are the inherent features of strength found in a waka ama. Each component will be described in detail with an accompanying image at the beginning of each chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

The backbone or foundation that a waka must be built from

Chapter one is the **Takere** or the spine. It is the main structural component of the rangahau. It describes the inception of this rangahau, what forces that shaped the foundation, what is known regarding the intersectionality of Māori, women and disabilities, and adaptive waka ama. The following chapter is the tuarā and the basis that everything else was built upon, that being the kaupapa; Exceptional and Included; Tuawāhine in Waka Ama.

Figure 2: Main structural component of waka. Source: R Nuku, 2024.

Introduction

The objective or this rangahau is to examine the voices of wahine Māori living with differing abilities that compete in waka ama and the impact waka ama has had on their lives. Using qualitative research methods I will explore the lived experiences of five exceptional wāhine and draw on a Māori lens to understand the experiences of these wāhine Māori, participating in a sporting pastime that attempts to be inclusive to peoples with impairments.

Lived experiences are essential for social justice (Pratt, 2021) and has been used to change policy and practices in social delivery (Moran, 2024). I would be bold in thus assuming that lived experiences are crucial for understanding human behaviour and social analysing. By acknowledging the significance of lived experiences, insights can

be gained into diverse perspectives and realities, contributing to a richer understanding of human existence and perhaps improved social relationships within our society.

The rangahau is centred on kaupapa Māori and tikanga principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga. A collaborative approach was selected to not only capture their voices but to empower the participants to lead, guide and take ownership of the mahi. With very little academic literature available regarding Māori with disabilities in sport, it was important that this rangahau be completed *by* and *with* them rather than *on* them. It has not been without its challenges for myself as the kairangahau and an outsider. I was constantly anxious and critical of my writing that I presented their voices correctly and with mana. Constant guidance was offered and provided by the participants, my adaptive kaumātua and mentor, and supervisor, but the exercise never became easy.

This kaupapa is an embodiment of a desire to know where the wahine Māori living with differing abilities are. Through self-reflection and wānanga with the adaptive community, I came to realise that what I was hoping to achieve is to celebrate these adaptive kaihoe. They, like the tūpuna whaea and tuawāhine from kōrero tuku iho, bring mana to themselves and their whānau. When we arrive at crossroads in our lives, we too draw on those narratives to help us to make sense of the world, the same is true for these modern day tuawāhine. They are amongst us. More often they are in plain sight. Sometimes we just need to stop and remove the blinkers to see them, hear them and earn the wisdom they have to offer.

Positionality:

Our first experience at waka ama was in 1997 through Kōkiri Tai Patu Waka Ama Club in Petone, Wellington. The club invited the whole whānau down for a ‘row’. At that time we only had two young daughters and my husband's father Tamihana was living with us. Needless to say, welcoming the whole whānau, mokopuna through to kaumātua, to exercise and be healthy together was the biggest attraction. Waka ama then became a lifestyle for us. We would purposely travel to experience other waterways in Aotearoa, to meet other like-minded whānau, and inadvertently extended our waka whānau overseas. It is no exaggeration if we were to state that

waka ama was our way of life. Our whānau have attended every national sprint regatta since the beginning of our journey. I myself have missed only one to give birth to our pōtiki. My husband took our tamariki up to race, drove home to me, our pēpi decided that it was time to meet his whānau early hours of that morning, then Myk went back to Karāpiro to support our eldest and her team. We have also unexpectedly given birth to an earlier child at the Tauranga Moana regatta in 2001. She was aptly named by her Papa, Te Wai a Tauranga after their tūpuna who married Te Nuku I generations earlier. These are mere examples of the connection and passion we have for waka ama.

Coaching was a natural progression. Typical for most parents, it begins by coaching your own tamariki. In 2014 one particular whānau member from Nuhaka visited us at our home away from home, Pandora Pond, coaching the students of the local kura. Eight years earlier he'd injured his body and was dependent on a wheelchair but being a lover of Tangaroa, he was drawn to the water. He gently lowered himself into a single-person waka, paddled away, fell out, laughed and he has been paddling and laughing since. The significance of that first encounter is that in our desire to include him, he then pulled in more whānau, impaired like him, to join in the fun. By the end of the year, we had two adaptive teams primed to race at the annual Waka Ama National Sprint Championships.

Two years under our belt with successful participation by adaptive athletes throughout the motu, Waka Ama New Zealand (WANZ), the national governing body, was then able to support the first adaptive international campaign at the World Sprint Championships on the Sunshine Coast of Australia in 2016. Due to my heavy involvement with adaptive paddling, I was given the honour of the position as coach for this first campaign. At that stage, we included every interested adaptive paddler within Aotearoa to compete. Our primary goal was to test the waters, so to speak, and to prove to everyone that adaptives are not any different. Needless to say, from those humble beginnings, adaptive paddling was offered at every national event thereon within Aotearoa and we have been fortunate to be taken along for the ride. The use of 'we' is purposeful. Even though I may have been a coach, I did not perform my responsibilities alone. Coaching adaptive athletes requires a team of support which was

provided by immediate whānau, wider whānau, friends, adaptive athletes and adaptive whānau. As the years have passed my role has altered to a supporter and mentor, however a person can never stop being whānau. Kaupapa whānau and whakapapa whānau are one in the same where the interactions may come and go in waves but the relationship still has unbreakable links.

Tuapapa

Waka Ama

The pacific people share a navigational heritage unparalleled in history. It is the greatest migration the world has ever seen across the greatest body of water, and it can be attributed to the va'a, wa'a, outrigger canoe or as how it is termed in Aotearoa, waka ama. Over time those canoes transformed into smaller versions for transportation and fishing purposes (Neich, 2006), which in turn evolved into designs more suitable for amusement and competition. Waka ama as a sport gained international recognition in the early 1950s even though it had been in practice since the mid-1800s (International Va'a Federation, 2009).

Waka ama is one of the many kaupapa Māori that can accredit its resurgence and success from the revitalisation of te reo Māori and cultural practices. Waka ama was revived in Aotearoa by the initial efforts of Matahi Whakataka Brightwell. He established the first waka ama club Mareikura in 1985 (Waka Ama Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.) and with the passion of other individuals, a national body was formed two years later. The society is titled Ngā Kaihoe o Aotearoa (NKOA) but is most commonly called Waka Ama New Zealand. Governance is delegated to a board of four elected and three appointed members as per the constitution. Currently WANZ employs seven staff members to run the organisation which administrates members from six regions throughout Aotearoa, five in Te Ika a Māui, one encompassing the entirety of Te Wai Pounamu. The whakapapa and methodology of the sport enables its participants to experience culture, pride and community which is underpinned by tikanga (Waka Ama Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.) that is only possible through language and culture.

The hosting of the National Long Distance Championships are shared by the various regional bodies. This not only serves to provide experience in event management throughout the membership, but it also alleviates the financial burden on remote clubs such as those in Kaitaia, Uawa and in Waihōpai to travel every year. National Sprint Championships are held at Lake Karāpiro annually in January and runs for seven days. What is special about this event is that waka ama has its entire membership at one site, in one regatta. At the beginning of the week taitamariki from the age of five through to 16 race, and young adults through to kaumātua divisions wrap up the tournament at the end of the week. Pakeke and kaumātua are able to support their tamariki and vice versa. Parents can also compete in the same team with their own parents or their own tamariki if they meet the minimum age requirement.

Adaptive Paddling

The term adaptive was adopted following the International Va'a Federation (IVF) platform for athletes that would normally be categorised as para-athletes. As the term implies, modifications to equipment and rules are applied that will allow for those living with differing abilities to participate and compete. For instance, rule 9.1 states that, "Paddles must have one blade and may be of any shape or size" (Waka Ama Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023, p. 8). Whereas for an adaptive athlete who has no hands, a solution could be a wing-blade (double-blade) as seen in kayaking which provides a longer shaft to make attachments for the upper arms, that then has the ability to create force which would not be possible with a single blade. Another example is rule 6.2 states that the kiato and ama have to be lashed on the left-hand side of the kōhiwi (p. 7) however adaptive paddlers can race with the ama on the right-hand side if they so wish.

In 2008 adaptive paddling was first presented in the World Sprints Sacramento program, as a medal winning category. It is a term that has been embraced by the waka ama impaired community. Aotearoa had their first team entry as an adaptive crew in 2014 at the national sprint championships. It was an exhibition team to showcase to our communities what was possible for people with varying abilities. From that humble beginning, in 2016 Aotearoa formed their very own representative adaptive contingent and adaptive teams have been competing at national events ever since. Teams are

composed of co-ed members and there must be a minimum of two wāhine in the crew. One unique modification or concession for adaptive teams here on home waters, is that crews can be composed of adaptive and non-adaptive athletes at a ratio of 1:1. This enables a range of adaptive paddlers to be included with the assurance that they have someone dedicated to supporting them inside the waka itself if needed and to boost visibility and awareness.

Adaptive racing in Aotearoa is scheduled during the national events not run as a separate regatta on its own. Perhaps if participation exceeds the dedicated week of waka ama races, adaptive races may need to have their own separate regatta which may change the narratives. However, here is an example of how during our kōrerorero, Hine Karoro identifies that competing at the same time as the rest of the waka whānau has its place for people with varying abilities.

> I think what waka does, that not other sports does, is that they have their competitors as part of that competition. A lot of sports will have a blind rugby tournament. But it's never part of that world event. They'll have a special Paralympics or a special tournament or whatever where you're singled out.
> (**Hine Karoro**)

Waka ama has placed special significance on adaptive racing that inadvertently has begun to address the restraints caused by inaccessibility. At the week-long national sprints in Karāpiro, adaptive team racing is held during the final day. The best of every category and every division duke it out in one final meeting. Adaptive V1 (rudderless single craft) racing is also held on the same day as all other V1 divisions. The adaptive whānau are not only competing, they are seen by the waka ama fraternity, rubbing shoulders with Aotearoa's A-list validating the adaptive category. "[It] introduced me then to all these top-level athletes and they were so supportive. I never felt like a hassle" (**Hine Karoro**). Hine's comment exemplifies the boost in her morale by really feeling like she fit in and noticed. Similarly with international events, adaptives who are selected for Team Aotearoa receive an equal share of funding towards their campaign. A coach and manager are supported by WANZ and are assigned solely for the adaptive

category. They and the premiere divisions (open and development women and men) are the only teams to receive this financial and management support.

Adaptive Whānau

The adaptive whānau comprises all adaptive kaihoe in Aotearoa, wāhine mā, tāne mā, Māori mā, tauiwi mā. Their experiences have a unique perspective as fellow team mates. In particular, the interest or research purpose for identifying this rōpū is in the care and aroha for one another, competing for each other, supporting one another to achieve their dreams within the sporting arena. Although this rangahau is focussing only on one sector of adaptive athletes, the participants' experiences, ambitions and viewpoints have all been influenced by and for the entire adaptive whānau and therefore they "… express themselves in a collective and indigenous way" (Hickey, 2008, p. 29). Even though this rangahau is drawn from the wahine Māori cohort, they convey themselves as representatives of all of the adaptive athletes.

Adaptive Whānau Whānui

To foster the kinship that already rallies under the banner of waka ama, I have adopted the adaptive whānau whānui term for this rangahau. The adaptive whānau whānui is all of the adaptive paddlers and all of their support people. These include significant others, whānau members, past coaches and managers, and other key individuals who help with the adaptive movement. The purpose of identifying this group is because as a rōpū, they create traction, they are the machine, they together make things happen. Collectively they advocate for the adaptive movement by fundraising for international events, actively recruiting adaptive paddlers, lending their expertise, and have helped to shape what adaptive paddling looks like in Aotearoa.

The adaptive whānau whānui are a mixture of whakapapa and kaupapa whānau. They all have an interest in the welfare of this whānau, are fighting for change and acceptance, and they recognise that disability is not something that is central to the identity of their whānau member; whānau is. Whānau, collective responsibility, and cultural values and practices, when organised in conjunction with each other, are the necessary components for Māori survival and successful achievement (Penehira et al.,

2009). Identical to being in a waka, every person is important because every individual contributes to the collective goal of reaching shore safely and are essential to its success.

It is necessary to make note that the adaptive whānau whānui term used here has parallels with the concept Whānau Hauā gifted by Donny Rangiahau to the Māori disability agency, Te Roopu Waiora in South Auckland. However the distinction only lies with the 'adaptive' term specific to waka ama.

> Whānau Hauā sees disability as a collective endeavour of both the individual and the whānau as a whole. Whānau hauā are driven by a collective effort and the cultural obligations and responsibilities that whānau members have to each other and the whānau as a whole, while they strive to achieve balance within an environment of change and institutional barriers (Hickey & Wilson, 2017, p. 87).

Figure 3: Adaptive Whānau Whānui. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2015.

Te Ao Pākehā

In our colonial past, Māori were regarded as an inferior race that needed to be civilised, and their impairments represented a part of society that was detestable and to be eradicated in the new colonial state. Settler patriarchal ideals amplified the divide for the Indigenous women of Aotearoa. On top of being born inferior and bestowed the abhorrent identity of disabled, from a Western paradigm women were regarded as the

property of men (Johnston & Pihama, 2022). Māori women experienced the denial of their rangatiratanga by the stripping of their status as landholders, and politicised to mirror those of the dominant position. With a triple whammy like this, it is not surprising there are disparities within the disability population today between Māori and non-Māori, and an even greater divide between Māori women and non-Māori peoples (Henare, 2019).

Tangata whenua living with impairments are still experiencing the inequalities because of those lasting colonial models and dominant ideologies. The on-going effects are the perpetuation of social barriers and behaviours that constitute disabilities (Kusumowardoyo et al., 2024, Pérez et al., 2022). Those mentalities contributed to the reluctance of whānau Māori to use disability services (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019) because they sit at odds with Māori cultural beliefs. State services would separate the individual from the whānau and institutionalise them. In te ao Māori health does not lie solely with physical attributes. The spiritual and cultural components would be considered too (Pihama & Smith, 2023) providing a holistic approach to wellbeing that involved the whānau together which are necessary for Māori survival and achievement (Penehira et al. 2003). The whānau of one of the tuawahine experienced this totalitarian control when the doctors informed her parents of her diagnosis, "... they were like, 'Oh, she's got cerebral palsy.' He [Dad] was like, 'What?' And they were like, 'Yes. She needs to go into a home'" (Rehutai). It did not take the whānau long to realise that Rehutai's needs were eclipsed by the dominant narrative. Her parents withdrew her and she later received superior care through cultural perspectives of wellbeing and traditional modes of healing.

