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**Oho Mauri:  
Cultural Identity, Wellbeing, and  
Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake**

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

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
in  
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*Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungūnu, Kāti Māmoe, Rangitāne, Ngāti Porou*

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# WHAKARĀPOPOTANGA:

## ABSTRACT

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This study, *Oho Mauri*, seeks to understand the experience of mental illness from the perspective of those it affects most– the consumer. In order to test the assumption that mental health depends as much on culture and identity as psycho-biology, *Oho Mauri* examines the worldviews of 17 Indigenous people - Māori - who have had experience of mental illness (Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake). Their views on mental illness, within the context of the recovery approach, constitute the core of the thesis.

*Oho Mauri* examines the relationship between cultural identity and wellbeing, in order to answer the research question: “Does a secure cultural identity lead to improved wellbeing for Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake?” Indigenous people the world over have considered this relationship, generally maintaining that greater wellbeing is a function of ethnic values, customs, and practices.

A methodological approach that is cognisant of Māori knowledge and understandings was key to this research. So too was the Kaupapa Māori research paradigm that was employed alongside other relevant qualitative methodologies: feminist, case study, empowerment, narrative, and phenomenological approaches.

Two main sets of conclusions emerge from *Oho Mauri*, both of which are drawn from the cultural values and cultural worldviews that Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake hold. First, just as a secure cultural identity pays dividends in the recovery process, so can a cultural identity that has not been allowed to flourish increase the intensity of confusion and complexity that accompanies mental illness.

Second, understanding mental illness has two dimensions: clinical; and personal. Whilst a diagnosis is a valuable clinical tool, understanding mental illness also requires recognition of the interpretations made by Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake and the meanings they attach to their personal experiences. Often these provide alternative

explanations and understandings of the experience of mental illness and are perceived as the most significant aid in a journey towards recovery.

The findings in *Oho Mauri* do not claim that a secure cultural identity will necessarily protect against mental illness. They do demonstrate, however, that cultural identity is an important factor in the recovery process and that the recovery process itself can contribute to a secure cultural identity.

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---

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'whanau<sup>kā</sup>' is the same term as 'whanaunga' which is used throughout the thesis to mean either 'a relative' (singular) or 'relatives' (plural). The 'k' used instead of 'ng' represents a dialect difference between Kāi Tahu (the predominant southern Iwi) and most northern Iwi. The term 'whanau<sup>kā</sup>' has been used in this instance in recognition of Dr. Russell's (and my) Iwi.

<sup>2</sup> The title '*Oho Mauri*', which loosely translates as 'the awakening', originates from a comment made by one of the research participants who described what being exposed to Te Ao Māori for the first time - through his involvement with the Kaupapa Māori mental health service - meant to him: "*It felt like my wairua was reborn... I was free... It freed me...*"

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Tāngata Whai Ora' is a general term used in Aotearoa/New Zealand to refer to Māori with experience of mental illness— that is, those who have at some point in their lives personally experienced a mental health disorder or other mental health problem. Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake advice is that the term is used to mean special, unique, and absolute and is associated with the whakatauaki 'Kia maumahara ki tou mana āhua ake' which means 'Cherish your absolute uniqueness'. Advice from Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori is that 'whai ora' literally means 'in search of wellness'; 'tāngata' meaning 'people'. In various regions in the country other terminology such as 'Tāngata Motuhake' is used instead, to mean the same. The inclusive term 'Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake' is used throughout the thesis in recognition of these differences.

