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**Investigating the Social Supports of successful Māori  
Undergraduate Appellants at the University of Waikato**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Applied Psychology (Community)**  
at  
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by  
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# ABSTRACT

Educational disparities between Māori and non-Māori tertiary students are evident in regards to participation, retention, and completion rates at secondary and tertiary levels. Instead of focusing on negative statistics, it was of interest to investigate Māori students who had failed sufficient papers to initially be denied re-entry to university study, yet continued to attain their degrees, as a result of a successful appeal. Māori undergraduate students, who had successfully appealed from 2003-2012, were recruited for my research. The availability and utilisation of social supports were investigated, along with the decision to make an appeal, the role of cultural expectations, and barriers experienced by participants. A mixed method approach was utilised in this research through use of an adapted overarching Kaupapa Māori framework, statistical analysis, and 13 interviews. My research found that social supports were beneficial for participants throughout their appeal, as they provided: emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational support. Although the social supports utilised by participants were satisfactory, barriers to accessing formal supports were also found, which included: perceived stigma having failed their papers, pride, as well as being whakamā. The appeal process was a beneficial intervention from the University of Waikato, which provided participants another opportunity to overcome the factors that contributed to their initial failure. Post appeal, participants implemented strategies to address and reduce their factors in order to become academically engaged. Participants were deemed to be resilient from their continued pursuit of degree attainment, implementation of their strategies, and their use of perceived social supports.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Disparities between Māori and non-Māori tertiary students' academic engagement have been consistently noted in regards to participation, retention, and completion rates (Ministry of Education, 2012). To identify reasons for the disparities, there has been a focus on students' individual traits, such as IQ (Mayes, Calhoun, Bixler, & Zimmerman, 2009; Neisser et al., 1996), academic self-efficacy (Cassidy, 2011), and coping mechanisms.

The danger of sole focus on individual traits takes away from the impact one's environment has on academic engagement, such as one's living environment for example (Te Tari Matauranga Māori, 2007). Consideration is needed for students who experience factors (barriers) which affect their tertiary attainment. These factors can vary, and can include commitments such as childcare through to health concerns (Hunt, Morgan, & Teddy, 2001).

For tertiary students who encounter multiple barriers both within and external to the university environment, it has been noted by previous researchers (Kantanis, 2000; Munro & Pooley, 2009) to contribute to low retention and completion rates. In particular, research that has highlighted Māori tertiary students' experiences, has also found factors (within a student's own personal environment or in regards to academic engagement) which can contribute to low retention and completion rates for Māori students (Hunt et al., 2001; Jefferies, 1997; Ministry of Education, 2001).

The identification of barriers felt by Māori tertiary students is useful to help inform future students, staff, and university institutes of these, and to open discussion on what can be done to help alleviate these (Levy & Williams, 2003). For my research, I chose to investigate Māori tertiary students who had experienced barriers that led to them failing more than half of their required course load.

It was of personal interest to research Māori students who had failed, yet overcame the barriers they experienced in order to continue to study. By students overcoming negative factors in order to pursue their degrees, the concept of resilience (overcoming adversity and difficulties) was appropriate. In addition, investigating resilience displayed by Māori tertiary students was of personal

interest, as doing so provides a more positive outlook of Māori tertiary attainment, and further showcases how they did so and to also consider reasons why Māori students do not appeal.

The generic definition of resilience is overcoming difficulties (Ungar, 2011), and when used to view Māori tertiary engagement, it provides an interesting and positively focused area to research. One such opportunity for students to overcome their adversities, and continue with their tertiary study, was through the provision of the appeals process by the University of Waikato.

The appeals process at the University of Waikato provided a context for my thesis, within which I chose to investigate the two concepts, resilience and barriers experienced. These two concepts (my research objectives) were chosen in order to explore the experiences of Māori students who had successfully appealed. Through investigating barriers experienced, and ways these were overcome, an overview of Māori students' experiences with gaining a successful appeals could be presented. In order to further investigate how Māori students were successful with their appeals, the overall aim of my research was to investigate the perceived social supports available and utilised by students.

