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***Wairua and Wellbeing:
Exploratory perspectives from Wāhine
Māori***

**A thesis
presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Master of Science
In
Psychology
At Massey University, Albany Campus,
New Zealand.**

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Whakataka te hau ki te tonga

Kia mākinakina ki uta

Kia mātaratara ki tai

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Ko Piako te awa

Ko Hokianga me Tipaka ngā moana

Ko Ngāti Manawa me Ngāti Taurua ngā hapū

Ko Te Rarawa me Ngāti Paoa ngā iwi

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¹ A karakia (prayer) to begin this research.

² Acknowledgement of the mountains, river, seas, sub-tribes, tribes, marae, and people that I belong to.

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³Whakataukī (Proverb): With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive

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ABSTRACT

There are significant health disparities between Māori (Indigenous people of New Zealand) and non-Māori in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Initiatives to address these issues include (re)connection to Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) and the integration of Māori health perspectives within the New Zealand health system. Although wairua (Māori spirituality) is recognised as being crucial to the oranga (wellbeing) of Māori, it is not very well understood and there is little research on how wairua is manifested within this context.

The aim of this research was to enhance the understanding of wairua and highlight its importance to the wellbeing of Māori wāhine (Māori women). Guided by a kaupapa Māori (Māori cultural ideologies) approach, this research utilises narrative inquiry to explore the perspectives of eight wāhine Māori about what wairua means to them and their wellbeing, and how it is actualised in their daily lives in contemporary Aotearoa. These wāhine have all participated in a mana wahine (Māori feminist discourse, authority, influence, power of women) programme designed to enhance the wairua of wāhine by (re) connecting them to Te Ao Māori.

Thematic analysis was employed identifying three key themes; wairua, oranga and mana wahine. Further analysis revealed that these three main themes can be understood as the connection to: Wairua, Tāngata (people), Whenua (land), Tūpuna (ancestors) and Atua (God/deities). This connection was described by the participants as vital to their wellbeing through providing a sense of belonging, strength, self-determination, support, resilience, stability, empowerment, cultural identity, self-respect, motivation, guidance, and self-efficacy. Wairua was described as a spiritual essence, an intuitive knowing, a higher power or Atua. Access to wairua was through cosmology narratives and tikanga (customs) such as karakia (prayer), karanga (ceremonial call), raranga (weaving) and waiata (singing).

The purpose of this research was to explore Māori perspectives of wellbeing and enhance cultural understanding. Implications for the findings advocate (re)connection to Te Ao Māori and the integration of traditional knowledge with

medical science within Māori mental health services as pathways to positive health outcomes for tāngata whaiora (Māori mental health service users). While recognising the diversity of Māori in their desire to participate in Te Ao Māori, the choice to accessing it should still be made available.

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