Tōrangapū

Contemporary vices such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (CRPD) and New Zealand's Public Health and Disability Act of 2000 highlight the growing consciousness of societies nationally and internationally to curb those earlier complicit ideologies. The CRPD was ratified in Aotearoa on September 25, 2008. Its purpose is to, "promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with

disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity" (United Nations, 2006, p. 4). The convention recognises through the inclusion of Article 6 the plight of wahine with disabilities. It identifies that wahine are subject to multiple sites of discrimination and specific measures must take place as a fundamental right. However Indigenous people are only mentioned once in the entire document, in the preamble. The concern and concentration of effort was obviously focussed more on compensating the dominant cultures' own disabled communities and not those they suppress and suffocate.

It was identified in a health and wellbeing report commissioned by the Waitangi Tribunal that many Māori with disabilities wrestled with both Māori and disabled identities (2019). Attach the assigned distinction as *woman* and this adds a third identity to contend with. For some, this divergence into another category of 'other' is ever so subtle that we are not even aware of it. The Women's Rugby World Cup for example, makes the specific distinction of gender. Recognition for women in rugby is well overdue. Provocatively, the Rugby World Cup title does not state, 'Men's Rugby World Cup' nor has that conversation appeared to have arisen. Perhaps the hierarchy is unperturbed and immune. Although this attention to detail is not intentional, the use of grammar or omission here is one way we make sense of our world and this exemplifies the subtle bias that all *othered peoples* live within our diverse societies. Awareness and research is vital to recognise and intervene the way derogatory language is applied (Singh & Ghai, 2009), and how the ability to be well is severely compromised for a person faced with multiple marginal identities (Hickey, 2008) as seen for our wahine populace.

A new ministry within Aotearoa was established in July 2022. Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People was specifically shaped to bring together the Māori and the disabled communities and aims to gather the voices of all those affected by disabilities (Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People, 2021) perhaps in an effort to be responsive to the needs as expressed at ground level (Birdling, 2004). Minister for Disability Issues, the Honourable Carmel Sepuloni states, "[p]ersons with disabilities must experience meaningful inclusion and participation in all areas of community life, including

education, work, civil society, cultural and sporting events" (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2022). Whether Māori will cast aside their reservations and mistrust of government initiatives to contribute their opinions is yet to be seen. Rehutai expressed her scepticism at the new department,

> ACC clients always have access to equipment resources etc. Whaikaha clients we have to fight for resources. We physically require support (ableism) to access our moana to train and if we don't have the support, we are disconnected to our taiao, which is hugely disabling for Māori.

It is a long road to turnabout societal attitudes that actually disable and hinder effective participation by the impaired population. If a wheelchair user needs entry into a community facility, the problem is not the person's paralysis but with poor consideration by the architects and project managers to consider all its local inhabitants and patrons. Policies and laws can be passed however the learned prejudice and behaviours of the past two centuries will take a tremendous amount of work to alter in every sector, in every household of society.

Tuawahine | Tuawāhine

Conceptualising the title for this rangahau it was important to shift away from the terms that have segregated and oppressed the adaptive community. As our relationship within the adaptive whānau whānui developed, it became apparent that the labels that are used to describe them, end up overshadowing the most important aspect; they are children of Papatūānuku and Ranginui first. Pākehā framing in kupu such as disabled have over time created a negative connotation resulting in social division and separation. Kupu Māori such as hauā and whaikaha have been used to attempt to be culturally inclusive however it still aligns with a colonial paradigm of being lame and striving for strength.

Using tuawahine is an attempt to redefine and reimagine as part of a broader narrative around mana, whakapapa and atua. According to Williams (1971), the kupu tuawahine is a common term used to refer to the heroine of a story. Principal female character

and female idol (Moorfield, 2011) are additional definitions and in old English vernacular it could be interpreted as “my lady” (Tregear, 2001, p. 545). Kōrero from whakapapa too illustrates qualities as the defining feature, not the physical appearance. The tūpuna of Tāwhiao Tūkāroto Matutaera Pōtatau Te Wherowhero, the second Māori king was referred to as a tuawahine. She had sacrificed her pet dogs to provide succour for her people because their health and wellbeing was under threat. This chivalrous deed epitomised the mana of wahine (Turia, 2008) and has become immortalised by King Tāwhiao in the following whakatauākī,

> He tau pai te tau. He tau ora te tau. He tau ngehe te tau. He tau mo te wahine. Rapua he purapura e ora ai te iwi.” The year is good. A year of well being. A year of peace. A year for women. We must seek that which will be of greatest benefit for people (Evans, 2022, p. 188).

The leading lady in the kōrero of Hinemoa and Tutanekai is referred to as a tuawahine. “Whakatau noa iho ia ki te noho. Aano te rangi o te kooauau a Tuu-taanekai me he runa, aano e ueue ana i a tuawahine kia haere atu ki te kare-a-roto o toona ngaakau” (Te Whāriki, n.d., p. 3). This pūrākau is famed throughout Aotearoa. Two lovers, separated by a body of water, wanting to be together but their families did not agree. The puhi tapairu of Tuhourangi, was not to be deterred. Even though all waka would be dragged ashore every night to prevent her from absconding, she dared the cool waters and swam across defiantly. Hinemoa’s choice to follow her heart is an inspiration to her uri whakaheke. It is an example to not always confirm, that it is okay to go against the grain. With a strong will and determination, Hinemoa set her own pathway exemplifying mana wahine (Tira, 2018).

These women’s deeds and resolve are a source of pride, mana and motivation for their people. Similarly, Te Huhuti, the tūpuna whaea of chief Te Hāpuku, also noted as a tuawahine of Ngāti Kahungunu, was resolved to act, as with King Tāwhiao’s tūpuna and Hinemoa, “[n]o konei i kautāhoetia ai e ia taua moana; nō reira kihai ia i tawhitawhi kia whakaaroaro rānei, kia aha rānei; kāo, ko tōna whakaaro i pēnei nā, “Ahakoa nui te

moana, me aha? Engari me whakamātau" (Department of Education, 1961, p. 10). She was determined and did not hesitate to take action.

It is uncertain whether the title tuawahine was bestowed because of those singular acts but the leadership and strength of will, illustrated in these accounts, help to shape the meaning behind the intended use of the term tuawahine in this rangahau. Undoubtedly, these three tuawāhine have traits that are admirable and inspirational as do the participants of this rangahau. They inspire me and every non-adaptive paddler that has competed with or witnessed their races. For some living with an impairment, saying that they are inspirational and exceptional is a conceited notion (Young, 2014), however just as I am in awe of our koro and kui who compete in IronMāori, they challenged me to question what and how I perceive the world to be. Their presence disrupted my assumptions. Tuawāhine as a term of reference under this light, portrays leadership and mana, a far cry from the disabled model.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis has six chapters. Each chapter begins with a quick overview of the metaphor, then details a specific part of a waka ama it refers to, its function whether it be structural, stabilising or strengthening component and how it correlates to that section of the thesis.

Chapter One provides an introduction and overview of the research context. The intention is to highlight the exceptionality of wāhine Māori that challenge the norms. I acknowledge the position I have as a researcher and how I became involved in this kaupapa. This is followed up with a view on the foundation of which the tuawāhine live in from the cultural realm as well as the marginalised and political realms. The chapter ends with an in depth exploration of the term tuawahine and why it fits this kaupapa.

Chapter Two outlines the methodological approach, Participatory Action Research and Kaupapa Māori, that has been used to guide the rangahau. The ethical requirements are discussed and describe the methods used to collect kōrero. This chapter ends with personal ethical considerations as an insider/outsider kairangahau.

Chapter Three begins by explaining the metaphor used in the layout of the rangahau. Of the structural, stabilising and strength components in the making of a waka. The literature view that follows investigates the intersectionality of the kaupapa and acknowledges the challenges faced by wāhine Māori hauā in sports.

Chapter Four provides an insight into the lives of each tuawahine. It begins with a poem written for this rangahau by Hine Karoro. The individual profiles are presented with images in order of the kōrerorero collection.

Chapter Five is an analysis covering three aspects drawn from the kōrerorero emphasising the voices of the tuawāhine: the benefits gained by the tuawāhine by their inclusion in waka ama and adaptive paddling, their aspirations for the future of adaptive paddling, and finally a revelation of self-determination and mana motuhake.

Chapter Six acknowledges the benefits of impaired inclusion in waka ama, the obstacles that are not so apparent in this small research and the need for change. Then concludes with a reflection on the journey that we, the tuawāhine and myself have taken.

CHAPTER TWO

The body needs a sound structure for everything else to attach to and take shape.

The two remaining structural components are the **Katea** (the ribs) and the **Kōhiwi** (the body or hull of the waka). The Katea are evenly spaced along the length of the Takere. They are the various practices that were implemented to undergo a rangahau. These being the methodologies, ethics, and the research practices, all sections required to structure a sound and robust rangahau. The Kōhiwi envelops the spine and the ribs of the waka. Its silhouette is a visual representation of the rangahau and an embodiment of the tuawāhine's potentiality. The following chapter covers the necessary components needed to structure a sound rangahau.

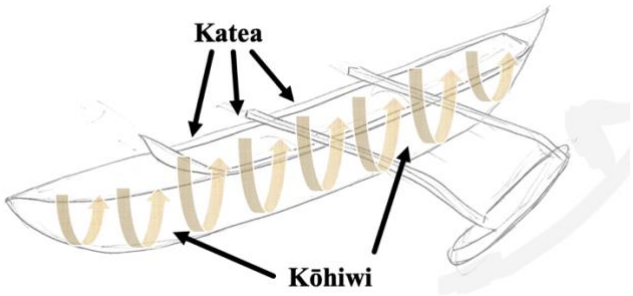

Figure 4: Waka structural components. Source: R Nuku, 2024.

Methodology

Māori, disabled women are without a doubt a marginalised community of Aotearoa's society. Specific methodologies that work with communities in the fringes are Kaupapa Māori research, critical race theory, oral histories and participatory action research (Smith, 2021). While I was attending a MAI ki Te Matau-a-Māui networking opportunity sponsored by Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga for Māori pursuing a post-graduate degree, Participatory Action Research or PAR was pointed out to me as the best methodology for this thesis. Anne Hiha, one of the Mātanga/Academic Mentors, asserted that this was the ideal direction to uphold the voices of my participants as experts of their own experience in a collaborated work. The tuawāhine in this case decide and direct the research in a participating manner as co-researchers, asserting their tino rangatiratanga, and therefore orchestrators of their own destinies (Choi et al., 2022).

> The PAR process of engaging community members in *what is* (the needs, resources, and constraints within their present community) and *what could be* (the community they envision) is considered a consciousness-raising, health-promoting activity in itself and of equal importance to the research outcome (Mayan, 2009, p. 43).

PAR essentially enables community members to have control on the research direction. The mahi is completed with them and therefore they benefit from the knowledge that is produced (Kusumowardoyo et al., 2024).

Kaupapa Māori has an important role alongside the PAR methodology. As a research methodology itself, Kaupapa Māori incorporates Māori traditional beliefs and ethics with contemporary strategies (Henry & Pene, 2001, Stewart, 2021, Curtis, 2016) to indigenise the gathering of and analysis of knowledge. According to internationally recognised and leading scholar in the decolonisation of Indigenous peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Kaupapa Māori is a social project concerned with sites for struggle and domains where Māori are situated in crisis (Smith, 2021) and therefore a political undertaking as well. She further adds that Māori people need, "to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity" (p. 26). Kaupapa Māori research facilitates this by gathering the voices of marginalised groups aligned with cultural principles to ultimately represent their experiences authentically where historically the anthropological or colonial way of seeing and thinking have been the tools previously used. Seven principles offered by Smith (1999) as cited in Pipi et al. (2004) to guide Māori researchers to acknowledge Māori ways of being and perspectives. The seven principles are, i) aroha ki te tangata; have respect for people, ii) kanohi kitea; present yourself ā-tinana, kanohi-ki-te-kanohi, iii) titiro, whakarongo, kōrero; learn with all your being and senses first, then maybe you can speak, iv) manaaki ki te tangata; share and host generously, v) kia tūpato; always be cautious in everything you do, vi) kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata; it is your responsibility to ensure the mana of the people are always intact, and finally vii) kaua e mahaki; be humble in everything you do.

The following are examples to demonstrate some of the Kaupapa Māori principles used in the design of this thesis.

- The Māori participants and their experiences need to be at the centre of research (Smith 2021, Mahuika, 2015). The tuawāhine and their voices form the structure, provide stability and strength to this thesis. They can be heard throughout the rangahau presented here including a chapter dedicated entirely to sense the bigger picture of who they are. The tuawāhine are celebrated and are written with care as experts of their own knowledge.
- The subjects or participants have control of the research (Tomlins-Jahnke, 2005). Aligning with PAR, the tuawāhine have mentored and guided the composition of this mahi with the aim that once completed, this rangahau will be presented to the WANZ board, as the most relevant stake holder, to be made aware of hindering factors for adaptive wahine to develop and provide direction in this area (Pérez et al., 2022).
- The research needs to make a difference, be transformative (Pihama, 2015, Smith, 2021, Curtis, 2016). As far as we are aware, there is no research specifically regarding Māori women with impairments undertaking a competitive sport. It is hoped by the tuawāhine that this may lead to more research in this area and with the support of WANZ, which will lead to changes and advancements at regional and national levels. Although the transformation will not be attained within the research time frame, they have blossomed from the instigation of this rangahau.
- Kaupapa Māori must be informed by mātauranga Māori (Curtis, 2016). The use of a metaphor to describe the construction of this thesis showcases the expertise of our seafaring tūpuna to assemble a craft that enabled them to settle across the pacific. The parallels are uncanny when compared to a well designed rangahau.