The overall aim to investigate social supports was chosen for two reasons. The first reason I chose to investigate social supports was due to my own reflection, and recognition of the important role that my own social supports have had in my tertiary attainment and progression. The following whakataukī (Māori proverb) came to mind upon this reflection, as it further attests to the importance of social supports:

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa taki tini*

*Success is not the work of one, but the work of many*

The second reasons I decided to investigate social supports was due to previous research which has shown that the provision and utilisation of these helped aid Māori tertiary students' retention and completion rates at university (Nikora, Levy, Henry, & Whangapirita, 2002). Therefore, what social supports that successful Māori undergraduate appellants utilised had access to and utilised, was the overall choice of investigation, and the aim of my research. To provide a context of how social supports can be helpful to overcome barriers, the concept of resilience to is explored further.

## SECTION ONE: RESILIENCE

Resilience research is focused on how individuals or communities overcome adversity, which can involve anything from learning difficulties through to exposure to violence and war (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). The initial area of resilience research focused on individual characteristics and genetic makeup (Ungar, 2012), which encompasses the nurture side found in many research debates.

In contrast, the nurture (consideration of environment) side of resilience research takes into account the social ecology surrounding an individual. In particular, resilience research that looks at one's environment considers what resources individuals have, given their position in society, and also provides a focus on the supportive systems that are available to them (Ungar, 2011; 2012). What an individual's social environment (wider ecology) may look like is explored next.

**Social ecology.** Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecological model can be implemented to view the different levels of resources (particularly support systems) an individual has surrounding them. The different levels of one's ecology include:

- Micro (the inner most structures such as family, friends and teachers).
- Meso (an individual's school, work, or wider community).
- Macro systems (such as their culture/s, societal influence and upbringing; all of which contribute to one's beliefs and values).

(Bottrell, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Santrock, 2001).

The interaction and influence of the different levels of one's ecology, has an effect on the possible resources one may have, as well as the availability of these. Resources can include support (financial or emotional, for examples; Santrock, 2001) or possible opportunities (such as future employment; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The different levels of one's ecology not only determine what resources one has access to (Ungar, 2011), but can also influence the different value and belief systems an individual has (Bottrell, 2010).

The macro level sources, in particular, can influence an individual's beliefs or value systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) either through interaction with others, or

from direct influence from government policies. As individuals have little or no influence over government policies, which can affect their belief systems and access to resources (Bottrell, 2010), consideration is needed for those who need extra help, particularly in an educational environment (Kantanis, 2000).

In Ungar's (2012) resilience research, he discusses and recognises that one's social ecology determines what social supports and additional resources are available. For those who have limited or no resources (particularly social supports), a real problem emerges, and Ungar (2012) states that extra consideration is needed for those individuals with limited support.

Ungar (2012) describes that while individual characteristics of resilience (such as cognitive ability) can be important, primary focus should be towards one's social ecology; especially for those with limited resources. Through focus on an individual's social ecology, rather than one's individual innate characteristics, a more holistic view of resilience is presented. To provide a further overview of an individual's social ecology, utilisation of Kurt Lewin's (1951) *Person and Environment fit (PEfit)* theory can be applied in order to view the transactional nature of gaining resources (Bottrell, 2010).

Within Lewin's theory, he suggests that an individual's behaviour is dependent on their environment, and that their beliefs can affect the resources they can access from it (Ungar, 2011). In other words, the availability of resources and one's perception of the usefulness of them, pertain to their use (Stewart, 1989).

The resources of interest in my research, were the social supports available to Māori tertiary students, both informal (family, friends, significant other/s) and formal systems (Iwi and/or hapū, and university services). The reason for my research focus on informal and formal support systems was additional due to the importance they both have on aiding individuals through periods of difficulty (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Frydenberg, 2008; Pooley & Cohen, 2010; Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002; Santrock, 2001), and academic engagement.

While there is no universal definition of what academic engagement constitutes (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010), Sbrocco (2009) states that the term encompasses students':

- behavioural involvement in the educational environment (both academic and non-academic activities);
- their emotional engagement (the more positive the emotions, the better their engagement);
- and their cognitive engagement (showing an interest in the subject matter).