# RĀRANGI UPOKO: TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>WHAKARĀPOPOTANGA: ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>MIHIMIHI: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>RĀRANGI UPOKO: TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>RĀRANGI WHAKAHEKE ME NGĀ HOAHOA: LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>xvi</b>
<b>RĀRANGI KUPU MĀORI: GLOSSARY OF MĀORI TERMS.....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>WHAKATAKI: PREFACE.....</b>	<b>xxiv</b>
<b>UPOKO TAHI: WHAKATAU</b>	
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	1
Ngā Whāinga: Research Goals and Objectives.....	2
Whakatakoto Kaupapa: Thesis Layout.....	3
Whakaine Oranga: Measuring Wellbeing.....	5
Whakaine Tikanga Tangata: Measuring Cultural Identity.....	10
Te Hoe Nuku Roa.....	12
Whai Māoritanga: Secure Māori Cultural Identity.....	14
Tikanga Tangata Hauora Hinengaro: Cultural Identity and Mental Health.....	16
Tirohanga Ao Māori: Māori Worldview.....	20
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	23

<b>UPOKO RUA: HUARAHĪ MAHI</b>	
<b>CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGIES</b> .....	25
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	25
Huarahi Mahi Rangahau: Developing the Research Methodology.....	25
Ngā Ariā: Paradigms.....	26
Te Whakapakaritanga o te Rangahau Māori: Māori Research History and Development.....	28
Mā Wai te Tuhingaroa?: Writing for Whom?.....	29
Rangahau Māori He Aha Tēnei?: What is Māori Research?.....	30
Te Hiranga o te Mātauranga: The Importance of Knowledge.....	33
Whakamana: Empowerment.....	35
Matatika: Ethics.....	36
Hononga Ihiihi: Power Relationships.....	38
Kāwai Tangata me te Rangahau: The Importance of Ethnicity in Research.....	39
Whakawā Wawe: Bias.....	42
Rangahau Manawahine: Feminist Research.....	43
Huarahi Inekupu: Qualitative Approach.....	44
Anga Kaupapa Māori: Kaupapa Māori Framework.....	46
Huarahi Mahi: Methodologies.....	48
Huarahi Mahi Tuatini: Mixed Methodology.....	51
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	54
<b>UPOKO TORU: TIKANGA TĀNGATA</b>	
<b>CHAPTER THREE: CULTURAL IDENTITY</b> .....	56
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	57
Ngā Kāwai Tangata: Dimensions of Ethnicity.....	57

	<b>Page</b>
Āhuatanga Māori: Defining Māori.....	57
Wehenga tataunga o te Māori: Census classification of Māori.....	60
Māoritanga: Māori cultural identity.....	62
Maru whenua noho tāone: Colonisation and urbanisation.....	63
Rerekētanga: Diversity.....	68
Tuakiri hurihuri: Changing identities.....	71
Te tū Māori: Being Māori.....	73
Tuakiri āhua tūkino: Negative identity.....	75
Ngā Tohu Tikanga: Cultural Indicators.....	76
Whānau.....	77
<i>Rōpūtanga: Belonging</i> .....	79
<i>Iwi</i> .....	79
Whakapapa.....	81
Marae.....	82
Whenua.....	86
Te reo Māori.....	88
Whakawhanaungatanga: Contact with other Māori.....	90
<i>Whakaakoranga: Schooling</i> .....	90
Rongoā Māori.....	91
Waiata.....	93
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	94
<b>UPOKO WHĀ: ORANGA HAUORA HINENGARO MĀORI</b>	
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: MĀORI WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH.....</b>	<b>95</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	95
Oranga: Wellbeing.....	95

	<b>Page</b>
Ariā Oranga Hauora Māori: Models of Māori Health and Wellbeing.....	97
Te Oranga me te Māuiuitanga ki Tō te Māori o Nehe: Traditional Māori Wellbeing and Illness Beliefs.....	102
Whakakoretikangatanga: Deculturation.....	105
Whaiora: Māori Health Development.....	106
Rerekētanga: Disparities.....	108
Ngā Whakamarama: Possible Structural Explanations for Poor Māori Health Status.....	114
Hauora Whakatūtaki: Measuring Health Outcomes.....	115
Hauora Hinengaro: Measuring Mental Health.....	117
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	121
<b>UPOKO RIMA: ĀHUATANGA MAHI</b>	
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: METHODS.....</b>	<b>122</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	122
Te Tohutohu Kaumātua: Kaumātua Supervision.....	122
Whai Tauira: Sample Recruitment.....	123
Whakawhiti Whakaaro i Mua i te Rangahau: ‘Pre-research Consultation’.....	126
Rau Whakamōhio: Information Sheet.....	132
Rārangi Uiui/Ārahi: Interview Schedules/Guides.....	132
Ngā Uiuinga: Interviews.....	134
Uiuinga Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake: Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake Interviews.....	136
Ngā Tāngata Whai Pānga: Participant Profiles.....	136
Uiuinga Pūkenga Tuarua: Secondary Expert Interviews.....	137
Tuhinga Kōrero: Transcription.....	138
Tātari Whakaaturanga: Analysis of the Data.....	140