The Kaupapa Māori approach also requires culturally safe processes in the form of tikanga to uphold the integrity of the mahi being completed. The notions and practices of tikanga Māori are grounded in mātauranga Māori and can vary from region to region (Mead, 2003). Tikanga concerns correct cultural behaviours or social practices (Henry

& Pene, 2001) in distinctly Māori ways which acts as a safety net for everyone, and everything involved. Social practices and values such as mihi, acknowledging whakapapa and mana, poroporoaki, koha, manaakitanga, aroha, all serve as guidelines for Kaupapa Māori approaches to research, thus serving as correct cultural behaviours for engagement and relationship development with the goal of creating a positive difference for research participants (Smith, 2021).

Therefore, tikanga will vary from kaupapa to kaupapa, each requiring specific practices suitable for the situation. The practices of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and aroha were predominantly used to carry out this research. These were used fluidly to cater for the diversity of the tuawāhine. For example when engaging with them, I ensured to utilise the best amount of reo Māori to cater to the varying levels of ability to exemplify inclusivity. Some are more confident compared to those who are at the beginning of their language journey. Also, prior to asking the first research question at the individual kōrerorero, the first utterances was acknowledging them, their achievements and their whānau, and inquiring of their wellbeing. This natural yet deliberate act places tikanga at the forefront of the mahi and sets the tone of the kōrerorero.

As a researcher for this kaupapa and an insider/outsider there were many implications for me to consider. For one, I needed to be aware of the challenges I would encounter, and the community needed to understand the limitations of the rangahau (Smith, 2021). The limitations became apparent when the whānau wanted to address many areas and include the wider whānau. As each kōrerorero progressed, the participants understood that it would take time to achieve all their aspirations which will go beyond the timeframe of this first research, but those desired actions exposed by the rangahau will be followed through as a commitment to each other as an adaptive whānau.

Ethical Research Requirements

Ethical requirements are an important part of the rangahau. It, like tikanga, holds to account the people in power to ensure conditions and safe behaviours are undertaken. This is for the safety of the tuawāhine, the kairangahau and the university institution,

and to maintain the integrity of the kaupapa. Ethical approval was sought through the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) and accepted.

Having a strong relationship with the adaptive whānau whānui, I had informed them of my intended master's research and the topic before I commenced full time study. Every response was encouraging, and support was offered from the men as well. Once approval was given by the MUHEC, personal communication was made with the five wāhine, followed by an official invite via email enclosing an Information Sheet (IS) detailing the kaupapa and the rights of all persons involved. There were several ways the rights of the tuawāhine were respected. At any time during the research, the tuawahine could withdraw from the rangahau, if they wished, they could have a support person with them during the kōrerorero and they also had the right to ask questions at any time.

Methods

Initially my own musing and burning desire for this rangahau was to find out where our wāhine Māori with impairments were and why they were not at waka ama where our culture, Māori is in the dominant position. There were the same handful of wāhine in attendance at the national events, but there were no new faces on the circuit. It was through a journal and reflection processes that my initial research question of, 'What is holding back wahine Māori with impairments from participating in waka ama', I realised my core desire of bringing this rangahau to the fore. To celebrate those astounding wāhine and to show them and the rest of Aotearoa, how exceptional they are.

Locating literature to support or bring light to this complex and refined topic was difficult at the beginning. With scarce success searching on my own, I was able to enlist the help of Ria Waikerepuru, Kaiwhakarato Rārongo Rangahau Māori for Massey University. Key words such as 'waka ama', 'outrigger', 'paddling', 'disabled', 'wahine', 'women', 'Māori', 'hauā' and their varying suffix were employed to search through the academic engines with results of less than ten sources to draw upon. A defining moment was coming across the works of Huhana Hickey and picking up the book

Wahine Toa; Women of Māori Myth by Kahukiwa and Grace (1984). Hickey, an advocate and scholar who has lent her experiences as an Indigenous disabled wahine living under the colonised thumb highlighting the intersectionality of those identities and the paradigm and those conflicting world views. Her seminal writing provided a contemporary view of a wahine Māori with an impairment and perhaps the only published perspective of its kind at the time of this rangahau. Wahine Toa demonstrated the gifts shared by and power of Māori whaea tūpuna. As the thesis statement blossomed, the search diverted down this mātauranga Māori and ancestral knowledge pathway seeking a strength based perspective exemplifying the super powers that mothers and wahine seem to hold, rather than centring on a physical impairment that is not central to their being, or a member of a whānau and a community.

Knowing the five active adaptive Māori women, I utilised my already established relationships to engage in recruiting them for this rangahau. The justification in selecting these five kaihoe was because our pre-established relationships would make the tuawāhine feel more at ease to share their narrative. I could not approach some and not others because at every gathering that I have attended, the adaptive whānau go and do together. Not including one or some of them all was not considered by this researcher. Furthermore those five voices are from five distinct impairments, circumstances, each at differing stages of their lives and child rearing. The opportunity to capture a rich range of qualitative kōrero was exponential.

After proposing the rangahau to the wāhine and allayed any apprehension regarding the process of the mahi an official invite was emailed out. Each wahine received an IS outlining the rangahau, the process, the management of data, and their rights. If they chose to accept the invitation to be interviewed their rights were listed within that document. It explained their right to be respected and that they were under no obligation or coercion. When the individual agreed to participate in the rangahau, a Consent Form (CF) was signed by them and returned to myself.

As detailed in the IS, two pathways would be used to gather information and provide greater opportunities for each tuawahine to have a voice, provide direction and give feedback: ā) an individual kōrerorero, and ē) a collective wānanga. The intention for individual kōrerorero was to allow each wahine to not be pressured by time, to be the centre of attention, and to share till their hearts content. However, the purpose of the collective method was twofold. One was to allow the tuawāhine to contribute their perspectives and insights and to wānanga their whakaaro with those who truly understand and empathise with them. The other was to provide support and courage in each other's company, and perhaps speak up for one another too. In my experience many, Māori women in particular, find it difficult to sing their own praises, this could be a consequence of not wanting to be seen as a kūmara, however the people who care for you have no such qualms and readily offer and identify the skills and traits that one may feel too uncomfortable to express.

Individual Kōrerorero

Interviews were planned with two open-ended questions. The first leading pātai, 'how did your waka ama journey begin and what keeps you coming back', was to allow a free flow kōrero where the participant would divulge their experiences over their time in waka ama. At this point the purpose of the rangahau would be obtained; their lived experiences would be articulated by their own words and released into the world. The second pātai, 'who or what inspires you' was an attempt to capture any unique or ancestral mātauranga that is used by the tuawāhine or their whānau. If the kupu 'culture', 'growth' or 'mātauranga' arose, the kairangahau was to follow through that line of thought. By limiting to two questions, the kōrerorero would remain informal and natural as though telling their story to a friend. The power would remain with the participant and not the kairangahau forcing the conversation to take a certain path or following a list to draw out specific expected outcomes. By limiting the questions to two, it would confine the interview data to a manageable quantity especially considering there were five sources. There was never any concern that there would not be enough knowledge gained by these tuawāhine; they are all natural storytellers.

The design of the kōrerorero were to be kanohi-ki-te-kanohi however due to the after effects of Cyclone Gabrielle (road closures, the destruction of our kāinga and amenities) our life was turned upside down and only one was completed in person. Thus, three of the individual interviews was fulfilled via Zoom, one was via Messenger Video, and the one kanohi-ki-te-kanohi was luckily enough to be completed in Samoa at the 2023 World Long Distance Waka Ama Championships. The recordings were then transcribed through Microsoft 365. After feedback and reflection on the first returned transcript, a version absent of fillers and repeated words was sent back to the tuawāhine within two weeks for corrections and validation. A follow up email or message two weeks after was sent to gently nudge the wāhine to check and return.

The first individual kōrerorero with Hine Karoro helped to shape the succeeding discussions. Once her transcription was ready, she requested that it be read to her and a time was organised to coincide with less interruptions and distractions. Although the exercise took nearly an hour, reading the transcript to Hine Karoro was beneficial and rewarding for us both. She was able to immediately identify the errors which were corrected instantaneously and it was obvious when she exclaimed, “I don’t sound dumb!” (personal communication, June 19, 2023) that omitting redundant kupu was necessary for that exercise. This caused me to reflect on the succeeding kōrerorero and process. It made me appreciate how natural it is to stumble over words especially if you are the focus of discussion, and in recalling those utterances do not uplift or advance the building of our self-worth. The rangahau in its entirety needed to be an empowering exercise, not disheartening. From here the strategy to make an edited version was devised for the succeeding transcripts. It was also a stark reminder that options such as offering to read to a participant who is mostly blind, rather than leave it to their own systems should always be proffered, a major failing on my part.

<u>Collective Wānanga</u>

We created a chat to discuss options of bringing everyone together at one venue to share and wānanga about the rangahau, and to reflect on the themes that arose from the individual kōrerorero. From that initial wānanga, the rōpū would decide where to go from there. However, due to the long aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle and the busy

lives led by our membership, we used the chat as the main platform instead. The platform was used to share the progress of the written rangahau, gather information, make decisions for this kaupapa, and other adaptive matters. For instance, one of the tuawahine asked if our rōpū could be open to all wāhine adaptive paddlers. It was obvious by the response that the tuawāhine valued the wider whānau of wahine and the perspective the rangahau was highlighting. Also, as a cultural value, everyone should be lifted together and they did not feel right to take this pathway without all of the wahine within the adaptive whānau. The offer was extended to include the non-Māori voices in the chat. The chat continued is still in use and will continue to be utilised with the inclusion of all wāhine from the adaptive whānau.

As the kairangahau, I acknowledge that my own personal biases and relationships with these tuawāhine may influence this rangahau regardless of my attempts to mitigate any issues. However, I argue that it is a strength not a limitation. I have been fortunate to have shared some of their lived experiences alongside them and therefore this thesis is an expression of the aroha I hold for these wāhine, or expressed by Van Manen (2016), as a "sense of the pedagogic good" (p. 6). This thesis will reflect my concerns and interests in this kaupapa and can play a role in how the theories were generated and constructed during the interpretive process (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). My role here has been to present their experiences and their thoughts as a team member in a waka ama with them, with the same collective goal; get to the finish line together.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis, also known as inductive content analysis, is used for qualitative research when the aim of the research is to understand the experiences of others, and when there is little or no existing research (Vears & Gillam, 2022). Inductive approaches to qualitative analysis aims to produce an understanding of meaning from a set of data by closely reading the text rather than searching with predetermined codes of meaning. Codes arise or are developed during the process and are refined and re-coded to create content categories. A typical procedure of an inductive analysis of qualitative data has the following five phases: 1) preparation of data, 2) close reading of data by researcher to become familiar with text, 3) identify and design categories or themes, 4) overlapping

of categories is typical of qualitative data, 5) continue to revise and refine (Thomas, 2006).

Analysis began once all kōrerorero were completed to firstly preserve the discussions free from influence, and secondly to avoid predetermining the coding. This practice remained in line with the objective of representing the voices of these tuawāhine authentically. Commonalities as they occurred were highlighted and because of this method, I needed to return frequently to catalogue previous transcriptions. Although the backtracking would prolong the process, my ability to recall the dialogue of each wahine was effortless and I was able to see where their voices could be inserted during the composition of this mahi.

The commonalities produced eight main themes with many of them overlapping. For example all of the tuawāhine spoke of the allurement of whanaungatanga in waka ama, the practice of manaakitanga being enacted, and the importance of whānau. These concepts are seated in te ao Māori and for some of the tuawāhine, tikanga within their own whakapapa units. In many instances, the concepts may all be felt or visible in one act. Unable to present all their experiences, three concepts were selected that covered a range of the commonalities and best serviced the objective of this thesis as per my supervisor's advice and are expanded in chapter five.

Personal Ethical Considerations

At the time of the kōrerorero, my position as the potential coach for the 2024 World Sprints in Hilo, was a challenge to counter. Specific language and communication cues were deliberately employed to shift the power position to the wahine. During the online kōrerorero, my entire face filled the camera and never deferred from it for the duration of our conversation, I sat lower than the tuawahine at the kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) kōrerorero, and I limited my own intervention where possible. In the wānanga group chat, decisions were left to the participants, and I would follow through with requests in the effort to place myself in the teina position. At the rare moments when there was indecision, I would propose options to help move things forward.

These little subtle cues were natural because of the genuine interest in the kaupapa of the rangahau and wanting to get it done right.

The positive of being an insider/outsider is that the participants gave freely their experiences. Not only advice was offered for future research areas but also solutions for the future of adaptive paddling. This intimacy also allowed me to ask burning questions early in the process of the individual interviews. The responses were astounding and insightful. This served as a reminder that although I may feel more of an insider, I am an outsider. I can empathise with the adaptive members and their whānau, but my perspective is limited and that was why the answers were beyond my vision. This made me more open-minded and ready to learn more amazing whakaaro and ideas with the second half of the interviews.

The challenge at a personal level was to be aware of my own bias and hopes and ensure it did not interfere or blind the mahi. Two purposeful strategies were employed here; having a kaumātua who is also impaired to mentor and guide me through the interview and writing processes, and a reflection journal to question and review the journey. These two rautaki began four months prior to the first interview.

Throughout this report quotes from the kōrerorero are used and are accompanied by the name agreed upon by the tuawahine. For ease, the narrations have been polished for readability. Fillers, repeated single words and a quick change in subject or direction of thought, have been omitted to allow for flow.

CHAPTER THREE

Stabilisers enable a waka to traverse vast oceans and conquer greater challenges

An **Ama** or outrigger is a stabilising component that requires two mechanisms to link it to the waka; **Aukaha** (the rigging or lashing), and **Kiato** (the arms). This configuration creates a double-hulled effect enabling the waka to traverse longer distances and withstand the variable conditions typical of larger bodies of water. The Ama lies parallel with the Kōhiwi (hull) and is lashed to two Kiato. The Kiato stretches away from the Kōhiwi like two arms. They are the appendages that link the Kōhiwi to the Ama and are fixed by the Auhaka to the Taumanu. In this chapter we begin by exploring the limited contemporary knowledge available then turn to the Ama which represents the Māori Worldview. It provides balance to the tuawāhine with ancestral knowledge through Whakapapa and Mātauranga in the form of pūrākau. Whakapapa, represented by the Aukaha, is a "basis for the organization of knowledge" (Barlow, 1991, p. 173) is tightly bound to Mātauranga, represented by the Kiato, and together they inform our beliefs. Following the pūrākau wider topics under the umbrella of waka ama, wahine in sport and disabilities are explored.

