“There are as many ways to be wahine Māori as there are wāhine Māori.”

Mana wāhine, identity, and sense-making: Exploratory perspectives of what it means to be wāhine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa

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He whakarāpopoto (Abstract)

Mana wāhine is the power and authority inherent to wāhine Māori (Māori women). This research sought to understand mana wāhine and what it means to be wāhine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa. The aim was to explore identity construction and sense-making through the perspectives and experiences of wāhine Māori. An approach grounded in Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories was used in this research and embedded the process within a Māori worldview. Mana Wāhine theories specifically allowed the realities and experiences of wāhine Māori to be centered and validated their voices. Pūrākau methodology was used to elevate each participant's voice throughout the research process. A purposive sampling approach was used to support a range of wāhine Māori with diverse experiences to participate. Twelve people who identify as wāhine Māori, over the age of 18 and who currently reside in Aotearoa, participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The analysis involved engaging with pūrākau to individually interpret each narrative and re-present a co-constructed pūrākau for each participant. The discussion explored three overarching ideas that emerged across pūrākau, and related them to extant literature. Firstly, mana wāhine as an interwoven and relationally constructed identity grounded in whakapapa (ancestry) was discussed. This idea recognises the need to locate wāhine Māori collectively within te ao Māori. Secondly, mana wāhine was identified as a journey of growth and healing. This point affirmed the importance of pivotal experiences as informing, and being informed by, the sense-making within the pūrākau. Thirdly, that mana wāhine offers a space of potentiality and resilience. Within the pūrākau, there were multiple examples of identities of wāhine that were in resistance to dominant and essentialised notions of what it means to be wahine Māori. This research contributes to wider scholarly efforts that seek to decolonise, and indigenise, mainstream understandings of gender through celebrating the diverse realities of contemporary wāhine Māori.

He kupu whakataki (Foreword)

Mānawa mai te mauri nuku

Mānawa mai te mauri rangi

Ko te mauri kei au

He mauri tūpua

Ka pakaru mai te pō

Tau mai te mauri

Haumi e, hui e, taiki e!

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He rārangi upoko (Table of contents)

Te wāhanga tuatahi

He kupu whakaūpoko (Introduction)

This research explores perspectives and experiences of mana wāhine and what it means to be wāhine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa. Mana refers to intrinsic power, prestige, and authority, and wāhine Māori are the Indigenous women of Aotearoa. The aims of this research are to explore narratives of identity construction and sense-making. The title, *There are as many ways to be wahine Māori as there are wāhine Māori*, highlights the diversity of experiences and realities of wāhine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa. This quote was a memorable contribution from one of the participants of this project. An aspiration of this thesis is to elevate these understandings and showcase the inherent heterogeneity within mana wāhine.

In this chapter, I introduce my positionality in line with the theoretical foundations of this research, followed by an orientation to identities as they are understood in this project. Subsequently, gender constructs and what is meant when using the term "wāhine" are explained. The use of te reo Māori (Māori language) terms is then established and, lastly, an outline of each chapter is provided.

A protection and promotion of te ao Māori (Māori worldview) and Māori ways of being is inherent throughout this thesis. Engaging with a Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine approach reminds me that my position is firstly, and principally, a wahine Māori. Within this project I step into other roles as an emerging researcher. Being clear in this position allows me to bring with me my own subjectivity and lived experiences to inform and shape the research process.

To ask what it means to be wāhine invokes reflection from a specific place and time. Identity, context, and lived experiences shape the unique and subjective way that we negotiate our realities. Identity as wāhine Māori is neither fixed nor immutable; it is better understood as an unfolding series of chapters. Therefore, the stories that have been shared in this project represent the truth of each participant at that day and time of the interview only. It is equally important to acknowledge the influence of myself as the researcher on the interview process and therefore, the ways in which each wahine engaged with the process as well.

This thesis is interested in contemporary gender understandings and mana wāhine. The terms "wāhine" and "wāhine Māori" are used interchangeably throughout the thesis, and encompass any and all people who identify as wāhine Māori. As Hamley (2022) points out, reconstructing Māori gender identities in contemporary times is challenging, and it is important to not confuse wāhine and tāne as a simple translation of female and male. These terms align with two different understandings of gender, which are grounded in different worldviews. The focus of this thesis is on the experiences of wāhine, and I note that there are diverse gender expressions that may not align with discussions of wāhine and tāne.

Te reo Māori is a taonga and vital element of te ao Māori. It is used frequently within this thesis to promote its use and to acknowledge that English translations can struggle to communicate the entirety of meaning that can sit behind our words. The first time a word is introduced, a translation is supplied in-text in brackets and subsequent uses are not translated. A glossary is supplied in Appendix A. In line with the transformative goals of Kaupapa Māori research, normalising the use of te reo Māori is interwoven with the goals of this thesis.

Te wāhanga tuatahi (chapter one) introduces the research topic and aims for this project. The reader is oriented to terms and language used, and an overview is provided of successive chapters that follow.

Te wāhanga tuarua (chapter two) provides a comprehensive review of local literature pertaining to wāhine Māori identities and sense-making. The chapter includes three sections. The first section is a retelling of history from an explicitly wāhine Māori perspective, and an introduction to the Mana Wāhine movement. Following this, contemporary identity construction, identity within the psychological discipline, and culturally hybrid identities are discussed. The chapter closes with a review of literature relating to identities, gender construction, and psychology within the current context.

Te wāhanga tuatoru (chapter three) comprises the theoretical foundations, methodology and procedures for this research. Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories are established and reviewed as the theoretical framework of this research. Following this part, pūrākau (traditional narratives) as a methodology is introduced and discussed as the method of collecting and

analysing pūrākau. The research process is then detailed. Finally, my role(s) as the researcher, and ethics are critically discussed.

Te wāhanga tuawha (chapter four) individually presents the pūrākau of each participant. Presenting the analyses in this way intended to emphasise the contributions of each participant and elevate their unique standpoint. Interpretively, this decision provided the means to explore the meaning-making inherent within each story. The chapter closes with the researcher's positionality and reflexive component.

Te wāhanga tuarima (chapter five) provides a discussion of the shared threads and meaning-making across the pūrākau, connecting these understandings within extant literature. Three ideas are postulated; mana wāhine as an interwoven experience, a journey of growth and healing, and a space of potentiality and resilience. Subsequently, strengths, limitations, and implications are outlined and the chapter closes with a conclusion.

Te wāhanga tuarua

He kupu arotake (Literature review)

The following literature review engages with a selection of specific arguments made by pioneering wāhine Māori academics and scholars, and wider literature pertaining to Māori identity concepts both contemporarily and historically. Given the contextual focus of this project being Aotearoa, local literature has been exclusively emphasised to establish these perspectives and situate the gaze of this project. I establish how customary understandings of gender have been reclaimed, critically discuss colonisation from the perspectives of wāhine Māori, and explore contemporary identity construction. I then conclude with a section pertaining to recent arguments around gender concepts and critiques of early Mana Wāhine literature. As recent scholarship is limited in this area, key pieces have been selected to offer a review of the current setting as it relates to gender.

The voices centred in this chapter have been carefully selected as they provide distinct windows into influential sites for negotiating identity. I have approached the literature review in this way to emphasise the depth manifest in each of the selected articles. Where a section is focused on an individual's work, I have intentionally not used APA citation formatting. This approach reflects a principle of this thesis that emphasises the importance of presenting wāhine narratives in their entirety, and advocates for wāhine Māori to be central in discussions relating to tino rangatiratanga (self-determination).

I begin the literature review by exploring two papers by Ani Mikaere (1994, 1999) that have informed contemporary approaches to wāhine Māori liberation. These analyses provide arguments that have meaningfully contributed to contemporary understandings of the traditional roles and responsibilities held by wāhine Māori. Mikaere has produced an expanse of work exploring traditional gender roles that have reasserted wāhine Māori within traditional Māori society as leaders, matriarchs, and as having intrinsic, divine value to the collective. The ensuing examination of Mikaere's two analyses can be considered the contextual foundation for this thesis in terms of asserting the structural impacts of colonisation for wāhine Māori. I firstly orient the reader to historically situated roles of traditional wāhine and establish the legacy of colonisation through a distinctly wāhine Māori perspective. This approach positions patriarchy,

government, and religion as colonial tools that dismantled tikanga (Māori customs), cosmogony, and whānau (family) structures. I conclude the section by summarising Mikaere's impressions of what it meant to be wahine in the late twentieth century.

Subsequently, I give an overview of the Mana Wāhine movement that occurred alongside the Kaupapa Māori cultural resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s. The theoretical foundations and methodologies of this research project stem from these movements. In this chapter, Mana Wāhine is discussed in terms of its goals as a movement, its theoretical developments, and how it relates to feminism broadly. Following this, I review key literature that contends with identity within the discipline of psychology, the production of a "Māori identity", and contemporary wāhine Māori identity construction. This review includes a specific examination of Tess Moeke-Maxwell's (2005) work that explores the exclusion of Māori multiculturalism in dominant representations of wāhine Māori identities. I have emphasised this piece as it offers a basis for understanding how developments in contemporary identity challenges stem from dominant and essentialised notions of wāhine Māori identity. This article also establishes a significant theoretical development around "cultural hybridity" as a way of encompassing diversity in contemporary articulations of identity.

Lastly, I offer an orientation to how wāhine Māori identities are positioned in the current climate. I look to recent articles that contextualise the experiences of wāhine in the present, and also establish these experiences alongside gender diversity and tāne Māori. This section of the review develops critical arguments around essentialised notions of gender.

Colonisation from a wāhine Māori standpoint

The following section provides a historical re-telling of colonisation from a distinctly wāhine perspective. This establishes a foundation from which many of the contemporary struggles for wāhine liberation emerge, including the Mana Wāhine movement. The section begins by focussing on two papers from Ani Mikaere. Specifically, these papers are *Colonisation and the imposition of the patriarchy* (Mikaere, 1999), and *Māori women: Caught in the contradictions of a colonised reality* (Mikaere, 1994). The section draws ideas from both papers together and I reference respective papers only when the ideas are specific to each. Following this, Mana Wāhine as a movement is established, with prominent ideas and expressions explored.

To frame her seminal arguments that colonisation imposed patriarchy and destroyed gender balance, Mikaere (1999) contrasts the traditional roles of wāhine Māori according to tikanga with the status of wāhine Māori after colonisation. Beginning with a foreword, she locates the struggles of wāhine Māori, as Indigenous women in Aotearoa, alongside Indigenous women globally. She posits that the colonisation of Aotearoa is not an isolated example; rather, there are significant similarities in the imposition of colonial forces on Indigenous women. Like many Indigenous women, Mikaere recognises an interconnected colonial regime that targeted "the hearts of our women" (p. 36) and installed patriarchal norms to the detriment of Indigenous people of all genders. The erasure of traditional gender relations, as they were known and recalled, became a common theme amongst colonised Indigenous societies. Whilst the focus of this project sits firmly with perspectives from Aotearoa, Mikaere's positioning of wāhine Māori alongside international Indigenous voices remains important and powerful.

Mikaere argues that the colonisation and retelling of Māori cosmogony was devastating to the roles and status of wāhine Māori. Mikaere distinguishes the dichotomous realities of contemporary wāhine by contrasting the traditional roles they held with their status in contemporary society. To address the former, Mikaere enlists tikanga as a lens to establish two central ideas. The first idea is that gender is one of numerous interconnected and linked concepts within te ao Māori that cannot be understood in isolation. Mikaere provides an analysis of roles and responsibilities within the collective community structure, and emphasises how whānau units mediated the freedoms and positions that wāhine occupied traditionally. The next idea is the reassertion of the potency of divine feminine sexuality. Here, Mikaere engages with cosmogonic accounts and oral histories to evidence these claims. She then systematically details how colonisation disrupted tikanga by altering cosmogonical narratives and dismantling traditional whānau structures.

Tikanga

Tikanga, defined as Māori law by Mikaere, was traditionally constituted by balance across all aspects; gender, nature, atua (Māori deities), and other worldly concepts. Within te ao Māori, there is an understanding of a collective whole that is contingent on all of its parts to survive. Everything has a shared and cosmogonically traceable whakapapa that enables each aspect to connect to the beginning of the universe. Each person, flora, fauna, or worldly proponent has

ascribed intrinsic value and subsequent responsibility for collective wellbeing and protection. Mikaere describes how whānau lived within community villages and familial units that were often large. There was a high degree of fluidity in traditional cultural roles and the responsibility of tasks was shared at a community level. The ways in which the whānau interacted each day centred around ensuring the continuation and upkeep of the communal living set-up and community. Being in constant relation afforded people freedoms to engage in other roles beyond being parents or mothers. Mikaere (1994) argues that the responsibility of child rearing was shared beyond the parents. Wāhine in traditional society had great freedom as a result of the division of labour, often occupying leadership positions. Whānau units therefore were a significant site of protection for hauora (wellbeing) and safety because they affirmed and protected the mana of wāhine. Violence against wāhine was punishable to the highest extent possible. This punishment meant either death or, similarly, being declared "dead" at an iwi (tribe) or hapū (sub-tribe) level, whereby perpetrators were actively excluded and ignored by everyone within the community. Mikaere asserts that in collective Māori society, social exclusion was seen as one of the worst punishments one could prescribe, which demonstrates the extent that identity is constructed through collective association.

Traditional Māori cosmogony

Mikaere engages with cosmogonic accounts to reassert the importance and relevance of wāhine in traditional Māori society. This importance, Mikaere underlines, relates to the strength manifest in sexual and reproductive power. By providing an analysis of the narratives of atua wāhine (wāhine Māori deities), Mikaere showcases their roles as foundational pillars of Māori existence, such as Papatūānuku (earth mother), Mahuika (atua of fire) and Hine-nui-te-pō (atua of the night, guardian of Rarohenga). Speaking of their wisdom and specific role in knowledge transmission, Mikaere delineates the importance of kuia (older women, grandmothers) as repositories of knowledge and influential gatekeepers of knowledge transmission. Māori cosmogony also showcased the potency and divine nature of feminine sexuality and its critical constitutional role within te ao Māori. The creation story of Ranginui (sky father) and Papatūānuku separating is likened to a symbolic womb, exemplifying the importance of birth, whakapapa, and divine feminine sexuality in these foundational narratives. Mikaere notably mentions the symbolism of Māui (atua and tupuna) meeting his death on a quest for immortality; he tried to enter the vagina

of Hine-nui-te-pō, she awakened, and the attempt proved fatal. The potency of wahine sexual organs both bring life into te ao Mārama (the realm of enlightenment) and take it away, symbolically acting as a passage to another realm, te ao wairua (the spiritual realm).

Understanding the explicitness of sexual power is facilitated by a deeper understanding of te reo Māori words that have dual meanings relating to this potency. Hapū (sub-tribe and pregnant), whānau (family unit and birthing process), whenua (land and placenta as the organ of nourishment and sustenance), and te kore (the realm of infinite potential) and te pō (the realm of darkness) as a metaphor for the womb all reveal the role of femininity within traditional Māori belief systems and ways of life. This also locates our being as one in the same as the universal being, connecting us through whakapapa to the beginning of the universe. Wāhine who can have children, and want to, can embody whakapapa by connecting the past to the present and to the future through giving birth.

Colonisation of Māori cosmogony

Mikaere first addresses the impact of colonisation on Māori cosmogony inferring the centrality of these narratives to a traditional Māori existence. Making sense of traditional ways of being in contemporary times has made visible the disruption and retelling of these narratives through a colonial lens. This led to an invasion of different ideas that permeated through the societal weave, altering sociocultural development for Māori by naturalising the lesser position of wāhine. Mikaere highlights that colonisers arrived with culturally specific understandings and rules as they relate to women. In their view, women were chattels and should not manifestly hold any power or value beyond domesticity or contractual benefits relating to land and business interests. This view influenced and biased the ethnographic accounts of early settlers as they selectively emphasised the narratives of tāne Māori as legitimate voices of authority. These ethnographic accounts therefore dismissed the centrality of wāhine leadership and prestige within traditional society. Māori cosmogonical narratives became overlaid with Christian values to better align them with patriarchal values within a Western worldview. Mikaere asserts that upholding paternalistic values led to the objectification and exoticisation of wāhine. The status of wāhine within society shifted in alignment with the relegated status of atua wāhine within narratives. As these roles were deemphasised, the masculine characters were ascribed increased priority and dominance.

Mikaere speaks to the introduction of Io (supreme being), as akin to the Christian god, as the first supremely gendered being within te ao Māori. Io was placed at the annex of universal beginnings, leading to a reconceptualisation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, and their children, to be products of Io. This tilting of power towards masculine dominance begins the installment of patriarchal values. The depth of Māori symbolism relating to reproduction, life, death and whakapapa was systematically erased and feminine sexual potency was neutralised. In cases where neutralisation was impossible, feminine sexuality was demonised through the deployment of Western binaries that positioned "sin" and "pure" as two dichotomies. Through exposing this cosmogonical crisis, Mikaere outlines how the newly overlaid Christian, patriarchal narratives consequentially seeped into the cultural paradigm through the process of Aotearoa being colonised.

Colonisation of whānau and tikanga

Mikaere elucidates the profound impact colonisation had on traditional whānau units, the legacy of which, wāhine Māori continue to bear the brunt of today. The collectivist values of traditional Māori society sat in direct opposition with the individualised values of a Western worldview, creating devastation for Māori communities when Western ways of being prevailed. Mikaere links legislation such as the Native Land Act 1909 to the argument that destroying collectivism was an active, conscious, and necessary decision throughout the process of colonisation to ensure its success. This Act was a two pronged approach that involved dismantling traditional relationships between iwi and whenua and replacing this relationship with a Western "individualised ownership" ideology and model. The individual titles to land that were introduced by the Native Land Act were ideologically opposed to Māori ways of being relating to whenua. Land was not something that was owned, exploited, or extracted from, nor could it be understood devoid of its spiritual potentiality. The Act employed other tactics such as the relegation of rights pertaining to customary Māori marriages and the installation of legal marriages as the new requirement. This requirement sanctioned nuclear families and meant that Māori who wanted any hope of retaining land needed to quickly comply with the Act.

The undermining of collectivist Māori ways of being has been devastating for wāhine Māori, as this societal structure was intrinsically protective. Land loss, social upheaval, and the destruction of whānau units resulted in the marginalisation of wāhine, relegating them to the roles of

housewives and mothers only. The divine reproductive power of wāhine, as it was once understood, was replaced with a Christian morality that emphasised the virtuous virginal woman and narratives of purity, subordination, and cleanliness. These ideals within a Western cultural paradigm objectified women and were not compatible with the autonomy and agency traditionally known and lived by wāhine. New and unique domestic pressures to contend with arose as collectivist communities were abolished and smaller nuclear families emphasised and sanctioned.

Mikaere exemplifies how the whittling down of whānau units from hapū, as a large community group, to the Western nuclear family arrangements isolated wāhine Māori and made them vulnerable. Wāhine became displaced socially, economically, and culturally. Out of necessity and survival, wāhine were compelled to align with Western and Christian understandings of a "good" wife. These imported ideas of domesticity and the overlaying of Christian values became critical mechanisms for survival as the economic opportunities and sociocultural freedoms afforded to tāne Māori, albeit still limited, were not accessible for wāhine Māori. Increasingly, this placed tāne Māori in the highest positions of power within whānau units, further displacing wāhine Māori from their historical leadership positions and making them economically dependent on their husbands or partners. Mikaere argues that this began to infiltrate the self-perceptions of wāhine, displacing them from their mana as they became further separated from traditional elements of identity construction over time. The education system supported this fracturing of wāhine sense of self as it embedded a structure focused on raising women with values of domesticity and Christian morality. This approach institutionalised the remoulding of worldviews to further ensure wāhine were subordinate and complicit within this colonised, patriarchal regime. What emerged was a uniquely contradictory, colonised reality for wāhine Māori that both removed their rights to self-definition and sovereignty, and redefined them as undesirable and impure compared to their Pākehā (New Zealand European) counterparts, who were framed as virtuous.

Being wāhine in the 1980s and 1990s

Mikaere (1994) asserts the consequential developments from the position of a wahine, providing a commentary on the political and sociocultural landscape facing wāhine Māori in the 1980s and 1990s. Bringing attention to the ongoing nature of colonisation in the daily lives of wāhine,

Mikaere argues that the colonised realities of many wāhine were entirely invisible to the Crown. There was a lack of representation of wāhine Māori on governance boards, and in consultancy and advisory positions, even when actions relating to public health reform were specifically addressing the health disparities faced by wāhine Māori. Where the Crown was answering to Māori grievances regarding Te Tiriti, tāne Māori were being placed into negotiating positions, as they were perceived as leaders and decision-makers by the Crown. This enduring paternalistic belief of patriarchal leadership had become naturalised within Māori society to the extent that mainstream narratives extended that tāne leadership was an intrinsically traditional Māori way of being. Mikaere contends that a world where more power is held by tāne Māori than wāhine Māori is a direct breach of tikanga and we must understand this structure as an imposition. Mikaere highlights the numerous accounts of wāhine Māori maintaining leadership positions within whānau, hapū, and iwi, as well as at a national level with movements, such as Te Kotahitanga. Despite this evidence, wāhine Māori at this time were still being invisibilised.

Mikaere goes on to explore the interaction between the interests of Pākehā feminism and wāhine Māori. Alongside numerous wāhine Māori scholars, Mikaere critically situated the struggles of wāhine Māori at the intersection of compounding oppression from patriarchy and colonialism. Freedoms from these struggles required active resistance of structures and institutions that are upheld by these ideologies. Whilst there are similarities within the struggles of Pākehā women and wāhine Māori in terms of gender inequality, a viable unification appeared unlikely if Pākehā women could not critically consider their own roles and responsibility within colonialism as White privilege. Pākehā feminism emerged in response to the oppressive nature of patriarchal values and its continued development under a capitalist regime. Mikaere explains that at this time, many feminist movements had tendencies to define the realities of non-White women for them, removing their right to self-define and directly interfering with tino rangatiratanga. Pākehā feminism failed to service women at the intersections of gender and ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, and other sites of oppression as it privileged Western values that served Pākehā women. These values were inherent to colonial goals and, more contemporarily, capitalist goals, which perpetuate racialised oppression and exploit marginalised communities and the natural environment. Pākehā feminism's prevailing narratives were informed by Western superiority, which did not account for wāhine Māori experiences, instead emphasising those of Pākehā

women. Subsequently, wāhine Māori began their own movements to address the disparate outcomes they were experiencing.

Mana Wāhine movement

The review of these influential papers by Mikaere leads into a consideration of the contemporary context of Aotearoa. Cultural resurgence efforts brought attention to contemporary challenges facing wāhine Māori. I now move to Mana Wāhine, introducing the broad movement that seeks to reclaim the authority of wāhine Māori in Aotearoa and I review literature from a range of prominent wāhine Māori scholars, artists and figures.

To attend to the ongoing colonised realities of many wāhine Māori, Mana Wāhine developed as a movement, as part of the Kaupapa Māori revolution (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). It firstly began retelling history from a uniquely wāhine Māori standpoint and demanding theoretical space. In doing so, the Mana Wāhine movement inherently legitimised mātauranga wāhine (wāhine Māori knowledges) and reasserted the mana of wāhine, particularly by positioning wāhine as central voices in their own lives (Irwin, 1992). The term "mana wāhine" is constituted by two key parts; the "mana" of "wāhine", and the embodied, intrinsic prestige present within each and every wahine Māori. Mana Wāhine, as a liberation movement, is ongoing and is dedicated to affirming wāhine Māori rights to self-determination and self-definition, thus is crucial in assertions of tino rangatiratanga. Reestablishing mātauranga wāhine and the interconnected nature of te ao Māori with mana wāhine remains vital in reaffirming the role and status of wāhine Māori in Māori society and therefore is of fundamental interest to all Māori people (Pihama, 2001).

From this movement stems Mana Wāhine as a theoretical and methodological framework. Ani Mikaere and a number of Indigenous wāhine scholars, such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Leonie Pihama, Naomi Simmonds, Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku, and many others, contributed to the formation of these theories. These scholars focused on occupying theoretical space that was concerned with the ongoing systemic inequities specifically facing wāhine Māori, to make visible their diverse and often contradictory realities (Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 1992).

As an inherently decolonial political project, Mana Wāhine is a transdisciplinary movement. Alongside academia, the works of artists and writers such as Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia

Grace are considered foundational as well (e.g., Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984). There is much overlap between academia, art, and activism for Mana Wāhine and as such, Simmonds (2011) describes the movement as a "complex weave" (p. 12). A number of different names or umbrella terms have been coined over the decades to cover the ongoing and urgent projects of Indigenous emancipation from a gendered and place-specific location. Mana Wāhine has always been primarily concerned with the liberation of wāhine Māori and validation of their diverse realities by centering their voices (Jahnke, 1997). For this reason, it has been commonly referred to as Māori feminism, or Māori feminist discourses (Connor, 2007; Irwin, 1992; Te Awekotuku, 1992; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). Whilst this comparison to feminism remains problematic for many wāhine Māori, the assertion allows Māori feminism to be cross-fertilised with other Indigenous feminisms and epistemologies that challenge mainstream Western positivism, post-postivism, and other marginalising research models (Connor, 2007; Mikaere, 1999). Through this nomenclature locating Mana Wāhine alongside other Indigenous groups, efforts to address gender inequality and cultural preservation are reinforced at a global level (Mikaere, 1999). At the same time, scholars stress that this work must be done carefully to resist the articulation of Indigenous peoples as one singular, global group with similar shared experiences (Irwin, 1992; Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 2021; Pihama, 2020). This can risk the homogenisation of Indigenous experiences, displacing all groups from their unique authority to their land and background.

Māori feminist discourses also inherently assert the lack of suitability of Pākehā feminism for wāhine Māori (Awatere, 1984; Jahnke, 1997; Mikaere, 1994, 1999; Pihama, 2001; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Despite the ability of Pākehā feminism to include wāhine Māori by virtue of their womanhood, the history of Pākehā women in the oppression of wāhine Māori means they cannot account for wāhine Māori (Waitere & Johnston, 2009). A recent example of this was the exposure of the suffrage movement in Aotearoa not accounting for wāhine Māori perspectives and marginalising the wearing of moko kauae (traditional wāhine Māori chin tattoo) (Pihama, 2018). The suffrage movement, although vital, involved fighting for the right to participate in a democratic system that was imposed through the process of colonisation. Given these origins, this system provided privileges to Pākehā women that were not available to wāhine Māori, meaning Pākehā feminism was compelled to emphasise a Pākehā perspective over a wāhine Māori perspective. This involved active suppression of wāhine Māori practices, where wāhine

who wanted to participate in this movement were expected to refrain from getting a moko kauae (Pihama, 2018).