	<b>Page</b>
Tohatoha Hua: Dissemination of Results.....	143
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	144
<b>UPOKO ONO: NGĀ HAERENGA</b>	
<b>CHAPTER SIX: TĀNGATA WHAI ORA/MOTUHAKE EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND SERVICES.....</b>	<b>145</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	145
Kauri.....	146
Kōwhai.....	150
Maire.....	154
Mānuka.....	155
Miro.....	161
Nīkau.....	163
Pūkeko.....	166
Pūriri.....	168
Rātā.....	169
Tōtara.....	173
Whio.....	174
Ruru.....	182
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	188
<b>UPOKO WHITU: TE AO MĀORI</b>	
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: TĀNGATA WHAI ORA/MOTUHAKE IDENTITIES.....</b>	<b>190</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	190
Te Tū Māori: Being Māori.....	191
Ngā Tohu Tikanga: Cultural Markers.....	195
Whakapapa.....	195

	<b>Page</b>
Marae.....	198
Whenua.....	203
Te reo Māori.....	205
Rongoā Māori.....	213
Waiata.....	214
Whānau.....	214
Whakatipu tangata: Brought up by.....	215
Kuia, koroua mā: The role of grandparents.....	216
Whāngai.....	218
Tangata mokemoke: Void of whānau.....	219
Tūrangawaewae: Childhood localities.....	220
Hononga whānau: Differing levels of contact.....	222
Manaaki tamariki: Relationship with children.....	224
Awhina whānau: Whānau support.....	224
Tāngata Whai Ora/consumer whānau.....	226
Whakatipu Hei Māori: Brought Up Māori.....	228
Whakaakoranga: Schooling.....	234
Whakarōpūtanga Māori: Association with Māori.....	239
Whakarāpopototanga: Summary.....	243
<b>UPOKO WARU: KŌRERORERO Ō NGĀ KAUPAPA</b>	
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF THEMES.....</b>	<b>246</b>
Whakamārama: Explanation.....	246
Te Hohonga Whānau: Whānau Connectedness.....	247
Ngā Take Whānau: Whānau Determinants.....	249
He Whānau Kē: Whānau Substitution.....	250

	<b>Page</b>
Te Tū Māori: Being Māori.....	252
Tikanga Tika: Cultural Alignment.....	255
Tikanga tūturu: Cultural fit.....	255
Tikanga pono: Cultural integrity.....	257
<i>Waiata me rongoā Māori kia piki te ora: The place of waiata and         rongoā Māori in recovery.....</i>	259
Whakapapa.....	259
Tūrangawaewae.....	261
Te marae kia piki te ora: The place of marae in recovery.....	262
Ka Wehe i Te Pono: Escape from Reality.....	264
Ahuatanga Whakamīharo: Phenomenological Significance.....	265
<b>UPOKO IWA: WĀHANGA WHAKAMUTUNGA</b>	
<b>CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>TĀPIRITANGA – APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>274</b>
Appendix A: Information Sheet.....	274
Appendix B: Consent Form for Research Participants.....	276
Appendix C: Interview Schedule for Tangata Whai Ora Interviews.....	277
Appendix D: Letters of Support.....	280
Appendix E: Assessment of the Research against a Tikanga Framework.....	286
<b>RĀRANGI PUKAPUKA – BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>292</b>