Figure 5: Waka stabilising components. Source: R Nuku, 2015.

Literature Review

The New Zealand government are yet to gain a full picture of the disability sector in Aotearoa over time however in the government report measuring inequality for disabled New Zealanders, it concluded that the gap is significant across a range of aspects (Statistics New Zealand, 2020). Although the report was only an overview, it is expected to gain a more comprehensive understanding with the 2023 survey. However from the Waitangi Tribunal report of quantitative data from surveys conducted in 1996, 2001, 2006 & 2013 made it evident that disabled Māori continue to express an overrepresentation in comparison to disabled non-Māori and the percentage of disabled Māori women against disabled non-Māori women (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019).

To be expected, literature is sparce in the realm of Indigenous sports and impaired Indigenous women, however interest in the field of disabilities has developed in recent years. In 2001-2005 there were only 20 countries who contributed to research in adapted sports whereas in the 5 years up to 2020, 62 countries had devoted research to this kaupapa (Liu et al., 2022), a notable change.

A recent study has been conducted on para women of Saudi Arabia. Similarities can be drawn with the qualitative research by Alhumaid et al. (2024) where they studied the benefits of para sport as a potential means of empowerment and social inclusion. They claim that the nature of para sports not only redefines athleticism, a sense of empowerment is developed as well by the athletes and spectators alike. They too concur, and is supported in a study of adaptive snowsports by Mannella et al, (2023), that collaborative efforts with networks and from governments are necessary to counter the challenges women still face in accessing sports and creating inclusive spaces. Inclusion alone by the sporting body is not enough.

Likewise, in a study by Lumsdaine & Lord (2023) focussed on the voices of young sports women with disabilities. They make a plea for the expansion of narratives by young sports women with disabilities to further understand the complexities of their participation in sport and its sporting space. Although the tuawāhine in this rangahau are no longer rangatahi, their kōrero provides insights into their convoluted mature

lives with responsibilities and their drive to be active while attesting to the benefits of participating in a waka ama.

The only thing missing with those studies is the female Indigenous voices. Their narratives alongside cultural perspectives is the next goal on the horizon. Indigenous worldviews must be at the forefront of future research to shed light and address the disparities of Indigenous people otherwise the inequalities and marginalisation will only perpetuate (Hickey, 2008). Te Ao Māori perspectives are essential to bring insight into this complex topic of wahine Māori with impairments. Moana Jackson states that in order to make sense of what is happening to us as Māori, then we must turn to our ancestral knowledge (Kaupapa Rangahau, 2013). One of the foregoing methods of preserving prior thought or ancestral knowledge is pūrākau. Pūrākau, an avenue for transmitting knowledge (Tikao 2009), reflected the worldviews and wisdom of our tūpuna (Lee, 2005) and was the standard in which Indigenous people are guided and make sense of everyday lives (Routledge, 2023).

Pūrākau is one method used to pass on pertinent understandings about how one may live and think about the world (Pomare & Cowan, 1987). Three kōrero have been selected to highlight that challenges and impairments can be found in kōrero tuku iho. But that is not our direct correlation to these taonga. Every kōrero has knowledge to impart, we only need to learn them and take comfort that therein lies guidance and solutions to navigate our existence harmoniously in the ever developing and changing world.

Pūrākau

Tāwhirimātea

Tāwhirimātea was one of the children that did not agree to the separation of their parents, Papatūānuku and Ranginui. But it was inevitable. The upheaval experienced by the separation led to fighting amongst some of the children that was unrivalled. Not everyone wanted the same goals. Once the deed was done, Tāwhirimātea unleashed his powers upon the earth to express his anger and agony at the suffering they had

caused his parents (Reed, 2021). Hurricanes and tempests tore across the planet. So distraught was he that he tore out his eyes and threw them into the heavens which is symbolised in the Matariki constellation. Still today he reminds us of the sacrifice that was made so that we may live in te ao mārama.

Tapiata (2023) credits Tāwhirimātea for sending a hurricane her way. Every aspect in her life she felt as though she was succeeding. But it came to an abrupt halt. Hana thought she was being blown off track but Tāwhirimātea was setting her in another course. At first she thought it was too tough but over time she realised it was the right destination. Although Tāwhirimātea is blind, he sees the vision, he sees the bigger picture. The atua of wind was able to show Hana that although times may appear difficult, there is a lot to learn and to be gained through that hardship similar to his own.

Rakataura

Tom Roa, associate professor at Waikato University recalls a kōrero passed down to him through his whakapapa (Waikato Tainui, 2019) about the mutual and respectful relationship between captain of the Tainui waka, Hoturoa and his senior navigator, Rakataura. These two tohunga were highly skilled and are known to have contested each other consistently. They decided that they would have a race to settle one of these disagreements. Departing from Karangahape Road in Tāmaki-makaurau, to the destination Whakaotirangi, Hoturoa's wife, prophesied prior to Tainui waka's departure for Aotearoa. Hoturoa departed by sea and Rakataura or Hape departed on foot. In the end Hoturoa conceded his defeat as he saw the imprints of Hape's stride upon the land — 'hape' also meaning pigeon foot — as evidence of his earlier arrival by stating, "Koia kei te hape nei, kua tae mai ki konei" (Jones & Biggs, 2009, p. 49).

No concession was made for Hape to take by sea. It would have been an easier means to travel for someone bandy-legged to travel by water. Hape's skill as a navigator and intellect to taupatupatu with Hoturoa is what identified him. His physical prowess was not being questioned. He was seen as an equal.

Hine-ahu-one

Numerous facets were considered into the making and shaping of Hine-ahu-one, the vessel to hold the mana of the whare tangata (Sharman, 2019) which without, humanity would be lost (Pere, 1994).

> So Tane went to Kurawaka, the pubic area of Papatuanuku, and formed a new shape for me from her clay, being assisted in this by the Great Being and the many godly beings of the high heavens, who gifted or shaped the different parts of me (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984, p. 28).

A being that could grow a whenua as an intergenerational reminder of our connection with Papatūānuku, and that land and women are of parallel importance, 'he wahine, he whenua, e ngaro ai te tangata.' It was no small feat. An element so complicated that we, all wāhine, are still learning. In the chapter Impaired and Disabled, Hargreaves (2000) argues that the world of an impaired wahine is just as multi-varied and complicated too. For example, women tend to have emotional and psychological afflictions, have low self-esteem and a personal fear of body display because identity and self are powerfully tied with the body. In relation to physical activity, sports are viewed as a masculine avenue where men can reclaim their sense of maleness whereas it is not the same for women. Hargreaves asserts that this fear is even greater for disabled women.

There are an abundance of pūrākau that make reference to trauma, to challenges or represent mental stimulation that these three kōrero have briefly shown. However these lead to a greater understanding of one another as tangata whenua, and greater opportunities to transform into wiser, stronger human beings (Tamati, 2020) intellectually and spiritually. These then benefit the wider whānau, hapū and ultimate the iwi. E kore te tangata e pakari i a i te wai marino; a person cannot grow or develop in calm waters.

Ngā Mahi a Rēhia

Severinsen & Reweti (2021) completed a study of a waka ama club in Clive, Hastings to illustrate the connection between the paddlers and their environment. It was evident by the narratives that the members had developed a relationship with their awa and the life that it supports. This was not present prior to their participation in waka ama. The interviewees expressed their enjoyment for the sport, but it was not just for the activity itself. The respect they had developed was also evident in the interviews taken by Liu (2021). Like Severinsen & Reweti, the paddlers too would actively pursue and maintain mutual relations with Hinemoana and Tangaroa. Cultural practices such as karakia and rāhui denoted the spiritual connection and regard the paddlers had for their local waterways.

Having paddled for 25 years I can attest to the awareness that we now have of our environment. When a person frequents a site so often, it becomes your second home and that is how we feel about our local moana. We have learned that when the jellyfish arrive it is an indicator that the water temperature has risen, Hineraumati is on her way! And because of this connection to and with the moana, we act upon our responsibilities as kaitiaki of reciprocity, care for the taiao and it will continue to care for you. For these two clubs, waka ama has become the instrument for wellness through relationship development and a conduit to connect people with atua Māori.

Waka ama is without a doubt a past-time that sits within a Māori worldview. Karakia is recited to begin and close the event, the haukāinga are acknowledged, all ages are in attendance; mokopuna through to kaumātua, almost as though you were at a marae. Other indicators also add to the feast of te ao Māori; kai is being prepared and served, whānau in hi-viz are vehicle stacking, Māori insignia are proudly worn, and the ambiance is abuzz with warm and affectionate greetings as though a whānau reunion. Although the aim is to pit skills against each other, the racing is secondary to the whanaungatanga and manaakitanga one experiences at the events. Wikaire & Newman (2013) however warn waka ama enthusiasts to be aware that the more popular a sport becomes, the more vulnerable the cultural foundations are to modernity as seen with surfing. They have composed an insightful document in which Waka Ama New

Zealand, the national governing body, would do well to consider. Although the values of this past time are unpinned by history and traditions, the tangible commodities could alienate communities, in particular, Māori. Curiously, at club or grassroots level the attitudes and experiences may differ.

Advancements in technology are inevitable, however some solutions have long been established in waka to retain elements of its cultural foundation. In Hawaii dedicated events are held where modern or fibreglass canoes are not permitted. Only canoes made from koa wood are permitted to be competed on. Koa canoes have deep spiritual connections to the Hawaiian people (Wilkinson & Elevitch, 2003) and have been able to retain their mana through this policy. Similarly, in Tahiti rudderless paddling is celebrated and viewed with more prestige than those waka with a rudder mechanism. We assume this is to showcase one's mastery of 'being one' with Ta'aroa and to retain the connection with their atua.

The solutions in the examples above demonstrate how waka ama has been able to retain the connection to its roots and mauri in conjunction with its growth in popularity as seen in the decade prior to the Covid-19 lockdowns. According to the statistics on the WANZ website, national affiliation numbers had increased by 55% of which 54% of those affiliations were wahine (Waka Ama Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.). With the number of women and girls playing sports gradually increasing (Eime et al. 2021) research into this field is being explored. Thorpe et al. (2011) analysed the sporting experiences of three scholastic women, from three separate sporting codes to understand feminine theory and what that tells them about women's physical or sporting experiences in the 21st century. Using Bourdieu's feminist theories, they challenged themselves to ask critical and profound questions about their sporting experiences within their respective pastimes of basketball, snowboarding and waka ama. The questions were confronting and exposed some poor behaviours or biases.

Every time I have travelled away with a women's team, there is always some point where a discussion has touched a core. Truths are admitted or confessed which has made us reflect on our own lives and situations. There is a power of being with other

women; to voice our fears without being judged and with understanding. Our lives are all extremely complicated and by laying bare our fears, stresses, or anxieties, we were able to gain knowledge and understanding of one another and to also heal each other.

Although disabled people suffer from the severest of hardships it is the women and children, black and elderly women who are the most discriminated against (Hickey, 2008, Hargreaves, 2000). Rehutai explains,

> … are constantly having to intersect and manage multiple forms of oppression and inequity. One is that we are Maori wahine, are in-between the spaces of colonisation, reclaiming, reframing and re-energizing who we are. We are also in the space of ableism, whereby our bodies are scrutinised and determined by others to see if we are "disabled enough" (personal communication, December 13, 2023).

The tensions caused by the multiple disparities faced by Indigenous Māori women, “ensure ongoing inequities and the need for continued activism” (Stace & Sullivan, 2020, p. 20). Locating literature for this rangahau was extremely difficult and even though it is estimated that an astonishing one in three Māori have some form of impairment, knowledge gaps still exist (Hickey & Wilson, 2017, Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). This may be due to the small number of Māori entering into the state institutions where data can be gathered.

Solutions lie within kōrero tuku iho and mātauranga Māori. Tāwhirimātea and Rakataura are famed for their deeds, not for what is different about them. A multitude of atua were required to create Hineahuone and it is no wonder the lives of wahine are complicated. Waka ama has opened social opportunities that are ideal for wahine with impairments (Hargreaves, 2000, Statistics New Zealand, 2015) and it has also opened cultural and relational opportunities in an environment that reinforces whakapapa which is central to our identity (Wikaire & Newman, 2013) and wellbeing. All these elements make an ideal situation to find balance and equilibrium; through courage, comfort, and centring.

CHAPTER FOUR

A waka needs kaihoe to navigate the oceans, the kaihoe are at the heart to the waka

The **Paemanu** or seats is one of the strength features of a waka ama. There are three compartments in the waka with two Paemanu in each sector that provide additional support to the Kōhiwi. The Paemanu also serves as a perch to enable kaihoe to propel the waka to a desired direction. Each Paemanu is represented by the five tuawāhine and the kairangahau (see Chapter Six). Collectively we are paddling towards the same goal and are on this journey together. The seats all have their own roles, contributing their voices and drawing on their experiences and expertise to support one another for the journey ahead. Each seat feels and senses the movement differently bringing together various perspectives and knowledge. This chapter is devoted to the lives and voices of the tuawāhine that paddle this waka to its destination.

Figure 6: Six paemanu for six kaihoe. Source: R Nuku, 2024.

Through waka I found my whakapapa. Bloodlines we once thought were lost.
Through paddling the depths of the ocean. I learnt in depth about who I was.
In battling the turning of tides. And navigating the onset of storms.
I learnt to handle myself. And to take each day as it dawns.

I'll never forget how my coach once said. "Gurl you could really be great, but you've got to get out of the pond. Let me take you out past the wave break."
And I replied with a nervous shake "No no, the sea's not for me." "Come on babe" she would say. As she inched me to the edge.

"No, not today Whaea dear, I'm still just way too scared." And she'd safely turn us back and take me inland instead.
And finally, there was the day I was led out to sea by a ray.
As I remembered the pūrākau of Pania. The whai took me out her way.
So beautiful it was. I was caught watching its wings.
And Matua Val just kept on paddling past the buoys and the harbourside things.
And as the ray swum away, I looked up to a brand-new day.
We had paddled out way past my safe place and we sat bobbing in the ocean's waves.
Matua Val started laughing. And I had a good laugh too.
When Hinemoana and Tangaroa calls, what are you to do?
The sea creatures that once terrified me. Had become my strongest ally.
My kaitiaki deep sea friends. Paddle with me always, I do not lie.
I've never felt alone again. I feel them under my waka.
And I couldn't feel any safer. For we connect through whakapapa.