Within te ao Māori, Mana Wāhine cannot be understood in isolation; it is interconnected with mana tāne (inherent power and authority of Māori men), mana taiao (inherent power and authority of the natural environment), and mana whenua (inherent power and authority of the land) (Jahnke, 2002; Mikaere, 1994, 1999; Pihama, 2001). The health of wāhine Māori, tāne Māori and tamariki Māori are contingent on each other, thus activism that focuses attention on the unique experiences of wāhine contributes to collective liberation (Pihama 2001). Given the strong cultural grounding of Mana Wāhine, it can attend to the difference in experiences between wāhine and tāne in a colonised Aotearoa. Wāhine Māori have consistently featured as the leaders in Māori revitalisation movements and tribal efforts towards emancipation (Forster et al., 2015; Katene, 2010; Wirihana, 2012). Despite this, tāne Māori have at times been silent on wāhine Māori emancipatory action during the collective fight for liberation. A critical internal lens on the relationship between tāne and Western ideologies promotes understanding how wāhine have been positioned as inferior to tāne. Pihama (2001) argues that exposing historical sites of collaboration between tāne Māori and Pākehā men, and how this impacted wāhine Māori, does not seek to invisibilise or deny the oppression of Māori men. Rather, understanding this is vital to rebuilding and activating tāne Māori in the fight for the liberation of everyone.

Whilst Mana Wāhine has always been concerned with celebrating the breadth and diversity of the realities facing Māori women, it is not without critique. Recent literature seeking to promote diversity in identity articulations, has argued how Mana Wāhine has historically relied on essentialised narratives of wāhine (Berryman-Kamp, 2024). Within the context of the wider Kaupapa Māori resurgence movement, the goals of this time were to assert a Māori identity and Māori ways of being, empowering the differences from the dominant Western mentality. As time has passed, significant progress has been made towards reasserting the importance of femininity from a Māori perspective, in terms of reclaiming atua wāhine narratives and cosmogony, mātauranga wāhine, and the mana of wāhine. However, attention now turns to the longer term impacts that these essentialised narratives have had on wāhine who are not fully represented by these understandings. More recent consideration attends to these issues by applying a critical lens to the oppression that Māori women experience and how Māori nationalism has been influential.

Class, gender expression, sexuality, multiculturalism, and corporeal experience can contribute to unique and often contradictory realities for wāhine in Aotearoa, as can sordid debates over authenticity, blood quantum, and Māori normativity (Berryman-Kamp, 2024; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005; Moeke-Pickering, 1996).

Contemporary constructions of identity

The previous section established the process and ramifications of colonisation from a distinct wāhine standpoint, alongside the subsequent efforts of Mana Wāhine to reassert the status of wāhine Māori in Aotearoa. Through revisiting historical events, it is evident there was a culmination of unique social, cultural, and political factors that influenced the way wāhine Māori made sense of their reality and constructed their identities. This section explores contemporary identity construction. A significant amount of scholarship focussing on Māori identities involves all Māori so, firstly, I speak broadly about Māori identities in a general way. Where specific arguments are made from a wāhine Māori perspective, this is made explicit. As the goal in this review is to establish broad ideas relating to identity, specific models of identity are not reviewed. These ideas pertain to dominant understandings of identities in Aotearoa. I provide a brief historical overview of the impact of colonisation specifically on Māori identity construction. Then, I consider Indigenous identity within the global psychological context. Subsequently, I explore the production of the contemporary Māori identity, including how such a notion has been problematised. Lastly, I explore Tess Moeke-Maxwell's (2005) concept of culturally hybrid wāhine identities, as a pathway forward from a wāhine Māori perspective.

In traditional Māori society, Māori identities were developed at an iwi and hapū level, within a whakapapa structure (Jahnke, 2002; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; Rata, 2015). Whakapapa was of paramount importance, as it provided an interconnected framework for making sense of the world (Walker, 1990). Māori relate to other dimensions of te ao Māori through whakapapa, such as the spiritual, physical and metaphysical (Hamley, 2022; King, 2019; Walker, 1990). Whakapapa connects whānau to hapū and iwi, and socialisation to Māori ways of being was within whānau contexts, highlighting the importance of whānau membership for contextual learning and meaning-making of identity (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). Access to te reo Māori, tikanga, cultural practices, collective responsibilities, and whānau was fundamental and provided

the foundation for the development and maintenance of individual cultural identities (Durie, 1994; Mead, 2003).

When colonisation displaced Māori from their whenua, traditional whānau structures were negatively impacted, which disrupted practices from which Māori identities were derived. A specific sense of belonging to people and to place were key ways of traditionally identifying and expressing identity (Boulton et al., 2021). This was further reinforced in the 1960s when Māori underwent a period of urbanisation, with many whānau moving away from rural haukāinga (homes) into urban city centres due to economic pressures (Walker, 1990; Houkamau, 2010). Consequently, Māori were further displaced from traditional frameworks for self-definition, identity development, and other culturally anchored ways of being. Mass urbanisation eroded many Māori from elements foundational to identity, which made it extremely challenging for many urbanised Māori to maintain a connection to their whenua, family, and tūrangawaewae (one's place to stand) (Durie, 1995; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; Smith, 2021). Crown processes, such as the New Zealand Census, contributed to these challenges by authenticating Māori at a blood-quantum level, further undermining Māori identity by classifying Māori with an emphasis on biology rather than whakapapa. This disregarded the importance of iwi and hapū affiliations in te ao Māori, with the option to identify tribal affiliations only introduced in 1991 (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). This began a swift and devastating cultural shift in how many Māori were able to make sense of their cultural identity (Durie, 1995; Walker, 1990).

Māori identities within the psychological discipline

In order to appreciate Māori identities literature, it is necessary to summarise the theorising and study of identity in psychology broadly. As dominant understandings of identity are constructed within a Western paradigm, it is important to first problematise these notions of identity and their place in Aotearoa. Psychology, as a Western discipline in Aotearoa, was imported from Britain in the early 1900s (King et al., 2017). The form of psychology introduced is grounded in British and North American colonial assumptions (Hodgetts et al., 2010; King et al., 2017). This has led to reductionist, positivist, and empirical approaches being positioned as superior to Māori and Indigenous knowledges, and subsequently casts these ways of knowing as false, not robust, or invalid (King et al., 2017; Pihama, 2001). Within the context of the wider ramifications of colonisation, Māori and Indigenous peoples are left in a predicament whereby their unique

cultural identities are invisibilised and marginalised. Because identity for many Māori is culturally grounded, when cultural knowledge is invalidated, so too are notions of Māori identities (Moeke-Pickering, 1996).

Since the 1970s, as part of Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine movements, Māori scholars have asserted decolonial stances that seek to uplift and reclaim Māori approaches to knowledge production, sense-making, and identity construction (Irwin, 1992; King et al., 2017; Smith, 2021). Restating the impact colonisation had on identity and meaning-making for Māori, and asserting that identity can be culturally constructed, are critical decolonial ideas. There have been attempts to co-opt Māori identity disconnection as a site for promoting the suitability of Western worldviews for Māori (Hamley & Le Grice, 2021; King et al., 2017). When afforded theoretical space to examine ethnic and cultural identities, Māori scholars produce knowledges that are aligned with collective Māori goals and aspirations, as well as center the importance of diversity and heterogeneity within descriptions of being Māori (Jahnke, 2002; King et al., 2017; McIntosh, 2005; Moeke-Maxwell, 2012; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; Pihama, 2001, 2020).

There is a plethora of work by Māori scholars that covers contemporary Māori identity, how it is constructed, and its function in terms of wellbeing (Durie, 1985, 1999; Hamley & Le Grice, 2021; Jahnke, 2002; Kukutai & Webber, 2017; McIntosh, 2005; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; Webber, 2011). What it means to be Māori is deeply personal and contingent on a multitude of factors. Peoples' unique experiences and interpretations of what it means to be Māori are becoming exceedingly diverse in contemporary Aotearoa, and can be shaped by political, individual, and whānau understandings. Wāhine Māori identities are known to be contingent on socio-historical contexts, and ethnic and cultural identities are socially and psychologically constructed (Houkamau, 2010; Kukutai & Webber, 2017). A secure, positive Māori identity is associated with increased wellbeing, positive outcomes in health and education, and a mediation of negative experiences such as racism and marginalisation (Kukutai & Webber, 2017; Reweti, 2022; Webber, 2011).

Common in discussions about identity are debates about authenticity. Authenticity has been associated with Māori who experience a singular ethnic and cultural identity, and who live in alignment with cultural values and traditional subjectivities (Fox, et al., 2022; Moeke-Maxwell, 2012). The concept of authenticity is contentious to many people, with many arguing that it

‘gatekeeps’ Māori from their own identity (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2023; Fox et al., 2022; Mikaere, 2011; Pihama, 2001; Te Awekotuku, 1991). For authenticity to exist, so too must inauthenticity, reinforcing fixed and binary notions of cultural ways of being. Within the context of being wāhine Māori, being authentic and traditional is tied to the responsibility of reproduction and maternalism, which enables the continuation of Māori people both culturally and physically. Whilst these concepts hold deep value to Māori ways of being through their connections to whakapapa, whānau, and other critical Māori principles, dominant colonial narratives have positioned them as the only way of making sense of wāhine Māori identity and roles (Mikaere, 2011; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 2021). As a counter to the concept of authenticity, many focus on understanding Māori identity as being context-specific, relational, and dynamic (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2021; Fox et al., 2022; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 2021; Walker, 1990).

The harms that emerge from authentic notions of being Māori reflect a larger pattern of reductionism, erasing the complexity and nuance present within Māori identities. Notions of what it means to be wāhine Māori can become reductive when there is no room for alternative understandings, or space “in-between” (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2021). Reductionist approaches to understanding Māori ways of being and identities have been framed as neglectful, essentialising, and dangerous (King et al., 2017). Failing to acknowledge the complexity and variability misrepresents Māori identities and their holistic nature (Pihama, 2001). For wāhine Māori in particular, existing at the intersection of being Māori and being a wahine means there are additional identity pressures and politics. These pressures go beyond challenges associated with Māori identities from an exclusively ethnic perspective. Identity as a wahine in Aotearoa, as described by wāhine Māori engaging in feminist discourses and theory, is a deeply embodied experience that can involve experiences of colourism, racism, and neocolonialism, not just from non-Māori, but also Māori (Moeke-Maxwell, 2003, 2005). Heterogeneity within wāhine Māori identity expressions means identities may not be solely premised upon cultural sense-making, but shaped through the multiple and intersecting contexts that make up their daily lives (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). For these reasons, it is imperative for scholarly attention to be paid to analyses of identity construction as it relates to being Māori, being wahine, and other meaningful aspects that continue to shape the lives and experiences of wāhine Māori.

Cultural hybridity in identity expression

I now focus on one paper by Tess Moeke-Maxwell, titled *Bi/Multiracial Māori women's hybridity in Aoteaoroa/New Zealand* (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). This paper develops arguments of how dominant narratives of Māori identity have posed challenges for wāhine Māori with multiple cultural identities. This article has been emphasised as it explores problems with reductive notions of identity. Moeke-Maxwell provides a clear argument for how contemporary articulations of identity need to include culturally hybrid and plural notions of self. Moeke-Maxwell describes cultural hybridity as the ways in which many wāhine Māori from bicultural and multicultural contexts "straddle two different and opposing cultures" at once (p. 503). Whilst Moeke-Maxwell focuses on this from a multicultural perspective, her arguments form a foundation for the inclusion of other important facets of self that are relevant in the lives of wāhine Māori today, such as religiosity, sexuality, urban and rural backgrounds, and many others.

Moeke-Maxell begins offering a historical perspective on the emergence of what she terms an essentialised traditional identity. Dominant ideas of Māori identity arose in the context of national identity homogenisation. This development of this identity was a response to nationalist efforts for unity. Attempts were made post-war to lobby the population of Aotearoa to view themselves as "one people". Many Māori scholars and academics perceived these efforts towards monoculturalism to be seeking the erasure of Māori culture and the emphasis of Pākehā culture. Despite experiencing many social, economic, and political disadvantages, many Māori communities maintained strong cultural identities, resisting assimilation to Western norms. The production of a traditional Māori identity became politically relevant, and provided the means to instigate redress. This identity meant that the state's role in colonisation and its responsibility for the ongoing disparities faced by many Māori required acknowledgement.

The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 in the context of growing evidence about the disadvantages and unique challenges Māori faced. Within a Western paradigm, Māori were positioned as dichotomous to Pākehā. Moeke-Maxwell argues that this binary was socially adaptive at the time because it was a means for Māori to maintain Māori identity and resist assimilation. Through this approach to biculturalism, a traditional Māori identity became dominant as it was not threatening to the Pākehā subject. The mobilisation of traditional Māori

identity in this way became foundational to promoting social policy changes and restorative processes as it provided a rationale for re-engagement between both parties, Māori and Pākehā, who were involved in signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te reo Māori, tikanga, and Māori ways of being consequently were then able to be reclaimed and renegotiated. Where this failed to sustainably serve Māori was through the inherent essentialism within the traditional Māori identity.

A traditional wāhine Māori identity was produced as an extension of the traditional Māori identity, and remained in dichotomy with Pākehā. The archetypal wāhine Māori subjectivity reasserted the potency of wāhine reproductive abilities to not be seen as dirty or shameful, but as feminine, spiritual, and cosmogonically potent. This subjectivity was promoted and associated with authenticity. Whilst this enabled many wāhine to reclaim a sense of purpose and understanding of their role in continuing whakapapa, the criteria excluded wāhine who were only partially aligned with it. Many multicultural wāhine did not take up this subjectivity and were subsequently pathologised by being seen as identityless, or forced to assimilate and align with Pākehā ways of being. Moeke-Maxwell argues that these outcomes show how cultural hybridity was a threat for both sides of the dichotomy. Hybridity posed a threat to dominant narratives of Whiteness and the racialised traditional Māori identity as it challenged the boundaries of a binary that were providing particular utility to each group.

Western logic and Māori nationalism were resistant to multicultural hybridity. Māori efforts towards biculturalism were founded on traditionalised subjectivities, and biculturalism had provided political mobility for Māori in terms of decolonial efforts. Introducing hybridity meant allowing dominant notions of what it meant to be Māori to evolve, risking disruption of the wider liberation efforts. A move towards hybridity would entail supporting diversity of identity expression, which could mean a weakened adherence to traditional ideals and eroding the fixed notion of a traditional wāhine Māori identity. This was understood as a threat to ongoing efforts towards liberation. Thus, Māori nationalist movements maintained this traditional wāhine Māori subjectivity. Moeke-Maxwell argues that left many wāhine with three available options “traditionalise”, “assimilate”, or “pathologise”, none of which adequately represents the nuances and complexity of the identities of many wāhine.

Moeke-Maxwell's seminal argument is that cultural hybridity is relevant and must be included in discussions pertaining to Māori identities. She establishes how fixed and essentialised notions of wāhine identities do not represent the realities of contemporary wāhine Māori. Three examples of narratives that resist both traditional Māori identification and Pākehā identification are provided. Colourism, objectification, and patriarchal elites in the workplace are sites of women engaging with their multiple identities actively rather than passively. Brownness and colourism are embodied markers of subjectivity that may be an inaccurate qualifier of a woman's cultural belonging, producing an experience of racism idiosyncratic to a culturally hybrid wāhine. Objectification of bicultural and multicultural wāhine is also experienced as exoticising or eroticising, placing supreme importance on aesthetic characteristics over inner qualities. Moeke-Maxwell also exemplifies how wāhine are strategically placed in employment situations as navigators and conduits to bridge the two cultures, Māori and Pākehā. Moeke-Maxwell highlights the creative and active strategies wāhine used to navigate issues of colourism, objectification, and patriarchal elites to make changes in their lives. Complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions were framed not as a byproduct of the lives of multicultural wāhine, but instead were viewed as fundamental, formational, and constitutional characteristics. Honouring and centering these multiplicities in this way supports the rearticulation of wāhine Māori identities as not being bound by the specificities prescribed through essentialised ideas of identity.

The current context

There are many complexities and challenges present when tackling topics such as identity. Developments in understanding Māori identities remain ongoing and have political, social, and cultural groundings. In the nearly 50 years that have passed since the Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine resurgence began, remarkable progress has been made. For example, there have been many seeds planted within education and language revitalisation, and significant progress has been made with Kōhanga Reo (Māori early childhood education), Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori primary and secondary school) and Wānanga (Māori university) contributing to almost a quarter of Māori speaking te reo Māori as a first language (Statistics New Zealand, 2022). Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine are now well established theoretical frameworks that are used across a range of disciplines. This enables Māori communities to define for themselves the issues that

face them and generate solutions grounded within te ao Māori. For wāhine Māori, the Māori Women's Welfare League has been pivotal in providing opportunities and advocacy across private and public sectors, and within wider communities. Another significant milestone is also the WAI 2700 Mana Wāhine Kaupapa claim with the Waitangi Tribunal, that is considering the historical and ongoing prejudices and wrongdoings of the Crown towards wāhine Māori. This claim outlines how the roles, status, and authority of wāhine Māori have been actively undermined and marginalised by the Crown, in breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Waitangi Tribunal, 2025). All of the above are vital components that inform, and are informed by, the contemporary realities of Māori in the twenty-first century.

Many of the same challenges continue to be faced by Māori. The contemporary sociocultural and political landscape means new challenges have also emerged that Māori scholars are beginning to contend with. This section situates gender in the current context by reviewing recent examples of literature addressing identity, gender construction, and psychology. Paramount to this is situating the Mana Wāhine scholarship alongside efforts towards the representation of gender diversity. Also relevant are modern understandings of Māori masculinities as part of wider decolonial efforts. First I review Gerbic and Muriwai's (2025) article discussing the need for psychological practice to be more culturally responsive for wāhine Māori. Next, Berryman-Kamp's (2024) article pertaining to gender diversity within Kaupapa Māori is discussed. Lastly, the representation of rangatahi tāne (Māori youth) identity and sense of self is reviewed (Hamley, 2025). This continues to establish that liberation of wāhine cannot be achieved in isolation, it is entwined with the liberation of Māori who are marginalised in various ways.

Contemporary challenges

Gerbic and Muriwai (2025) locate the contemporary struggles of wāhine Māori in order to explore how psychological practice affirms or diminishes their mana wāhine. Gerbic and Muriwai (2025) attend to the ongoing dominant misrepresentations that continue to impact wāhine, and postulate that binarised reconceptualisations of what it means to be wāhine are also producing challenges. By calling out the persistent narratives of wāhine as criminals, beneficiaries, poor parents, and many other misrepresentative notions, the authors expose how these tragic and deeply problematic ideals continue to dominate mainstream rhetoric. They

reiterate the argument that wāhine Māori play a central role in collective wellbeing, and emphasise the role of wāhine in imparting tikanga and mātauranga generationally. They highlight the ability of wāhine to traverse spiritual and physical realms, promoting the strength of wāhine Māori in protecting and nurturing whānau. These ideas are commonplace in the longstanding fight against deficit-based narratives that wāhine have been engaged in. What this signifies is that, despite developments, the battle for self-determination for wāhine Māori remains a struggle and the same challenges persist. The authors maintain that an assertion of mātauranga wāhine, through a critical understanding of customary roles and responsibilities, remains absolutely crucial to dismantle the dominant rhetoric surrounding wāhine Māori that actively diminishes mana wāhine.

Gerbic and Muriwai (2025) also contribute to modern critiques of early-stage Mana Wāhine theory, positioning the overemphasis in early literature on life-giving as potentially excluding kōtiro (girl), takatāpui (Māori of diverse sexuality, gender and sex characteristics), kuia, and wāhine who cannot have, or do not want, children. As the scope of what it means to be wāhine became reduced within mainstream dialogue, the authors argue that this contributed to a denigration of the authority of wāhine on their own land by positioning them as lesser. Indeed, the authors underline the urgency in which the field must deny and challenge any conceptualisation of wāhine that is insufficient for all wāhine.

Contemporary developments in understanding gender

Whilst gender diversity is not of primary focus in this research, Mana Wāhine theories have been developed by many takatāpui scholars. Research in this area, though still limited, provides insight into how understandings of gender within Māori communities remain only partial and draw attention to the ongoing influence of, and temptation for, cisgenderism in our understandings of wāhine and tāne identities as Māori (Kerekere, 2017; Berryman-Kamp, 2024). Particularly during the current political climate, acknowledging the range of different expressions, articulations, and understandings of gender is an important responsibility, which Mana Wāhine has at times shied away from (Kerekere, 2017). Research on Māori gender diversity also seeks to re-tell customary Māori narratives to reassert the place of gender diversity within traditional Māori society. In this way, when asserting a Mana Wāhine standpoint, these perspectives are important in providing an inclusive understanding of gender.

Acknowledging this, Berryman-Kamp (2024) offers a tikanga-informed analysis of contemporary gender expressions. The author argues that the question is not whether gender diversity existed customarily, but rather how colonisation has cultivated a lack of acceptance towards gender diversity that is upheld and maintained within Māori communities. A conservative adherence to tikanga, when fulfilling roles during traditional processes such as pōwhiri, is at odds with contemporary expressions of gender diversity. Looking to customary Māori narratives and structures, the author asserts the heavy influence of colonisation on gender-based discussions. Similar to atua wāhine, within Māori cosmogony gender diversity in pūrākau, whakapapa, and te reo Māori have been under-reported and certain mātauranga eradicated. Berryman-Kamp reinforces the relevance of masculine and feminine continuum, instead of a male and female dichotomy, whilst emphasising that Māori had notions of gender as fluid and diverse. The author is not necessarily challenging the demarcation of customary roles by gender, but the maintenance of a physiological basis for role division and the emphasis of gender overall, which is a sentiment echoed by other academics (Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021).

Berryman-Kamp highlights the invisibilisation of gender diversity through processes of colonisation and speaks to the naturalisation of the gender binary within Māori understandings. Looking at how patriarchal and Christian values have framed conservative thought within Māori communities, the author signals the need to revisit current understandings of traditional practices to consider how colonisation has infiltrated them. Berryman-Kamp makes evident scenarios where wāhine and femininity have been recognised to the same extent as tāne and masculinity. These scenarios include whakapapa within certain hapū and iwi. It is extended that if wāhine existed customarily beyond this rigid gender hierarchy, gender-diverse people existed too. The association of roles such as karanga (ceremonial call of welcome) with wāhine is also scrutinised, as the author suggests it was not necessarily equated with physiological determinants customarily. Dismantling the way gender is assigned at birth is integral to this argument. The author relays evidence of pre-birthing practices that emphasised masculinity and femininity as ira (essences) that were read through the environment to ascertain gender and role, which may occur regardless of the physiology of the child.

With this in mind, more recent scholarship has highlighted the difference in these experiences from the perspective of tāne. Hamley (2025) explores Māori masculinities as a liberating area of psychology to resist the impacts of colonial masculinities. As an emerging area, Māori masculinities seek to address the harm of negative stereotypes and deficit-based narratives, in this case relating to rangatahi tāne identity and sense of self. The author highlights the harmful, limiting ramifications for identity construction in rangatahi tāne growing up in urban environments due to systemic marginalisation. Hamley argues that dominant conceptualisations of masculinity have resulted in rangatahi tāne naturalising deviancy and physicality in articulations of contemporary tāne Māori identity. At the same time there are sites of counter-storying; use of humour and expressions of takatāpui are adaptive possibilities available to rangatahi tāne. Hamley shows the extent that colonisation has devastated Maori femininities and masculinities, having limiting impacts on identity for everyone.

Whilst discussions pertaining to gender diversity and tāne Māori identity have been brief, there is an emphasis of academic focus on dismantling Western gender constructs in modern times. There are many problems related to biological determinism, male and female binaries, cisheteronormativity, and cisgenderism which produce pervasive and ongoing threats to wider contemporary articulations of Māori ways of being. The privileging of these constructs has roots grounded in colonisation, thus they are maintained within the current structure of society. To challenge these sites of harm is to make visible the plurality located in the experiences of all Māori. Whilst wāhine and tāne have always been understood on a continuum within the greater context of te ao Māori, the early reliance of Mana Wāhine and Kaupapa Māori on essentialism has enabled Western binary logic to infiltrate dominant understandings of these social categories. This has meant that dichotomised understandings of wāhine and tāne have become naturalised, resulting in the maintenance of a gender binary that excludes those who are gender diverse. Although, many scholars have revisited customary ideas as a means of better understanding Maori conceptualisations and experiences of gender (Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021; Berryman-Kamp, 2024). This contemporary literature reinforces the fundamental ideas postulated in early Mana Wāhine thought; reclaiming customary understandings are vital for contemporary liberation. We must remain vigilant in resisting the homogenisation and binarised construction of our own narratives (Pihama, 2020).

Hei whakakapi (Summary)

This chapter has explored literature pertaining to wāhine Māori identity and sense-making. A re-telling of colonisation from a wāhine standpoint established the foundation from which many of the contemporary struggles for wāhine liberation emerged. A review of the Mana Wāhine movement accounted for early efforts towards wāhine Māori, showing how wāhine Māori played active roles in reclaiming their tino rangatiratanga. Contemporary understandings of identity have developed within the discipline of psychology, alongside dominant productions of Māori identity through biculturalism. These ideas problematised what it meant to be wāhine Māori, leading many wāhine to strategically negotiate hybrid and plural identities. Finally, a look into modern literature shows the complexities and challenges that still remain present when articulating identity. At the same time, literary developments are supporting more and more diversity within gender and identity expressions.

Te wāhanga tuatoru

He ara rangahau (Methodology)

This chapter opens by first situating this research within Indigenous psychologies. It then considers its relevance to the field and explores the rationale for the theoretical foundations of this project. This overview is followed by a critical review of Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories, as the epistemological foundations. Then, pūrākau is explored as the methodology with a discussion of the rationale provided. Lastly, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and the narrative collection process are shared in detail.

Exploring what it means to be wāhine Māori within contemporary Aotearoa is firmly situated within Indigenous psychologies as it is concerned with the identities and sense-making of wāhine Māori. From a decolonial standpoint this research seeks to challenge the historically produced, mainstream understandings of gender in Aotearoa that continue to exclude and reject te ao Māori understandings today. This exploration creates exciting possibilities to promote, redefine, and re-present understandings of the diverse realities, experiences, and identities traversed by wāhine.