## RĀRANGI WHAKAHEKE ME NGĀ HOAHOA

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

	Page
<b>Upoko Tahī: Whakatau</b>	
<b>Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis</b>	
<i>Table 1:</i> Thesis research goals and objectives.....	3
<i>Table 2:</i> The components of wellness/unwellness.....	7
<i>Table 3:</i> Principles for cultural assessment.....	11
<b>Upoko Toru: Tikanga Tāngata</b>	
<b>Chapter Three: Cultural Identity</b>	
<i>Table 4:</i> Measures of cultural identity.....	76
<i>Table 5:</i> Three categories of Marae Governance.....	84
<b>Upoko Whā: Upoko Hauora Hinengaro Māori</b>	
<b>Chapter Four: Māori Wellbeing and Mental Health</b>	
<i>Table 6:</i> Te Whare Tapa Whā.....	97
<i>Figure 1:</i> Social wellbeing for Māori, relative to Europeans/Pākehā.....	108
<i>Table 7:</i> Estimates of 12 Month Prevalence of Common Disorders among GP Attendees– Māori.....	109
<i>Figure 2:</i> Diabetes in adults, by NZDep01 quintile and sex (age-standardised).....	112
<i>Table 8:</i> Number of episodes by length of stay for clients seen who received an inpatient service, 2002.....	119

## RĀRANGI KUPU MĀORI

### GLOSSARY OF MĀORI TERMS

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**Aroha:** love or compassion

**Ataahua:** beautiful

**Atua:** Māori gods

**Awhi:** aid or help

**Hākari:** feast/s

**Hāngi:** Māori food cooked in traditional manner in an ‘earth oven’

**Hapū:** sub-tribe/s

**Heretaunga:** Hastings

**Hēmanawa:** disheartened

**Hinengaro:** mind or intellect

**Hinu:** oil or lard

**Hōhonu:** deep

**Hui:** meeting/s or gathering/s

**Hūpē:** mucus or snot

**Iwi:** tribal group/s

**Iwi rohe:** tribal area/s

**Kai:** food

**Kaikaranga:** wāhine who perform the formal welcoming call and responding call at pōwhiri

**Kaimoana:** seafood

**Kaitautoko:** supporter/s

**Kaitiaki:** caretaker/s or custodian/s

**Kaiwaiata:** the performer/s of ceremonial waiata at pōwhiri

**Kaiwhakahaere:** Manager

**Kaiwhakapapa:** a person/people skilled in geneology

**Kākahu:** clothes or clothing

**Kāore:** not, but, or “no”

**Kapa haka:** group performance of Māori action song/s and dance/s

**Karakia:** prayer or religious or spiritual incantations

**Karanga:** call

**Katoa:** all, every, completely or total

**Kaumātua:** respected elder/s

**Kaupapa:** strategy/strategies, theme/s or philosophy/philosophies

**Kawa:** protocol

**Kina:** sea-eggs or sea-urchins

**Kōrero:** talk, speak, or discussion/s

**Kōrero-a-waha:** personal communication

**Kōrero purakau:** legend/s, or statement/s of cultural fact according to individual hapū and Iwi

**Koroua:** elderly man/men

**Kōtimana:** people from Scotland

**Kuia:** elderly woman/women

**Kupu:** word/s or remark/s

**Mahi:** work

**Mamae:** pain, ache or stress

**Mana:** integrity or prestige

**Mana ake:** unique identity or the unique nature of the individual and each whānau and the positive identity that flows from those unique qualities

**Manaakitanga:** according others total support, hospitality, goodwill, respect, and dignity

**Manawa:** heart or bowels

**Manawapā:** frugal or tight-fisted

**Manuhiri:** visitor/s

**Marae:** traditional meeting place/s of whānau, hapū or Iwi

**Mate atua/mate Māori:** illness/es for which there is/are no obvious physical cause/s

**Mauri:** life principle, life essence, life force, vitality or special character present in people and objects, including language