So, waka gave me many things. It gave me whanau in other corners of the earth.
It gave me a life that I felt like living. Overcoming all the things my sight loss had taken, including my worth.
In the waka I wasn't just blind. I was enhanced with understanding the tides.
I was able to trust myself again, and love all of my thoughts inside.
My other senses were treated as gifts. I can feel it when our waka lifts.
It gave me back my love of sports. That I'd missed since I was a kid.
It gave me pūrākau, karakia, taonga pūoro too. A sense of belonging in the world around me.
A big Aotearoa family. And kōrero of all things te ao Māori.
A whole ocean of strong kaitiaki. And an understanding of who I might actually be.
So many wonderful things I can't quite put into writing but makes sense to me.
Waka gave me what I had once lost. I could again see a future in sports.

And the people that held me close and actually give a toss. Saw me as talent not just blind sight loss.
I have struggled many times, I cannot reimburse.
My waka whānau who have taught me. Helped me cope when my days are diverse.
And I'll never forget my ray. That took me out to sea that day.
I'm grateful for the gift's waka gave; healing, more than our disabilities could take.
Hine Karoro

Hine Karoro

Figure 7: Hine Karoro racing blind-folded. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2018.

If being brave means to be 'ready to face and endure danger or pain', then Manawatū born Hine Karoro is the epitome of this definition. Moving to the opposite side of the motu, away from whānau and whakapapa, distancing herself from an abusive past, to start afresh with her three then young exuberant boys Te Wairua, Te Aorangi and Te Inurangi, is nothing less than heroic. Now add being officially blind to this cocktail, let it sink in for a bit, then you may gain an even bigger appreciation of her bravery and exceptionality.

Hine Karoro was first introduced to our adaptive paddling squad via a whānau who worked with her at the Napier City Council. There she was, this beautiful, energetic young wahine, enthusiastic to learn a new skill and open to new experiences. At that time, Hine Karoro was working in advocacy positions that focussed on uplifting young women, new mothers, and wahine with disabilities. Self-defence for women, education for young mothers including breast feeding, and skills for women and girls with disabilities were just some of her favourite programmes that she delivered. Hine Karoro explains some of the complexities for wahine in her field. “Your confidence, everything like that, is such a risk area. Your ability to participate in healthy things becomes so much lower because you’re poor and you’re traumatised, and you’re disabled. So, everything becomes super hard.” All these areas mirrored the experiences Hine Karoro personally faced. Who better than to provide support and education, than someone who truly understands your concerns and fears.

As Hine Karoro’s relationship grew with the adaptive whānau, so too did her confidence in us to be a part of her life, and through this, she was able to regain confidence in herself. With the help of our kaumātua, Papa Val, Hine Karoro soon blossomed into the athlete she always wanted to be, and had gained a connection with the whenua, the awa, and the moana that she wished had earlier in her life. The pūrākau and karakia that she has gathered from around the motu during her waka ama journeys, helped to keep her grounded and connected to te ao Māori. They appear whenever she needs inspiration or to uplift her wairua. They would make her okay.

Figure 8: Nickylee (left) with Hine Karoro. Source: Nickylee, 2017.

Hine Karoro has picked up her advocacy hat again. She was the mastermind behind the goal to create a booklet for grassroots waka ama clubs to guide them when they are supporting adaptive paddlers, with a special focus on wahine. Hine Karoro, like the rest of the tuawāhine would love to have more wahine join their waka, to learn and love being connected to atua Māori and to their whakapapa as they do.

> Waka is so adaptable. You can put people in and we're not any different. You're in the waka and people don't see you as disabled. So, for me that was super healing. [Waka] gives me a place, a connection. When I'm paddling, I always feel tūpuna there. It's like a real connection to them.

Jo

Figure 9: Jo competing at World Champs in Australia. Source: PaddlePics by MGL Photography, 2019.

Johanne Beverland is of Ngāti Waewae descent from the furthest hapū of Tūwharetoa. Amongst other accolades she's a huge advocate for disabilities being a board member on the CCS disability and a Peer Support leader for the New Zealand Spinal Trust. Jo is the mama-bear of the adaptive whānau. She is larger than life; can speak a little German, is regarded as a Goddess in Tahiti, would rather drown trying than sit back, and nearly broke her father's heart. What stands out the most, is Jo's fierce love she has for her whānau and her huge smile that hides the competitive beast inside.

It was her injury that introduced Jo to adaptive paddling. Although she had dabbled in waka ama in her younger years, it was used as cross-training for her competitive dragon boating endeavours. In 2013 while living in Australia she tore her right calf muscle during a netball match. Reacting to the warfarin prescribed to manage a clot, she bled throughout her spinal cord, where it severed the nerves. She was paralyzed from the mid-thoracic down and was told she would never walk again. Fortunate to be fit and determined she recovered very quick during the eight months spent in the Brisbane spinal unit. She recalls the first 3-4 months of being bedridden and needing help with everything. “Pretty depressing when you've been such an active person most of your life, and then all of a sudden that's taken from you. The hurt is more mental than the physical because I didn't accept that I was paralysed.”

During this time whānau became a huge support for her. Jo comes from a large extended whānau who she is super proud of. While recovering in hospital battling with the dramatic change in circumstance, they were pillars of strength. One particular visit from her cousin Dave, was to become significant on Jo’s outlook for her future. Dave encourages her to obtain a day pass and offers to take her to watch the Outrigger champs in Mooloolaba. Wheeling around the event, the Australian adaptive coach spied and approached Jo. Here is where Jo picks up the encounter that was to turn around her world.

> She came up to me and asked if I’d paddled before. I told her I’d never be able to paddle again. She said, ‘What? Well come with me.’ She took me down to the water then I saw all these people and wheelchairs and amputees. There were heaps of them. I was just looking at these people in amazement. I said to my cousin, ‘Get me in that boat!’ Oh God. You could not take the smile off my face. I was so happy. I was where I knew I should have been. That year I actually got selected to paddle for Australia as part of the adaptive crew that went to Rio. However, I was still in hospital, so they wouldn't give me clearance. They said my health was too fragile to go to a foreign country, it was a huge risk. And my father was happy because he didn't want me to wear the green and yellow. He said he'll never talk to me again if I paddle for Australia.

Lucky for dad and the Aotearoa Adaptive team, Jo was ready and raring to compete at the World Sprint Championships in 2016 under the black and white and she has contributed at every world event since. Although her largest medal haul of 5 was attained at the World Sprint Champs in London 2022, one of her most significant contributions to adaptive paddling nationally and internationally was in Tahiti 2017 at the inaugural World Long-Distance champs. Just prior to the event, the conditions were forecasted to be difficult and the race organisers consulted with the adaptive paddlers to re-confirm the race distance. Jo knowing that she was going to be challenged was even more determined to continue even though her race was upgraded to exhibition because she would be the only woman intending to compete under those punishing conditions. Punishing was an understatement. Jo was to fall out of her waka three times but refused to withdraw. With a safety-crew following her all the way, she was able to complete the gruelling 18 kilometre distance, paving the way for all future adaptive female paddlers world-wide.

> I didn't really care where I came. [I] had to prove to myself that I could do it, and two; I had to prove to other people that it could be done by somebody with a disability. So yeah, I was really stoked. And then [CEO of Waka Ama New Zealand] I think she was quite happy because, especially someone from New Zealand para and being the first woman [to do it]. Yeah, she was really stoked. The response I got from the local people; they made me feel like a real God.

Figure 10: Adaptive racing during the early stages. Jo (far left). Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2016.

Advocating for Māori with disabilities is one of Jo's passions. She accomplishes this not only by representing wāhine on a world stage, but also with her professional involvements. She uses her understanding of the broader or unseen influences on disabilities particularly from whānau Māori perspectives who are trying to navigate a hegemonic system. Jo's wisdom is poignant and vital with a perspective requiring further thought and discussion.

> But my goal has always been to support Māori, because I know how hard it can be and the relationships we have with our whānau. But it's not just for the person with the disability, it's also for the family members, because they are also going through their [the whānau members] injury. A majority of them just don't know what to do, and often it's the questions not asked because they're frightened. There's a fear of hurting their family member. I've also used my sport as a way to connect with people with disabilities. Even though our stories might be different, we share a lot of the same concerns. And a lot of it is pure fear around the unknown. Because we put an expectation on ourselves to be the person that we used to be and not the person that we are now and learning how to get on with the life as we are now.

With Jo's expertise and perspectives, the future of disabilities within Aotearoa has promise. There is still a lot to learn and Jo acknowledges this when we begin our kōrerorero. She identified the importance of gathering information and data to support progress for all people living with disabilities. This is so Aotearoa can truly become an inclusive nation by enabling equitable opportunities for everyone to get in a waka. The aim may be to line up against your hoariri or merely to *feel* the embrace of Hinemoana and Tangaroa.

> Being on the water and in a waka is my happy place. It gives me hope, peace and determination for what I do. I can sit in a waka in the middle of the ocean and all my worries, fears and sometimes stress just disappear...

Mel

Figure 11: TPOTI Regional Adaptive Team. Mel (third from left). Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2019.

There is a saying, if you want something done, ask a busy person. Well, this is Mel Rika. If she's not training, she's managing. If it's not fundraising for sports, it's fundraising for the kura. This māmā is one of those parents that you can guarantee will support all kaupapa with open arms with all-out effort. Her home too has the never-a-dull-moment, everyone-is-welcome communal sense. The night we chatted she had to move into the tari so that we could have a quiet space to kōrero. They had manuhiri staying over for a few days and a precious 8-week-old baby that was waiting for cuddles with her aunty. I am super grateful that Mel was able to give some of her precious time to share her story, her experience in waka ama, and her wisdom.

Prior to her accident Mel was a competitive hockey player and competed in several mountain biking events across the motu. However, she talks fondly of merely being in nature, of running or biking with her kurī, identifying herself as a 'forest baby'. It was not until she set her sights on triathlons that forced her to push outside of the comfort of Tāne-māhuta.

> I had a real bad experience when I was 10, I really thought I was going to die. I spent 20 years with a massive fear of the water, of the ocean, lakes. I wouldn't even stand in the water. And then I had a friend of mine, and he would literally be holding my hand and had his hand around my waist while I just went ankle deep at the beach. And I'm like, I can't do it. I can't do it. It was a real mental

> block for me. Within probably 2 years, I turned. I was swimming in the lake, doing triathlons. That fear became my challenge, and I was able to do that. Then it became my happy space.

Mel went on to complete two Ironman events inspiring not only her immediate whānau but all of those around her. However, in 2016 her world came crashing down. While hustling for the ball at a match competing for the Bay of Plenty women's hockey team, Mel separated a hamstring, severing a calf muscle, tearing both anterior and posterior cruciate ligaments, and irreparably damaging her peroneal nerve. Her foot no longer able to receive messages ultimately resulting in major repercussions for Mel's sporting endeavours. She describes it as though in a nightmare.

It was during the intense months of rehab when Mel was first introduced to waka ama. Her sons kura was offering a 'have-a-go' for the new entrant aged classes. What struck Mel the most was the whanaungatanga and the focus given to the kids. With the support of the hospital physiotherapist and the local club Hei Matau, they lifted her and her leg (still in a full brace), into the waka where she too was able to feel the enjoyment of playing on Hinemoana. Not long after, Mel's husband had a go and as a whānau they haven't looked back since. They have even competed together with their baby taking the kaikaranga role, giving her an essential position within the whānau dynamic.

> We've done a couple of family races, over at Omokoroa. So, we had all five kids, and Tom and I. Our baby couldn't paddle, she was only 6 maybe 7. And so she sat down on the floor and she did the calling. She was our kaikaranga for us, just so she was part of our whānau, you know. That was cool. We love being part of waka ama. It's kind of like our family now. We love going around to all the different events and you see somebody and you're like old friends and it's so lovely. Everyone remembers [you]. It's such a tight knit little community and I love it for our kids. I just love what it brings for our family.

Add a few years of paddling and a few regattas under her belt, Mel now considers herself a ‘water baby’ too. “I just feel tau, you know, like I'm on the water and we kind of have a little karakia in the waka and I just feel the mauri of the water for me.”

Figure 12: Mel (second from left) racing with her club Hei Matau. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2022.

Reflecting on the decades she spent afraid of Tangaroa and Hinemoana and how she was able to overcome that fear, has helped her to reframe her thoughts adding a whakaaro māmā and whakapapa perspective of water as a space of sanctuary, an āhuru mōwai, and a remnant recalling a rich and noble heritage that is hers and our inheritance.

> I wondered for a long time what, like even when I was hapū, when we create babies and for ourselves, we're in this womb full of water. It surrounds us. That's a lifeline we're surrounded by. And I just thought it's so natural to be in water, why was I struggling with it? What was that? What was the block? Because I should feel natural and comfortable in something where we come from. So, it was me always thinking that, no, I belong here, this is where I came from. I need to be in here and feel comfortable and tau. So yeah, it was just changing that scenario around for me to get comfortable in the water and I love it. We're a voyaging people and even like our whakapapa through Tainui, Te Hekena, and they travel all the way down in their waka to Ngāti Rarawa, over to Wakatū and then further on down the West Coast to Mahitahi down by Haast, so you know it's in the toto.

Nickylee

Figure 13: Adaptive Racing. Nickylee (second from left) racing her first season of adaptive racing. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2015.

As you can see, this beautiful young woman lights up the image, anō nei he putiputi. Her smile is struggling between the pure joy of competing, of feeling pride from the thousand-plus spectators on shore, and the grit she needs to paddle as hard as she possibly can with her waka whānau. Little did we know that she had been waiting a long time for an opportunity like this. Nickylee Epps as the pōtiki of our tuawāhine, is a woman of few words but who needs that, when you can radiate clearer than words could ever express.