It is imperative when engaging with psychological concepts such as identity, historical and ongoing trauma, and institutional violence as they relate to ethnicity, class, and gender that research be undertaken in a culturally safe manner. Thus this study was grounded in Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theoretical frameworks. Māori concepts such as wairua (spirituality), mana, and whānau are explored in depth, so the research needed to be grounded in epistemologies that take for granted Māori knowledges (mātauranga Māori and mātauranga wāhine), asserting Māori worldviews as inherently valid. Decolonising gender is contingent on restoring tino rangatiratanga, which is a key focus of Mana Wāhine theories and paramount to Kaupapa Māori. We have seen in the literature review that the complexities and contradictions present within the lives of many wāhine have often been erased and invisibilised through positivist epistemologies that emphasise seeking ultimate truths, and promote Western ways of being. Pūrākau methodology has been implemented as pūrākau and story-telling are culturally embedded ways of preserving and sharing valuable knowledges across generations. Furthermore, pūrākau are ancient traditions that have a deep and intrinsic whakapapa in Aotearoa.

Kaupapa Māori

To introduce Kaupapa Māori, firstly it must be situated as a wider project that spans its interest far beyond the field of research and academia (Smith, 2021). Kaupapa Māori was born out of the need for transformation of Māori strategies in response to the reproduction and privileging of Western ways of being. It was initially postulated as a "structural intervention" to resist the hegemonic Western education system in Aotearoa and position Kaupapa Māori as necessarily deserving of academic and intellectual space (Smith, 1997). Kaupapa Māori as a theory has proliferated, with many drawing initiatives from its elements within education, arts, and community initiatives. Generally understood to stem from a collective and holistic foundation, Kaupapa Māori seeks to address struggles for tino rangatiratanga through the assertion of te reo Māori and Māori cultural values (Mane, 2009; Smith 2021).

The importance of locating the origins and underpinnings of Kaupapa Māori is to assert that it is not solely a project of academic interest, nor should it be. Kaupapa Māori is an evolving and developing community approach to Māori rights, employed with diversity in application and connected through overarching principles and rationale. For its transformative aspirations to be realised, efforts must be made to contextualise Kaupapa Māori research alongside the communities for whom it serves. Smith (2017) argues that Kaupapa Māori theory is praxis; it must be connected to community and real tangible outcomes in order to call itself Kaupapa Māori.

The relationship between research and Māori has a problematic past. Western empiricism remains the dominant scientific model within research and was imported here through colonisation. It is grounded in reductive epistemological assumptions, such as binary logic and a rigid adherence to objective Western practices (King et al., 2017). Within this paradigm, for Western knowledges to be conceived as legitimate, Indigenous and alternative knowledges are positioned as illegitimate or invalid. Through this same logic, Māori as a group were positioned as the "researched" and not the "researchers", and more broadly, "inferior" to the "superior", (Mahuika, 2008; Mane 2009; Smith, 2021). This has sidelined traditional Māori ways of being within mainstream dialogue, and has had a colonising effect on Māori (King et al., 2017; Smith, 2021). Attempts to understand the experiences facing Māori communities have since been made through Western empiricism, which produces deficit-based theories and often blames Māori for

challenges produced by colonisation. The assumed objective nature of Western empiricism precludes any sense of responsibility (Mahuika, 2008). Particularly within the context of psychology, such research has been undertaken with Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) nations that is grounded in this same Western empiricism and reductivism. Subsequently, the discipline is inclined to focus on positivist measures and what are perceived to be categorical truths, thus failing to attend to the intricacies present within the many realities facing Māori (King et al., 2017). To this end, WEIRD psychology has been positioned by some as being entirely irrelevant and inept for Māori (Rua et al., 2021). Naturally, Māori have developed a hesitancy and cautious attitude towards involvement in research (Smith, 2021).

Kaupapa Māori theory, research, and practice is a critical approach to research that contributes to the validation and reassertion of Indigenous perspectives, within an academically rigorous framework (Mahuika, 2008). The specific interests of Kaupapa Māori research are grounded in the same overarching principles, practices, and methods that seek to privilege Māori epistemologies and address the impacts of colonisation. These epistemologies, and their inherent assertion of the validity of Māori worldviews, are transformative. For this reason, Kaupapa Māori research is deeply intertwined with tino rangatiratanga, which is a key principle, alongside other principles such as the assertion of te reo Māori, tikanga, mana wāhine, and mana tāne (Smith, 2021). Within the context of psychology, Kaupapa Māori research is particularly interested in meeting the urgent realities facing Māori communities that are underserved by psychology currently (Rua et al., 2021). In this way, Kaupapa Māori is inherently decolonial through its assertion of culturally grounded ways of theorising. Most poignant for this project are the mounting efforts to legitimate a sense of self that is interwoven, heterogenous, and highly contextualised (King et al., 2017).

The use of Kaupapa Māori theory in this project facilitates an interweaving of identity with an Indigenous Māori worldview. The project requires an epistemological position that takes for granted mātauranga. With a focus on wāhine Māori identity, the research maintains the assertion that the construction of identity has also been a response to colonisation (King et al., 2017; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). Indeed, this project can be seen as a critical response to dominant gender narratives that have been maintained through WEIRD psychology, and the subsequently limited understandings of wāhine Māori subjectivities that have prevailed. Therefore, efforts to

argue for a diversity of representations of wāhine Māori identity must maintain and support the wider goals of Indigenous and Māori psychologies through centering mātauranga and disrupting categorical and isolated understandings of identity.

Mana Wāhine theories

Mana Wāhine is a movement, theoretical foundation, and methodological framework that asserts and maintains space for mana wāhine by critically exploring being Māori and being a wahine (Simmonds, 2011). To critically explore the intersection of being Māori and being a wahine, Mana Wāhine, as both theoretical and methodological frameworks, developed as an extension of Kaupapa Māori theory (Simmonds, 2011). The unique and ongoing harms of colonisation experienced by wāhine Māori include the undermining of the power and status present in the everyday lives of wāhine Māori, yet it is given little scholarly attention (Smith, 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). The last thirty years have seen a proliferation of scholarship focussing on reclaiming and reasserting Indigenous knowledges by centering traditional ontologies and epistemologies (Wilson et al., 2021). Alongside this, Western feminist critique in the late twentieth century has exposed the struggles of women against oppressive patriarchal ideals in Western society, including the culpable role of psychology in maintaining these structures (Eagly & Riger, 2014). The experiences of Indigenous women globally have not been adequately engaged with, or analysed, by Western feminist critique (Awatere, 1984; Pihama, 2001; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Indeed, powerful critique has arisen around the suitability for Western feminism for wāhine Māori and the unique experiences of gender relations between wāhine and tāne (Johnston & Pihama, 1994; Pihama, 2001; Waitere & Johnston, 2009).

Mana Wāhine theories is a collection of theories and ways of researching that are asserting a worldview and framework that critically center the realities and experiences of wāhine Māori, as articulated by wāhine Māori (Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2014; Te Awekotuku, 1991). As posited by Irwin (1992), theories in this way are not performative, but instead a necessary tool for liberation. Mana Wāhine places the decolonial efforts to emancipate wāhine Māori from oppression within both an individual and collective paradigm (Pihama, 2020). By centering the lived experiences of wāhine Māori, wāhine are afforded opportunities and possibilities to make their stories visible, and to celebrate the diverse ways in which wāhine Māori make sense of their realities.

Smith (1992) posits four overarching projects that link the collective concerns of Mana Wāhine theory. These four projects are wairua, whānau, state discourses, and Pākehā and Indigenous women's discourses. Smith (1992) outlines their importance in the fight against the struggles facing wāhine Māori, and the need to extend discursive space around these projects from a Mana Wāhine standpoint. These four projects are postulated as informing, and being informed by, the realities of many wāhine Māori (Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 1992). Simmonds (2011) extends that these projects remain pertinent to wāhine Māori liberation.

Given the inherent intersectionality related to identities as Māori and wāhine, Mana Wāhine acknowledges and seeks to empower the diversity of realities facing wāhine in contemporary Aotearoa (Irwin, 1992; Simmonds, 2011). As a theoretical framework it is a non-prescriptive, dynamic group of ideas that has been concerned with racism, sexism, classism, and prejudice against queer groups, since the 1970s. Mana Wāhine has had many names; Māori feminism, Māori women's discourses, Māori women's studies. There is a rich whakapapa within the Mana Wāhine movement. This research recognises and engages with Mana Wāhine as a collection of diverse projects and efforts all striving for the same, enduring collective goals, restoring the mana of wāhine through efforts to Indigenise gendered narratives in Aotearoa (Pihama, 2020).

Pūrākau

Pūrākau are customary ways in which knowledges are transmitted that uphold Māori philosophies and worldviews (Fox, 2024; Lee-Morgan, 2019). At times, pūrākau are ancient cultural repositories that take many forms, and the practice of sharing pūrākau has shaped the understanding of historical events across many generations (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020). Pūrākau are embedded within retellings of whakapapa, whakairo (carving), waiata, raranga (weaving), names of people and places, and much more. Pūrākau are layered and multifaceted, enabling knowledges to accumulate through ongoing exploration, intergenerational transmission, and adaptive modes of sharing (Watene, 2025). Traditional and contemporary examples of story-telling include oral traditions on marae, to online sharing via social media. To this end, pūrākau have been crucial in contemporary reclamation and revitalisation efforts, and they are key to cultural preservation. Pūrākau connect us as Māori to our tūpuna (ancestors) and future generations, provide space for exploration of contemporary meaning-making, and become useful resources for the future (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020; Lee, 2009; Smith, 2021).

Pūrākau, as a methodology, has a recent history within academia. Wāhine Māori, in particular, have engaged with pūrākau and story-telling to represent herstories, and powerful versions of traditional pūrākau through a Mana Wāhine lens (Mead, 1998; Mikaere, 1999; Te Awekotuku, 2003). Lee's (2009) seminal work framed pūrākau as a methodology with robust philosophical, culturally-coded, and epistemological roots. Pūrākau methodology provides a means of decolonising, reasserting, and representing Indigenous narratives and story-telling as a rigorous method of knowledge transmission. Pūrākau has therefore become a methodology that aligns closely with efforts toward cultural identity reclamation (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020; Woodhouse, 2019).

Pūrākau offers an approach to narrative inquiry that is influenced by life history and portraiture, whilst simultaneously being culturally responsive (Lee, 2009). Pūrākau indeed finds parallels and influences from narrative inquiry, but is deeply rooted in te ao Māori. This validates and legitimises Indigenous knowledge construction and elevates the mana of many other concepts in te ao Māori due to the interconnected nature of the worldview. Extending this, pūrākau methodology challenges the emphasis in Western research on being objective, quantifiable, and empirical. This is imperative to decolonising methodologies as it provides a qualitative practice that enables Māori research that is grounded in, and reclaims, traditional Māori ways of transmitting knowledge (Lee, 2009; Lee-Morgan, 2019).

Within the context of this research, a pūrākau methodology is employed both in the collection and analysis of narratives. An important facet of utilising a pūrākau methodology is that it honours sharing of knowledge as dynamic, developing, and contextually specific, whilst simultaneously taking for granted that each participant is the expert on the subject matter (Lee, 2009). The pūrākau produced are reflective of the particular time and space the story-teller was in at the time. With this in mind, pūrākau are not presented as truths, but instead as co-constructed repositories that represent a moment, and through which the reader can interpret and make their own meaning (Woodhouse, 2019).

Wāhine

This section details the research methods for this project. This research focuses on the sense-making of 12 wāhine with regards to their lived experiences and realities identifying as

Māori and as wāhine in contemporary Aotearoa. Exploring what being wāhine means to them and what has informed their sense-making identity as wāhine are the aims of the research. The criteria for participants was being over the age of 18, identifying as wāhine Māori, and residing in Aotearoa. An advertisement was distributed through word of mouth within my networks, as well as through my social media platforms. The Information Sheet (Appendix B) was distributed to wāhine who expressed their interest in participating. Whānau or support people were invited to attend at any part of the process, which was communicated via the Information Sheet.

The twelve participants were affiliated with many hapū, iwi and other ethnicities: Kuki Airani, Moriori, Ngāti Hauiti, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Whakaue, Te Arawa, Waikato-Tainui, Pākehā. Two participants identified as takatāpui. The youngest participant was 24 years old at the time of interview, and the oldest was 73 years old. The mean age was 43 years old.

Kōrero

Participant involvement included one semi-structured interview, which lasted 60 to 90 minutes, with an additional 30 minutes to one hour either side of the interview for whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships). Once participation was confirmed, the interview took place at a time, date, and place of the participants choosing, which happened to be at their home or private space for all 12 participants. For many of these meetings, myself and the participant spent longer than the required time for the research together, allowing our roles to shift and change away from our roles within this project into our roles as whānau and friends.

Specific tikanga were used for the interviews to ensure that the research was embedded within te ao Māori practices and in alignment with Kaupapa Māori research principles. These included opening and closing karakia (incantation) for each interview, whakawhanaungatanga, grounding through a kōwhatu mauri (stone that symbolises a spiritual anchor), and the provision of koha (expression of gratitude). Prior to the first interview, I went to Taputeranga Marine Reserve and performed a karakia to guide my selection of a kōwhatu mauri for this project. The karakia was the same karakia that I performed before each interview, which was an important ritual to develop the collective mauri (life force) within and between the participants and myself as the researcher. The kōwhatu mauri was carefully protected and only ever held or touched by wāhine

who participated in this research. I have carried this kōwhatu mauri with me wherever I have worked on this thesis thereafter to continue to let this mauri guide me. Whakawhanaungatanga fostered a sense of trust and respect through maintaining relationships and took place through the sharing of kai (food). As my participants all hosted me within their personal spaces too, the provision of kai and inu (drink) was shared between myself and each participant. This gesture was not required of participants but was graciously acknowledged as their extension of manaakitanga as haukāinga (home person) to me as a manuhiri (guest). The koha was another customary acknowledgement of their time, effort, and generosity in this project.

As foundational to Mana Wāhine theory, Smith's (1992) four projects have been drawn on in the methods of the current research. The Interview Schedule (Appendix C) was organised into four sections that corresponded with each of the projects. The interviews were audio recorded and were then transcribed verbatim by myself. Transcriptions were returned and reviewed by participants for their final approval, in line with the key principle of tino rangatira and kaitiakitanga (guardianship). This enabled participants to own their stories and carefully ensure they are told how they would like them to be told. The importance of this step was evident, whereby two participants made written edits to their transcripts, three participants requested a meeting to discuss the transcript, and one provided approval through a voice-note that reiterated the sentiment of their kōrero (discussion). For all participants who requested a hui (meeting), no further changes were made to the transcript. Discussions centered around how the transcripts would be used, how it would represent Māori voices, and how it would be unidentifiable. The attitude of the researcher remained unwavering in the position that we are Māori first, and the researcher second. Despite the additional time required, this process was vital to ensure that all participants felt at ease with their contributions.

Pseudonyms have been used to anonymise participants and protect their identities. These names were decided on, or agreed to, by participants. The chosen names were considered another way to enhance the mana of each pūrākau and the participants themselves. I had suggested names that participants agreed were suitable, and others chose to use tūpuna names, or other names of significance to them. Whilst only a small part of the process, this process was treated with significance given that names can be sites of harm for Māori (May, 2023; Parker, 2021).

Co-constructing pūrākau

The analysis of each narrative involved interpreting, retelling, and co-constructing a pūrākau that represented the "heart" of each story (Lee-Morgan, 2019). The way in which each story took shape was not linear, and there were contributions of wairua in the process. The analytic process began during each interview, where certain threads surfaced within the stories of the participants. Through the interview process I cast my focus towards the emotional ebbs and flows, paying attention to the moments that offered a window into each person's sense-making and considering the times where I became particularly moved.

The next step, the transcription process, was a reorientation to repetitions of concepts, words, and particular experiences. Links to te ao Māori understandings were more visible, and my comprehension of the reciprocal and relational construction of each interview deepened as I listened to myself participate. The next step, returning the transcripts, reinforced the responsibility of representing these narratives in a way that my participants would endorse. This reminded me of my positionality as the process progressed to the reconstruction of the pūrākau. Starting by reflecting on initial impressions and feelings at this stage became a useful way of revisiting my experiences during each interview. This became an experience of wairua for me, and, along with the experience of wairua with the participant in the interview process, wairua was central to the analytic process. In the same way, grasping the kōwhatu mauri often imbued in me the clarity that was needed for the sense-making of each pūrākau to bloom.

Each transcript was read upwards of five times in its entirety and specific excerpts were selected to include in the thesis due to their relevance. The narrative arc was presented through orienting these excerpts in a variety of orders until coherence was achieved. As the interpretation of each pūrākau progressed, the analysis required my mauri to be settled. Interpreting someone else's way of making sense of themselves and their lived reality needed an awareness of self, my own thoughts, and emotional responses. It necessitated a confidence that my unique lens will compose a narrative that is just and resonant.

My role(s) as researcher

Writing and retelling these pūrākau represented the challenges that we face in our overlapping roles as Māori and as researchers. Within a Mana Wāhine approach to research, the challenges at

the margins of the practice of research are not ignored (Irwin, 1992; Te Awekotuku, 1999). Mana Wāhine theory faces up to the contradictions and complexities, and provides space to consider their origins, their resolutions, and their ongoing impacts, as defined by wāhine Māori. This places heavy responsibility on the researcher. Te Awekotuku (1999), when discussing wāhine Māori researching ourselves, questions,

> How does a twenty-one year old starting out on her first self-directed study approach a kuia? How does she make herself trusted? How does she convince these kuia that she is worthy of their information? What does she do? (p. 59).

These questions resonated with me as a 30 year old approaching my first self-directed project. The epistemological position of Mana Wāhine theory is critical for this research as it pays heed to the interconnected, interwoven nature of us all, regardless of our roles. It also acknowledges the impossibility of demarcating the different roles we hold in our lives, and the responsibilities these require when we step into various spaces. Throughout this project, I have been: researcher, writer, listener, and co-author of pūrākau. At the same time I have never stopped maintaining my roles as a daughter, mokopuna (grandchild), cousin and whanaunga. These roles we hold cannot be fulfilled in isolation of each other, nor can their responsibilities, relationships, and expectations be isolated to particular times and spaces. Thus, these questions become central to my praxis. Reflexivity is therefore intertwined with my role as researcher and it is through this lens that I have engaged with this project. When it came to the responsibility of co-creating the pūrākau, the trust and generosity offered by participants was not once lost on me.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Appendix D). Significant consideration was given to the ethical risks posed by undertaking this research. Through thorough discussions between myself and my supervisor, as well as consultation with wāhine within my academic community and whānau, three areas were located as potential sites of harm. Data sovereignty also remained at the forefront throughout the research process.

There was a risk of psychological harm due to the concepts and related experiences that would be discussed during interviews. These topics spanned personal experiences of marginalisation, colonisation and colonial violence, state and institutional violence, racism, sexism and misogyny,

difficulties within whānau environments, wairua or spiritual experiences, and other lived experiences as a minoritised group. This risk was addressed by carefully considering the setting of the interview, encouraging whānau attendance and support, and providing resources and the option to debrief after the interview.

The second risk identified was the likelihood that the participants are known to the researchers. Existing relationships were viewed as potentially increasing the comfort of participants to engage in the research as trust and rapport were already established. Equally, this means additional effort and reassurance were made to demarcate my role as researcher and as a community member, particularly in the cases of privacy, use of data, and knowledge sharing. This was addressed through communications when participants expressed interest in participating, as well as when written consent was sought before the commencement of the interview. This ensured informed consent to participate.

The third risk was related to wāhine Māori in general. This research could be generalised or applied inappropriately in understanding experiences of wāhine Māori, which may in turn have harmful impacts. This risk was mitigated by utilising Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories alongside a pūrākau methodology to center perspectives and experiences of the participants. Particular care has also been taken when writing this thesis.

Data sovereignty was also considered throughout this research. Multiple praxis were put in place to protect the privacy of participant data from a Māori perspective by engaging with Māori Data Sovereignty principles: whanaungatanga (process of maintaining relationships), kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga (support and care) (Kukutai et al., 2023; Te Mana Raraunga, 2018). These principles guided the responsibilities of the researcher to protect the privacy of participants and the accountability of the researcher to participants.

Hei whakakapi (Summary)

This chapter accounted for the theoretical foundations of this project, the methodology used, and procedures for interviewing and interpretation. Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories were reviewed and established as the theoretical foundations of this study. Pūrākau was discussed as the methodology using an overarching Mana Wāhine lens to inform the method and analysis. The role of the researcher and ethical responsibilities were specifically outlined to convey the

intricacies of taking part in research by Māori, for Māori, within a contemporary context. The next chapter will present the narrative interpretations of the participants.

Te wāhanga tuawha

Ko ngā pūrākau (The narratives)

Having established the theoretical foundations and methodology, this chapter presents the pūrākau of the participants. Each pūrākau is presented one by one to exhibit the meaning-making and distinctive story of each participant. In keeping with the aims of this research, empowering and elevating individual voices in this way asserts the tino rangatiratanga of each participant, and showcases diversity. The order of the pūrākau is consistent with the interview progression. Maintaining this temporal sequence acknowledges the developments between each interview. Each pūrākau begins with a guiding quote that represents the essence of each narrative, followed by an introductory statement that provides an overview. The pūrākau is a co-construction built from direct excerpts from the interview transcripts, followed by my interpretation of the excerpt. The quotes were carefully selected based on how they represented the sense-making of each participant in understanding themselves as wāhine Māori, as well as their fitting within a wider narrative arc for each story. At times, my own contributions are included to provide greater context, or to support the story-telling. The chapter ends with my own positionality and reflexivity. Sharing my positionality last was a deliberate choice to empower the position of my participants. The reflexive component attends to my own developments in understanding my sense of self as Māori during this project.

Ko Rangimārie

"Older wāhine, younger wāhine, kōtiro, it's amazing to see what being wahine can do for a person."

Rangimārie's pūrākau explores the development from kōtiro to wahine. She narrates how her understanding of herself as a wahine has been shaped by her study to become a midwife and continues to be shaped through her role as a midwife. She portrays a dualism of being a kōtiro and being a wahine where she contrasts her identity, community, and achievement on either side. What becomes clear is Rangimārie's ability to story her experiences through her developed understanding of being wahine. This allows her to see how her younger experiences were framed by discrimination, and through the support of her whānau and her community, she can stand proud in who she is presently.

Rangimārie's pūrākau opens with her current understanding of what it means to her to be wahine and its importance to her.

> *What does it mean to me? To be a wahine? It means everything to me. It's a very central part of who I am and how I navigate the world and how I understand things. [...] It's being Māori, it's being spiritual, it's being Papatūānuku, it's so much more than just my body and my reproductive organs or it's more than the clothes that I wear or the name that I have. You know, it's whakapapa, being wahine is whakapapa. Being a woman is- that's my gender, that's my sex, that's how I live and I dress. But it's not whakapapa like wahine is.*

Rangimārie emphasises the centrality of being wahine in terms of her worldview and identity. Listing what this means for her identity, she relates it to her ethnic and cultural identity, her spirituality, and her embodiment of atua wāhine. She equates being wahine with whakapapa and distinguishes this as the difference between being wahine and being a woman. Being wahine frames "how" she understands and navigates life and outlines who she can "be". Whereas identifying as a woman, she associates more strongly with what she does, the clothes she wears, and the way she lives. She extends that being a wahine goes beyond her physiology and physical appearance, personal style, and even her own name, giving the impression of a vast and boundless conceptualisation. Being a wahine to Rangimārie is constructed beyond gendered and

physiological limits. What comes across is Rangimārie's tone of expansiveness; she reiterates how much "more" being wahine is to her, reinforcing its importance in comparison to the material aspects of her womanhood.

Rangimārie speaks passionately to her work as she constructs a narrative of how she has arrived at her present understanding of being wahine.

> *Every single day I get up and go to mahi [work] I think, "Wow, the power of wāhine. The divine!" Honestly, there's something so special about being in that space with whānau when, you know, Hawaiki [ancient Māori homeland] is right there and everyone in the room can feel it and there's those two worlds so close in those moments and it's only because you've got a wahine there. Her whare tangata [womb] is going hard. She's bringing her pēpi [baby] into the world and it's like, "Wow. This is incredible." And then, she takes that pēpi home and she raises that pēpi. And then, that pēpi has a pēpi. It's beautiful to see. You just think, "Yup, that's wahine."*

Beginning with an internal whakaaro (thought), Rangimārie returns to the interconnectedness of wāhine and spirituality, binding the power of wahine with the "divine". Sharing her experience practising as a midwife, she draws from Māori creation narratives to make sense of her experiences. She speaks of a proximity to Hawaiki, inferred as the source of life, and to two worlds, te pō and te ao mārama, only made possible through the presence of the wāhine giving birth. This powerful narrative speaks to the amazement Rangimārie feels when making sense of childbirth through a te ao Māori lens. She extends her earlier sentiment that being wahine "is whakapapa" by positioning this baby as the first of many successive generations, all created through this wahine. This highlights how the role of childbearing sits in relationship to whakapapa for Rangimārie in her conceptualisation of being wahine.

Rangimārie portrays a different understanding of being Māori when she was a kōtiro.

> *I remember, as well, being in high school, a Pākehā space, and being made prefect and hearing that I was only made a prefect because they needed some more Māori people. And for a long time I thought that my achievements weren't what they were and that they just needed more Māori. It's not because I'm actually really good at this, it's because they need their statistics to look good. I was being tokenised. [...] And similarly, if I do fail,*

they are gonna say, "Oh, it's because she's Māori." Either way, my successes or my failures are going to be attributed to the fact that I am Māori. [...] So that was a really big one for me in my feeling proud of myself. I never felt proud, I felt pitied, if that makes sense? And it really felt like my achievements were not achievements and that it was just because I was Māori. [...] [My mother's] experience of racism towards me and my brother were her first times seeing or being on the receiving end, the second-hand receiving end of that racism, and it became quite obvious to me as I grew up like, "Oh, she don't know. She's not gonna be able to help me with this one here." So I didn't really have anyone to guide me through that. So yeah, rejected who I was, rejected te ao Māori, tried to be as White as possible, became an angry feminist. And that just didn't serve me at all.

Rangimārie constructs her previous understanding of being Māori through her experiences of achievement in high school where being Māori became a negative site of misattribution. Her emphasis of this being a "Pākehā space" provides context, positioning this school as encompassing a worldview different to her own. She shares a disparaging story of her sense of achievement being attributed to affirmative action and her failings understood through a deficit basis. Her use of absolutes, "only made prefect", shows the reductive and totalising impacts of her achievements being framed in this way. Her "never" feeling proud emphasises the insidious nature of this rhetoric on her ability to cultivate a sense of pride and positive self-regard. She explains how her mother's inability to understand racism and support her through these experiences led to her feeling isolated. This illustrates a desire for support and help-seeking, highlighting how challenging these experiences were for her at this time. Her corrective "second-hand receiving end" maintains herself and her brother as the primary recipients of racism, emphasising a felt difference in the reality of this experience between themselves and their mother. Having insufficient guidance when navigating these experiences led Rangimārie to reject being Māori and take up a "White" identity instead, despite knowing that it was not suitable.