**Mihimihi/mihi:** greet, or greeting/s

**Mihingare:** missionary/missionaries

**Mirimiri:** physical therapies, massage and manipulation

**Mohio:** know, intelligent, clever, or conscious of

**Mokopuna:** grandchild/grandchildren

**Mōteatea:** tribal chant/s

**Murihiku:** Invercargill or Southland

**Noa:** something that is free from tapu, that is something that is not forbidden, restricted, confidential or sacred

**Ōtautahi:** Christchurch

**Otepoti:** Dunedin

**Pā:** traditional stockaded village

**Pākehā:** non-Indigenous New Zealanders

**Pakeke:** adult Māori who is learning and preparing for kaumātua status

**Papakāinga:** individual's or group's original home base

**Pepeha:** recitation of an individual's whakapapa

**Pēpi:** baby/babies

**Pōwhiri:** formal welcoming process

**Puku:** abdomen

**Pukuriri:** angry or irritable

**Putiputi:** flower

**Putiputi ataahua:** term of endearment

**Rangatahi:** youth (singular or plural)

**Rangatahi Māori:** Māori youth (singular or plural)

**Ringawera:** cook/s

**Rohe:** area/s or territory/territories

**Rongoā Māori:** traditional Māori medicine

**Rongoā rākau:** herbal remedy/remedies

**Rūnanga:** assembly or institute

**Tāmaki Makaurau:** Auckland

**Tamariki:** children

**Tāne:** Māori man or Māori men

**Tāngata:** people

**Tāngata Ingirangi:** people from England

**Tāngata Whai Ora:** Māori with experience of mental illness

**Tāngata whenua:** aboriginal or Indigenous person/people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, or the person/people hosting a welcome

**Tangi:** the mourning process associated with death and burial

**Taonga:** something/things that is/are precious or a treasure

**Tautoko:** support

**Tapu:** sacred or sacredness, or something/things which is/are forbidden, restricted or confidential

**Te Ao Māori:** The Māori World

**Te Ika a Māui:** the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand

**Te reo Māori:** the Māori language

**Te taha hinengaro:** the mental and emotional sides (of health)

**Te taha tinana:** the physical side (of health)

**Te taha wairua:** the spiritual side (of health)

**Te taha whānau:** the family and community sides (of health)

**Te Upoko o te Ika:** Wellington

**Te Waipounamu:** the South Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand

**Teina:** junior

**Tika:** correct, accurate, valid, realistic or reliable

**Tikanga:** custom or meaning

**Tikanga Māori:** Māori custom

**Tikanga tuku iho:** tradition

**Tinana:** body

**Toa:** warrior

**Tohi:** naming ceremony/ceremonies

**Tohunga:** expert/s or specialist/s

**Tuakana:** senior

**Tūranganui a Kiwa:** Gisborne

**Tūrangawaewae:** individual's home-ground, considered a place where one is able to 'stand' and identify with particular Iwi, hapū, and marae

**Tūroro:** old term for Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake or Māori with experience of mental illness

**Tūturu:** real, trustworthy or authentic

**Urupā:** cemetery/cemeteries

**Wāhine:** women

**Wāhine toa:** women leaders

**Waiata:** sing, or song/s

**Wairua:** spirit

**Wairuatanga:** spirituality

**Wānanga:** learning or series of discussions

**Whaikōrero:** formal speech-making or oration

**Whakaaro:** thinking, or thought/s

**Whakairo:** carving

**Whakamā:** shy, embarrassed or loss of mana

**Whakapapa:** ancestry or geneology

**Whānau:** family/families

**Whanaunga/whanauka:** relative/s

**Whanaungatanga:** concept akin to building relationships

**Whare:** house/s

**Whare paku:** toilet/s

**Whāriki:** carpet/s or mat/s

**Whatumanawa:** emotional, or the open expression of emotion

**Whenua:** land

**Wīwī:** people from France

# WHAKATAKI

## PREFACE

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In a previous life I managed a Māori mental health unit, Te Korowai Atawhai, at the old Sunnyside Hospital in Ōtautahi<sup>1</sup>. It was staffed by 13 Māori mental health workers known as Pūkenga Atawhai, trained as experts in Māori mental health.