I think back when we first captured Nickylee watching her nanny on the shore of the local waterway at Pandora Pond in Ahuriri. She was barely in her teens. Pandora had become a reclamation site for all the local waka clubs and in summer the water was a racetrack for teams preparing for the national waka ama sprints championships. Then year after year, beyond her teens, Nickylee's presence was synonymous with the kuikui crew. Throughout those 12-plus years, we never once saw her pick up a paddle, but she never looked like she wanted to be anywhere else, "It just looked real fun and just being on the side-line, I felt a part of it too, like I felt like I was having fun too." When it was decided that our club wanted to support a local adaptive team, our thoughts went immediately to Nickylee. Her response was an immediate and emphatic yes!

Figure 14: Nickylee (left of image) volunteering at IronMāori. Source: Nickylee, 2017.

Championing for Nickylee has perhaps come from a genuine love of life, from her upbringing in the Rātana faith and her love for her whānau. She has not only been a stalwart for her nanny at waka ama, she's also been a dedicated volunteer for IronMāori events for over a decade. IronMāori like waka ama has become a kaupapa for Māori who aspire for healthier outcomes for the whānau that is sustainable and achievable with the inclusion of all age groups competing together at the same event. When an athlete comes across her officiated site, they are greeted with Nickylee's beaming energy of joy and their wairua cannot help but be uplifted and reinvigorated hence her secured position within the IronMāori whānau. All those years giving her time, supporting whānau Māori fighting for healthier outcomes for their whānau in waka ama and IronMāori, Nickylee displays natural qualities that are esteemable.

Now with eight years of waka ama under her belt, Nickylee has earned a bundle of medals from her national and international campaigns. But it has not been easy; it is always a challenge. She's hemiplegic which means she can only paddle on one side of the waka. This requires stamina and adaptation to lactate build-up to exert your energy over races ranging from two-five minutes in length. Furthermore, the expertise and support are not always available to provide the consistency Nickylee needs but that has not dampened her motivation or drive to have high aspirations for herself. Inspired by rongoā Māori and by her whānau, she has set her sights on her own personal goals too.

Her nanny and her aunties inspire her in so many ways. Nickylee shares the moment that was to set the course to her current profession as a Health Advisor at the local Taiwhenua and a budding rongoā practitioner.

> Every time we used to get sick, Nanny used to always use rongoā on us. Including miri and all that other stuff. But it was when she got sick, she was in the hospital, and she was doing chemo. It just was draining her. And she wasn't really doing much, she was just bedridden. Then we brought her home and when she was just on rongoā, she was actually coming to the lounge for karakia, eating with us and doing everything and [not] only going to bed. I was watching all my aunties working on her. And then I fell in love. I wanted to learn more and that's how I got into it.

Unlike talking about herself, when talking about these wahine who she looks up to, Nickylee lights up and is no longer the shy, coy woman we are accustomed to seeing. It is an example of the humble human being she is that we are fortunate to have in our lives. With the combination of genuine aroha and rongoā Māori, Nickylee has a fulfilling life ahead of her. Aroha mai, aroha atu.

Rehutai

Figure 15: Rehutai (fourth from left) racing in Samoa. Source: Xavier Keutch Photography, 2023.

I was lucky enough to be able to interview Rehutai in Samoa the day after she'd accomplished something she had never ever imagined. I find her sitting on her bed,

looking outside at the luscious tropical plants bordering the pool, reminiscing of the past few days that had flown through like a hurricane. She appears exhausted but exhilarated, not from the 30-degree temperatures and 80 percent humidity, but from racing a harrowing 16-kilometres at the World Long Distance Championships in the Adaptive Mixed division. Rehutai had never competed in a marathon before this moment but that wasn't going to stop her.

Dreams are never too big. Even though Rehutai is the newest adaptive member, she has taken every opportunity to learn and to grow. First ever regatta was in 2022 at the World Sprint championships in London where their team won Gold in the 500m and Silver in the 1000m-turn race and the V12-double hulled 500m events. The championship in Samoa is only her second ever regatta and now she has set her sights on Vaka Eiva, a week-long waka festival during mid-November in Rarotonga, not three-months later. Ngawai (Rehutai's friend and pou whirinaki) made inquiries for Rehutai & her to do the "fun race" together. She managed to get them into a team of paddlers who are going from their local club, Hoe Aroha. The final team to do the fun race, will be drawn from a hat on the day, so Rehutai is crossing every part of her body, that hers and Ngawai's names are going to be the first names to be pulled out.

No holds barred, Rehutai is a self-confessed mover & shaker. She believes her zest for life and personality comes from her koro and ngā kuia, her parents, and her cousins. The philosophy of working hard for what you want, and steadfast determination is her driver to live life to the fullest. Her whānau's fierce advocation for her wellbeing and deep distrust of colonial systems has shaped her to advocate for herself and not be overlooked or be defined by other's expectations or views of disability.

> I was saying to my Nan like, the disability isn't in me. It's in other people. In the way that they see me. And I think I say this because of my personality. I'm like, maybe having slow legs is [to] actually slow me down [laughter].

She smiles, as she reminisces over the times that her cousins try to include her in their adventures. She tells me that they would throw her in the wheelbarrow or piggyback

her around. Her cousins chuckling away, as they compared Rehutai to the weight of a bush pig, caught after a hunt, whilst carrying her on their shoulders; she wouldn't have it any other way. At other times the cousins would be urging her to do what they'd be doing, "They'd say, jump off the rocks, you'll be alright. For me it was like, well, I'll either die, or I just kind of carry on and learn from it [laughter]. So, yeah, we'll just see what happens, so I would jump".

It was no different during her schooling years. Seeing what her mates were doing, knowing she wanted to be in there too. "And then I was like, yeah well, I've only got two choices really. I'm just gonna try or can just sit here and wonder. Oh nah, I'll get out there."

Figure 16: Rehutai in Rarotonga. From left: Ngawai, Rehutai, Maki, Papa Sunny. Source: Rehutai, 2023.

When talking to Rehutai, you sense the love she has for her whānau. Being from a whānau who is very ingrained in Te Ao Māori and very resilient has contributed to upholding the inherent value of mana and rejecting medical so called 'experts' of what they felt was the best care for Rehutai. Hearing her kōrero about this experience helps us understand the immense challenge they must have experienced during those times. But now, she has had the chance to repay all the effort that they put into her. Rehutai's win is their win too.

> So, wakas for me, it's just more than just a sport, really. It's hauora on all levels, strong tinana, fuelling my body better, etc. In my type of mahi, it can be really

draining, so when I feel this, I just tell my manager I'm going for a paddle, and being on the water, out in the taiao, I feel so much better. For me there is a deep Māori connection, yeah. And that's what waka represents as well. You have ngā tīpuna kei muri i ahau. And he ara anō kei mua i ahau. So, there's a future in front of me and there's my tupuna supporting my path behind me as well. That’s real.

CHAPTER FIVE

The inherent features of strength are identified in the waka

The additional structures that add strength to the foundation of this rangahau are; **Rauawa** (the gunnel), **Taumanu** (the thwarts), **Parewai** (the wave deflector), **Ihuwaka** (the bow), and **Kei** (the stern). These elements describe what has been gained by the tuawāhine by their inclusion in waka ama and are described in order of the inductive analysis taken from their kōrerorero.

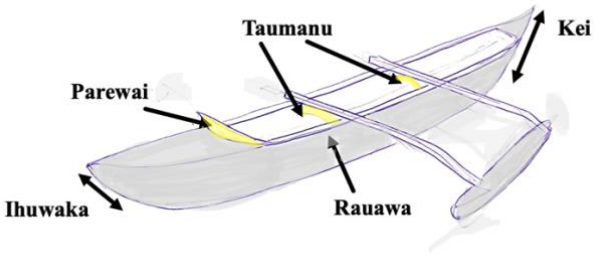

Figure 17: Waka strength components. Source: R Nuku, 2024.

- The Rauawa structurally runs along the length of the upper-external edge of the Kōhiwi. Its function is to reinforce and strengthen the Kōhiwi, and to guard against the water that runs along the hull and threatens to surge inside the waka. It represents the support gained through Whānau by the tuawāhine due to their inclusion within waka ama.
- Two transversely fixed Taumanu lie on the superior-interior surface of the Kōhiwi, separating the waka into three sections. The functions of the Taumanu are to serve as an attachment site for the principal appendages (the Kiato (Mātauranga) to link to the Ama (Worldview), bound by the Aukaha (Whakapapa)), and to provide internal reinforcement and support as available through a relationship with Atua Māori. This connection is likened to an āhuru mōwai, a sheltered haven, a space where the tuawāhine can connect and restore spiritually in the embrace of primal whakapapa.
- The Parewai rests at the superior-distal end of the Ihuwaka to dispel the excess water that attempts to swamp or bombard the waka as it meets external forces head on. This added feature is represented by the kōrero Whakamanawa. It

expressed the ability of the tuawāhine to deflect and cast aside the dominant assumptions due to their involvement in waka ama.

- The function of an Ihuwaka, as the kupu suggests, is to break or separate the surging water with the front of the waka, or drive through a wave unimpeded towards a purpose. This is likened to the Moemoeā of the tuawāhine gathered from the kōrerorero. This rangahau has provided an impetus for the tuawāhine to push aside any impediments and to direct advancements in adaptive paddling.
- The stern of a waka is called the Kei or Noko. It has an effect on the waka's ability to traverse the water and is the key site to manoeuvre a waka. As the drivers of their own destinies and of this rangahau, the tuawāhine are steering in a direction of their own making and choosing. They are self-determined and take control through Mana Motuhake.

This chapter draw parallels between the above five structures that provide additional strength to a waka with five themes from the data analysis that have either given support or shown the strength of the tuawāhine.

Using an inductive analysis approach, commonalities were determined from the data once the transcriptions were reviewed and confirmed by the tuawāhine. Initially there were five correlating themes that align with cultural concepts or values; whānau, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, tikanga, and mana motuhake, and three unique areas of areas of interest; whakamanawa or what had inspired them in their lives, whainga or goals for the future of adaptive wāhine in waka ama, and whakakōroiroi or the challenges adaptive paddlers face. Many of the above intersected each other.

Returning back on the intent of this rangahau, new headings were created to capture and contain the lived experiences by the tuawāhine. The first heading 'Hua' details the wellbeing benefits gained by the tuawāhine from their inclusion in waka ama. By far the benefits gained by the tuawāhine carried the most weight of their narratives. These sub-categories of an extended whānau, an āhuru mōwai, and the upliftment of the ngākau attempt to explore the various areas in their lives that have been the most impactful. As drivers of their own research, the aspirations of the tuawāhine sits under

‘Moemoeā’. This was the one of the main goals of the tuawāhine participating in the rangahau; to have more wahine Māori with impairments at waka ama. Here we gain insights into their collective concern. The final heading ‘Mana Motuhake’, a hidden gem, emerged through the kōrerorero. One profound statement then led to a deeper dive into what was not plainly uttered by all. From an amateur researcher point of view, it appears as a silent yet passive approach of self-identity, a reclaiming for others.

Hua

> *It gave us back huge. It gave us connections with so many people that became whānau to us. Like [name-A] would look after my kids and [name-B] would take them on the paddle boards, and it became like they had a whānau again, you know? So, it gave our whole little whānau so much as well, it wasn’t only me. It was them as well.* (**Hine Karoro**)

Whānau

Within Māori society whānau is the foundation whereby one learns to understand relationships, and the obligations and responsibilities that are bound to those relationships. It is from this we learn to seek, create and maintain the relationships that we want in our own whānau units. The astuteness of this tikanga and its environment, is that it is also “*a site of collective wellbeing*” (Pihama et at., 2023, p. 42) signifying that in a Māori world perspective ā) hauora is not an individual responsibility, and ē) affirmation that every entry in whakapapa is of value.

Whānau is not limited to whakapapa or ancestral lines only but can be members who “*provide caring, support and nurturing roles that traditional whānau provide*” (Hickey & Wilson, 2017, p. 86) often referred to as kaupapa whānau. The impact from the support and the strong relationships developed through waka ama is a recurrent theme in every kōrerorero with the tuawāhine.

> We love being part of waka ama. It's kind of like our family now. And I said to [husband], you know, we love going around to all the different events and you see somebody and you’re like old friends and it's so lovely, everyone remembers

you. It's such a tight knit little community and I love it for our kids. Both son and baby are in paddling. (**Mel**)

It just looked real fun and just being on the side-line I felt a part of it too like I felt like I was having fun too. (**Nickylee**)

[Name], he's got a good crew because he's well set up with supporters in there. Yeah. And they push him. They see past the chair and the ability. (**Rehutai**)

It just introduced me to this whole whānau of support that really looked after me. (**Hine Karoro**)

Was wheeling around in my wheelchair. And then that's when [Ingoa], the first Australian adaptive coach, saw me. She came up to me and she said, 'Umm so have you paddled before?' And I went, 'Oh yeah. But I'll never paddle again.' She said, 'What? Well come with me.' So, she took me down to the water. I saw all these people and wheelchairs and amputees. And there were heaps of them. My cousin [Ingoa] was with me and he's like, 'Cuz, give it a go.' And I was like, 'Yeah, get me in that boat.' Anyway, they had three guys and my cousin put me in. I was in Seat 2. And all she said to me was, 'Just keep your timing with the person in front of you and you'll be right.' Oh God. You could not take the smile off my face. I was so happy. I was where I wanted, well, where I knew I should have been. And the rest is history. (**Jo**)

When unfeigned care is offered in an inclusive environment, a positive connection or attachment is developed. As the relationship blossoms, a language arises that implies there is a whakapapa bond. For instance, the families that we have interacted with in waka ama, are known as Nanny, Koro, Aunty or Uncle to our children. They became our waka whānau. Referring to someone outside of your whakapapa line as whānau is common nowadays because the interactions and relationships developed are meaningful. Whānau, whether whakapapa or kaupapa, are a source of aroha that has a vested interest in each other's wellbeing and motivation. And like whānau we share the

losses as well. One tuawahine sorrowfully recalled the passing of one of their adaptive members exemplifying the connection created in the adaptive whānau, “but it's always sad when you lose someone of your whānau. Because we were whānau” (**Jo**).

Atua Māori

Waka ama opened up or reinstated relationships with atua Māori also. Just like being in the arms of one’s koroua, the tuawāhine found safety and aroha through this connection.