Rangimārie shares how her journey of overcoming her rejection of te ao Māori came about through her studying to become a midwife.

Developing into the wahine that I am now came from my journey into midwifery, or becoming a kaiwhakawhānau [midwife], because I was surrounded by wāhine. I was surrounded by this beautiful birthing kaupapa [initiative] and I got to see whānau grow. I got to see all of the things that wāhine and only wāhine can do and I was like, "Holy, I am powerful!" And that was when I knew I shifted from the kōtiro space to the wahine space 'cos I was really, I've always been proud of what we can do as wāhine, but yeah. My understanding of it changed. [...] It's the journey that I've needed to have the confidence to really grasp what being a wahine means. You know, you move through that adolescence phase where you're like, "Who am I?" A sort of sense of rejecting some identity sometimes and as I've grown, I have really grown into myself as wahine. [...] I don't think it's by luck that I ended up in this mahi. I think my tūpuna just threw me there, said, "This is where you need to be." And I've had all the tohu [signs]. I know. And that, for me, has been a massive shift in my understanding of who I am. And engaging with other wāhine Māori who reject these colonised ideals, where I haven't moved in a space like that before.

Rangimārie recalls how her journey of becoming a midwife fostered self-development that led to her present understanding of herself as wāhine. She cites the importance of her community in exemplifying what wāhine can do and emphasises being surrounded by wāhine. This highlights how she was able to situate herself alongside the wāhine she was working with, developing a deeper engagement with her identity and signifying her departure from being a kōtiro. She mentions having "always" felt pride around what wāhine can do, using absolutes to underline its enduring nature. Taken alongside her earlier statement about struggling to feel pride in herself, this highlights how her journey has facilitated the reconstruction of her view of being Māori. By framing her sense of pride as eternal, Rangimārie shows how she now revisits her past self, kōtiro, through her present self, wahine, inferring an element of healing within this development. This is also reflected in how she explores the idea of rejection across the phases of her life. During her kōtiro phase she speaks of a rejection of self, whereas in her wahine phase she speaks of other wāhine rejecting colonial constructs, symbolising a shift from negotiating her identity alone to within a community. Maintaining the significance of her work for her identity, she introduces her tūpuna by sharing how they "threw" her into this work. This shows the spiritual

grounding of her current sense-making, which also represents a shift. Her understanding that tūpuna established her within her work context illustrates how pivotal her work has been.

Rangimārie shares how her graduation was an important event for her and her whānau in validating her sense of identity.

> *Now I feel wahine in celebrating my achievements, and that growth from kōtiro to wahine through the giving of a taonga [treasured object], receiving of a taonga. I feel wahine. [...] Everything from how [my whānau] gave it, the choice of taonga, my dad saying, you know, he's blessed a karakia over it, washed it in the awa [river], followed proper protocol, the tikanga. Everything through upholding that tikanga and giving me a taonga strengthened my mana. And it showed me that they honour me as wahine through all of the choices that they made there. They could've given me a bunch of flowers. But that's not what they chose. They chose to give me a beautiful, beautiful pounamu [greenstone]. That really validated my sense of achievement and identity.*

Rangimārie details the protocols taken by her father, underlining how meaningful it was to her that he was able to prepare her taonga in this way. By naming that she felt "honoured" and her "mana" strengthened exemplifies the weight of this taonga in relation to her sense of validation. Not only does this highlight the importance of the efforts of her whānau, it shows how her studies have provided opportunities for her validation as a wahine Māori that have extended beyond simply her work.

At the beginning of her pūrākau, Rangimārie expressed difficulty feeling proud of herself. This came through her challenges negotiating discrimination, particularly relating to her achievements. Through her journey into midwifery, she underwent a transition from kōtiro to wāhine. This dualism is reflected in the way Rangimārie portrays her feelings of pride, her feelings of achievement, and comfort within her identity. Rangimārie's pūrākau is a warming example of how identity as wahine is a relational journey that is supported through immersion in Kaupapa Māori initiatives. Through immersing herself in more culturally relevant spaces, Rangimārie was able to overcome internal challenges and shape an identity that is closely aligned with her lived reality and central to her worldview.

Ko Maarama

"You can't maramataka [Maori lunar calendar] your way out of intergenerational trauma"

Maarama's pūrākau outlines how identity as a wahine Māori is resilient and multifaceted. She shares her experience of sexual violence perpetrated by a whānau member. For her this necessitated a disconnection from whānau at a young age, and subsequently precluded Maarama from growing up with a strong understanding of te ao Māori. During adulthood, she recollects her processing of the trauma and grief associated with this abuse and how her lived experience informs her relationship with te ao Māori now.

Maarama's pūrākau opens with her sharing her mother's role in fostering a secure sense of being Māori in her early life.

> *I have always had a sense of being Māori. I have never felt disconnected from it as an identity as opposed to being disconnected from te ao Māori. And, you know, my mum is the one who really instilled that in me despite the fact my mum's Pākehā. She was always like, "Look, you're Māori, you've got a marae [a complex of buildings and courtyards affiliated with specific iwi or hapū]. It's your absolute right to go to your marae. That's who you are, there's no, "Oh, you're too disconnected or too fair skinned or too-'", the thing was always like, "No, this is who you are".*

Maarama narrates an enduring sense of being Māori as an identity, which she contrasts with being disconnected from te ao Māori more generally. She portrays her relationship with her mother as a critical source of identity resilience. Her mother imbued in Maarama an understanding of who she is by maintaining her metaphysical connection to her marae. Her notion of identity is constructed as an inherent birthright and constituted by whakapapa, which enables Maarama to maintain her sense of being Māori even in the context of feeling "disconnected from te ao Māori".

This disconnection to te ao Māori was to protect her from whānau violence. Maarama makes a challenging disclosure regarding sexual assault being perpetrated at her by a whānau member at a very young age.

Dealing with abuse and Māori, you know, that's really difficult and painful for me as I was sexually abused by my [whānau member] when I was little. Very little. And that has, you know, led to my disconnection from any of that side of the family apart from immediate family.

Maarama shares how her lived experience of sexual violence has shaped how she conceptualises abuse within Māori communities as an adult. She reiterates how she was "very little" at the time of being abused, emphasising her vulnerability being at such an impressionable age.

Her mother instigated her disconnection from her extended family, which also resulted in her being disconnected from her Māoritanga (Māori way of life).

My mum was the one who'd cut off, essentially, that side of my family and it's a real difficult thing because it has cut me off from my Māoritanga and that has been a terrible thing for me in a lot of ways. And yet, she didn't have a choice.

Maarama contrasts the varying responses of her whānau to her abuse. When Maarama's mother ended contact with one side of her family, Maarama describes her connection to her whānau and Māoritanga as "cut off", highlighting the severity of what this experience has been like for her. While Maarama recognises this as "a terrible thing", at the same time she expresses understanding towards her mother's actions as the only option to prioritise Maarama's safety.

She describes some difficult whānau interactions that claimed Māori ways of being as prioritising silence.

And you know, like, my family is really fucked. After it came out that I'd been abused, [another whānau member] sat my parents down and said, "We're going to deal with this the Māori way and the Māori way to deal with it is that we're never going to talk about it again and it's never going to be brought up." And it's actually kind of funny 'cos I knew this story and went my whole life thinking that they were lying. And I think it was last year I was like, "Oh, they were telling the truth."

Maarama uses strong language which emphasises her intense disagreement and the diabolical nature of these experiences. Maarama shapes her whānau member as instructing silence and their response as prioritising the protection of the senior whānau member who perpetrated the abuse.

In her retelling she vividly recalls being told this story and notes that it has been an ongoing site of meaning-making. She narrates that it is "kind of funny" that she only recently came to believe this story. Alongside her strong language earlier, Maarama conveys that the response of her whānau member is so unbelievable and absurd that it is almost laughable.

> *It was this terrible tikanga, but like, it wasn't that they were manipulative. Literally, that was how they dealt with it. And that's like- you know, some of my skepticism about tikanga stuff is, "Just 'cos it's a tikanga, it doesn't mean it's the right tikanga."*

Likening this response to tikanga suggests an observance of an "imposter" tikanga that may have arisen within her whānau historically. Imposter tikanga, as conveyed by Kruger et al. (2004), are practices that purposely seek to silence speaking out against whānau violence and thereby facilitate its perpetuation. Maarama's retelling of these experiences illustrates the potent impacts of imposter tikanga becoming naturalised within whānau, and known and accepted as the "Māori way". Maarama portrays the damaging effects in her skepticism of tikanga broadly, exemplifying how imposter tikanga fosters undue distrust and doubt.

There was a shift in Maarama's pūrākau when she turned to talk about her adulthood, narrating that trauma arose unexpectedly during a work noho marae (overnight stay at a marae).

> *I realised the day before, "Oh shit, I'm like processing abuse trauma here. And I can't get out of it." [...] Pretty much like that, and giving birth were the two most intense experiences of my entire adult life.*

Maarama's trauma came up within the context of her first time engaging in a Māori space as an adult. She compares the intensity of this experience to giving birth to emphasise how challenging it was for her.

Going on to explain her time at the noho marae in more detail, she shares her felt grief when witnessing the kaiako (teacher) speak knowledgeably about their marae and tūpuna.

> *[The kaiako] was telling us all these stories about his marae and he knew who everyone was in every photo and what every painting represented and all the stories, like the pūrākau, and it's just, just absolute grief that I would never have that and I could never go home myself because of the abuse. And I spent the whole four days crying in the*

corner and trying to keep it together enough so that my coworkers didn't know what was going on.

Maarama recollects being faced with the memories of the abuse she experienced and resulting sense of disconnection from te ao Māori. The extent of her disconnection became salient in contrast with the kaiako, who she viewed as deeply engaged in their Māoritanga. The access that this kaiako had to cultural knowledges and his connection to his whakapapa and marae represented something unattainable for Maarama, which produced a sense of grief. The impacts of her abuse and the consequences for her own sense of being Māori are emphasised with absolutes; she can "never" go home. Her use of "home" reflects how she observed her kaiako as being within his own "home" and shows how Maarama was grappling with her desire to return to her own home. She describes trying to disguise the emotional intensity of her experience from her colleagues, illustrating how challenging this must have been.

Maarama then arrives at a central turning point in her pūrākau as wahine, where she recalls an important interaction with the other kaiako of the noho marae.

She didn't know until the last day that I was Māori and then I had a bit of a breakdown at her. And she was like, she said to me, "You know, the thing you have to remember is that you're fighting to get to your tūpuna but at the same time, your tūpuna are fighting to get to you." Which was lovely, just the perfect thing to say. [...] [It was] that kind of thing where you feel connected to the other person, you feel connected to your tūpuna, you feel connected to where you are and that moment and the emotions. Like that to me is that wairua thing.

For Maarama this interaction embodied her understanding of wairua. She recalls feeling a connection to her tūpuna, her emotions, other people, and her surroundings, showing a deeply interwoven and relational experience of wairua. Maarama emphasises the importance of what this wahine had said to her, which provided her with reassurance that indeed she is not alone and that her tūpuna are actively trying to connect with her too. In line with her mother fostering in Maarama a strong metaphysical connection to her marae, so too does this kaiako strengthen Maarama's metaphysical relationship to her tūpuna.

This experience led her to start a journey of reconnection with te ao Māori.

> *Oh my god. It was amazing. You know, I went out of it again going, "This has to change my life. This can't be something where I feel really strongly and then over time it fades and I don't do anything differently." That was what changed my life. That's why I'm studying te reo.*

Maarama harnessed the intensity of this experience and directly attributes it to her decision to reconnect with te ao Māori, starting by reclaiming te reo Māori. The pivotal nature of this event is clear in how positively Maarama frames it, highlighting her immense strength and resilience. Maarama, now some years later, speaks te reo Māori with ease and is increasingly connected with te ao Māori.

Maarama brings her pūrākau to the present, where she shares her thoughts about the importance of honesty in seeking to address ongoing whānau violence within Māori communities.

> *A lot of that stuff about being connected to tūpuna resonates with me a lot and also makes me uncomfortable. Like, because I know what my tūpuna were like. And you know, my [whānau member] abusing me, I have absolutely no doubt that [they were] abused by [their] family. [...] I think the things that really upset me are ignoring the nuance, and turning blind eyes to things. I just feel like you've got to start with being honest. [...] If we're that rosey, rose-tinted glasses about it, we're not going to be able to deal with it. You can't maramataka your way out of intergenerational trauma. That stuff can be healing but you can't just paper on some stuff like that and not deal with the fact that a lot of our whānau are really fucked up. Some of them won't be able to get out of that state. [...] Community-focused solutions, yes. All of that, yes. Resources, yes. But like, when it comes down to it, you gotta keep kids safe.*

Maarama narrates the tension and discomfort she feels in holding multiple ideas as truth. She acknowledges the likelihood of there being an intergenerational aspect to her abuse. Relating this to broader issues, Maarama postulates that honesty and understanding nuance are critical to addressing the issue of whānau violence. She hints at the idiom "papering over cracks" to emphasise her belief that contemporary lifestyles can incorporate traditional practices in ways that are only surface-level and do not address underlying causes. Whilst she acknowledges the

healing potential within these practices, her strong language emphasises the magnitude of the problems she sees facing many Māori. Her repetition of whānau as being "fucked up" relates to her lived experience and contextualises the priority of holding the safety of children paramount.

Maarama constructs a profoundly brave and insightful narrative that highlights how trauma can inform sense-making in an ever-evolving way. Establishing the importance of metaphysical connection and supportive whānau members in identity resilience, Maarama shares how impactful it was for her to reflect on her trauma. In doing so, she has overcome intense barriers to strengthen and reconnect with her sense of being Māori. Her pūrākau highlights the contradictions and complexities in her reality; the contrasting responses from her whānau regarding her abuse, her resonant and uncomfortable relationship with te ao Māori concepts, and her conceptualisation of trauma. Maarama navigates through these challenges, refusing to simplify the nuance and living her life in line with the value of honesty.

Ko Kahukura

"Doing for my whānau is the same as me doing for myself."

Kahukura's pūrākau outlines the interwovenness of identity and purpose as wahine Māori, with whānau and whakapapa. Kahukura shares how her roles and responsibilities within her whānau hold deep purpose for her and encapsulate her identity as wahine Māori. She shares three examples of varying roles and responsibilities she holds within her whānau and relates them to her sense of purpose. Engaging with te ao Māori throughout, Kahukura contextualises her experience as wahine through accessing a depth of meaning and purpose grounded in atua wāhine and wairua. In doing so, she conveys what wairua means to her and how she gives precedence to te ao Māori in everything she does.

Kahukura begins her pūrākau by articulating the depth of meaning and purpose that being wahine affords.

> *Being wahine is, for me, a huge privilege. [...] I feel this massive, yeah, depth and connection and understanding as being a wahine Māori. [...] I mean, we are the creators of life, you know, and the connection to our tūpuna, it all comes through the whare tangata. Yeah, and there's this beautiful, very purposeful feeling to that for me. [...] There's a depth within, for me, connection to Papatūānuku, understanding our whakapapa through that as wahine Māori. There's a depth for me in collectiveness, like there's much more of a purpose for me as a wahine necessarily than there is as a woman. [...] It's an emotional depth that you can use to care for others, like a very motherly kind of- in a very motherly kind of space.*

Kahukura shares how integral and entwined her connection to whakapapa, atua, and Māori cosmogonical narratives are to her experience as wāhine. Her repetition of depth emphasises the interwoven nature of being wāhine, and how she finds meaning and purpose through her connection to Pāpātuanuku and her understanding of whakapapa. This depth is also situated in her experience of collectiveness and her sense of purpose, which distinguishes her experience as a wahine Māori. It is something she is able to engage with in many ways, including emotionally and relationally.

When Kahukura is asked for a story that she associates with being wahine, she illustrates how this collectiveness relates to her whānau. She narrates an experience of caring for her kuia.

> *Taking space to look after my nan when she was in hospital. [...] I think that, for me, epitomised being wahine Māori, of moving away from your own individual life [...] and taking time out to be next to my nan and care for my nan. And that caring came very much in the form of lots of kōrero and, but also mirimiri [a type of Māori healing practice] and using that essence of caring that I think comes with wahine Māori in a form. [...] It felt quite like a marker, a tohu for me that I was on the right path to be able to give back to our kuia and in that kind of way.*

For Kahukura, the experience of caring for her kuia "epitomised" being wahine. Significant to this story is that Kahukura goes beyond her personal life to care for her kuia in a culturally-grounded way, which situates this experience as a site of meaning-making. Shifting her focus from her individual life to needs in relationships is a way that she fulfills the deep purpose that she associates strongly with being wahine. Introducing this idea of an inherent "essence of caring" is resonant with her translation of depth to a means of caring for others, illustrating how these practices draw directly from her experience and identity as wahine. Given Kahukura's broader focus of reclaiming traditional knowledges, her engagement with traditional Māori healing practices throughout this experience is in itself an act of reclamation for herself and her whānau. Seeing this experience as a tohu reinforces how this experience is representative of her purpose. This affirmed her decision-making in her life up until that point, through her ability to care for her kuia.

Kahukura then shifts her narrative to a different relationship within her whānau that she feels is important, her nieces.

> *I think one of my biggest drivers is to be a good example for my nieces as a wahine Māori. There's often, you know, times that it's seen as a disadvantage being Māori and I never want my nieces to feel that. I want them to know and understand, like know within their bones that being Māori is your biggest asset. And in fact, like, how lucky are we to be Māori? [...] I always have felt this really intense wāhine line within me. I know that might sound weird but it is a feeling that I have of like, "Oh, I am from a very strong*

wāhine line" and I can feel that and I definitely don't want that to be lost. I want my nieces to feel that as well.

Kahukura shares how her nieces are a big source of motivation in her life, reinforcing her commitment to her whānau. Through this responsibility as a role-model, Kahukura seeks to affirm her nieces' sense of being Māori and protect them from being negatively influenced. She speaks of being Māori as advantageous and an asset, illustrating how she believes a strong sense of self will equip her nieces well in their lives. Kahukura emphasises the extent she hopes to imbue a positive sense of being Māori, by wanting them "to know within their bones" how lucky they are to have Māori whakapapa. The use of bones as an embodied metaphor is also culturally resonant, given the inherent link between whakapapa and kōiwi (bones). As a literal and metaphoric link to whakapapa, kōiwi are the lasting remains of tūpuna and symbolise iwi connections. She also describes wanting her nieces to feel the inherent strength of their whakapapa, which Kahukura articulates through her own embodied connection to her matriarchal line. She describes the intensity of this feeling and not wanting that to be lost, providing another example of how whakapapa transmission is important to her. She makes sense of her role and responsibility to her nieces through cultivating a strong sense of self and supporting their embodied experience of whakapapa. This shows how interrelated whānau, whakapapa, and tūpuna are in Kahukura's everyday life.

A third example of whānau responsibility that Kahukura shares is in regards to her family members who are yet to reconnect with their Māori identity.

Within my own whānau, it's been, yeah, a little bit rocky along those paths. Again though, as a wahine Māori I feel like part of my purpose in life is to help guide my family back on to that path. And again, that motherly kind of role that I kind of take within my whānau to do that. Huge purpose.

Kahukura frames the journey of some of her whānau members through the metaphor of a path, alluding to challenges and obstacles between her and her whānau as rocks on this path. Kahukura understands that her role is to guide them back onto the path. This is another way that Kahukura describes living her purpose through her understanding of whakapapa. This gentle description gives the impression of the generosity and patience Kahukura affords these whānau members and

could be seen as an expression of the "motherly" role that she occupies. This reflects a deeply collective sense of self and her alignment with traditional Māori ways of relating.

Kahukura constructs a narrative that attends to the various roles and responsibilities she holds within her whānau. She explains the cosmogonical depth from which she draws her strength as a wahine in fulfilling her purpose. Offering examples of her experiences caring for whānau, being a positive role model, and gently guiding them, Kahukura gives an impression of deep love, patience, and commitment to her whānau. Through her embodied connection to atua wāhine and her tūpuna, Kahukura makes clear how integral her understanding of te ao Māori is to her understanding of being wahine.

Ko Matatū

"One of the greatest blessings of being Māori, I believe, is our understanding of and valuing of te taha wairua [spiritual wellbeing], spirituality and the spiritual realm."

Matatū's pūrākau explores the experiences of a wahine negotiating meaning related to cultural and gender identities, alongside religion and spirituality. In her narrative she constructs a dual identity as a proud wāhine Māori and as a member of the Mormon church, through coming to appreciate commonalities in values and understandings of wairua and spirituality. She shares her journey of strengthening her understanding of wairua from a Māori perspective, through integrating mātauranga with her existing understanding that was grounded in a Mormon perspective. The "blending" of these worldviews she describes as seamless and as holding no tension in her lived experiences, however she acknowledges the complex entanglement of colonisation and Christianity both locally and abroad. Matatū's pūrākau is a prime example of the plurality in the lived realities of many wāhine Māori, and how identity can be constructed through multiple layers of meaning and truth.

Matatū begins by asserting the role of wairua in shaping her reality and sense-making.

> *I connect with taha wairua all day, every day. If my wairua is not right, nothing is right. I can be sick in my tinana [body], but as long as my wairua is strong, I'm good. I can feel emotionally stressed or depressed, but if my wairua is strong I can carry on.*

Matatū outlines her wellbeing as interconnected through physical and psychological experiences that are moderated by the strength of her wairua. She characterises wairua as enabling resilience in the face of challenges, and conveys how wairua is the dimension through which her everyday life is framed. Her expression, "all day, every day", emphasises the extent of her connection with her wairua and the impact it has on how she makes sense of her life.

Matatū reflects on her previous understandings of wairua and its grounding in faith.

> *I was raised predominantly Christian and not Māori because my dad couldn't give us what he didn't have. Though we did step inside Māori spaces as often as we could, we didn't have te reo, though I was learning it in school. My former understanding of wairua was very much from a Christian perspective in terms of spirituality and the things that*

you do in order to maintain your spirituality like reading scriptures, prayers, being kind, and talking to God. There are a number of ways that Christianity encourages you to strengthen your spirituality. As I grew older, I put myself into more spaces so that I could understand what wairua looks like from a Māori perspective.

For Matatū, Christianity played a significant role in her upbringing, with her understanding of te ao Māori coming later in life. She individually references herself and her father, and highlights their divergent experiences of te reo Māori which she had shared during the interview; her father's story of language loss and her story of language reclamation. Matatū conveys compassion for why there was a lesser presence of te ao Māori growing up. She uses wairua as a term that encompasses both spirituality from a Christian perspective, and wairua from a Māori perspective, introducing how she holds multiple perspectives simultaneously. Positioning her earlier understanding as "former" intimates an iterative process of developing her present understanding of wairua. Matatū introduces her strong sense of agency, where she recalls "putting herself into spaces" to facilitate her learning of wairua from a Māori perspective. Framing it in this way gives the impression of self-determination and accepting ownership of her own life.

Matatū elaborates on the specificities of the faith of her and her whānau and the alignment she experiences between these worldviews.

We align with the Mormon church. And so everything that that church talks about is aligned with, basically, te ao Māori. All of the tikanga, manaaki [care], tautoko [support], faith, pono [honesty], forgiveness, truth, sharing, whānau comes first all the time regardless, sharing and grateful. All those amazing things that te ao Māori espouses. We don't always live up to that and there's lots of reasons why we can and can't do those things, 'cos it's challenging. That was our reality.

Matatū constructs her identity collectively within her whānau by speaking to their shared experiences and ways of being. To emphasise this, Matatū switches to collective language to convey a group perspective. She identifies core values and strengths from te ao Māori and her faith to highlight commonalities. She conveys that "everything" aligns between her church and te ao Māori, in terms of values and worldviews, as both her faith and culture are central to her

identity. This overlap supports her negotiation of these co-existent identities. At the same time she expresses a flexible understanding for herself and her whānau in terms of living these values. This emphasises that these values are aspirational and, in the same fashion that she spoke about her father, she displays compassion to herself and her whānau too.

Matatū is forthright in addressing the possibility of tension within her dual identity.

> *I do understand that Christianity definitely played a part in colonisation. I see that, I understand that, and I get that. I know that our church historically, in places other than New Zealand, was part of the oppression of people's cultures and religions and colonised their land. But wairua i te ao Māori, wairua i roto i te hāhi, he ōrite [wairua in te ao Māori and wairua within the church are the same, or similar].*

Matatū attends to the role of religion in the global processes of colonisation. Her emphasis on "seeing it", "hearing it", and "getting it" highlights a desire to convey that she understands the extent of the oppression associated with the church. She underlines the specificities of Mormonism in the colonisation of other cultures, acknowledging the far-reaching impacts. She fluidly switches to te reo Māori, which makes explicit her ability to hold these truths as equal through a lens of wairua, and represents the ease with which she traverses perspectives. Engaging with te reo Māori is a way that she strengthens her wairua too, showing how she draws strength in this way to support her sense-making and position.

Matatū narrates her present understanding of wairua, illustrating how she negotiates the tensions and differences in worldviews.

> *From what I understand, in my experience of wairua, it is partly atua based, partly wairua based, in terms of spirits and stuff, partly taiao [natural environment] based and also partly mātauranga and te reo based. For me, spirituality from a Christian perspective and wairua from a Māori perspective, those two perspectives have never been an issue. Blending those two worldviews is easy because they look so similar to me. [...] I can go to the taiao to strengthen my wairua. I can karakia to atua Māori for help. I can say a prayer in English at church and read the bible and feel stronger in my wairua.*

Matatū identifies two perspectives, Christian and Māori, that she connects to in contextually specific ways. She describes a multifaceted understanding of wairua that draws equally from these worldviews. Matatū engages with te taiao to strengthen her wairua and practices karakia to communicate with atua for guidance. Equally, she acknowledges the strength of prayer within a church context and the utility of reading the bible in supporting her wairua. Matatū describes "blending" these worldviews yet she draws on each at different times, in different ways, and in different contexts. This suggests that she is able to hold both together and they are "blended" together within her. She agentically decides when and how she engages with this "blended" standpoint. Matatū repeats what she "can" do, and the "ease" through which these practices are accessible, and through the similarity with which she perceives them. This is reinforced by her emphasis having "never" experienced an issue in holding this perspective.