Through my experience in working in the mental health sector, I observed that many Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake were dislocated from their Iwi<sup>2</sup>, hapū<sup>3</sup>, whānau<sup>4</sup> and marae<sup>5</sup>, and unaware of their whakapapa<sup>6</sup>. Anecdotally I have heard Māori health workers support this observation and hypothesise that those Māori who have a strong cultural identity, “who know who they are and where they come from”, are not those seen in their mental health services.

During my time as Kaiwhakahaere<sup>7</sup> of Te Korowai Atawhai I often spoke to training nurses, social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists, many of them new to Aotearoa/New Zealand, about Māori mental health. One of the things spoken about was the importance of identity for Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake. I instinctively knew this to be true, and professionally had seen evidence to support this.

Through my nursing training and working with Te Korowai Atawhai I had had the opportunity to observe and work with healing programmes that were based on knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> The Māori place name ‘Ōtautahi’ is used throughout the thesis to refer to Christchurch.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘Iwi’ is used throughout the thesis to mean either ‘a tribal group’ (singular) or ‘tribal groups’ (plural).

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘hapū’ is used throughout the thesis to mean either ‘a sub-tribe’ (singular) or ‘sub-tribes’ (plural).

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘whānau’ is used throughout the thesis to mean either ‘a family’ (singular) or ‘families’ (plural).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘marae’ is generally used throughout the thesis to refer to the traditional meeting place/s of whānau, hapū or Iwi. When used to refer to a contemporary meeting place, the term is indicated as such in the text.

<sup>6</sup> The term ‘whakapapa’ is used throughout the thesis to mean ‘ancestry’ or ‘genealogy’.

<sup>7</sup> The title ‘Kaiwhakahaere’ was used to mean ‘Manager’.

of whakapapa. Typically these were healing programmes developed as treatment modalities for Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake within Kaupapa Māori mental health services<sup>8</sup>, and increasingly within mainstream services striving for biculturalism. Their focus included connecting Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake with their whakapapa in order to enhance their identity and wellbeing.

In Ōtautahi we had one such programme named Te Awa o te Ora which essentially began using waiata<sup>9</sup> as a therapy to increase self-esteem, enhance cultural identity and to encourage whanaungatanga<sup>10</sup>. The programme later developed to include the teaching of individual whakapapa. The dramatic changes in behaviour and seeming levels of wellness as Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake gained knowledge of their whakapapa is a phenomenon I have witnessed, and I relay two such examples:

The first occurred in the late 1980s when I spent some time as a student nurse with Te Whare Marie, the Kaupapa Māori mental health unit at Porirua Hospital. As part of their programme for tūroro (as Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake were then referred to) once a week a pōwhiri<sup>11</sup> would be held for any new staff or students. The tūroro on the programme would assume the role of tangata whenua<sup>12</sup> and became familiar with pōwhiri processes including karanga<sup>13</sup> and whaikōrero<sup>14</sup> as a result. After the formal whaikōrero (and before

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<sup>8</sup> Kaupapa Māori mental health services are defined as services which may offer a range of treatment and support services, but which include as base elements: whanaungatanga, whakapapa, cultural assessment, empowerment of Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake and their whānau, te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, kaumātua guidance, access to traditional healing, access to mainstream health services, and quality performance measures relevant to Māori. Fundamental to the provision of these elements is also the need for sound management systems and practices (Ministry of Health/Manatū Hauora, 2002b).

<sup>9</sup> The term 'waiata' is used throughout the thesis to mean either 'sing', 'a song' (singular) or 'songs' (plural).

<sup>10</sup> The term 'whanaungatanga' is used throughout the thesis to refer to a concept akin to building relationships. It has at its core the value and respect of whānau, but this does not mean it solely refers to establishing rapport with family. The process of whanaungatanga is applicable to any relationship so may refer to communal contribution as much as family togetherness.

<sup>11</sup> The term 'pōwhiri' is used throughout the thesis to refer to a formal welcoming process.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'tangata whenua' is generally used throughout the thesis to refer to the aboriginal or Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is often translated as 'people of the land'; 'tāngata' meaning 'people' and 'whenua' meaning 'land'. When used within the context of pōwhiri, such as in this instance, the term 'tangata whenua' refers to the people hosting the welcome who are differentiated from the visitors (or 'manuhiri').