> So for me, I was a forest baby, but now I've become a water baby. So yeah. And I think just for me, I just feel tau, you know, like I'm on the water and we have a little karakia in the waka and I just feel the mauri of the water for me. And I just feel like this is where I'm supposed to be. (**Mel**)

> I karakia to all of the atua all the time about stuff. Definitely Tangaroa is one of the big ones that I turn to because I felt so at home in the ocean as well. Once I got over my fear, I got out there. I feel safer there than anywhere. (**Hine Karoro**)

> [I]n Aussie when I first had this injury, I would jump on a single from where our club was based. I would paddle out, stop paddling (because where we were it was really lovely). I used to just put my paddle down and lie back and, haaaaaa. And that's where I would sort of de-stress, if you like, not that I got stressed majorly. But it's where I would just let everything go if I had any worries or things. (**Jo**)

Hine Karoro credits waka ama for opening the flood doors permitting her Māori heritage to permeate into her life, bringing with it a range of cultural aspects; whānau, karakia, pūrākau, whakapapa, and taonga pūoro, that have supported her through her undulating mental wellness.

> [T]hen you get in a waka and it’s like you know the water and you feel your tūpuna there and you’ve got all this te ao Māori around you, you just feel like

> you've found your place you know. So, for me that was super healing. (**Hine Karoro**)

Life has its complications for everyone to varying degrees, there are always ups and downs and, in this sense, our tuawāhine's lives are no different except they battle extra unseen challenges. The water became a meaningful space or bluespace (Liu, 2021), a safe haven, secure in the comfort of the atua Hinemoana and Tangaroa to recover and rejuvenate. Within the atua realm, the tuawāhine were able to fill their wairua, tapping into a source that is available to us as descendants of Papatūānuku and Ranginui.

<u>Whakamanawa</u>

Aotearoa can claim having the very first adaptive wahine to compete at a World Marathon Championship held in Tahiti, 2017 in the V1 (individual rudderless event).

> I didn't really care where I came. [I] had to prove to myself that I could do it, and I had to prove to other people that it could be done by somebody with a disability. So yeah, I was really, really stoked. I came away from that with a lot of, just the response I got from the local people, and they made me feel like a real God. (**Jo**)

Triumphantly returning to her lodging, she was met with an enraptured and adoring community. The site was a dedicated facility for the residents of Papeete living with differing abilities and mental health complications. Jo's act challenged the perceptions of what they could accomplish not only for themselves, to the authorities that exert power over them and to all of the international viewers as well. They were ecstatic for Jo's milestone but also the overflow of kudos and recognition upon them too.

The beauty about exceptional people, they do not only inspire those whose lives they reflect, but those whose awareness they have woken. On a national scale at waka ama, the inspiration caused by the adaptive whānau is most evident during the annual sprint competitions at Lake Karāpiro. The applause during their races is worthy of the final event of the tournament. Their presence disrupts the status quo therefore making their

actions and deeds inspirational to adaptive and non-adaptive alike dispelling with ripple-like results. In the words of an adaptive whānau whānui,

> … to the adaptive paddlers I got the absolute pleasure to paddle with at nationals. I admittedly did have some tears in my eyes seeing the struggles you face daily but your love for waka and the excitement it gave you filled me with joy. I'm completely honoured to share nationals with you and can't wait to paddle with you again. To be a part of the adaptive paddlers really is beyond words" (Butcher, 2015).

Kaupapa whānau also inspire the tuawāhine. Mel speaks of her admiration for the senior members who are still physically active. They epitomise a lifestyle that allows te iwi Māori to celebrate their leadership well into kaumātua years.

> Like I look at [Ingoa-1] from over at Team-OC. [Ingoa-1] is in the over 70s, and she just looks unbelievable. They just look so healthy. You're out in the weather, your skin is tanned. It's healthy looking. Uncle [Ingoa-2] from over there. I look at Uncle [Name-3] and that's what I want. So yeah, I think that's what inspires me to look like [Name-1] when I get to 70 [laughter]. (**Mel**)

For Hine Karoro it is the example her tūpuna have made that has helped her to navigate the world for herself. Her awareness of this knowledge was only brought to life through her involvement with waka ama.

> There's different pūrākau that really help me at different times. I really hold on all the time to the migrations and what we must've gone through to bring our people from there to here, in waka. How strong you would've had to be. How you would've worked together. I think of that when I'm struggling a lot. I think if our tupuna could have navigated those big oceans and got all the way here, looked after each through that, you know. I just hold onto that when I am struggling. But yea, Hine-pū-te-hue is one of my favourites. But it's also like all

> of the atua. But yeah, I tend to store the pūrākau in my head and they pop up when they're needed. (**Hine Karoro**)

For the tuawāhine with taitamariki, they are motivated to be active together as a whānau. Learning sensuously and cognitively together, a cultural past-time that builds on the cultural values of relationships with each other, and with Hinemoana and Tangaroa. Also celebrating in an environment that honours their own heritage and mātauranga which is in stark contrast to the era those māmā grew up in.

Moemoeā

> *… a handbook would be awesome. It could be used for any para paddlers that are coming to a club and how they deal with them. Because I think the one thing that we recognized quite early on in the piece, when it came to individual clubs, is that they don't have the resources. So, we couldn't have a "come try-day" for instance unless we pulled on someone like [Ingoa-1] to bring in all of his spare chairs. You know, because we need somebody to be supplying these chairs for those paddlers with spinal injuries in particular, to sit in the waka or other specialist equipment for those amputee paddlers and so on and so forth. And then when you're looking at our higher disability guys like [Ingoa-2] and [Ingoa-3], you know their equipment is quite specific to them and their injury. That's high level and that's another elevation again, because it's around the kind of support that they need, in terms of not only getting in the waka, getting their gear on the waka, but getting them into the waka from their chairs.* (**Jo**)

During the whakawhanaungatanga phase of the first kōrerorero, Hine Karoro offered her idea of creating a booklet as a collective with the adaptive wahine, to support clubs wanting to cater for adaptive paddling. The aim is to address the low participation rates by adaptive paddlers, with a particular focus on wahine and how to retain them. This vision consequently gained unanimous consent because it too reflected their own concerns for participation numbers of adaptive paddlers as evidenced below,

> [I]f we spot somebody, we need to kōrero to them and encourage them that here's a sport that you can come and do. I attended a disability day at one of the local schools. And met [Name] from disability or somewhere. So, I went along to that day, and it was a lot of wheelchair sports, and I participated in all of that. I said to her that I do waka ama and if there were people who wanted to have a go, any of the people who were there today, we could organise that. (**Mel**)

> [N]ot many other people know about it aye. We need to get it out there, so they know and maybe if they have a go to experience it. (**Nickylee**)

> I got out of the car and then I hear this, 'Yay!' And I was like, aye? So, I walked over, and I said, 'Kia ora, my name is Rehutai.' And then [Jo] goes, 'Oh wow we need more women.' And then [Name] goes, 'We were just praying to the waka gods, that a wahine would come on board and you popped out of the car.' (**Rehutai**)

Adaptive team racing began in 2014 in Aotearoa. When looking back on race entry information on the Waka Ama website, the participation rates had doubled in 2017. In 2023, nearing the completion of its first decade, adaptive competition has descended to its original numbers. The tuawāhine are keen to promote adaptive waka to other members of the community and to share their love for the sport. They understand that waka is not widely known and the challenges they have personally confronted would provide insights into the complexities experienced across communities. Other suggestions were made in the attempt to boost participation rates. From volunteering to showcase adaptive paddling in major centres around Aotearoa in a concerted effort to provide more visibility, through to academic vices to capture information to facilitate the progress they desire.

> I can't drive. So sports, I think that's what people don't realise, to commit to a sport when you have a disability, and then you're a mum, a solo mum, then you're a wahine Māori. Your ability to earn is so much lower, your ability to get to events is lower. Everything. (**Hine Karoro**)

> … for Māori wahine, and I totally get it, we deal with the whole raising of our whānau and holding down jobs. Trying to keep ourselves centred and balanced with everything that's going on. And try not to show all of that kind of stress too. (**Rehutai**)

> We have a paddle and they watch us, and they join in, or we'll try and help them. (**Nickylee**)

> We need to get it out there, so they know. (**Mel**)

> ... there's a lot of information and data collecting that needs to be done. (**Jo**)

Like most athletes, the tuawāhine strive to be the best they can be by setting goals to achieve their aspirations. With the creation of a book to assist grassroots clubs to facilitate their community needs, it leads to the prize all athletes work towards; gold medals. Their moemoeā would be advanced from the outcomes of the booklet, alongside the knowledge and data to be gained from earlier campaigns, resulting in a greater presence at national events. In turn Aotearoa would have a larger and stronger field to select representative teams and a greater knowledge base for advancements to be made in coaching and equipment ultimately benefiting the athlete.

Hope is a realisation or manifestation of what one desires even against all odds. As a result of having hope, a positive outlook on life is perceived and wellness improves (Murphy, 2023). Even though the dream for adaptive paddling is big, it nurtures the hauora of our tuawāhine and their whānau by keeping them focussed and committed to a kaupapa. The moemoeā goes beyond the duration of this masters studies but the journey has begun and we are excited to see it blossom and one day come into fruition.

Mana Motuhake

> *The disability isn't in me. It's in other people. In the way that they see me.*
> (**Rehutai**)

References such as ‘disabled’ and ‘normal’ are identifying markers that are hierarchical in nature, whereby one is measured against another; with one being the standard while the other sub-standard, not normal. Identity is important because it not only helps to define us, but it is also directly linked with our hauora or wellbeing (Durie et al., 2002). Labels, titles and identities can be tricky too especially if they have been used to perpetuate oppression and maintain control over another as experienced with those labelled as disabled. This highlights the precarious position people living with differing abilities can find themselves in such as seen in the quote above. From this tuawahine’s perspective, she is not disabled, it is a society’s perception and therefore their attitudes and behaviour that places this identity upon her (Stace & Sullivan, 2020).

Complications arise with the disabled identity. People living with differing abilities may require a ramp or a prosthetic limb, and are forced to adopt the identity ‘disabled’ because government policies only align or recognise this term. To acquire state funding for aids, medical evidence from a doctor would be required to verify the individual's inability to perform a physical movement. They are then forced to take on a Western medical term and what that label brings with it, or go without aid. Te Wainui Witika Park too expresses her struggle, “It’s scary to use the word disabled. I can’t advocate for myself without using it.” (Te Tiriti Based Futures & Anti Racism, 2020). Boxed into a paradigm that has control over her livelihood even though it may sit at odds to how she feels and sees herself as expressed by Rehutai.

Rehutai was the final tuawahine interview to take place. Her statement used at the beginning of this section has stayed with me ever since. Impacted and determined to highlight her perspective it dawned on me perhaps the other tuawāhine use language, although not so obvious, to express the same sentiments. Forcing me to return to the transcripts again, I collated the frequency and use of the word disabled and any derivatives, and if that was not present, the word para. The findings are interesting. Hine Karoro and Jo use *my disability*, *our disability* and *with a disability* prolifically. Rehutai uses disability only one more instance, referring to aids that were being offered for her to use. Mel refers to her disability only once in the following, “I've only ever

been in the Te Puku Adaptive team because my disability didn't have enough points to qualify me." Interestingly, Nickylee does not use any derivative of the word disabled, para nor impaired at all throughout the entire kōrerorero.

Rehutai's wisdom then provided a perspective not earlier considered compelling me to re-read the kōrero from this new standing point. Of course Hine Karoro and Jo would use the terms disabled and disabilities throughout their kōrero. By far, these two tuawāhine had the longest interviews and therefore their opportunities for use was exponential, however they have had long professional relationships as advocates within disability services where those words are the typical vernacular. Mel's single use of the kupu disability, made reference to the para-classification system that determines the level of impairment of the athlete. Her comment is marked with negative connotations which will be discussed directly. The absence of any reference to disabilities in Nickylee's kōrerorero, I would now argue, is attributed to two factors; her shy and humble behaviour, and the whānau's philosophy. Her kōrerorero was the shortest in duration, decreasing her opportunities to verbalise these terms. However a more realistic explanation is the way the whānau environment sees and treats Nickylee, informing her of how to see herself, which is someone of value contributing to the collective. Hence disabled or any other referring term was not part of her vocabulary nor could define her. This is evident in the following statement, "[l]ater on it felt normal because I could still do everything I wanted to do. I became a pro of just doing things my side" making reference to the side of Nickylee's body that is still responsive to neural control. Nothing was impossible, just adapted and therefore it was natural to her. Similarly for Mel when she makes the remark, "[i]t works good enough to get me around and do what I need to do." In context, these sentiments parallel with a left-handed guitarist using a right-handed guitar or using a ladder to reach the top cupboard. When something is difficult to achieve, solutions are available to make it work but the actions are not a defining difference. Entering from this new light, the data would suggest that more than half of the tuawāhine did not see themselves as disabled but disability was something that was attached or assigned to them externally.

Returning to Mel's remark, she alludes to the politics of classifications that defines the eligibility of an athlete to compete. This system is utilised to ensure a fair and equitable competition in the ranges of sports provided at the Paralympics. Within the sport of waka ama or Va'a as it is internationally known, there are 4 classification levels VL1, VL2, VL3, VL4 (V=Va'a, L=Level). In essence, the lower the number, the more restricted the athlete. Qualifying an adaptive team for internationally sanctioned events is a unique system. There must be a minimum of two women in the six-person crew, and the combined classification numbers must not exceed the classification point total that is stipulated by the event organisers. The teams' point total is limiting but forces a range of impairment levels within the crew. In Mel's instance, she is what has been coined in the adaptive community as 'not-para-enough' and is a site of pukuriri and mamae for many of the adaptive whānau and whānau whānui as captured in the following dialogue,

> … you've got a disability. Okay, your neck hasn't been chopped off, but it [her body] doesn't work properly.' And I said to him, 'But it's all good. It works good enough to get me around and do what I need to do.' You know, so that was fine, but I can still paddle in the adaptive team for nationals, I just can't qualify for a New Zealand team to go to worlds. (**Mel**)

Mel has an injury that restrains her from enjoying the activities that she once was able to do, "I can't do any of that. I couldn't twist my foot on my bike anymore to get in and out of my cleats on my shoes and I couldn't swim because I couldn't kick", and yet her injury is not enough to be recognised on a global system. This identifies the gap that exists in this arena where herself and others find themselves in a state of undesirability.