Matatū narrates how her church and community provided a diversity of perspectives around what the lifestyles of wāhine Māori look like.

> *Through the church and through our community, I got to see lots of different versions of women. [...] I was so blessed to be raised with a variety of women who held a variety of roles and attitudes and perspectives and upbringings. [...] The idea that we could do anything the hell we wanted. I had amazing female teachers and people that would push me and encourage me, "You could do this, or you could do that." I had friends who were super rich and academically on to it. Their perspectives changed me too because some of what they had was not present in my home. My community showed me all these beautiful versions of what a wāhine Māori could look like and I got to pick and choose which part of that I wanted and which part of that looked and felt right for me."*

Matatū portrays how the fluidity in her experience and her sense of agency extend beyond her understanding of wairua. Discussing how she constructs herself as wahine, she shares how she has been able to choose her ways of being, which stemmed from early encouragement to assert agency in her own life. This describes how she came to experience her identities as pluralistic. Her sense of "picking and choosing" is reminiscent of how she practices the plurality within her wairua, emphasising an active and self-determined stance. Highlighting the importance of role models, Matatū speaks fondly of the many women who have influenced her rich understanding of wāhinetanga (womanhood).

Matatū provides an in-depth account of how she negotiates wairua from te ao Māori and Mormon perspectives. Wairua is the dimension through which Matatū makes sense of herself and her world, and she shares in detail how fluid and plural her identities are. What emerges throughout the narrative is the role of agency in enabling her to choose how she experiences her everyday life. This is clear not only in her conceptualisation of wairua, but also in how she constructs herself as a wahine Māori. Drawing strength from her whānau, faith, and wairua, Matatū's pūrākau showcases how wahine Māori navigate intersections of religion, culture, and gender through agentic practices that are grounded in self-determinism.

Ko Lily

"You don't have an opinion about my body. This is mine."

Lily's pūrākau retells experiences of being a wahine, what these have meant for her at different times, and how she has chosen to respond going forward. Lily shares a pivotal experience during high school where she felt pressured to receive a hormonal contraceptive injection despite experiencing harmful side effects. Later in her adulthood she reflects back with a critical lens, seeing the discrimination and bias present within this interaction. As her understanding has developed over time, she has engaged with this experience to shape her career choices and passion for improving Māori health outcomes. Lily's story is a demonstration of how her self-determination and resistance are sites of resilience and strength.

Lily's pūrākau opens with her exploring how being wāhine is an embodied experience.

> *[I'm] always being conscious about reproduction, like my body is different. And so I'm always considering how my body is different from my partner's body. Those biological factors I do consider often. [...] I think it's because I am a woman and I have had issues with my reproductive parts that I am always thinking of that. And so, when I hear people flippantly talk about pregnancy as if, "Why doesn't every woman want to be pregnant or whatever?" And me personally, that triggers me, 'cos I'm like, "Actually, I am always gonna be a woman even if I don't have kids." And so, I think that's what it means to be wahine for me and you can't remove that from me. I'm always gonna be it.*

Lily outlines how her embodied experiences are central to her understanding of being wāhine. Situating her experience alongside her partner, who is a man, she illustrates how she constructs her experience relationally. Her use of absolutes in how she considers her body, "always being conscious", "always considering", reveals the significance of her experience as embodied when making sense of herself as a wahine. Her notion of being triggered, alongside her disclosure of challenges relating to her reproductive system, indicates a hurt or experience of marginalisation shaping her understanding. In response to this, a thread of self-determination emerges. She opposes narratives of womanhood that solely relate to childbearing, instead determining her sense of being wahine based on her own desires. She ends with a defiant declaration of

autonomy, framing her identity as a wahine Māori as enduring and resistant to the ideals of others; it can't be removed, she will "always be it".

Lily elaborates on a challenging experience that has shaped parts of her reality.

> *[At highschool], we had free nurses come in and free doctors. When I would go there, I had a boyfriend at the time. They genuinely really pressured me, really pressured me to go on the Depo [Provera] jab. And so I went on it for three cycles and then I was having really awful reactions from it. [...] I remember saying to the GP, "I don't want to do it anymore because I think it's causing this" and I remember her saying, "I don't believe it's that." She just doubled down and she wouldn't let me consider anything else. I remember that conversation, I remember being really stoic. I was like, "No, I don't want to go on it again." [...] I think because I've always been quite defiant, I was like, "No, I'm not." But I felt I really had to push back on her. [...] It wasn't until I got older, I was like, "Oh, you just saw this Māori young teenager and you just assumed I couldn't understand how to use a condom and that you didn't want me to get pregnant. Why?" She didn't test me. They didn't check anything about my body and I was going through really painful symptoms. And it really messed me up. I had to go to another clinic for a second opinion for ages after it. But she didn't listen and it made me think that her prerogative was that, "Māori are more likely to get pregnant. I'm gonna force and make this girl feel dumb and that she needs to do this really invasive form of birth control."*
>
> *In hindsight, did you feel like you actually consented to that in the first place?*
>
> *No, not at all. I wasn't told any of the side effects. I didn't know any of the symptoms. It was actually quite new at the time. I felt like a guinea pig. It was the most like obvious form of like, "Oh, you just don't know me as a fucking person. You see me as a statistic that you need to reduce." [...] I think the way I make sense of it now, like for example, when it comes to my reproductive rights, I've had people saying, "Oh, you should go on the pill" and everything. [...] I just remember thinking like, "Actually, you are not a trained physician and I'm not paying to talk to you. You don't have an opinion about my body. This is mine. And I don't want kids and I know I don't want to have kids. That's why I have taken on the precautions that I deemed necessary and it's not up to you to make me*

do invasive things." [...] I do think that it's that view that, "I'm preventing the statistic by altering this person's body." Who the fuck are you to do that? You can't castrate Māori because you don't want more Māori to have kids.

Lily shares how she responded to an experience of having her bodily agency and autonomy undermined and dismissed. These events happened during a formative chapter in her life, emphasising how pivotal this experience was in shaping her understanding of herself and her experience as a wahine. Threads of resilience and self-determination emerge as she recalls how she reasserted sovereignty over her own body. She describes having to "push back" and stand up for herself in order to resist being ignored by health professionals. Lily carried the pain of this experience in her body for some time afterward.

As she looks back with critical awareness, Lily constructs a counter-narrative, continuing in this thread of resilience for herself. Despite describing many instances of ethical malpractice in her story, Lily does not frame herself as a victim but instead, positions her younger self as "stoic" and "defiant". Lily describes being perceived as dumb and feeling belittled, but now she contextualises this experience within wider systemic issues. In her counter narrative, she understands the underlying motives of her physician are premised on deficit-based and harmful narratives surrounding the sexuality of wāhine Māori. This supports her to retain agency over her self-definition, whereby any negative influences from this experience on her sense of self are mitigated by understanding the problematic attitudes of the practitioner.

Lily's ongoing use of strong language indicates a deeply held anger, and illustrates how this event still elicits a strong emotional response. Reflecting on this story is important to Lily as it has led her to develop a critical perspective. Her use of "invasive", "guinea pig", and "castrate" illustrates how violating and dehumanising this experience was for Lily. This is reiterated by her sense of vulgarity and disgust when sharing that she felt the doctor viewed her as a "statistic" rather than a person. She makes another declaration when rejecting someone's unsolicited advice; "You don't have an opinion about my body. This is mine". These repeated declarations emphasise how her efforts for autonomy remain ongoing, as she still experiences challenges in some interactions. Her critical perspective is a source of protection going forward.

Lily shares how this experience has shaped her passion for supporting other Māori experiencing health issues. She aims to foster trust within the healthcare system through her practice as a social worker.

> *I was very mistrusting of GP's. Ironically I work for GP's now. But I think it's because I understand where that mistrust comes from with GP's, but also trying to build that bridge of- we don't want that mistrust to lead to poor health outcomes, 'cos Māori are more likely to die. I'm working with a lot of Māori women who have awful health outcomes and so I'm trying to make them trust the GP 'cos I know what it's like to have an untrustworthy GP and if I feel that their suss [sic], I'll fucking fight back. And I know the ones who are the good ones and are actually trying to prevent or manage your diabetes or whatever. So I find that that experience, for me, has helped me shape to be passionate to support other Māori.*

Lily engages with her past as a site of meaning-making, using it to shape her passion for supporting other Māori. She conveys a collective sense of responsibility when constructing an image of a bridge to represent Māori engagement with healthcare. She positions Māori on one side, and GPs on the other. In this metaphor, she is the one building the bridge in between by integrating her ability to empathetically understand with her passion for supporting others. She has positioned herself as someone who knows the "good" doctors from the bad. She uses strong language again when explaining how she will fight back if she suspects a GP is untrustworthy. This emphasises how she uses her practice as a social worker as a site of resistance, whereby she restores agency for the people she works with, and in doing so, she enacts her own agency too.

Lily's narrative is ultimately one of strength and resilience. Lily shares a narrative that emphasises her fierce sense of resistance and reclamation. She centers her experiences in high school as a site of meaning-making. This is not only in terms of how they have framed her present reality, but how they have shaped her embodied understanding of herself as wahine. By constructing a vital counter narrative, she shows how her reflections on this experience have led to her developing a critical perspective on structural issues facing wāhine Māori. Using her lived experience as a source of strength, she now centers her practice as a social worker on supporting Māori to foster greater trust within the health system to improve health outcomes.

Ko Anahera

"You look through the lens towards the past, desperately searching for that tūpuna knowledge, but the lens that you're looking through is a Pākehā lens."

Anahera's pūrākau offers an analysis of negotiating the tension between tūpuna practices and contemporary ways of being. Speaking often to her body as a site of knowledge, she portrays an embodied experience of being wahine. Anahera had her ikura (menstruation) at the time of the interview, which she discussed at the outset. This grounded her pūrākau firmly in the present. She emphasises the importance of mātauranga and shares her commitment to learning and rediscovery, whilst attending to the contextual challenges that she faces in doing so. Anahera eloquently constructs her pūrākau through a deeply analytical lens that intimates her academic background.

> *The experience of being wahine that's sitting with me most presently at the moment is this relationship to toto, to blood. I'm just at the end of my ikura and I think that ikura has been like a consistent- that returning to a cycle over the course of a lifetime. I've been thinking a lot recently about the sacredness of that blood. I guess that's what's sitting most present in my body at the moment around being wahine.*

Anahera narrates a dynamic understanding of what it means to her to be wahine. She directly relates being wahine to her "toto", and draws from the physical experience of her ikura as a cyclical grounding, a form of rhythmic consistency that will occur until later in her life. She portrays her body as a site of knowledge and her blood as sacred, illustrating that, for Anahera, being wahine is a deeply embodied experience.

She elaborates on her monthly practices and experience of ikura in her current context.

> *I would say my maternal line is the one that I'm most strongly affiliated with and when I think about people that are just big pou [pillars] for me in my life, it's all wāhine. [...] From them, I think I've drawn many practices around just being in relationship with my body. And so, on a monthly basis, that usually looks like slowing down a lot around ikura. I have also had this relationship with PCOS [Polycystic Ovary Syndrome] which has not always been the most fun. I think I often feel clashed between like- I think this is a binary*

that I don't always love, but I'm like, "Argh, PCOS and Western ways of being, it's fucking me up!" But even like, you know, I have become a user of AWWA, the period underwear, and thinking about the awa atua [menstruation] and that river and then how we wash them out. But in the past, with the relationship between land and ikura, blood was treated so differently. Yeah. I think there's lots of ways that I wish I could be more connected to those ancestral practices.

Anahera naturally transitions from speaking about her blood to her whakapapa, highlighting how her embodied understanding is interwoven with her tūpuna and atua. Many wāhine in her life, from both whakapapa and whānau perspectives, are significant pillars of strength and mātauranga for her. From them she learned an embodied way of connecting to herself, drawing on monthly practices around her ikura. At the same time, Anahera contrasts this with her experience of living with PCOS, conveying that she sees this condition as obstructing her ability to engage in these practices. Given that she often returns to her body as a site of knowledge throughout her pūrākau, it is understandable that PCOS feels disruptive for Anahera, particularly as she aligns PCOS with the West. She constructs a binary between Western and Māori ways that suggestively locates these ways of being in opposition to traditional ancestral practices. Referencing AWWA period underwear, Anahera speaks to the symbolism of this modern menstrual product as representing traditional practices of washing away menstrual blood in a river, sharing her understanding of traditional mātauranga and the connection between blood and land. Despite AWWA, as a brand and product, offering opportunities to decolonise menstrual cycles through the promotion of traditional Māori practices, Anahera still feels far away from the traditional practices around ikura blood. She arrives at the core of her struggle; her desire to reconnect further with traditional practices feels obstructed by her contemporary context. This emphasises the importance that reclaiming mātauranga wāhine holds, and underlines Anahera's motivation to learn.

The importance of mātauranga is further emphasised when Anahera shares how it relates to her being wahine.

As I have journeyed alongside, reconnecting to te ao Māori and understanding more about [te] ao Māori institutions' ways of being and speaking and doing, I have had to consistently reevaluate that relationship to wahinetanga, wahine, with the new things that

I find about it. I think that there's this tension for me between things that are deeply ancient practice that's inside my body and then these new languages or things that I learn, and I'm like, "Oh, that makes so much sense" or "Why did I not know that?" Or "I wish that my mum had known that or had this opportunity to experience that."

Now speaking to how she integrates reclaimed mātauranga into her everyday life, Anahera again returns to a relational construction of her sense of self, first exploring her relationship to toto and her body, and now her wahinetanga. Anahera eloquently describes an ongoing reevaluation of this relationship, conveying a lucid understanding of how she negotiates herself, her context, and newly reclaimed knowledges. Her use of "consistently" reiterates Anahera's commitment to learning as she is having to continually integrate new ways of being into her daily life. Anahera is forthright about the challenges this brings, where she describes the tension she feels between her embodied knowledge and her ever-unfolding understanding of this knowledge within a contemporary context. She conveys frustration and a sense of grief for both herself and mother when sharing thoughts that come up when learning new things. This emphasises how, despite how strongly articulated her pūrākau is, it still remains deeply personal and can be an ongoing site of struggle.

Anahera remains with this sense of struggle and tension, and shifts her pūrākau to a recent role she held within the public sector using pain as her connecting thread.

I just finished [a contract] within the public sector, [it] felt like jail. It was violent. [...] I knew even as I was doing it, and even as I was wanting to not be there, that I was in the right spot and, just one of those puku [gut] feelings. [...] I think too, that so much of that was a fight to stay human. I remember walking in and feeling like I could either feel the pain or not feel the pain and become numb and I had to choose so consciously to stay in that pain even though it was so hard. And often I feel that way about ikura as well. Ikura can be quite painful for me. Sometimes I have to use those Western medicines to get through them 'cos I've got Western stuff to do. Then other times there's this opportunity to sit with the pain and I think like, I have been meditating recently on this concept of like, "Okay, well, my body is designed to be able to feel pain. Why is that? There actually is a lot of stuff that's happened in the last month. What is coming up from me? What is being processed by my body right now?"

Anahera reinstates how she finds opportunity and autonomy in returning to her body as a site of knowledge during challenging and painful scenarios. She describes her time working for the government as "violent" and dehumanising, using a metaphor of jail to emphasise the oppressive and harmful nature of her experience. Despite this feeling of imprisonment, Anahera identified a choice within this pain, illustrating her powerful will for autonomy. She determined her choice as either being with the pain inherent in her experience, or to go "numb", portraying an abandoning of her body. Describing her decision to remain with this pain led Anahera to revisit her pūrākau around her ikura, and she draws a parallel between menstrual pain and her time in this job. She expresses that pain can be an opportunity for insight, continuing her thread of embodied knowledge and reinforcing, again, her strong ethic of learning. Maintaining a binary comparison, she aligns pain relief and contextual demands with Western ways of being, and positions the alternative as the opportunity to meditate on embodied knowledge, a practice with foundations in Eastern knowledges. Sharing some reflexive questions that are grounded in a monthly practice, Anahera shows how she prompts herself to explore her embodied knowledge and return to her body as a source of guidance.

> *I'm also really hesitant to- I don't know why this phrase is coming up for me, but be a sucker for punishment. I never wanna put myself through things for the glory of, "That was hard." I want a soft life and I would like a soft life for our mokopuna. And the question that one of my favorite tuakana [mentor] has often posed is, "How are we practicing the world we need?" What that acknowledges for me is like, I need to be in the practice of where I'm trying to get to. We are not gonna get to the world that we need by burning ourselves out.*

Anahera clarifies that pain and punishment are not things she repeatedly seeks out, nor does she derive glory simply from perseverance. She conveys her broader aspiration for the "soft" life she wants to live and the life she dreams of for successive generations. Using "soft" as a direct opposite to "hard" emphasises how oppositional her aspirations are from the ideas of perseverance and punishment that she has constructed. Closing her pūrākau, she reflects once more on her aforementioned work experience, sharing her realisation that she needs to live her life in accordance with her future aspirations. Her repeated mention of working towards the

world that “we need” highlights her collective sense of purpose and illustrates how she sees her individual choices as contributing to the whole.

Anahera provides an embodied account of her experience as a wahine that traverses whakapapa, mātauranga, and her ultimate aspirations for herself and future generations. Grounding her pūrākau in her experience of ikura, she frames her identity as wahine Māori as present and dynamic in nature. Returning often to her body as a site of knowledge, this recurring thread emphasises her way of making sense of the world. Her quest for reclaiming and learning traditional mātauranga strengthens her relationship with, and understanding of, her body, and moves her closer to living her life in the way she aspires to. She acknowledges the challenges and tensions posed by her current context but remains future-focused, moving towards a gentle way of being through her ever adaptive and iterative way of making sense of herself and her world.

Ko Grace

"My personal development journey actually opened my eyes and was like, 'Yeah, actually you can be all that you want to be.'"

In Grace's pūrākau she shares how sites of struggle and survival can be obstacles in developing a sense of self as wahine. Grace narrates the pressures and responsibilities she negotiates as a solo mother of three tamariki (children). Constructing her understanding of roles through contrasting masculine and feminine energies, Grace shares how she has felt limited in her ability to express her wahine essence. Providing context around her upbringing, she identifies enduring pressures of struggle, survival, and what she "should be" doing. Grace's pūrākau follows her journey overcoming these pressures and shifting into an unknown, where she forges her own path whilst raising her children. She portrays a current sense of being wahine that celebrates a grounded sense of self.

Grace's pūrākau opens with her recalling why she has previously found it difficult to define being wahine.

> *Up until as of late, I've found it a little bit hard to define. And that probably stems from, I feel like it stems from me being a solo mum for so long, so I feel like I've been in quite a "do-do-do", quite a masculine energy, and not feeling like I had time to step more into that flow, into that "being", into that wahine state, or the feminine state, however we describe it. [...] I was working 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m, like forty-hour weeks. Actually, I was working fifty-hour weeks 'cos I had two jobs, crazy! Anyway, and then I was studying. Like I was doing all these things 'cos I felt like I should be.*
>
> > *So you were working two jobs, fifty hours a week and studying, and raising three kids? On your own?*
>
> *Yeah. I was pregnant though, so I had two kids and I was pregnant.*
>
> > *Yeah, I don't know if that makes it easier, though?*
>
> *[Laughs] Yeah, nah, it doesn't. Not at all.*

The responsibilities of Grace's role as a solo mum left no time to "be wahine". Attributing this with a masculine energy, Grace associates masculinity as action-oriented and tangible, whereas

femininity, or wahine, is described as fluid and experiential. Her use of "energy" and "state" positions her understanding as transient and situational; these are complementary essences within her. Grace also shares how ideas of what she "should be" doing have guided her decision making in the past. She typifies a standard week as entailing numerous commitments and pressures. Through a jovial back and forth clarifying the details, Grace portrays her honest and warm demeanour.

Grace distinguishes her role as a mum from her experience as a wahine.

> *I remember I used to feel like I couldn't be, or step into being, a woman properly. I was a mum but a mum feels different to a wahine.*

Grace speaks to femininity, wahine, and being a woman interchangeably. She narrates feeling precluded from being a woman both inherently and in terms of becoming, expressing limited agency. Her repetition of "feeling" intimates an emotional element within these experiences. Grace's use of "properly" suggests she has an idea of how to express herself as wahine, yet it felt unattainable. In contrast, she confidently claims her role as a mother. Differentiating this from being a woman extends her earlier association of being a mother invoking a masculine energy.

Grace elaborates on what a "mum role" looks like for her.

> *When I'm in my mum role, and it's more specifically a single mum role, a lot of that is just making sure my kids stay alive and providing for them and working and earning money and, you know, that kind of stuff. Which, yes, us as wāhine can do but I put that more to a tāne energy. Again, we do encompass all of it but it's a very "doing" energy, which I mean yes, we as wāhine are always "doing" but I feel like I haven't been "being". [...] We need it all to balance but I guess that's the difference for me is that I guess I've had to try hold it all and not truly been able to step into my more wahine side.*

Grace constructs a contrasting and complementary understanding of masculinity and femininity by critically exploring her role as a mother. She specifies being a single mother to emphasise that she alone holds the full weight of the responsibilities. By sharing her focus on keeping her children alive, Grace illustrates the fundamental pressures of survival that she carries in this role. Describing that she has had to "hold it all" clarifies how the demands of her roles leave little time to explore her wahine side. This paints a picture of a challenging and intensive way of being that

Grace reiterates sits within a tāne energy. A tension between achieving a balance of expression between energies is evident. She postulates that everyone has masculine and feminine energies, but frames femininity as a conditional state, rather than an inherent one. Grace does this by actively trying to demarcate that just because she is wahine does not mean she is "being" one. This is extended by her use of "truly", which reinforces an extant idea of what it means to be wahine that is challenging to embody.

Looking further into her past, Grace describes how her focus on survival began earlier than when she became a mother.

> *I was fifteen when I got pregnant, I've been a mum more of my life than not. Even then, because I was a teenager, I was struggling with my identity and still figuring out life. I was gonna say I didn't have responsibility but I did. I've looked after myself even since before I was a mum. So, I don't know, as young as eight that I remember is kind of when responsibilities seeped in and I never really looked at a woman role or a male role, I just looked at surviving. So I don't really remember thinking specifically, "What does being a woman mean?" It was more about, yeah, not struggling. And my, I guess, wāhine role models back in the rā, back in the day, were probably also not the best. Everybody just like, drank and, you know. That was the life that I grew up in, was a lot of alcohol, drugs, gangs and violence and all that kinda stuff so those kinds of concepts just weren't in my view. I didn't really have- well, not have time, I just didn't know.*

Grace had initially postulated that her role as a solo mum had precluded her from developing a sense of wahinetanga. As her pūrākau unfolds, it emerges that even from a young age, her environment had necessitated a focus on survival rather than self-actualisation. Detailing the presence of substances, gangs, and violence, Grace describes how the environment she grew up in was organised around survival rather than unpacking gender from a young age. Describing responsibilities as "seeping in" at such a formative stage gives the impression of a gradual yet insidious development. Taken with her earlier comment around her role in keeping her children alive, it makes sense that Grace's focus has remained strongly on survival. Her identity was shaped around "doing", with no space for "being". Having responsibility from a young age created a habitual alertness to the dangers and likely negative consequences of not "holding it all". She conveys a strong sense of self-protection and self-reliance when she was younger and

discusses how resisting struggle was emphasised in her life, rather than distinguishing gender roles.

Grace's narrative closes by exploring the recent developments in her understanding of herself.

> *I started my personal development journey, maybe 3 years ago. I mean, I've always been on a personal development journey, but intentional. It really reminded me that I'm allowed to be me. No matter where I'm at on my journey, and it's probably always going to evolve, so my perception of being wahine is probably going to continue to change as I continue to grow. [...] I'm glad I was bold and courageous and took that step out of my normal, even though it was just like dabbling here and there, 'cos I just like had that inkling that there was something else. Yeah. Which made it really hard cos the wāhine that I used to be around, obviously I still loved and adored them, but I was like, "I don't want my life to be like this though." [...] I just started being real intentional of who I was around. I've met really amazing women who actually have very different lives, and Māori wāhine, but because I met them it gave me hope that I could become the wahine that I wanted to be and not this "should be".*

Grace's pūrākau shifts to the present. She describes how her journey of personal development has enabled reflections around her agency and right to self-determine. Grace acknowledges that her personal development journey has been longstanding, distinguishing recent efforts through her intentionality. Positioning her journey in this way constructs a counter narrative; her past experiences offer important sites of meaning and growth, and emphasise her commitment to growth and evolution. This is reinforced through her use of absolutes when sharing her belief that her identity is "always going to evolve". Her emphasis on continuation and change grounds her sense of being in her context and shows a sense of agency toward her future, as it is not fixed but up to her to make meaningful. Her repetition of intentionality intimates a departure from a survival focus, or a "doing" mentality, towards a focus on being deliberate, or "being". This symbolises a shift, encapsulating how she has overcome the aspects of her reality that had made her feel precluded from "being" wahine. This is reinforced through her contrasting the wāhine role models in her past and her present. Grace is forthright with the tension she felt in shifting away from the wāhine in her past, emphasising the difficulty of making the intentional decisions to change the trajectory of her life. In her present environment, she emphasises the difference

between her life and the lives of the other wāhine in her present environment, to emphasise how their points of difference do not preclude Grace from having feelings of hope.

Grace's pūrākau explores how her past challenges have informed her present understanding of what it means to be wahine. Gender roles and understandings have felt like an elusive topic for Grace until recently, when she began her intentional self-development journey. Beginning to receive the hua (gifts) of this journey, she shares how being herself feels permissible now through a shift in role models providing a source of hope. Closing her pūrākau with the idea of intentionality, Grace provides an inspiring narrative of how being purposeful and deliberate can facilitate a shift from "doing" to "being".

Ko Tangiahua

"Oh my heart swells, ka pupū ake taku ngākau."

Tangiahua's pūrākau offers a perspective from a ruahine (older woman of importance) who holds the role of ahikā (burning fires of occupation) for her whānau whānui (extended family). Her pūrākau explores how her responsibilities pertaining to whānau, whakapapa, and whenua are constitutional aspects of her identity. She emphasises how seeing success within her whānau relates to her experience as wahine. A contrast emerges when she speaks to her own sense of accomplishment, leading to a conversation about her childhood experiences. Tangiahua engages in self-reflection throughout her pūrākau, and her strong resolve and enduring self-determination is clear. Tangiahua, in the end, names integral parts of what it means to her to be wahine through confidently asserting her achievements.