<sup>13</sup> The term 'karanga' means 'call' and is used to refer to the formal welcoming call and responding call of wāhine at pōwhiri.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'whaikōrero' is used throughout the thesis to refer to formal speech-making or oration.

the hākari<sup>15</sup>) a mihimihi<sup>16</sup> would take place. At one such pōwhiri, as we were going around the room listening to people recite their whakapapa, it came the turn of a young man who was intellectually disabled. My understanding was that this rangatahi Māori<sup>17</sup> attended Te Whare Marie from the community as respite for his parents. I do not know whether he had any diagnosis of mental illness. Although I had met him a few times, I had never heard him speak and had assumed he was mute. I later found out he could speak, but only communicated with his parents in te reo Māori<sup>18</sup>.

The normal practice during such pōwhiri was that when it came to his turn to mihi, the kuia<sup>19</sup> would stand wherever she was in the room, and would speak for him. However, on this day, before she had the chance to do so, he just stood and recited his pepeha<sup>20</sup>. Not only this, he accompanied it with the most beautiful mōteatea<sup>21</sup> imaginable. I doubt anyone had ever thought he was capable, but obviously whilst he was accompanying his parents at hui<sup>22</sup>, he was making connections. Once he had finished he just sat down again, the room moved to silence. I have often thought about this day and wondered about this man's strength of identity that had not until that time been realised.

The second example is similar but relates to Te Awa o te Ora in Ōtautahi. At the time Te Awa o te Ora was made up of about 20-30 Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake (on a good day) who once a week met for waiata and whanaungatanga. These Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake were either living in the community receiving ongoing community mental health support, or were inpatients of the hospital.

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<sup>15</sup> The term 'hākari' is used to mean either 'a feast' (singular) or 'feasts' (plural).

<sup>16</sup> The terms 'mihimihi' and 'mihi' are used interchangeably throughout the thesis to mean either 'greet', 'a greeting' (singular) or 'greetings' (plural).

<sup>17</sup> The term 'rangatahi' is used throughout the thesis to mean either 'a youth' (singular) or 'youth' (plural). 'Rangatahi Māori' is used when referring specifically to either 'a Māori youth' (singular) or 'Māori youth' (plural).

<sup>18</sup> The term 'te reo Māori' is used throughout the thesis to mean 'the Māori language'.

<sup>19</sup> The term 'kuia' is used throughout the thesis to mean either 'an elderly woman' (singular) or 'elderly women' (plural).

<sup>20</sup> The term 'pepeha' is used throughout the thesis to refer to the recitation of an individual's whakapapa.

<sup>21</sup> The term 'mōteatea' is used throughout the thesis to mean 'a tribal chant' (singular) or 'tribal chants' (plural).

<sup>22</sup> The term 'hui' is used throughout the thesis to mean either 'a meeting or gathering' (singular) or 'meetings or gatherings' (plural).

They began by learning waiata— one or two at first. Only a few would participate. Most just congregated outside, smoking and coming inside for food when it was kai<sup>23</sup> time. Over time - many months - the weekly sessions became a highlight of the week for most of these Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake, and more began to participate.

After a while it was decided that everyone, Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake, staff and whānau, should begin to learn their pepeha. Mainly through the dedicated work of the Pūkenga Atawhai and their knowledge of these people, lives began to unfold. The first time a ‘formal hui’ was held, where each of these Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake were to stand in front of manuhiri<sup>24</sup> and mihi to them, reciting their pepeha, they were unashamedly petrified. Yet, one by one they did. Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake who had once appeared to be the most psychotic, aggressive, ‘off-the-wall’ people, and others who had appeared to be so severely withdrawn they were like curled up hedgehogs, blossomed. In fact, in time this group began to work the speaking circuit at mental health conferences both within Aotearoa/New Zealand and throughout Australia. Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake, once unable to even look you in the eyes, were now able to stand, mihi, hold their mana<sup>25</sup>, and describe to rooms full of strangers what it was like for them to live with the experience of mental illness.