A combination of the abovementioned types of involvement from students therefore provides an overview of what academic engagement may be. For my research, it was also of interest to see how participants defined their academic engagement, in order to add to the overview of the term (discussed later in Chapter Three).

As the involvement of social supports can aid in students' academic engagement (Williams, 2010), the overall aim of my research was to find out what sources successful appellants had access to, and those students utilised. In determining what enables and aids students' uptake of social supports, Stewart (1989) states that perceptions of the sources themselves are crucial. If students have negative perceptions of the sources (Stewart, 1989), or have had negative past experiences (Hobfoll, 2009) they often do not utilise these. Before the different sources of support are presented, students' social characteristics and abilities to access support were considered, as these have been described as resilient qualities (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002).

**Social characteristics of resilience.** In addition to recognising one's social ecology, Reed-Victor and Stronge (2002) state that certain socially dependent characteristics also contribute to resilience and accessing support:

- extraversion (ability to engage with others to develop social ties);
- agreeability (ability to provide support for others);
- conscientiousness (being goal-driven);
- emotional stability (having self-esteem);

- and experientialism (openness to learning from experiences, and commitment to overcoming problems faced).

The abovementioned characteristics provide a means for individuals to gain resources from their environment, which are important to discuss within the context of a tertiary education environment. For example, extraversion is needed for students to gain additional support systems, and also enables one to foster a sense of belonging within the tertiary environment (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Pooley & Cohen, 2010). Having a sense of belonging in a tertiary environment has been described to be important in retention of students (Coleman & Hagell, 2007) as it enables them to feel both socially (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005) and academically integrated.

In addition, Reed-Victor and Stronge's (2002) experientialism characteristic also relates well to students who have failed, yet overcome the adversities and difficulties they faced in order to continue to attain their goals (conscientiousness). Therefore one's social ecology, one's fit within one's environment, as well as social characteristics, can all contribute to the concept of resilience.

The before mentioned social characteristics found by Reed-Victor and Stronge (2002) are important in providing an overview of resilience, but consideration is also needed towards one's ability to openly discuss any difficulties experienced. The ability to discuss difficulties was highlighted in Merritt's (2003) research investigating the academic achievement of young Māori female participants.

Merritt (2003) found that her participants' ability to discuss their difficulties with their social supports contributed to their academic resilience. From her findings, the importance of help seeking was an additional element to add to the holistic perspective of resilience (Merritt, 2003), as long as there were provisional and appropriate resources to do so (using the *PEfit* theory; Ungar, 2012).

Through acknowledgement of the importance that an individual's social ecology, the ability to access resources in times of difficulty (the adversity) are crucial for resilience (Pooley & Cohen, 2010; Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002; Ungar, 2012), so long as such provisions are available. In other words, a students'

fit within their tertiary environment, as well as the resources they have available within their social ecology, provides a holistic view of resilience.

The provision of a holistic view of resilience was important, as my interest and theoretical preference lies within Community Psychology, which requires the application and utilisation of a holistic view to any phenomenon researched. A holistic perspective is also an integral part of Kaupapa Māori research (Masters, Levy, Thompson, Donnelly, & Rawiri, 2004), and Te Ao Māori (Māori world view), and therefore provided an appropriate means to investigate what Māori tertiary student resilience may entail.

The holistic perspective of resilience helped to provide an overview of what Māori tertiary student resilience looked like (access and utilisation of social support, dependent on availability). It was additionally important to see how other researchers had come to define the term within an educational context, and the results of my search are presented next.

**Māori tertiary student resilience.** As a result of my search of Māori tertiary resilience research, few projects were found. Two researchers have suggested that Māori educational resilience can include the enrolment and participation in education (Merritt, 2003), as well as qualification attainment (Williams, 2010). The determination to attain qualifications has been documented from as early as 1975 by Tinto, who suggested that possessing the drive to complete is actualised by academic and social integration into the tertiary environment. Again, the social ecology when discussing resilience is paramount to understanding the complex nature of it.