Tangiahua's pūrākau opens with her sharing strengths she associates with womanhood, and her roles and responsibilities as a wahine Māori.

> *As a woman I'm given this gift of being privileged to be a nurturer, giver of life. What else? Being given special skills and gifts to nurture my family. So that's as a woman. [...] For me as a wahine Māori, I would say, this has been developing in me through… It's not something that was… I suppose, it was predestined to be. However, in this role as a wahine Māori, my role is to be the ahikā here. So I keep the home fires burning for the family. I run open the home. And that's for my whānau whānui. No matter what line you come from, the doors open.*

Tangiahua identifies a distinction in being a woman and being wahine Māori. Her ability to nurture and give life are strengths she has received by virtue of being a woman. Whereas her role as ahikā she associates with being wahine Māori. Both her womanhood and her wahinetanga are grounded in an overarching responsibility to provide for her family. She demonstrates her commitment to these responsibilities and her whānau by ensuring her homestead remains readily accessible to any of her extended whānau. Tangiahua's use of the word "line" attends the multiple whānau lines present within the structure of whakapapa, acknowledging how this grounds her understanding of whānau. Tangiahua speaks of "home fires burning" and "doors

open", constructing a welcoming image of her reality, sharing her warm and receptive way of being.

She goes on to identify the responsibilities she associates with being a wahine Māori living on the land.

> *You have a responsibility. You have a responsibility to your whānau, to your whānau whānui, to reconnect those ones that are out there that have lost their way, lost their identity, are feeling unloved, to reconnect back to their ancestral homeland, to their tūpuna, their language, to their reo. It's about teaching them whakapapa. [...] I also feel, as a wahine Māori, a strong pull towards supporting the future generations and the greater iwi. So therefore I'm on the rūnanga [iwi authority] and trusts. That is my way as a Māori woman to ensure that my family have the knowledge to connect my family to all those different links of our whakapapa. And that is a role for me as a Māori wahine living on the land.*

Tangiahua's repetition of responsibility emphasises the importance she places on her role. She takes seriously her commitment to whānau, whānau whānui, and wider iwi. Indeed, she situates her responsibilities intergenerationally, extended even to those whom she may not know yet. By not limiting her focus to only her own immediate whānau, Tangiahua aims to strengthen her iwi on the whole, seeing the greater importance of this for her own whānau and for the continuity of her iwi. Tangiahua believes in fostering identity and connection through language and whakapapa knowledge, and this is an important facet of her responsibilities. Her work in this regard has been enduring. Historically, she was an active contributor to the establishment of the local Kōhanga Reo affiliated with her iwi, as well as various iwi revitalisation activities. Now in her seventies, she is an active member of her iwi rūnanga and she holds roles on trusts, illustrating how she sees governance as critical for iwi prosperity. These opportunities have only become available recently through iwi development. This illustrates how Tangiahua adapts to meet the changing times, continuously adjusting to contemporary developments. Her final line emphasises how her responsibilities remain grounded in a traditional Māori worldview, where her role and connection to the whenua are interwoven.

Shifting the kōrero to moments that have felt representative of her experience as wahine, Tangiahua reflects on moments of success and pride.

> *I think I feel that when I see my mokopuna succeed, whether it be at education, whether it be sport. And my children, when I see success in them, I'm happy because that's part of the pieces that make them whole as a person. The other thing is when I see my mokopunas helping, clearing tables at any hui or just going and asking elders, "Would you like a cup of tea or a coffee?" That's how simple it is. Those are my moments. And I look at them and I just think, "You're a part of me and I'm leaving something beautiful behind for the world." Those are really my moments. Anything else would be just about me and that I don't like, sort of just looking at me and what I've done. I've had lots of success in life. But I've worked hard.*

Tangiahua frames her experiences and success as a wahine Māori as connected to her whānau, and as closely entwined with achievements of successive generations. For Tangiahua, these achievements are important as she perceives them as contributing to a sense of wholeness. She also gives the impression of pride when speaking of her mokopuna helping at hui and assisting elders. Given her held responsibility towards successive generations, seeing her own descendents help out in this way personifies her hard work as paying off. She is able to locate herself within them and sees them as representing a legacy, reinforcing Tangiahua's deeply collective way of making sense of herself. Tangiahua does not like centering herself and her accomplishments independently, but when briefly speaking to her successes, she mentions her hard work, framing them as a result of persistence rather than of ease.

Elaborating on her personal challenges, Tangiahua shares some internal rhetoric that was shaped by experiences during her early schooling years.

> *I became aware of who I was through the sense of, you know, the teacher, giving up on me and telling me to go and draw circles on the board. Most probably well meaning. But I did it so often it felt like, I can still see the green board, round and round. It was like the dumb corner while all the other kids sat at their desks and I was standing at the board doing that. [...] I've been, always, I didn't feel adequate in myself. I've always felt quite dumb really, which was instilled in us since we were children and through schooling. But*

I fought against that as a woman. I fought against that as a woman. I thought, "I'm going to do my nursing."

Tangiahua's experiences in childhood is a contrast to her description of the successes of mokopuna she described. She retells a story of being singled out in class so often that she can still vividly picture the green board. These discouraging experiences were understood as the teacher "giving up" on her, and sending her to the "dumb corner", which shaped her understanding of who she was. She recalls seeing other children treated differently, giving the impression that this experience produced feelings of shame and left her with few opportunities to develop a sense of achievement or success. It is no wonder that Tangiahua expresses so much joy in the success of her mokopuna, given her own schooling experiences precluded her from finding that within herself. Through her use of absolutes when sharing her subjective experience, Tangiahua conveys the enduring impact her schooling has had on her sense of self, having "always felt" dumb. Despite the significance of these experiences, she emphasises a self-determined position and constructs a narrative of resistance. Set on becoming a nurse, the notion of her fighting shows how she developed a strong resolve to resist and overcome these narratives.

Tangiahua ends on a final note of self-determination once more, using whakataukī (Māori proverb) to make sense of her reflections.

I think it's important for us as wāhine Māori to reflect because we don't very often reflect on what we've achieved in life. 'Cos I don't, now that I'm sitting here, I am being pushed into this position to think and it's about whakamā [shyness]. The kūmara [sweet potato] doesn't speak of its own sweetness. Kāore he kūmara e kōrero e pā ana ki tōna reka. Engari [but], I think we need to be still in that, be humble and yet allow ourselves to say, "I connect people. I care for people. I nurture people, I manaaki people."

Tangiahua shares how she has not regularly reflected on her accomplishments, which can be understood within the context of her experiences at school. She shares how whakamā and the value of being humble, espoused by this whakataukī, contribute to her modestly sharing about her achievements. Her use of whakataukī emphasises how being humble is an important value to Tangiahua, but also how it can easily become conflated with whakamā. Tangiahua acknowledges

this contrast and, whilst still emphasising the value of humility, sees how whakamā has precluded her from speaking confidently to what she does as a wahine Māori.

Tangiahua is a ruahine whose importance and wisdom is clear through the profound contribution she has made to the continuation of her iwi, through their reo and revitalisation movements. Her pūrākau demonstrates her deep connection with her community, whānau, and iwi through her commitment to her roles and responsibilities as ahikā. Tangiahua's story is one of progression. Overcoming the enduring impact of disparaging childhood experiences, Tangiahua reflects that asserting her achievements is important to her and she can do so without going against her values. Being wahine Māori to Tangiahua means she connects people, nurtures people, and extends manaaki toward them, especially her whānau.

Ko Pania

"It's staying committed to our culture, continuing the weave of whakapapa and really understanding who you are."

Pania's pūrākau explores how whānau can play a significant role in identity evolution and provide a means of resilience for wāhine Māori. Being the only Māori person in her immediate whānau, Pania's embodied sense of being Māori was framed negatively at times during childhood. Pania shares how her understanding of herself changed after she began critically exploring what being wahine Māori meant to her. She narrates two key turning points in her life; an invitation from a Māori kuia, and having her first child. Both strengthened her awareness of her whakapapa and self-expression as Māori which led her to develop her understanding of what it meant to be Māori.

In her wider pūrākau, Pania shared that she is Māori through her father, and was raised by her mother and stepfather alongside her maternal siblings. Pania's narrative begins by exploring how her context in childhood shaped her sense of self as Māori into adulthood.

> *I knew I was different. Being referred to as "the black sheep" in the family, almost quite literally, you know. There was all sorts, and why do I think differently to my siblings? Why is it that manaaki comes so naturally to me but it's not necessarily naturally across my whānau? Was it more that I understood whānau and tikanga now? Why do I do and think certain ways and never understood that?*

Pania situates herself within her whānau through difference. She recalls family members referring to her as the "black sheep", which was used as both a metaphor and an "almost literal" description. This intimates her skin colour as a basis of difference and portrays that this mindset was reinforced by others. She shares questions that span her past and present selves, portraying her reflections as ongoing. This illustrates her enduring desire to make sense of these differences, and her having "never understood" conveys that answers have been quite elusive.

Pania elaborates on her experience growing up.

> *It felt like I wasn't actually allowed to be Māori. [...] My culture was dampened and actually some of the things that make up the characteristics of wāhine Māori, you know,*

our hair isn't naturally straight and things like that, but that was used as a weapon of, like an accountability tool when it came to behavioral things. So you wouldn't be able to look after yourself a little bit nicely, you know, like hair gel and things like that 'cos that's a consequence. And so you can go to school looking like the ugly Māori girl. Not that that was the intent, but that was the literal feeling and lived outcome for me. So I did a lot of stuff to change who I was, didn't wear taonga, would only wear rose gold, I wasn't gonna do this, wasn't gonna do that.

Pania identifies not feeling like she had permission to "be Māori". She describes her culture being "dampened" and uses experiences regarding her appearance as examples. Given the difference in her appearance from the rest of her whānau, Pania attributes certain physical characteristics, such as her hair type, to being Māori. This introduces a connection between her physical characteristics and her culture. She describes how these characteristics were used as sites of punishment, which led her to understand her appearance as a marker of culture, and subsequently viewed her Māori culture negatively. Sharing how she would go to school "looking like the ugly Māori girl" highlights this alignment. Her use of second person gives the impression that she is conveying the voice of her parents, but also emotionally distancing herself from these experiences. She distinguishes the perspective and intent of her parents from her own lived experience, intimating how her inner world was impacted by these actions. There is tension for Pania. She discussed the direct harm inflicted on her through the "weapons" of accountability from her parents. At the same time, she acknowledges these harms were unintentional, demonstrating the complexities present with these experiences. Pania does not speak directly to the emotional hurt these experiences produced, but it is evident in her later actions where she describes attempting to change who she was.

Pania shares a series of turning points in her life that shifted her perspective around being Māori. The first was a conversation with her partner's kuia.

Then I met my tāne and I remember his nanny turned around and said to me, "Come in our little latté girl. Brown on the inside but White on the outside you think you is." And that was when it started to change for me and I started to realise actually, who am I? And not, what can I be? Who am I?

The contrast between Pania's inside and outside worlds becomes clear. Pania retells an interaction with another family member that centers around her skin colour through metaphor, though this time referencing that her "inside" self was incongruent with her "outside" self. Earlier Pania had recalled changing who she was on "the outside" by performing an identity in a way that aligned more with the values that were instilled in her. This focus on her "outside self" growing up meant Pania had maintained this mindset into her adulthood. The pivotal conversation with this kuia reads as a challenge to integrate the inside and the outside; an invitation to acknowledge who she is inside. Pania again uses rhetorical questions to narrate her internal process as her understanding shifts. These questions signify how deeply she associated this experience as pertaining to her personhood, making clear why it remains a site of meaning-making for her.

Pania shares the second turning point for her, when she was planning to become a māmā (mother).

> *We were trying for our tamāhine [daughter] and I realised it wasn't about me anymore. And when you choose to step into that space of being a parent, well, to grow your whakapapa, there comes a major responsibility with that and I did not want my girl to get to her late thirties like her māmā and figure out who she- "Oh my goodness. He Māori ahau! [I am Māori!]" And I actually realised that it was my superpower. And who doesn't wanna be Māori? And so yeah, for me it was becoming a māmā and stepping into that space of responsibility and personal ownership and then all of a sudden opportunities for it were announced, it was always "yes" because it was kaupapa Māori. And then the journey began and connection of aroha [love] for my inner self.*

Pania speaks to the collective responsibility she felt after deciding to have children. Portraying this choice as growing whakapapa demonstrates her sense-making through a Māori perspective, illustrating the development and resilience of her identity as a wahine. She makes clear her aspirations to provide her daughter with a strong sense of being Māori, which she now portrays as her own "superpower". The idea of her "inner self" re-emerges, portraying a journey towards connecting aroha within. This is the first time in her pūrākau that she speaks to her inner self using her own voice, conveying that her journey into te ao Māori has supported a significant

change in the way she identifies with herself. She gives the impression of excitement and joy as she speaks to herself as Māori. Indeed, instead of dampening her culture, she now celebrates it.

Continuing to reflect, Pania shares her present understanding of what it means to be wahine.

> *How do I love oneself? Where does my own personal advocacy start? I say to my daughter your tinana, he taonga, it's your taonga. But what does that look and feel like as I nourish her? Do I love her? Do I feel her? […] I can't raise my daughter if she doesn't understand what that is. So I found I've had to understand what it is to actually be a wahine is to protect myself 'cos I've never been able to protect myself before. That decision was made by others for me and it didn't work.*

Again she offers a number of reflective questions to emphasise the way she continues to make sense of herself in an evolving way, in this case in her role as a māmā. These questions illustrate the enduring efforts she exhibits in searching for meaning within her context. At the same time as Pania questions how one can love themself, she describes how she supports her daughter to have a positive relationship with her body. This situates her sense of self relationally with her daughter and exemplifies how, by changing her daughter's relationship with her tinana, she can also re-shape how she perceives her own tinana. She introduces the idea of protection as a central aspect of what it means to be wahine. Pania describes having "never been able to protect", herself to emphasise the extent to which she felt vulnerable to harm. She situates the responsibility of this with others and, taken with her clear efforts to support her daughter to have a different relationship with her body than what she had, her sense of protection extends to her whānau too.

> *I fight for my girl, I fight for her future, I fight for this, fight for that I'm so sick and tired of fighting. Actually, I don't have to fight any more internally.*

Closing her pūrākau, Pania stresses the repetitive nature of "fighting" for herself and her daughter. She describes being "sick and tired of fighting" conveying a combination of frustration and grit. However, Pania shares a sense of relief that she is no longer fighting with herself. The challenges she has faced in aligning her inner and outer worlds has evidently reached a place of balance.

Ko Nganeko

"I have to have faith in myself. I have to believe in myself, in my knowing, even if I don't know how I know it."

Nganeko's pūrākau explores her journey of understanding her mana wahine, which is grounded in whakapapa and wairua. This involves reconciling with her upbringing immersed in te ao Pākehā (Western worldview), as she steps into her mana as wahine and shifts her life into a Māori paradigm. Nganeko recalls a critical event in her life that bridged the gap between these worlds and developed her understanding of, and trust in, what she explains as divine guidance. Now, fully embracing her identity as a "mana wahine Māori", she shares how her identity is collectively grounded through the deep trust she places in the guidance of her tūpuna.

Nganeko's pūrākau opens by exploring her understanding of being wahine.

> *[Being wahine is] about knowing who I am, knowing my whakapapa, knowing my pepeha [customary Māori introduction] and standing in my own mana, pretty much is what mana wahine Māori is for me. [...] A wahine in the te ao Māori world has definitely got mana, you know. That mana doesn't sit in the Western world as a woman, I feel. [...] Yes, you can have mana as a woman outside te ao Māori, but you are more suppressed out in that world than you are in te ao Māori world.*

For Nganeko, whakapapa knowledge and mana are integral parts of her meaning-making as a wahine, illustrating the interwoven and overlapping nature of her identity. Nganeko frames mana as something she stands in and conveys that her experience is embodied. Elaborating broadly on her understanding of mana, she alludes to her own lived experiences of negotiating her expression of mana across Māori and Western worldviews. Nganeko outlines a contrasting experience within Western and Māori contexts. Through her use of the word "suppressed", she conveys how mana wāhine is more diminished within Western contexts. Nganeko maintains that mana is still held by wāhine within this context, but suggests it does not belong there, or is better situated within te ao Māori.

Nganeko goes on to provide context for this understanding, speaking to her own experiences of trying to express her mana as a wahine Māori within Western contexts. During this time in her life, Nganeko and her whānau were living overseas.

> *When I try and [be wahine] in this other world, it comes with so many, so many things. Unnecessary things happen. I'm like, "Why does that keep happening?" "It's because you're not meant to be doing that. You're meant to be over here being this mana wahine. If you just step into this, then things will go with ease and flow. You're trying to force yourself to be on this side because that's what you know. That's what you've been brought up with. But it's not aligning with you because you're meant to be out here. As mana wahine, not over here as being a woman." [...] I've had to learn the hard way because, I mean, look what happened with my daughter, you know, because I was trying to do other things and they're just like, "No, no, no. What are you doing? Like, stop it, woman. Like, get over here." It did. It took me a while to get to that point where I was like, "Oh, okay, I got it now. Thanks, Nan. You know, but really, did you have to put me through all of it?" "Yes, because you were not going to listen." [...] [My daughter] was just the sacrifice, she was just the vessel for me, for me to learn all the learnings. It was just like, "Oh my God." I was like, "Okay, I'm listening."*

Nganeko narrates a dialogue between herself and one of her tupuna, her kuia, to construct this transitional period of her life that initiated her return to Aotearoa. She continues to frame her pūrākau with comparisons of Western and Māori contexts, this time recollecting her lived experiences of navigating from one to the other. By sharing her story through dialogue, she constructs her identity relationally and alongside her tupuna, exemplifying the importance of whakapapa in her meaning-making. Nganeko speaks to a pattern of "unnecessary" happenings portraying a sense of frustration within her past, when living within a Western context. Asking her tupuna for guidance around this pattern emphasises her enduring use of spiritual sense-making, and shows an inherent desire to change her situation at that time. She recalls her tupuna sharing that she was not living in alignment with who she was, portraying her past self as not feeling "forced" to stay within her context because it was "what she knew". This retrospective dialogue alludes to Nganeko's internal challenges in trying to live out the advice of her tupuna. She recalls "learning the hard way", attributing her daughter's illness to her not

listening to her tupuna. Positioning her daughter as a "sacrifice" and a "vessel" maintains her daughter's centrality within her story and in the context of her spiritual sense-making. Describing her daughter in this way, as a conduit for her own learning, illustrates how Nganeko sees her relationships with others as a source of connection to her tūpuna. It also illustrates the potent power her tūpuna hold in her life and Nganeko's identity and agency is co-constructed with them, and lived out relationally.

In the wider pūrākau, Nganeko speaks to her daughter's journey back to health. She describes this time as heightening her ability to be guided by her tūpuna, and ultimately facilitating her transition away from a Western focus in her life to a Māori one.

> *I'd go out [...] to the hot pools and I'll just be in the ngahere [forest] and I'll be and I'll just cry and do whatever it was that I needed to do talk to our tūpuna and everything else out there because it was a safe place for me to do that. So I'd release and then they'd refuel me and then they'd guide me to what it was that I needed to do when I went back. You know, so my connection to te taiao was, I would say it was getting a bit more heightened in that time.*

Nganeko speaks of visiting Aotearoa and immersing herself in te taiao as a safe way to express herself. She recalls crying and releasing, demonstrating the significant emotional impact her daughter's illness had on her at this time. She is directly narrating her negotiation between worlds. As she engaged more with her life through a Māori lens, she recalls feeling nourished and her connection to te ao Māori was strengthened. Her use of "refuel" as a metaphor constructs an image of regaining energy so that she could return to care for her daughter overseas. She is sustained by te ao Māori, when living in alignment with the wishes of her tūpuna. Notably, despite the extremely challenging circumstances, there was an impression of ease with which she portrays this scenario.

> *When I fully stepped into it and I just allowed myself to just flow in that world of actually just being mana wahine as opposed to being a woman. Life just goes with ease and flow.*

After her daughter's health improved, Nganeko relocated back to Aotearoa to live on her whenua, stepping into herself as mana wahine. Most importantly to her, is the ease and flow with which she now experiences her life.

Clearly a potent site of meaning-making for Nganeko, she discusses how she has come to understand this experience years later.

> *It was already like pre-done. It was just already done, marked out, you know. [...] So they always had a mission for me [...] and learning to trust in that knowing of that, you know, but you don't know how you know. Trust in that, yeah. Trust in that, because our tūpuna are never going to put you in harm's way. Never. Why would they? You are a product of them. You know, they're never going to put you in harm's way. They might give you some real shit challenges that you don't want to do. You might go through some real shit experiences but you have to go through the experience to then overcome it so that you can then share that kōrero with the up and coming because there's going to be some others coming through that are going to be experiencing the same, you know, and to me that's wairua.*

Nganeko closes her pūrākau by reinforcing how integral her tūpuna are to her identity as wahine Māori, framing her connection with them as wairua. Reflecting on what she has learned, she shares how her life's purpose was always predetermined, implying efforts to resist this are futile. Therefore, she focuses on cultivating trust and highlights the importance of learning. Her repetition of this trust emphasises how this was a challenge for her within her own story when moving away from the world she knew and into the unknown. She speaks to this broadly and encourages people to trust within the unknown, rather than be concerned about the potential for harm. She distinguishes "harm" from "shit experiences" by positioning the challenges faced as necessitated by the need for learning. These closing remarks seem to be a direct instruction, conveying her belief that the purpose of overcoming challenges is to support the learnings for successive generations.

Nganeko's pūrākau centers around how her spiritual sense-making enables her tūpuna to be the guiding force in her life. There is the impression of contentment and clarity in Nganeko's present existence, as she recalls the learnings that have shaped the way she finds meaning in her daily life. Mana has an inherent presence across her pūrākau and life, alongside her tūpuna and te taiao, illustrating how deeply interwoven the natural world and te ao Māori are within her sense-making. Her mana, she shares, is ever-enduring and needing to be expressed, showing its importance in her being able to fully realise her identity. For this reason, she refers to herself

throughout not as wahine Māori but as a mana wahine, an assertion of her mana and acknowledgement of her journey to get there.

Ko Alice

"*Identifying myself as wahine Māori, as opposed to a Pākehā woman, I guess I never really thought about it consciously."*

Alice's pūrakau explores the challenges of maintaining multiple cultural identities as a wahine who identifies as both Māori and Pākehā. Alice constructs a narrative of dual identity held with varying levels of confidence. The challenges pertaining to her Māori identity relate to the cultural implications and expectations she associates with claiming this identity. However, this sits in conflict with how she constructs and performs her identity, which is fluid and responsive, rather than a rigid set of obligations. She shares how dominant representations and expectations of Māori women have at times informed her decision making, despite intuitively knowing she was going against her own desires. What is evident throughout Alice's pūrākau is her determination to construct a narrative grounded in honesty, to effect change for others related to the unique marginalisation she has experienced.

What does it mean to you to be wahine?

> *I find that it's a difficult question to answer really, cos I've never thought about it that way. And the idea, you know, if I'm looking at this as a Māori woman, wahine, versus wahine as woman in general. I think it's- it's a sort of a movable feast for me really. [...] It doesn't mean just one thing. It can mean a whole lot of things.*

Alice interprets the question through a binary notion of wahine Māori and women "in general", conveying an understanding of these identities as existing within a dichotomy. The question poses a challenge for her, as she does not consider her identity in isolation. She instead constructs her identity as fluid and contextually responsive, illustrated by her use of the phrase "a movable feast".

She describes a recent scenario that required her to negotiate and define the boundaries of her cultural identities.

> *Recently, I had to fill in a form for a particular service and they said, "What is the ethnic identity, your primary ethnicity?" And I couldn't answer that because I always want to put that I'm Māori and New Zealand Pākehā. And so I just put "other" and then a note*

saying, you know, I am these different things. And I can't say one is paramount all the time. So if I'm in a Māori setting, then yes. That's when I'm drawing on that.

Within this story Alice constructs identity as both something she is, and as something she does. The challenge posed by this form illustrates how Alice balances the varying significance given to her multicultural whakapapa in different settings. She occupies a hybrid position, negotiating spaces as both Māori and Pākehā. For Alice, totalising herself as monocultural is not an option. She selects "other" as the most fitting representation of her own truth. The symbolism is powerful; Alice must "other" herself in order to assert agency in her right to self-define, or alternatively choose to misrepresent herself. This is a prime example of how binary logic can be marginalising. No space is afforded to attend to Alice's unique subjectivity.

But it's not a one hundred percent of the time thing in terms of how I see myself, there's sort of both things there. It's only when you're responding to a context that you have to bring- call on one of those things. Because when you're by yourself, I mean, when there's no one around… Yeah, I think part of it is about responding [...] You take for example your tribal affiliations that you talk about when you go into a marae. And that's about linking in with the people there. I could equally do that about my Pākehā whānau.

Alice moves on to speak about the notion of responding, framing her identity as contextually grounded and relational. Alice describes how she engages with the fluidity of her experience to lean into certain aspects of her identity, depending on their contextual utility. She uses examples to demonstrate this fluidity in practice, explaining how she could also share whakapapa from either side depending on what is contextually relevant. She uses the scenario of a marae to exemplify how she draws on the importance of whakapapa, iwi affiliations, and whānau as means of connecting. Alice "brings" and "calls" on her various identities to emphasise that they are parts of her whole sense of self and a performed response. Performing one part of her identity does not lessen the importance of the others. Her incomplete account of her experience being alone extends this idea, where she intimates not feeling a need to perform her identity when she is not aiming to relate to anyone.

Alice narrates her experience of homogeneity as a wahine Māori. She examines the tensions that arise when challenging dominant representations of Māori ways of being.

> *I think the wahine Māori discussion for a lot of people, wouldn't be necessarily for everybody, invokes a lot of [tensions], particularly because out there, a lot of people are saying, "This is how we do things." And I think, "Do we?" Or "This is what we should do or as Māori, we do this." I think, "Well, do we?"*

Alice describes her felt pressure to conform to certain ways of being and she mentions that "a lot of people" are pushing these representations. She frames that these representations include expectations of what she should be doing, and how she should be doing it. This expresses the discomfort and tension she experiences when she encounters dominant narratives that do not align with her own lived experiences and practical knowledge. Alice postulates that there are many other wāhine who experience tension for similar reasons, illustrating she views these challenges as not an isolated experience. Her pūrākau reflects her desire to resist all-encompassing narratives that homogenise experiences and marginalise expressions of difference.

Alice reflects on how she has held these tensions over the course of her life.