My belief is that they would never have got to this place had it not been for the strength they gained from knowing who they were and where they came from. This same strength was what I believe allowed the rangatahi Māori referred to in the first example, to mihi.

Others may differ in opinion and attribute these dramatic life changes and increased wellness to intensive therapy or just whanaungatanga. I believe however, that personal and cultural identity played a huge part. In this regard my hypothesis has been shaped by both my personal and professional experiences— the idea that a secure cultural identity provides an ideal platform for improved wellbeing, and that Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake benefit from this.

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<sup>23</sup> The term ‘kai’ has been used throughout the thesis to mean ‘food’.

<sup>24</sup> The term ‘manuhiri’ has been used throughout the thesis to mean either ‘a visitor’ (singular) or ‘visitors’ (plural).

<sup>25</sup> The term ‘mana’ is used throughout the thesis to refer to integrity or prestige.

Put simply, this study aimed to explore the possibility that a secure cultural identity, and strong links with whānau, hapū and Iwi, provided some protection for Tāngata Whai Ora/Motuhake.

Although this thinking originates in my experiences within the mental health sector, it echoes a commonly voiced belief of many others, that stronger cultural identity improves wellbeing. Professor Mason Durie has written extensively about the links between cultural identity and mental health for Māori. In a press release regarding closing the mental health gaps between Māori and non-Māori<sup>26</sup>, where Durie (2000) is quoted as linking mental health problems of Māori youth to government policies over the last 100 years, he states “There is now strong evidence that where cultural identity is secure, mental health is better”. Indeed, this is a view that I, and many others share, and one that formed the subject of exploration for this thesis.

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<sup>26</sup> The terms ‘non-Māori’ and ‘Pākehā’ have been used interchangeably throughout this thesis to refer to non-Indigenous New Zealanders.

*HAVE YOU NOT BEEN LISTENING?*

*We are the tangata whenua. Nau mai, haere mai.*

*Now we are all one.*

*We think a little differently, mind. We do things a little differently too.*

*We all think alike, really. And we don't do things that differently, you and I.*

*Our whānau are the most important thing to us.*

*We love our families too, you know. But friends are just as important.*

*Our kaumātua are respected. Listen to them.*

*The age of retirement is 65 years.*

*Our reo is part of who we are. It needs to be taught in schools.*

*Is that going to get them a job? My child will learn French.*

*Our rangatahi need to see positive role models on television - to hear the reo spoken.*

*Are we going to make sure they use subtitles, so we can all understand?*

*How come their children can wear greenstones to school? Ours can't wear crucifixes.*

*Who said you couldn't wear your taonga?*

*They have too many children. They can't even look after the ones they've got.*

*Another pēpi? Kia ora tāku moko.*

*Look at them all on the DPB and the dole - that's taxpayers' money, you know.*

*I hope that superannuation lasts.*

*Look at the amount of them in prison.*

*Those judges, lawyers, police - no hea koutou?*

*They're in the news again, unable to account for funding they've received.*

*What news?*

*This is such a young land - barely 200 years old.*

*We have been here for well over a thousand years.*

*If it weren't for us you'd be running around in grass skirts still, if you hadn't all eaten yourselves first.*

*We thrived for generations before nearly being annihilated by those third world diseases.*

*What about the Asians? There are lots of other cultures in this country, you know.*

*Treaties can only be signed with Indigenous people. Did you not know that?*

*They can't even look after the land they do have - look how overgrown it is.*

*And kia ora for the gorse.*

*That land is my tipuna's. They named it. They are that land. That land is part of me.*

*That's nice - quaint even. But I bought this land. And your ancestors are dead.*

*We have a Treaty. Honour it.*

*The Treaty is history and we're sick of hearing about it. It has no relevance to today.*

*We cannot move forward until we have addressed the past.*

*I didn't sign it. It has nothing to do with me.*

*Don't takahia the mana of our marae. Learn our kawa or stay out of our house.*

*Why do you let them get away with this? They can't do that, can they?*

*It's about time someone stood up to them.*

*Have you not been listening?*