There is depth and richness in the voices of these tuawāhine that is astounding, containing layer upon layer of knowledge yet to be divulged. For instance the age the tuawāhine gained their impairments, the range of injuries and abilities, the whakapapa whānau and the individual's life experiences. All of these angles will shed a brand new light to consider. What has been understood is these tuawāhine have gained a support network that buffers their experiences from the outer world (Cram et al., 2003), they

have a safe haven to rejuvenate as though having korowai wrapped around them, and they inspire and are inspired alike. The tuawāhine have dreams and aspirations to make waka ama more accessible to others living with differing abilities, especially for women, all the while, demonstrating for us the complexities of identities and the insights of those from within. All of these factors have been possible through waka ama. This taonga had bridged the tuawāhine to te ao Māori not only relationally but historically, culturally, and spiritually. Belonging to a culture that is inclusive, values collectivism and not individualism all the while caring for the spiritual needs that we as tangata whenua require for wellbeing.

CHAPTER SIX

A sixth paddler is welcomed into the waka, to listen, to learn and to share.

Here we conclude with the perspective of the remaining kaihoe, filling the final available **Paemanu** with the knowledge gained from paddling with the tuawāhine. From the positions within the waka, the tuawāhine have shared their mātauranga, revealed their mastery of moving about the world, resilient in a vessel that is sound in its componentry. Collectively our crew has read the conditions and see what course needs to be taken and how. In this final chapter, a final voice is added to the experience with a wider perspective gained from this new knowledge.

Kaihoe Tuaono

The voices of five tuawāhine championing for all women living with impairments have been showcased in this rangahau. They do this by sharing what they have gained through their involvement in waka ama and providing a glimpse into a realm where there is sparse knowledge. These exceptional wāhine have a zest for life. They challenge the norms regarding women with impairments in sport and determine their own rangatiratanga, their own social justice. Change cannot happen alone. In a highly politicised world of disabilities, allyship is key to amplifying the small voices of those living in the fringes that are overshadowed by other societal priorities that lack the strength of advocacy (Ratima & Ratima, 2000).

Waka ama as a sporting body upholds the values of whanaungatanga, a tikanga based value that focuses on relationships, and manaakitanga, the act of nurturing those relationships (Mead, 2003, Stewart, 2021). These values are specified by WANZ in conjunction with Hauora and Tū Tangata, guides the governing body affairs to create "a culture of sharing, building and maintaining positive relationships," (Waka Ama Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d., p. 12). The purpose of those values is to empower its constituents whilst in their journey of wellness. Due to the experiences in waka ama, the tuawāhine of this rangahau have been welcomed into another whānau grouping; an adaptive whānau whānui made up of wāhine, tāne, Māori and non-Māori, adaptive and non-adaptive. The shared experience of living with differing abilities and

understanding the hardships and challenges of living day to day in a society that does not consider their needs is what they have in common yet waka ama has been the agency that has drawn this whānau together and given it a foundation to blossom from. Through this cultural laden foundation, a deeper care for one another was developed and their desires to nurture and help each other succeed all signify that these values are existent and thriving.

Sport in general has become a significant way for women to assign meaning to their lives (Hargreaves, 2000) however waka ama has gone one step further. The environment and cultural values are intertwined and are important for wellbeing (Durie, 1998). Waka ama has succeeded in providing a space for wellness. Healing has been made available through relationships with atua and the environment. It has brought comfort, contentment and identity to the tuawāhine in a world confined and restrained by settler standards.

These tuawāhine have a joy for life. The impairments they live with can be challenging but that was not the focal point of their kōrerorero. What they are living with was explained very matter of factly but there was no remorse, angst or contempt about it. What I recall the most about my interactions with the tuawāhine, was how they were able to capture moments and draw me in through their natural story-telling abilities and their mischief. During the kōrerorero, often we found ourselves in rapturous laughter at their escapades. The following demonstrate some of those outrageous moments.

> Yeah, we'll get a wheelbarrow, and the kids will chuck me in. Or my cousins would piggyback me. And then compare me to like carrying a bush pig [laughter]. (**Rehutai**)

> So I couldn't drive a car at the time because of my foot and my knee was all still in a brace, but I could ride my motorbike so I used to ride my motorbike out to the hospital so I could go and do physio [laughter]. (**Mel**)

> We were in Tahiti, and this was a W12. And I was in the back of Hine Karoro. And so, because she was splashing water right in my face, [the] whole race my eyes were closed and I didn't know what was going on. And then when we crossed the finish line, [I was] like what, what was happening? And we actually came first [laughter]. It was so funny. And then when I told her she's mm-mm, [because] I'm usually the one wetting everyone behind me [laughter]. It just felt like it was so fun. So worth not seeing, nah. (**Nickylee**)
>
> And then I went to the deepest end of the pool and the first thing I did was I started pulling myself up and twisting and turning to sit. And the physio said, 'What are you doing? Why are you doing that?' I said, 'I'm learning how to get back on the boat.' She's like, 'What? I've just put you in the water. And here you are trying to keep back in a what? A boat?' I said, 'Yeah, because our boat tips. I have to know that I can get back in.' [laughter] (**Jo**)

Hine Karoro's comment reminded me of how astounding she and the rest of the tuawāhine are, constantly challenging our perceptions, "I've trained for MMA fighting. Jiu Jitsu was one of my sports as well." I recall her training for a Fight For Life in 2017. It would astonish me that she would put herself in the ring and make herself vulnerable by fighting a sighted athlete but she was not deterred. Suicide awareness was the focus of the cause that year and it was an important kaupapa to her that needed highlighting. By placing herself in that platform Hine Karoro opened more opportunities for other corners of society to see that people with impairments are the same as everyone else and are not immune to struggles of the hinengaro and wairua too.

It is pertinent to mention here very briefly obstacles encountered by the adaptive whānau whānui hindering them from being able to support the impaired members of their community. Competition for water space, council consents and attitudes, and resources are the most common hurdles. Most waterfront lots for sports have been allocated to sailing, rowing and kayaking agencies. Granted, those sports are well established and for some that can be over a century. Waka ama therefore must house their equipment under trees, against fences, any available space not too far from the

water edge. They must sidle alongside those willing to share the water entry points. Not all water users are willing to concede space for other sporting equipment and disputes have occurred. For one club, it took in excess of two years before the council approved the installation of a jetty. In the meantime their wheelchair member had to navigate a steep algae exposed ramp with no safety rails. Specialist resources become a necessity to cater for the range of disabilities but these are not easily available to minority groups who typically have to pave and pay their own way. A team of human resources are required to rig, lift and load waka, install equipment, carry paddlers, mind limbs and wheelchairs abandoned on shore, etc. This on top of the concern of preventing further injury once on the water. The tuawāhine understand the challenges;

> … other clubs have tried to support their para-athletes. But it's hard to really support para-wahine. I'm only seeing that now with how many wahine they're able to get for world competitions is so low. Because it takes so much for a club to support someone. (**Hine Karoro**)

Rehutai shared the time her local club turned her away from the training session because they were unable to cater to her needs in conditions that are challenging, "... they [were] like, 'Oh, maybe you should sit this one out." Their lack of confidence to mitigate their concerns swung the pendulum back into exclusion. Although WANZ have countered the inaccessibility by providing inclusion and visibility, barriers at the community level have to be met by the grassroots members. Expertise, knowledge and power is required on the ground where everything begins, not in the elite arena. If the numbers of adaptive paddlers increase as per the moemoeā of the tuawāhine, the consequences are that the issues summarised here will be heightened and in need of addressing.

Change must happen on a wider scale. Within Aotearoa's disability population, Māori are over-represented (Henare, 2019), with women and girls being subjected to multiple sites of discrimination (United Nations, 2006) and because of that the outlook and perception for this sector of our society is concerning. What further exacerbates the

negative perspectives of Indigenous women, is the absence of their voices within positions of power where decisions are made on their behalf. This in turn breeds ignorance and continued domination whereby these wahine then become doubly colonised (Hargreaves, 2000). If the public is unable to open its eyes to other ways of being and moving about the world, discrimination and oppression will continue.

Without volunteers and knowledge most ventures fail and are abandoned. Allyship can be as easy as moving aside for a wheelchair user and not using a disabled car park without a permit. It can be difficult too, such as reviewing tikanga on a marae to allow seeing-eye dogs into a wharenui or wharekai or writing a thesis to honour the tuawāhine of your community.

I look forward to the day when the adaptive teams no longer inspire. It will indicate that within our society there has been a shift. This would signify that there is more universal acceptance and inclusion.

Kōrero Whakakapi

A thesis topic that intersects Māori, wahine, waka ama and impairment was narrow. Fortunately I knew all of those athletes, they are but a handful. One of the challenges lay with finding published literature to bring academic insight. With assistance, the mere data available was captured. That was not the case with pūrākau and ancestral knowledge. With the surplus of kōrero, it was difficult to contain myself to just a bare few. Wahine Toa by Kahukiwa and Grace (1984) was a goldmine of wisdom passed down from tūpuna whaea. I learned to appreciate not only how profound mātauranga Māori is as a way to understand the world, but how tikanga Māori naturally sets rules of engagement for healthy relationships. Failing all else, tikanga Māori held all the answers and how fortunate we as Māori are to have that in our lives.

Writing this thesis has not been easy. I was constantly mindful of how to represent the kōrero of the tuawāhine and purposeful in the words I chose such as the use of exceptional. In my research of voices of women with impairments, to my horror one stated that the kupu exceptional was objectifying them (Young, 2014). After wānanga

and deliberation, I found peace in the knowledge that as long as I wrote from the ngākau, its meaning and intention will not be lost. In constant doubt of my ability to do justice to the mātauranga shared by the tuawāhine my hair greyed rapidly and I have gained quite a few wrinkles. However, working with the tuawāhine was easy. All I felt and received was aroha, understanding and trust. The tuawāhine are phenomenal. It was difficult to put into words what it is that these wāhine represent but the rangahau process cleared up for me my own personal motives for researching this topic; to raise an awareness of the amazing people in our communities and in my life.

Once Papa Val wheeled down to our local waterways a decade ago it lifted the fog to show what was happening right in front of me and has altered our course in life. We were privileged that the adaptives have allowed us to care for them and had the patience as we learned to navigate the hurdles of coaching adaptive athletes. I feel humbled that they shared their kōrero with me. Throughout the transcription and the analysis phases of this mahi, I could hear their voices and it felt like I had spent a consistent three full months in their presence. Once chapter four was complete, I was left mokemoke for their company. Their kupu, their laughter and their cheekiness remain with me. My regret is that we were not able to meet in person together. We have made a promise to still have that wānanga in the coming year.

Figure 18: LDN 2023-Day2 Race 5. Papa Val (fourth from left) racing at Whitianga. Source: Waka Ama NZ and Garrick Cameron - Studio5 Photography, 2023.

What I have learned in my years of paddling is that when heading into the ocean, the best course to take is to head straight into Tāwhirimātea; to meet the most difficult

conditions first. The longer the duration into the headwind the more I learn how to manoeuvre the waka safely for us both. Sometimes I need to take the wave at an angle, oftentimes the kōhiwi and the ama need to crest the swell together, or it is best to just punch directly through it. By heading in that direction first, the ride home is easy, swift and exhilarating. It is as though Tāwhirimātea has his hand on my back, leading me through an unrehearsed routine as my father used to do on the dance floor with my siblings. These tuawāhine are currently pushing against the surges. Through their experiences they have read and learned how to coast the swells. They are still pushing into the waves so that when the time is right, the waka can turn and will fly on the journey home.

Glossary

This glossary provides simple definitions or explanations of kupu and terms used in this rangahau. In most cases these are not explained nor discussed in the text.

āhuru mōwai	calm place, sheltered haven
aroha	care, love
awa	river
atua	ancestor of continuing influence
hapū	kinship group, clan
hauā	crippled, disabled
haukāinga	local people of the marae
hauora	health, vigour
hinengaro	mind
Hineraumati	personification of Summer
hoa	friend
hoa rangatira	significant partner
hoariri	opponent
hua	benefit, gain
ingoa	name
kaihoe	paddler
kaikaranga	caller in the waka
kairangahau	researcher
kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	face-to-face
karakia	recite ritual chant
kaumātua	elderly person/people
kaupapa	topic, purpose, subject
kōrero	to speak, a narrative, a story
kōrerorero	for the purpose of this rangahau; interview
kōrero tuku iho	intergenerational narratives
koro | koroua	elderly man, grandfather
kōtiro	daughter, girl

kui | kuikui	elderly woman, grandmother
kupu	word
kurī	dog
mā	when used with other nouns; indicates plural
mamae	hurt, injury
mana	prestige, authority, status
manaakitanga	associated with duties and expectations of care and reciprocity, care and commitment
manuhiri	guests
mātauranga	knowledge
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
moana	ocean, lake
mokemoke	lonely
mokopuna	grandchildren
motu	country, nation
ngākau	seat of affections, heart, mind, soul
pakeke	adult
Papatūānuku	Earth
pēpi	baby
pōtiki	youngest child
puhi tapairu	chieftainess, high-born female
pukuriri	angry
pūrākau	Māori intellectual tradition
rāhui	temporary prohibition
rangahau	Māori research
rangatahi	to be young, young
rangatiratanga	autonomy
Ranginui	atua of the sky
rautaki	strategy
taitamariki	young children
tamariki	children
Tāne-māhuta	atua of the forests and birds

tangata whenua	local people, hosts
taonga	something special
taonga pūoro	Māori musical instrument
tari	office
tau	to be settled
tauiwi	foreigner
taupatupatu	debate
te ao mārama	world of light and life
te ao Māori	Māori worldview
teina	younger sibling of the same gender
tikanga	custom, protocol
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
tōrangapū	politics
toto	blood
tūpuna whaea	ancestress
uri whakaheke	descendants
wairua	soul, spirit
wānanga	to meet and discuss
whai	stingray
whaikaha	to have strength
whakaaro	thoughts
whakapapa	ancestry
whakatauākī	formulaic saying – author known
whakawhanaungatanga	process of establishing relationships
wharekai	dining room or hall
wharenui	meeting house
whare tangata	house of humanity, womb

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