> *I think now that I'm older I'm probably more able to start dealing with it. But it used to cause me a lot of anguish, I'd end up with this conflict and then think, "What should I do?" And this means going back partly to this, "What in my gut do I feel," like what I wanna do versus what I should do. So I had a lot of that sort of tension. [...] I kinda don't really care anymore. Don't take another forty years to get to this, learn from what people are saying.*

With age, Alice has identified useful ways to address matters. She relates to her body as a source of trust, explaining that the embodied tension she historically felt is no longer present or a site of anguish. Throughout the interview, Alice engaged with the opportunity to present additional truths and realities about Māori culture. On many occasions she spoke of her experiences as being shared, "what people are saying", "for a lot of people", suggesting she believes many people share her experiences of having their identity foreclosed by a bicultural binary. Whilst sharing a direct instruction to me, the message seemed to convey an attempt to communicate to her younger self, telling her to celebrate her unique positionality and not get caught up with who she "should" be.

Ko Annette

"I have lived through a space of change and transition, from not knowing who I was to then knowing who I am."

Annette's pūrākau explores the importance and enduring nature of whakapapa. Annette was adopted by her Pākehā parents in a closed adoption, with her parents being told she was a "half-caste Māori baby." Now in her sixties, she constructs her pūrākau around a pivotal time of becoming in her life, when she learned her whakapapa and began making sense of what it meant to her to be wahine Māori. Centering her pūrākau around some critical reflections of her high school experiences, Annette shares her journey of moving from not knowing who she was, to knowing who she was, and how this impacted her sense-making.

Annette opens by sharing her present conceptualisation of what it means to be wahine.

> *Whenever I think about being wahine, I think about my own māmā, you know, and the knowledge and the skills that she passed down to me. [...] My māmā was a Pākehā, and so I was raised in a very English way. But her essence, you know, when I think about her essence of who she is, she reminds me of all of the lovely Māori wāhine that I have met of her age. [...] She taught me to be respectful, to be humble, to learn how to knit and sew and crochet and how to make kai go a long way. And I know so many people like that that I have met in my journey of finding who I was and, you know, the part of my identity that was basically removed by being adopted. She might have outwardly looked Pākehā, but I think she really was channeling the essence of what Māori is in terms of that care and aroha, you know.*

When exploring what it means to her to be wahine, Annette looks immediately to her mother, framing her understanding as relational and grounded in whānau. She describes her upbringing as being "very English" but contrasts this with the essence of her mother exemplifying wahine Māori, despite her being Pākehā. She shares how her mother expressed this essence through care and aroha, by instilling in Annette values and practical skills she still holds with importance today. Introducing her experience of adoption as a site of meaning-making, Annette narrates how her journey of self-discovery facilitated her observation of these values and skills in other Māori women. Annette's mention of these wāhine and her recurring emphasis of her mother's essence,

positions her understanding of being wahine as relating to ways of being, rather than ethnic background. Whilst she does not speak to the concept of mauri directly, her description is reminiscent of Māori understandings of life-force. Essence, as something that Annette's mum channels through her sense of care and aroha, is similar to how mauri can be expressed through Māori ways of being. By demarcating her mother's being Pākehā, Annette situates her mother's essence as an internal phenomenon, clearly illustrating how she can construct her understanding of being Māori through her non-Māori mother. This essence is also about being a woman, given Annette has identified characteristics of womanhood in her mother that she views as essential to being wahine. Within the context of her adoption, this shows a beautiful and adaptive way of connecting to te ao Māori through her adoptive whānau.

She elaborates on her journey, making sense of herself as wahine Māori.

> *As a Māori wahine that came later in my life. Like I've just turned sixty two. It's really only been since the eighties, since in my twenties, that I actually knew where I was from and started making connections of why were all my mates in high school were Māori? Why I gravitated to that space, always to the kapa haka [Māori performing group]. Why I always was hanging out with my mates playing netball and speaking reo with them. You know, and yet I was the one that probably looked the least Māori.*

Annette was able to connect with her biological father through the Adult Adoption Act 1985 law change. It was at this time that Annette learned her pepeha. She alludes to this experience when she mentions "actually knowing" where she was from. Her emphasis on "actual" illustrates how her understanding of herself as Māori prior to this perhaps felt incomplete, and that this experience offered a corrective understanding. She narrates how this knowledge enabled her to culturally situate herself and begin reconstructing meaning from past experiences in high school, where she had aligned with culturally grounded ways of being. This positions her whakapapa as a sense-making framework that Annette used to strengthen her identity as Māori and illustrates the importance of whakapapa to her as a wahine Māori. Annette returns, again, to external appearance, this time describing herself as not looking Māori. This intimates that her appearance has been relevant in her ability to participate in Māori ways of being, as she speaks of her involvement as being in spite of this.

Annette continues to recollect her experiences in high school, providing context for her reflective questions.

> *All my mates were Māori and stuff and like they used to, a little bit like, "Let's, let's take Annette 'cos we feel really sorry for her 'cos she acts like us, she talks like us but she's not one of us. She wants to be there, we'll bring her in as whānau, okay?" And I'd be in their mum's kitchen with their māmā with the boil up and stuff, which my mother would never cook. Or, I'd be over at aunty's place having pūhā [sow thistle]. My mum would just not have it near the house. So, for whatever reason, my early days, that's what felt good to me. So that's kind of where I went.*

Annette conveys a strong desire to be in proximity to Māori culture and practices during her time in high school. She recalls her experiences with a sense of complexity. Having previously described the dissonance she felt at that time, Annette elaborates about how not knowing her pepeha contributed to her identity struggles, as did some of the sentiments conveyed within her communities. She shares how she felt pitied by her friends, that they "felt really sorry for her". This is coupled with a strong rhetoric of marginalisation, "she acts like us, talks like us, but she's not one of us" highlighting that, despite her best efforts to fit in, she was not accepted as Māori. At the same time, she constructs this friend group as a very welcoming whānau, portraying a felt sense of comfort in these spaces; they "felt good" to her. This highlights how Annette negotiated a complex environment, with her friends providing a strong sense of whānau, but also being a source of marginalisation. Ultimately through sharing that she "wanted to be there", Annette portrays a sense of resilience in her identity as wahine Māori, and there was an inherent strength in choosing to negotiate this environment.

Annette returns to her embodied experience as a wahine Māori.

> *What about your experience as a Māori who doesn't "look Māori"?*
>
> *It can be just as- I was trying to think of the word. It's just as marginalising. Like I say, I think most of my friends used to feel sorry for me. It's like, "Come on, come home with me, come on girl. You look skinny, you need a feed." When you want to belong to something and yet you're not put in the front row of the kapa haka.*

She shares how her appearance has been a site of marginalisation that can come from within her own community too. She describes her experience as "just as marginalising", emphasising that her feelings of exclusion from te ao Māori was extremely challenging and multifaceted. This illustrates how Annette's experience as wahine is also an embodied one. She also recalls instances within her friend group and her kapa haka group that related to her body, and mentions feeling that she missed opportunities as a result of her appearance. Annette uses the word "belong" to signify that it is less about being put in the front row, but more about her deeper desire to belong.

Returning to the present, Annette describes how she addresses the ongoing challenges of not being seen as a wahine Māori throughout her work.

> *In the industry as a social worker, Pākehā thought I was Māori. Māori thought I was Pākehā. And it wasn't till I spoke to them they said, "Oh, where are you from?" And I go, "I can do this bit in te reo, but not the whole thing." I said, "You know, I grew up in a high school and we didn't have anybody teaching te reo in high school" and that I had to go to French class. And then there'll be a big crack up and they laugh and then we talk about where we're from and things.*

Both Māori and Pākehā people continue to mistake Annette's ethnicity and cultural identity, though this time she conveys these stories with humour, illustrating how she negotiates these situations differently as an adult. To emphasise this, she shares an example of a Māori person mistaking her as Pākehā at work and their dialogue engaging in whakawhanaungatanga. This time, Annette uses humour and te reo Māori to share where she is from. The casual nature with which she shares where she is from speaks to how far Annette has progressed in her knowledge and confidence. What was previously a site of struggle and marginalisation is now an integral aspect of her identity and way of relating. Despite the ongoing challenges of not being perceived as Māori, Annette can strategically negotiate interactions to express her identity and avoid feeling misunderstood.

Annette's pūrākau follows her haerenga (journey) of self-discovery within the context of her being adopted, where she contrasts her experiences before and after learning her pepeha and whakapapa. This pivotal moment in her life has enabled her to reconstruct her understanding

around her challenging experiences in high school, and strengthen her identity as a wahine Māori. Subsequently, Annette is able to make sense of her reality through her experiences and context. A thread emerges around her embodied experience as fair skinned, whereby she attends to the marginalisation she has faced as a result of this. In her pūrākau she also shares an interaction where she negotiates asserting her identity. Whilst Annette speaks to this interaction casually, this part of her pūrākau represents Annette's essence; she embodies kindness, humour, and a sense of calm. Relating her final remarks to how she described her mother's essence, it is clear to see how Annette's essence was imbued from her mother, giving her the ability to be comfortable in who she is, even as she negotiates her awareness and knowledge of this through her life.

Ko Kelsey (Positionality and reflexivity)

This section focuses on my positionality and reflections throughout the research process. Firstly, I briefly share my own journey of coming to terms with my own identity as Māori, to establish a foundation from which my perspective is based. I then share how this positionality informs my perspective of sense-making and collective experiences. Acknowledging the similarities and differences in my reality locates me within a collective, and through these relationships we can enhance mana and have it mutually recognised (Mead, 2003). In the following section I share reflexive components of the research process and particular sentiments that contributed to developments in my sense of self during this project.

Identity is a deeply personal experience. Throughout this research process, I have been privileged by the generosity with which my participants have shown themselves. Laying bare the meaning that they have made in their own lives frequently left me questioning my own understandings as a wahine Māori, an Indigenous researcher and, simply, as a human being. Hearing other people's truths and important experiences that have shaped their sense of self inevitably developed my own understanding of myself over the course of this project. At its core, this project required me to contend with my own understanding of what it means to be Māori and reflect on the interplay between my identity and my emergent role as a Māori and Indigenous researcher.

Positionality

My position as a wahine Māori researcher with lived experience of identity challenges has informed the motivation for this research. Much like many of the wāhine who participated in this research, my relationship with my identity as a wahine Māori has been a journey through many places, spaces, and times. On my mother's side, I am a second generation New Zealand Indian, from Gujarat. On my father's side, we affiliate with Ngāti Hauiti in the Rangitīkei, and we trace our whakapapa back to Ireland too. I am 30 years old and an only child, born and raised in Te Awakairangi. In my early years, we were involved with the wonderful Gujarati community of Petone. Being Māori was not an identity I was able to confidently express until I was an adult. By moving through phases of language learning, identity experimentation, and increasing proximity to te ao Māori, I developed into the proud wahine Māori I am today. It is through this

journey that I can relate to the pain, frustration, and difficulties inherent in negotiating a colonised Aotearoa as wahine and indeed, as a multicultural wahine.

What it means to be Māori is a question that has plagued me for as long as I can remember. Once I identified for myself what it means, which I too acknowledge is an unfurling and ever-changing understanding, the challenge of simultaneously holding multiple cultural identities emerged. Coming from a multicultural background means I negotiate an additional layer of complexity. It has often felt like there is little room for cultural expression that invites us to bring our "full" selves. A step towards a secure identity as Māori has felt contingent on a step away from expressing my Gujarati side. A fully formed and comfortable sense of self often feels unattainable, and perhaps it is. The threshold of "being enough" in any and every iteration of my identity has always felt just out of reach. As I have gotten older, I began to accept that I was seeking the impossible. This orchestrated my motivation for this research; to contribute to the understanding that the realities of wāhine Māori are diverse, multifaceted, and complex. By reflecting on my own positionality, I can draw on my lived experiences to provide culturally responsive research practice that helps me to understand the experiences of others. At the same time, I acknowledge my experience as my own, as are the experiences of each and every wahine. It is from my position that I draw reflections on the research process itself, particularly around the felt responsibilities to my participants, and their communities and tūpuna. The importance of establishing my positionality and reflexivity is to construct the subjective lens through which this research is framed.

Reflexivity

Heading into this project, I knew that the strength of my identity would be put to the test. I was undertaking my first self-directed piece of research on identity, when my own confidence as Māori has only been recently acquired. The first half of the project I put pressure on myself to learn as much as I possibly could about Māori culture. I learned te reo Māori immersively. On the weekends, I prioritised attending my own iwi events, such as kura reo and whakapapa wānanga, and said "yes" to anything and everything kaupapa Māori. I desperately tried to equip myself with knowledge to fend off the internal struggles I was still contending with. Who am I to do this research? Why am I doing this? As I proceeded further into this journey, the louder and more plentiful these questions became. What benefit will this thesis have for Māori? Are you

actually Māori enough to be undertaking Kaupapa Māori research? Who am I to be doing this? Who do I think I am?

I worried about how I would overcome these anxieties. However, when it came to the actual interviewing process, engaging with my participants released me from these worries almost immediately. When negotiating a space for the interview to take place, all participants invited me to their home, except one, which took place at their personal studio. I turned up with kai, and so did they. Oftentimes the whanaungatanga we engaged in before the interview went on for hours, and in one case, days, as we made up for lost time. In one particular instance, I was invited to learn to karanga by a participant. The emotional and spiritual intensity of that weekend will forever be a memory that I hold close. This invitation affirmed and validated me as Māori, as a moko, and as a wahine. Tears flowed for both of us and the embrace we had just before my departure has held me along the entire project thereafter. The korowai of aroha that each wahine wrapped around me during the interviews imbued in me a profound sense of strength and purpose beyond anything I ever anticipated. This is what is imbued in the kōwhatu mauri for this kaupapa.

In every interview, every interaction, I was seen and treated as a Māori first, and a researcher second. As we journeyed, I noticed how the efforts I made at the start of this process had indeed strengthened my sense of self and became powerful ways of relating. My efforts to learn te reo Māori meant I could offer a fluidity in conversation to those participants who wanted to, and could, kōrero Māori. It also meant I understood the hurt for others who did not, or could not, speak te reo Māori. By understanding what it was like to swim in my own awa, I could understand the emphasis many wāhine placed on their connection to te taiao. Restoring my connection with my iwi as an adult, I related to the pain of not having known a connection to whenua. These experiences were shared and provided profound ways of empathising. These experiences therefore needed to be shared.

During the transcription phase, the hours spent listening to myself and the participants' kōrero initially felt uncomfortable. All of my participants were known to me to varying degrees and for varying lengths of time. Replaying the interviews, where I discussed with my whanaunga and friends' stories and past experiences that we have never explored before, emphasised the trust that each of them had in me and my work. Equally, the amount of laughter and cheekiness that

took place reminded me of the mutual and reciprocal joy we experienced throughout. By the end of the transcription phase, I felt an empowered shift within myself. My initial insecurities and anxiety at the magnitude of holding these pūrākau had subsided and instead I was reminded of my strong sense of belonging within the collective. Through coming to understand myself in this relational way, I was able to develop my sense of identity as I made sense of the stories of my participants. Their generosity uplifted me in my position as a researcher and through the empowerment of their kōrero, I acknowledged them too.

When almost half of my participants wanted to discuss their transcripts, which initially felt like a setback, I drew on this experience. I had emailed my participants their transcripts and many shared feelings of embarrassment, worry, and self-consciousness. Honouring the right for my participants to tell their own pūrākau was of paramount concern to me, so I organised times to sit down together and have a cuppa. In one case I agreed to re-interview. Concerns of misrepresenting Māori, coming across as "dumb" and not wanting to seem too abrasive were common. Yet in the end, only minor amendments were made to two transcripts. This project centers on wāhine Māori voices and aims to empower their lived experiences and realities. However, I came to realise that the extent to which we are afforded the opportunity to speak freely and from an unchallenged position is so rare, that when we do get the chance, we become our own worst critics. I was grateful for the opportunity to affirm the perspective of each of these participants by standing firmly by their side, and on their side. Simmonds (2011) said "Mana Wāhine enables the exploration of diverse Māori realities from a position of power rather than having to talk or write 'back'" (p. 11). The questions that left me feeling overcome in the early stages, I have now come to understand were examples of me preemptively preparing to "answer back". The question was never, who am I? This has always been who I am. I am a wahine Māori and my participants, my tūpuna, and my wider communities have reminded me of this fact.

Hei whakakapi (Summmary)

This chapter has spanned the twelve pūrākau at the heart of this research. Each story was co-constructed through an interpretative component and retelling of each participant's story. Ending with my own positionality and reflexivity, this chapter shared parts of my own story and insight into how this project has changed, and will continue to change, my story going forward.

Te wāhanga tuarima

He kaupapa kōrero (Discussion)

To return to the aims of this project, this research seeks to position wahine as central and elevate the legitimacy of the multifaceted, unique and highly intersectional experiences of wāhine Māori in Aotearoa. In the previous chapter, twelve pūrākau were presented through a co-construction and interpretation. Presenting the narrative of each participant individually was purposeful and powerful. Each pūrākau held within it deep expertise and showcased the rich understandings and meaning-making in the experiences of each participant. This approach to analysis enabled a holistic retelling of participants' stories, giving due consideration to the many layers within the pūrākau of each wahine. In line with the aims, presenting the pūrākau in this way exhibited the diversity of realities, and situated participants as collaborators, honouring them as experts in their own right.

This chapter will now locate shared threads across pūrākau and situate them alongside extant literature and understandings. The terms pūrākau and narrative are used interchangeably when referring to ideas from the previous chapter. Smith's (1992) four projects framed the interview schedule and provided anchors for the wāhine to orient their pūrākau. The discussion introduces three contemporary threads that speak to the shared perspectives endorsed across pūrākau. The threads introduced in this chapter are: mana wāhine as an interwoven experience, a journey of becoming, and a space of potentiality. Given this project's emphasis on showcasing the diversity of wāhine, this structure highlights overarching commonalities. Within each idea, the distinct ways that wāhine experienced them are detailed in greater depth.

Mana wāhine, an interwoven experience

Mana wāhine was discussed throughout the pūrākau as an interwoven experience understood through a framework of whakapapa. Many of the stories drew on whakapapa, whānau, atua wāhine, cosmogony and wairua to construct their meaning-making relationally. These were important sites of identity, growth, and sustenance. Whakapapa distinguished being wahine from being a woman, with being wahine primarily understood as "more than" a claim to gender or sex in the pūrākau. Through whakapapa, a greater depth of meaning and purpose is associated with

being wāhine, through physical and metaphysical connections to other aspects of te ao Māori. For example, many wāhine described whakapapa as a grounded connection to whānau and tūpuna which determined a sense of responsibility to generations past, present and future. This framed the relational nature of wāhine identities across many of the pūrākau, as many wāhine often equated being wahine with their whakapapa.

Whakapapa is the customary framework for collective identity, and through learning whakapapa we begin to rediscover new ways of knowing, being, and doing (Smith, 2021). The significance of whakapapa cannot be understated when it comes to Māori worldviews. Whakapapa connects Māori to tūpuna, others, the environment, the wider world, and even to the beginning of the universe (Jackson, 2020; Mikaere, 2011; Pihama, 2020). It establishes identity as Māori, signifying heritage and subsequent rights and responsibilities relating to whenua, whanau, hapū and iwi (Mead, 2003). Intergenerational transmission of whakapapa is a significant responsibility within te ao Māori, and is accomplished through cultural traditions, such as mōteatea (traditional Māori chant), waiata, and whakairo (Mahuika, 2019). Through whakapapa, descent lines can be traced back to Papatūānuku and Ranginui, demonstrating its logic as an entire knowledge system based on connection (Taani, 2022). Jackson (2008) conceives of the temporal dimension of whakapapa as a "process of never-ending beginnings" that contextualises the present time and space, with the past and future (Jackson, 2008). Whakapapa remains valuable as a technique, framework, law, cultural template and source of mātauranga through which we can understand ourselves within a relational worldview.

Many wāhine shared pūrākau that enriched understandings of whakapapa, by highlighting its foundational importance in their sense making. In other pūrākau, new understandings emerged by exploring their experience of restoring their relationship with whakapapa. Some wāhine who took part did not know their whakapapa growing up, and described learning their pepeha as a transformative experience. Whakapapa provided a gateway to seek out and learn more about te ao Māori. Gaining this whakapapa knowledge commenced an ancestral relationship, a "new beginning" (Jackson, 2008; Smith et al., 2023). Whakapapa was shown to be the source through which relationships with mana, cosmogony, te reo Māori and other forms of mātauranga are possible (Jackson, 2020). This was endorsed across pūrākau where many wāhine, once having learnt their whakapapa, began reclaiming te reo Māori, researching tūpuna wāhine and

prioritising kaupapa Māori opportunities. This substantiated their mana through a restoration of ancestral knowledges. Particularly when whakapapa has been unknown, an "untelling" of the past happens through identifying how tūpuna connections had previously been impacted through colonisation (Jackson, 2020). For some wāhine, this meant working through challenging feelings of "disconnection" by increasing proximity to, and knowledge of, te ao Māori. The motivation to learn was often framed as an act of protection, with wāhine who took part conveying a desire to shield successive generations from similar experiences of "disconnection". A desire to extend whakapapa knowledge to successive generations was inherent. Wāhine Māori are often positioned as the custodians of whakapapa, as established through the reclaiming of cosmogonical narratives (Simmonds, 2011). This provides contemporary examples of how wāhine take up roles as whakapapa custodians (Simmonds, 2011). In this way, whakapapa produced an obligation to generations past, present, and future, and engendered behaviours that focused on cultural survival (Mikaere, 2011).

Whakapapa strengthened connections to identity as wāhine Māori in a metaphysical way. Māori worldviews contain a combination of material, metaphysical, and relational elements that are interwoven and held with equal importance (King, 2019; Hamley, 2022). The metaphysical dimension of te ao Māori is the connection to any non-material facet of life, such as tūpuna and atua (King, 2019). Internal relationships with metaphysical aspects of te ao Māori contribute to the many social ties that weave identity as Māori (King, 2019). Jahnke (2002) affirms the potentiality of connection at a metaphysical level, particularly for wāhine Māori in contemporary contexts. Fostering and maintaining a sense of being Māori in this way offers possibilities for wāhine who have been alienated from their whenua, marae, iwi or hapū (Jahnke, 2002). The pūrākau support these understandings by providing lived experiences of many wāhine maintaining a strong Māori identity metaphysically. For those wāhine who had not, or could not, have a physical connection to their whenua or tūrangawaewae, a strong sense of self as Māori was sustained through internal relationships. Metaphysical connections to tūpuna and atua, and even physical places such as marae, were emphasised as integral aspects of identity. Practices related to te taiao, te reo Māori, and karakia encompassed how these metaphysical links were expressed. This metaphysicality was emphasised in cosmogonical relationships, where many narratives shaped emotional links back to Papatūānuku and the beginning of the universe. Atua

wāhine, cosmogony, and wairua thus become deeply relevant in sustaining a sense of being Māori in contemporary realities.

Whakapapa is a framework through which Māori can make sense of themselves, whānau, iwi, hapū and, indeed, the universe. The pūrākau enriches the understanding of whakapapa as layered (Pihama, 2020). Through these diverse articulations of wāhinetanga, what is evident is that whakapapa is foundational and it does not operate in isolation. The role of these concepts is deeply relational and integral to framing identity. Whakapapa is the structure through which relationships are established with everything in the world. Through an affiliation with whakapapa, connections are able to be sustained to other Māori concepts like mātauranga, cosmogonical narratives, atua, whānau and whenua. It is through whakapapa that wāhinetanga can become embedded and interwoven within a Māori paradigm.

Mana wāhine, a journey of growth and healing

Across the pūrākau, becoming wāhine was portrayed as a journey that traversed a range of different experiences and sites of meaning-making. Some wāhine established a journey of growth and development by reconstructing previous phases of identity where being wāhine Māori was a struggle. Others began with a strong sense of being Māori, and the journey involved a commitment to lifelong learning and reevaluation. Irrespective of where and how journeys began, the pūrākau articulated a persistent engagement with mana wāhine, which was continually developing and provided a foundation for healing.

For many wāhine who participated, their journeys began with experiences of, or having proximity to, physical and psychological harm. For some wāhine, a lack of access to cultural knowledge and support meant that these experiences presented challenges to the validity and strength of their identities as wāhine Māori. Many wāhine connected these past experiences to meaning-making in terms of being a wahine, describing previous feelings of uncertainty, doubt and a rejection of their identity. These lived experiences went on to inform and shape their journey and growth relating to being wāhine thereafter. It is important to emphasise these experiences as representing the environment in which contemporary identity for wāhine Māori was constructed in the pūrākau. At an individual level, these experiences of grief, trauma, lateral violence, and other adversities represent the contemporary ramifications of colonisation. These

experiences evidence Mikaere's (2011) argument that political, ideological, and institutional efforts continue to shape the lives of wāhine, through the ongoing process of colonisation. The colonial goals of replacing a Māori world with a Western one created coercive pressures to assimilate to the dominant Western ideology, maintained through the cultural erasure of Māori ways of being and desired assimilation to Western ideals (McLachlan et al., 2021). The pūrākau align with this, where many of the experiences described are examples of how internalised racism, intergenerational trauma, and violence are present in the lives of many wāhine today and contribute heavily to identity struggles. Often, overcoming the challenges facing many of the wāhine required a departure from predominantly Western ways of being, which is why words such as "transformation", "rebirth" and "reassertion" are frequently associated with the journey of becoming (O'Regan, 2009).

The pūrākau canvassed pivotal moments in the past that represented foundational opportunities for growth. The value in these experiences was often found in an invitation to self-determine, whether through whakapapa or through taking ownership of their own stories. Taking up these opportunities often led to a development in the ways wāhine made sense of themselves and their lives. This new lens through which to see the present necessitated a reconstruction of historical experiences. These perspectives aligned once more to Jackson's (2008) notion of "untelling" the past once a need for change is identified. The "untelling" of past experiences provided opportunities for many wāhine to express agency in their own sense-making. This enabled the wāhine who participated to perform in their own lives the way that they choose, making identity a tangible aspect. This had a positive impact on the wellbeing of many wāhine who took part. As Moeke-Pickering (1996) shares, moving through pivotal moments as wāhine, or transitioning through phases when moving towards new understandings, results in a greater ease of being wāhine Māori. This was certainly endorsed in the pūrākau through the shift in identity as fixed and immutable, to fluid and developing.

