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**He kupenga mate pukupuku uu mo ngā wāhine Māori.**  
**Te Whare Tapa Whā: A multidimensional exploration of**  
**the impacts of breast cancer among wāhine Māori**  
**survivors.**

A thesis  
presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
Master of Philosophy  
in  
Māori Studies

At Massey University, Palmerston North,  
New Zealand.

Lucy Margareth Ripia

2013

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## ABSTRACT

Verse 1:

*Breast Cancer  
The illness that threatens the lives  
of mothers, daughters, sisters and wives  
Why me, we ask, oh why me?  
Perhaps the answer lies deep within the family*

A breast cancer diagnosis for wāhine Māori (Māori women) impacts on the whole whānau (extended family), hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe). This thesis captures the experiences of seven wāhine Māori who went through the diagnosis of, and treatment for, breast cancer. A personal experience of breast cancer provided the impetus for choosing this topic, enriched by the opportunity to speak with other women and reflect on their own experiences. The qualitative method of interviewing and sharing experiences between the researcher and the participants was exceptionally enlightening for all concerned. This reciprocity and exchanging of experiences produced similar as well as unique, individual stories.

Surrounding the design, data gathering and analysis were kaupapa Māori (customs, traditions and philosophies of being Māori) concepts and research methods to help ensure the cultural safety of all participants, as well as garner a deeper understanding of the information gathered from a Māori perspective. Whakapapa (genealogy) played a significant role in all the interviews. For various reasons, tūpuna (ancestors) remained a source of strength as well as a source of vulnerability when it came to acknowledging their contribution to the wellness of the participants. The women felt reminded to search for strength from their tūpuna to help with their healing, yet were also mindful of the reasons

they were diagnosed with breast cancer in the first instance, through whānau history and genetic makeup.

This multidimensional exploration of how breast cancer impacts on the well-being of Māori women uses Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) to capture the aspects of well-being in a Māori context. The objective of this research therefore is to investigate the experiences of Māori women who have travelled the journey of breast cancer. Their stories will provide an increased understanding of the impacts on their physical, spiritual and mental and emotional wellness, including the impacts on whānau structures and relationships.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Verse 2:

*Family histories are full of hidden treasures  
Health, education and wellbeing measures  
Things that help us to understand  
Help us to know where to get a hand.*

This work has been a great motivation for me and with the support of whānau, friends, Māori health provider colleagues, academic advisors and even strangers, I was able to bring a little bit of everyone to this thesis.

The greatest inspiration came from the breast cancer survivors themselves. Their stories have made the utmost contribution and I want to thank Whaea Jackie, Brigette, Olive, Ihaia, Ramari and Moana for their backing. Ngā mihi nunui ki a koutou me tō whānau hoki.

To my whānau, especially my mother Gemma Leef, who so courageously had to relive the experiences as a daughter and sister of those who have suffered from breast cancer. To all my eight brothers and sisters and their whānau, who shared and experienced the shock of my breast cancer diagnosis as much, if not more than, myself. Taku aroha ki a koutou.

To my hoa rangatira (husband) Donald and our sons for having the patience and allowing breast cancer to be a conversation and not a curse. You have all let this be something we should not hide but share with many. Thank you for the strength. Ngā manaakitia mātou.

Having been blessed with a mokopuna during this thesis journey has added a new dimension to our whakapapa. I will forever be vigilant with her health and the health of all our mokopuna, who through whakapapa are at risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer in their adult years,.

This work would not be possible without the guidance of Massey University academics and friends that have travelled the Masters and Doctoral journey. Special thanks go to Professor Sir Mason Durie for the initial encouragement and having greater trust in my abilities than I did. Extra special acknowledgements go to Dr Margaret Forster and Dr Lily George, who have walked beside me throughout this thesis journey. Ngā mihi ki a kōutou.

Finally, I extend a huge expression of gratitude to Te Rau Puawai staff for investing in my academic journey which has provided me with academic and cultural insights and understandings. Mauri ora.

## GLOSSARY

### A

aroha – to love, to care

awhi – to embrace, to cherish

### H

hinengaro – mind, intellect

hōhā – a nuisance

himene – hymn

### I

iwi – tribe

### K

karakia – prayer, incantation

Kohanga reo – learning nest

kōrero – to talk, converse

kaitiaki – guardian

koha – gift/gifting

kupenga - net

### M

mana – self-determination

manaaki – caring for others

manaakitanga – respect for others

manuhiri – visitors, guests

mokopuna – grandchild

marae – meeting house

Māori – indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. Of Māori descent/blood/whakapapa

### P

Pākehā – non-Māori, European, Caucasian

## **R**

rongoa – traditional Māori medicine

Rātana – a Māori religious faith

## **T**

tikanga – customs, protocol

tinana – physical being

tokotoko – walking/talking stick

tōhunga - skilled person, chosen expert, priest

## **W**

wahine – woman

wahine toa – female warrior; woman of strength

wāhine – women

wairua – spiritual

whā – four

whaea – mother, aunt

whānau – extended family, social

whakawhanaungatanga – relationship building

whakapapa – genealogy, continuity

whakamā – embarrassment, shame, shyness

whare – house

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