Simmonds (2019) describes "being wahine" as something that becomes known, felt and practiced. Many wāhine affirmed this when sharing how overcoming challenging experiences and taking up responsibilities in their lives supported a development in understanding themselves as wahine. In many pūrākau these experiences were life-changing, dramatic shifts in the ways in which they viewed their world. Pihama et al. (2023) liken the journey of taking responsibility for

one's healing to rebuilding a whare, physically and metaphorically. New support systems, access to fundamental resources, and finding safe and nurturing spaces become the foundations. For many wāhine, the journey of healing was entwined with the journey of becoming. The wāhine who took part tended to build their new foundations from whānau support systems, which were often interwoven with learning mātauranga, whakapapa, and te reo Māori. This was demonstrated through the emphasis many wāhine placed on certain experiences, such as intimate kōrero with whānau, learning whakapapa and mātauranga, and finding role models and community. These experiences became critical sites of growth and meaning-making for many wāhine, and the transformative nature of these experiences produced a reevaluation of expressions of identity; the whare was rebuilt. This led many wāhine to develop a sense of purpose within themselves and their whānau, which they fulfilled by reviving cultural practices, and learning te reo Māori and mātauranga.

As the narrative journey progressed, the journey itself, of becoming a wahine, was often narrated through the metaphor of being on a path. Journeying along a path fosters a positive conceptualisation of learning, sense-making, and integrative developments of what it means to be wāhine, and Māori. Smith et al. (2023) speak of trauma-informed healing and "igniting the path to wellness", which symbolises the elucidation of the path people are on (p. 65). The ability to anticipate where one is going is vital for healing (Smith et al., 2023). This was shown through many wāhine associating their "path" with tūpuna guidance. Tūpuna guidance and decision-making made the path visible and provided a relational framework for sense-making. This located agentic responsibility within ancestral relationships, and enabled hope, trust, and a sense of purpose and meaning to be found within every experience. For many wāhine, making sense of these pivotal moments directed them on their path and they revisit these experiences often, engaging with them as powerful sites of meaning-making.

Articulations of mana wāhine emphasised an acceptance and understanding of wāhine Māori as an identity that will develop and grow over a lifetime. This stance reflects a lifelong commitment to learning what it means to be wāhine Māori and acknowledges the iterative journey already traversed. This instigated a shift away from identity as a fixed and immutable aspect of personhood to a necessarily dynamic and ever-evolving relationship with meaning-making. The

collective metaphor of a path best represents this shift, symbolising the journey of life and provides connection to tūpuna.

Mana wāhine, a space of potentiality and Indigenous resilience

In contemporary Aotearoa, there is a growing diversity of expressions of being Māori (Houkamau, 2010; Kukutai & Webber, 2017). The pūrākau showcased the plurality present within the lives of many wāhine by demonstrating how they negotiated their multifaceted identities. Many wāhine held identities that were shaped by religiosity, spirituality, biculturalism and multiculturalism, and gender. For some wāhine, multiple identities were held simultaneously. Often this multiplicity was emphasised in spite of felt expectations and pressures to uphold certain notions of how to be wāhine. Dominant understandings of wāhine Māori identity were particular sites of marginalisation and exclusion for the wāhine who took part, with many describing the challenges present "in-between" these identities (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2023). The complexity of negotiating dominant and essentialised identity representations shaped and framed how many wāhine responded to their lived experiences, and became sites of resilience and diversity.

Expectations of wāhine emerged within the pūrākau as sites of struggle. Many wāhine shared a felt pressure to comply with certain ideas, ways of being, and life choices. These unhelpful and unrealistic expectations related to desires of wanting to have children, and prescribed certain ways of being, speaking, and presenting in terms of appearance. Inherent to these notions is the perpetuation of a fixed and regimented idea of what it means to be wāhine. These pressures exemplify the contemporary challenges produced by dominant identity representations for wāhine Māori. Articulations of wāhine Māori identity that derive from dominant representations are increasingly problematised due to their marginalising effect on the many wāhine who align with multiple subjectivities (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2023; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005; Webber, 2011). Western binary logic produces rigid constraints around these identities by positioning people within a dichotomy; Māori and Pākehā, wāhine and tāne, subject and other (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). There is little room for overlap across the dichotomy as the categories are culturally distinct, with fixed, oppositional criteria such as skin colour being brown or white. For wāhine Māori, the dominant identity representation is a traditional subjectivity that is aligned with customary notions of roles and responsibilities. A wāhine Māori subjectivity encompasses

responsibility for cultural transmission and the continuation of whakapapa. Whilst many wāhine who took part aligned with these articulations, challenges arose for those who did not, given the unchangeable nature of this identity. What this subjectivity fails to provide space for is the continuum of experiences and multiple spaces "in-between", which led to the conformity pressures stated in the pūrākau (Berryman-Kamp, 2024; Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021; Moeke-Maxwell, 2003).

Embedded within dominant representations of wāhine Māori identity are essentialised notions of what it means to be wāhine. There was value to this essentialist identity in the early stages of the cultural revitalisation movement. A simplified Māori identity provided utility within political and legislative advancements, through the development of an "oppositional Māori identity politics" (Hoskins, 2017, p. 98). Māori existing independently of Pākehā in political understandings provided a legislative rationale for Māori institutions to be created in fields such as governance (rūnanga) and education (Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa, and Wānanga) (Hoskins, 2017). However, this simplification of identities was constructed within a colonial binary logic and subsequently bound by it, which left no room for diversity in identity expression or anything "in-between". The consequence of this has compelled many wāhine, and Māori, to view themselves categorically, the harms of which were previously affirmed by the wāhine who took part (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2023). The binary production of the "subject" and "other" was particularly salient in the pūrākau, where many wāhine described that rejecting a traditional subjectivity had a marginalising effect that negatively impacted their wellbeing. Gerbic and Muriwai (2025) warn of exactly this effect, where they explain how essentialised articulations of wāhine Māori identity can sideline wāhine who cannot, or do not want to, affirm these traditionalised notions. A sense of hurt was echoed from many wāhine during experiences that sought to foreclose their right to self-determination in their own identity. Many wāhine felt they had to defend their unique sense of selves and demonstrated resilience through a range of strategies deployed in response.

The pūrākau extend how wāhine Māori remain strategically engaged in their struggle for autonomy in terms of identity expression. Whilst the challenges of essentialism and binaries have been discussed, it is just as pertinent to establish that wāhine have not taken a passive stance in response. Hoskins (2017) reminds Kaupapa Māori theorists to not overlook the active and

positive ways that many engage with being Māori when critically theorising liberation for Māori. It is well established that Māori have always been active in the fight for tino rangatiratanga (Mikaere, 1999; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). The pūrākau deployed adaptive strategies that addressed the challenges of negotiating this "in-between" state, which included embodying plurality and drawing from multiple identities in situationally and contextually specific ways. Wairua often underpinned these expressions, supporting Valentine's (2016) notion of wairua as boundless. Wairuatanga fostered identity resilience in wāhine that occupied multiple cultural subjectivities. This endorses Moeke-Maxwell's (2005) arguments of the importance of engaging with wairua to cultivate a strong sense of self as a "culturally hybrid" wahine, or multicultural wahine. Engaging in a hybrid identity extended beyond multiculturalism for some wāhine and was powerful for negotiating multiple spiritual understandings, supporting agency and self-determination. The pūrākau affirmed evolving and unfolding understandings of wāhinetanga, and supported arguments toward reconceptualising discussions around Māori identity to include dual, hybrid, and diasporic experiences (Ahuriri-Driscoll & Blake, 2023; Gerbic & Muriwai, 2025; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). These articulations affirm the active and relational way wāhine Māori engage with their tino rangatiratanga through the complexities that may be present in their life (Pihama, 2020). Engagement with one identity often supported the expression of another, fostering fluidity and expansiveness as opportunities for identity resilience.

For many wāhine, acquiring new knowledges around wāhinetanga necessitated a reevaluation of identity and, as mentioned earlier, the evolving and unfolding nature of wāhine identity was cherished. These knowledges often included reclaimed understandings of what it means to be wāhine. This supported many wāhine to cultivate understandings of femininity that indeed aligned with essentialised notions of identity. Reproduction and dominant articulations of femininity became empowering and purposeful ways of making meaning that strengthened identity for many wāhine Māori who took part. These examples further reinforce that the struggle against essentialism is not with the representation and reclamation of customary notions of femininity, but through the assertion that these aspects are the only way of deriving power and meaning (Berryman-Kamp, 2024; Yates-Smith, 2006). The struggle remains grounded in wāhine rights to self-determination. This aligns with Pihama's (2020) argument that tino rangatiratanga remains a critical component of decolonising gender in Aotearoa.

The pūrākau enrich understandings of how binaries and essentialism continue to be sites of struggle, marginalisation, and exclusion for contemporary wāhine Māori. Expectations and pressures of performing and taking up a particular identity as wāhine Māori can influence contemporary identity expressions, particularly with more and more wāhine experiencing plurality in their worldviews. Wāhine remain resilient and adaptive, engaging with their sense of a self in fluid and dynamic ways that speak to the multiplicity of their experiences, contexts, and sense-making. These expressions of tino rangatiratanga resist Western binary logic and assert the diverse ways in which many wāhine choose to self-define.

Strengths, limitations, and implications

Employing Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories asserted and affirmed the validity of te ao Māori. Mana Wāhine, as a culturally situated, locally specific approach, provided space for wāhine Māori to discuss their own experiences without the need to "talk back" (Simmonds, 2011). The research invited wāhine to proactively share their worlds, rather than reactively defend their positions or choices. The scope of this exploration allowed meaning to be made in line with key principles of Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories, tino rangatiratanga and collective participation. Most important was the opportunity to affirm the legitimacy of the voices of the participants, and in this way, elevate their perspectives around how Māori culture shapes their everyday lives.

The strength inherent to pūrākau methodology supported the goals of this study to be achieved. Telling one's own story can be empowering and healing (Smith, 2021). Inherent to pūrākau methodology is that the scope and methods are flexible in their utility. This non-prescriptive approach enabled the research context and aims to lead the presentation of analyses through an iterative process, and with the support of my supervisor. Presenting the analyses in this way was a strength in its own right, as it associates the knowledge and expertise with each participant. Through this too, the study was able to make visible the "in-between" and plurality present within the realities of wāhine Māori, in line with the goals inherent to a Mana Wāhine framework. By celebrating diversity and supporting wāhine to tell their own truths, a space was created that elevated perspectives.

The literary foundations of this project were almost exclusively from the local context of Aotearoa, and where possible, from wāhine Māori scholars. Given the goals of this research were to explore contextually specific understandings of wāhine Māori identity, using a refined scope to review literature had a clear rationale to provide an explicit and formulated understanding from a local gaze. From this specific perspective, greater insight and nuance into the experiences and meaning-making of the participants was able to be ascertained.

The number of participants provides academic rigour to this research well beyond the requirements for a project of this scope. Supporting a robust number of voices to be present in this research gave the project strength. It also enabled collective ideas and knowledges to be upheld and strengthened. By supporting a large group of participants, the heterogeneity and diversity present among wāhine Māori realities becomes more evident. It also supports more wāhine voices to be heard and prioritised within academic spaces, elevating perspectives that may otherwise have not been made visible.

There are some limitations in this research. One is the relative size of the project and the exploratory nature of it. Topics canvassed in the interviews covered a wider range than the discussion and analysis allowed. Important aspects that were not able to be attended to in greater depth included age and other demographic factors, an analysis from an iwi and hapū level, skin colour and corporeal experience, class and socioeconomic factors, and mana tāne. Collecting and co-constructing twelve narratives was an immense undertaking for a Masters-level project and so ideas that were considered the most front line were discussed. Moreover, the importance of understanding what mana wāhine means to Māori who are gender diverse was not explored. Insight into the experiences and understandings of mana wāhine from these perspectives would provide enriching understandings of the research topic. This is a recommended avenue for future research, however my positionality means I would not be best placed to undertake a project such as this.

Another limitation was the interview process being conducted individually. Identity is often constructed collectively for many Māori, thus it can be challenging to explore in isolation from communities. Given the scope of this project, individual interviews were deemed appropriate and feasible, with an invitation extended to whānau members to participate. An approach that enlists wānanga would support collective sense-making and offer insight into collective identity

construction within a contemporary context, which was an area not able to be covered in this project. These are recommended ways of extending this research.

The implications of this research relate to clinical psychological practice by offering insight into how wāhine Māori make sense of themselves and their experiences. With the field of psychology having an underrepresentation of Māori in the clinical workforce, wāhine Māori seeking support may end up working with practitioners of different cultural backgrounds to them (Waitoki et al., 2025). There are a plethora of strengths apparent in each of the pūrākau that can support practitioners to enhance their cultural competency and reconceptualise understandings of wāhine Māori ways of being. The pūrākau provide strong evidence of identity strength, resilience, and sense-making. These can provide greater insight when producing formulations and offering other services to wāhine Māori and their whānau. Most critically, this study establishes the diversity in experience for many wāhine Māori, and offers examples of how intersectional oppression can shape the lives of wāhine Māori. These lived experiences challenge deficit-based notions of who wāhine are and assert the ongoing role of colonisation and racism in contemporary contexts. In line with the recommendations from Gerbic and Muriwai (2025) to psychological practitioners, recentering the needs and goals of wāhine Māori in clinical practice is vital in redressing the previous harms of the discipline. This research provides examples of contemporary challenges facing wāhine and how overcoming those challenges, for many, promoted wellbeing. This affirms how identity and sense of self remain important and relevant to achieving better outcomes for wāhine Māori.

It is the hope and intention of this study to uplift and empower other wāhine Māori to have confidence in their unique ways of being Māori. The ways that Māori express their identity are becoming increasingly diverse (Kukutai & Webber, 2017). Making visible the diversity in the lived experiences of the wāhine who took part celebrates difference and supports self-definition. The perspectives of identity in this research showcase cultural journeys, and many engage with mātauranga in distinct ways to construct meaning and purpose. Identity has been established as an evolving and multifaceted experience that is a changeable and tangible aspect of one's self. Conceptualising identity as fluid and capable of supporting multiple expressions is inherently agentic and has liberating potential. This research reinforces Māori worldviews and Māori ways of being as fundamental sites of meaning-making.

This study also has strong implications around the assertion of tino rangatiratanga for wāhine Māori in Aotearoa. Contributing new and diverse articulations around how wāhine Māori choose to define themselves strengthens contemporary understandings of wāhine identity and contributes to Māori self-sovereignty. With this in mind, these pūrākau could provide insight for future decision-making around policy that impacts the lives of wāhine Māori, in areas such as social justice, health and wellbeing, and Māori advancement efforts. In terms of addressing the past, as mentioned, many of the struggles and challenges facing wāhine who took part in this research are evidence of the ongoing ramifications of colonisation. This research may provide additional evidence and support to preexisting claims and institutional efforts that seek reparation for the wrongdoings against wāhine Māori in line with Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The most relevant within the current context would be the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry that has commenced with the Waitangi Tribunal.

He kupu whakakapi (Conclusion)

This research explored mana wāhine and what it means to be wāhine Māori through the experiences and perspectives of 12 wāhine. The aim was to explore narratives of identity construction and sense-making for wāhine Māori. Through retelling the pūrākau of each participant, three overarching understandings of mana wāhine emerged. Firstly, mana wāhine is interwoven and relational. Grounded within a framework of whakapapa, wāhine Māori understand themselves in relation to numerous other facets of te ao Māori. Secondly, mana wāhine is an ongoing journey of growth and healing. Constructing and reconstructing meaning around critical experiences constitutes the ever evolving nature of wāhine Māori identities and strengthens Māori ways of being. Thirdly, mana wāhine is a space of potentiality and resilience. Rich, multifaceted and diverse realities are constituted by multiple identities, and the strategies deployed when negotiating this plurality support endless possibilities for identity expression. Fundamentally, the narratives contribute to the exceedingly diverse understandings of what it means to be wāhine. This supports efforts to decolonise, and indigenise, mainstream understandings of gender by showing that there are as many ways to be wahine Māori, as there are wāhine Māori.

To complete this thesis, I offer a whakataukī.

Me aro koe ki te hā o Hine-ahu-one

Pay heed and dignity to the power of women.

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Appendix A: He kuputaka (Glossary)

This glossary provides a list of each te reo Māori term used within this thesis in alphabetical order. Alternative translations and interpretations of these kupu may exist.

ahikā	burning fires of occupation
aroha	love, care
atua	Māori deity, original ancestor, personification of natural environment within a Māori worldview
atua wāhine	wāhine Māori deity, original ancestor, personification of natural environment within a Māori worldview
atua tāne	tāne Māori deity, original ancestor, personification of natural environment within a Māori worldview
awa	river, stream
awa atua	menstruation
engari	but, on the other hand, to the contrary
haerenga	journey, trip
hapū	sub-tribe; pregnant
haukāinga	home, home people
hauora	wellbeing, health, fitness
hawaiki	ancient Māori homeland
Hine-nui-te-pō	atua of the night, guardian of rarohenga
hua	product, outcome, benefit
hui	meeting, assembly, gathering

ikura	menstruation
inu	drink
io	supreme being, creator, or god
ira	essences
iwi	tribe
kaitiakitanga	guardianship
kaiwhakawhānau	Māori midwife
karakia	incantation, prayer
karanga	ceremonial call of welcome
kapa haka	Māori performing group
kaupapa	purpose, mission, initiative
kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, topic, practice, agenda that is embedded in a Māori worldview
koha	gift, donation, acknowledgement, expression of gratitude
Kōhanga Reo	Māori early childhood education
kōrero	conversation, narrative, talk, discussion
kōtiro	girl
kōwhatu mauri	stone that symbolises a spiritual anchor
kuia	older woman, grandmother
kūmara	sweet potato
Kura Kaupapa Māori	Māori primary and secondary schools

mahi	work, do, perform, practice
Mahuika	atua of fire
māmā	mother
mana	spiritual power, authority, prestige, status
mana taiao	inherent power and authority of the natural environment
mana tāne	inherent power and authority of Māori men
mana wāhine	inherent power and authority of Māori women
mana whenua	territorial rights, inherent power and authority of the land
manaaki	to support, to host, to be hospitable, to care for
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, generosity, support, care
manuhiri	guest
Māoritanga	Māori way of life
marae	a complex of buildings and courtyards affiliated with specific iwi or hapū
maramataka	lunar calendar
mātauranga	Māori knowledges, wisdom and worldviews
mātauranga wāhine	Māori knowledges, wisdom and worldviews specific to wāhine Māori
māui	atua and tupuna, son of Taranga and Irawhaki, demi-god, well-known Polynesian character
mauri	life force, vital essence
mirimiri	to rub, to soothe, a type of Māori healing practice

moko kauae	traditional wāhine Māori chin tattoo
mokopuna	grandchild, grandchildren, successive generations
mōteatea	traditional Māori chant
ngahere	forest
noho marae	overnight stay at a marae
Pākehā	New Zealand European, non-Māori
Papatūānuku	earth mother
pepeha	customary Māori introduction, tribal saying
pēpi	baby
pono	honest, true, genuine, sincere
pou	pillar, post, support
pounamu	greenstone
pūhā	perennial sow thistle
puku	stomach, gut, abdomen, center
pūrākau	story, traditional narrative
Ranginui	sky father
raranga	weaving
(te) taha wairua	spiritual wellbeing
(te) taiao	natural environment
takatāpui	Māori of diverse sexuality, gender and sex characteristics
tamāhine	daughter

tamariki	children
tāne	Māori man, men, masculine
tangata	person (plural tāngata)
taonga	treasured object, possession
tautoko	to support, advocate, agree
te ao Māori	Māori worldview
te ao Mārama	the realm of enlightenment
te ao Pākehā	Western worldview
te ao Wairua	the spiritual realm
te kore	nothingness, the void, the realm of infinite potential
te pō	the night, the realm of darkness
te reo Māori	Māori language
tikanga	Māori customs, protocols, correct processes
tinana	body
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
tohu	signs
toto	blood
tuakana	elder sibling, mentor
tūpuna	ancestors
tūrangawaewae	ones place to stand, ancestral land
rangatahi	Māori youth

ruahine	woman of importance, wise woman
rūnanga	iwi authority, tribal council, board
wahine/wāhine	Māori woman/women, feminine
wāhinetanga	womanhood, femininity
wairua	spirit, spirituality, soul
Wānanga/wānanga	Māori university/to meet, to discuss
whakaaro	thought, opinion
whakairo	carving
whakamā	to be shy, embarrassed, feel shame
whakapapa	ancestry, genealogy, layers of descent,
whakataukī	Māori proverb
whakawhanaungatanga	process of establishing relationships
whānau	family, collective
whānau whānui	extended family, collective
whanaungatanga	process of maintaining relationships
whare tāngata	womb

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Tēnā koe

Ko Ruahine te pae maunga
Ko Rangitīkei te awa
Ko Rātā te marae
Ko Ngāti Tamatereka, Ngāti Ruuanga me Ngāti Hinemanu oku hapū
Ko Ngāti Hauiti te iwi
Ko Michael O'Connor tōku koro, ko Mary Benefield tōku kuia
Ko Gregory O'Connor rāua ko Niru Govind ōku mātua
Ko Kelsey O'Connor ahau

I am doing a Master of Arts (Psychology) at Massey University, Wellington, supervised by Dr. Elle Brittain (Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa, Ngāti Rakaipaaka, Rongomaiwahine). This study will explore the perspectives of wahine Māori and how colonisation and concepts such as Western gender narratives, mainstream feminism and other marginalising forces may be influential in what it means to be wahine.

If you are interested in participating, there is more information on the following pages.

Information Sheet

An exploration of what it means to be wahine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa: Making sense of identity, relationships and institutions.

What is the purpose of the research?
The purpose of the research is to explore different perspectives of how wahine Māori make sense of their identity. In order to look at this topic, I will talk to wahine Māori who live in Aotearoa about their lived experiences. The research will cover what being wahine means, and how wahine have been influenced and impacted by colonisation, Western gender narratives, mainstream feminism and other potentially marginalising forces.

What would my participation in the research involve?
This would involve taking part in an interview in a one-on-one situation, or with whānau, a friend, or other support present. The interview will take 60-90 minutes. I will conduct the interview, which will be audio recorded. This research will also require 30-60 minutes post-interview to review your transcript and share further information regarding the project.

Deciding whether to participate

Participation in the research is voluntary. To help you decide, you may like to talk about the research with whānau, friends, or people in your communities. If you decide to participate, please contact me to talk about the details of the interview. Together we will arrange a time and a place to do the interview.

What are my rights as a participant?

The following information is important for you to understand before agreeing to participate in the research, please read it carefully. I can go through this with you before the interview and answer any questions.

• You can decline to answer any interview question. You can withdraw at any time before November 2025, just let me know. You don't have to explain why you are withdrawing. But, please know that even if you withdraw, what you share in an interview may influence the research in some way.

• Your identity and interview will be confidential. All of the information you share as a part of the research will be held securely in a locked cabinet and password protected folders. A code name will be used to identify you in the written copies of the interviews. No material that could identify you will be used in reports from this research.

• You can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Where will the interview take place?

The interview can take place at a community venue, such as a marae or public library, or at your home. I can travel to where you live for the interview. The place needs to be somewhere we can be comfortable and quiet, so the interview is recorded clearly.

What will happen after the interview?

I will transcribe the interview and you will be sent a copy of the interview transcript to review. You will be able to add to it or take out any part. Findings of the research will be shared with you via email, telephone, or post. You will also have the option to meet with me to talk about the findings.

What recognition will I receive for my time and involvement?

You'll receive a $30 voucher for a grocery store as koha for your participation.

Who should I contact for more information or if I have concerns?

You can email me if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research at any stage. You can also email Dr. Elle Brittain, who is my research supervisor.

Kelsey O'Connor - Master of Arts (Psychology) Student
Kelsey.Oconnor.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

Dr. Elle Brittain – Co-director of the Center for Indigenous Studies, Lecturer in Psychology and Clinical Psychologist
E.Brittain@massey.ac.nz

Keeping safe

Because the research is about your lived experiences, some of the kōrero or discussions in the interview may be sensitive. We may talk about events which could be upsetting. There will be time at the end of the interview to talk about how you're feeling and to see that you're ok. If you become very upset at the interview, the interview will stop. If you feel upset and want to talk to someone about your experiences we can assist you to access a local counselling or support service.

Counselling and wellbeing services in Wellington

Wellington Women's Health Collective, 5/175 Victoria Street, Te Aro, 022 323 5008

Te Whare Rokiroki, 44 Wigan Street, Te Aro, (04) 801 5384

Ora Toa Mauriora, Porirua: 227 Bedford Street, Cannons Creek, Porirua (04) 237 6057 and 2 Ngatitoa Street, Takapuwahia, Porirua (04) 238 4071.

Ora Toa Mauriora, Wellington: 45 Rugby Street, Mount Cook, Wellington (04) 237 6057

Manawa ora mirimiri, 2 Jarden Mile, Ngauranga, Wellington (04) 974 4100

You can also contact Lifeline at 0800 543 354.

Nō reira, e mihi ana, e mihi ana – Thank you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 24/22. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

An exploration of what it means to be wahine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa: Making sense of identity, relationships and institutions.

Interview guide:

Mana wahine

1. *What does it mean to you to be wahine?*
2. *What has it meant to you in the past to be wahine?*
3. *How does being wahine differ from being a woman for you?*
4. *How have you made sense of your lived reality as a wahine in Aotearoa?*
5. *What is a story or experience associated with being wahine for you?*

Indigenous and Western and Pākehā womens' discourses

6. *What does feminism mean to you?*
7. *How do you think our narratives as Indigenous women have been influenced, impacted or altered by feminism?*
8. *How do you make sense of wider struggles faced by wahine Māori in relation to other women, and the population generally?*

State

9. *Can we explore a time where you felt marginalised, oppressed or excluded by government policies and ideologies as a result of being wahine Māori? This could include colonisation or patriarchal ideals.*
10. *What happened, if you are comfortable sharing?*
11. *How have you come to make sense of these experiences?*
12. *How do you reconcile the ongoing potential for recurrence?*

Interwovenness, whānau and wairua

13. *How does your connection with the following relate to your understanding of being wahine:*
    - *the taiao (natural environment)*
    - *whānau*
    - *tāne*
14. *How does your role within your whānau support you to feel empowered as a wahine?*
15. *What is your experience of wairua as related to being wahine Māori?*
16. *How has your relationship with wairua grown, changed or developed during your life?*

Appendix D: Ethical Approval

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA | MASSEY UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

19/08/2024

Dear: Kelsey O'Connor

Re: Ethics Application - OM2 24/22 - An exploration of what it means to be wahine Māori in contemporary Aotearoa: Making sense of identity, relationships and institutions.

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 2 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 27 June 2024**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Tracy Riley,
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chair's Committee