Within the context of Māori education, Merritt (2003) researched the resilience of young Māori high school students. In her study, Merritt (2003) advocated to look beyond the socioeconomic statuses of Māori students, and to instead focus on supports to aid them through adversity, much like Ungar (2012). Merritt (2003) also stressed the importance of perceived social supports for her participants, and the role that taha whānau (wider family) provided for her participants (parallel to Durie, 1995). Therefore, collective support can be viewed as important for Māori students' academic engagement and integration into the tertiary environment.

Another researcher investigated participants who had not fared well in the New Zealand school system, yet engaged with and completed their tertiary qualifications at the University of Waikato (Williams, 2010). In her Doctoral thesis, Williams (2010) discussed the concept of resilience as participants' determination to attain their degrees, despite their backgrounds and the difficulties they had endured. Williams's presentation of her participants' determination to participate at tertiary education, through to the completion of their degrees, prompted her to deem them as resilient (2010).

Degree completion is also suggested by Reed-Victor and Stronge (2002) to be in regards to their characteristic of conscientiousness. In addition, the resilient characteristic of extraversion, can also be used to gain additional resources within a tertiary environment. By using these characteristics, and taking an overall social ecological perspective of resilience, a potential marker of Māori tertiary student resilience was formed for my research. Two other considerations were also needed to conduct my research.

The first consideration pertained to the nature of the perceived social supports, or the resources available in one's social ecology, for Māori tertiary students. The second consideration (presented in Section Three) is regarding the provision of a context for students to practice resilience; in other words, the adversity or difficulties faced by Māori tertiary students (known as barriers to academic engagement).

## **SECTION TWO: SOCIAL SUPPORTS**

Social supports are important for an individual's wellbeing, and can also aid in difficult times in one's life (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Within research pertaining to social supports, two different areas of focus are apparent: the perception of support available (Stewart, 1989) and the result of support (support received).

**Perceived social support.** Often times, the sense that one is supported (defined as perceived social supports) can impact positively on an individual's wellbeing, especially if things go awry unexpectedly (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Zimet et al., 1988). Sarason and colleagues (1990) further describe the importance

of perceived social support as an "...individual's belief that they have people who value and care about them and who are willing to try to help them if they need assistance or other support" (p. 138). In addition, perceived social supports can also help to explain participant accounts of one source of support being sufficient in their time of need, rather than a larger network (Stewart, 1989).

According to research conducted by Ashida and Heaney (2008), who conducted interviews with 126 older adults living in community-dwellings (aged 65 to 85), the proximity and connectedness of social supports were also important in determining their perceived usefulness. The more connected and frequent interactions were, the more participants felt that they had perceived social supports (Ashida & Heaney, 2008).

The perception of social support can also determine an individual's uptake of different avenues of aid, where the nature of the difficulty may relate to the avenue of support sought (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). For example, students may discuss academic queries with perceived social supports that are more knowledgeable of the subject matter.

The perception or attribution an individual has of their social supports can be dependent on past experiences of their use (Hobfoll, 2009; Stewart, 1989). In other words, should previous interactions with the support source be satisfactory, the likelihood of future uptake is more likely. In addition, the values and perceptions held by the support source can also impact on an individual's uptake of their services.

Negative perceptions from support sources towards students have been described as a barrier, particularly for Māori tertiary students who have experienced racism and felt alienated from those sources (Jefferies, 1997). Therefore the perceptions of the usefulness and appropriateness of different support services can be paramount to students' uptake of these services. The importance of having perceived social supports cannot be understated (Stewart, 1989), and in addition, the receipt of support from these sources can also be beneficial when experiencing difficulty (Ungar, 2012).

**Received social support.** Researchers interested in the result that social supports have on individuals, measure the network size available as well as the effectiveness of each support system (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). The

different types of support that can be received from supportive sources, which can aid individuals to overcome barriers and negative factors (Pooley & Cohen, 2010), include:

- physical/instrumental (aid provided through actions and resources such as provision of transport, cooking, or financial support, for examples);
- emotional (provision of encouragement, caring for others and understanding, for examples);
- appraisal (provision of feedback of events, or aid in decision making, for examples);
- and informational (provision of advice or clarity of certain tasks such as enrolment to university, for examples)

(Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Sarason et al., 1990).

Although the receipt of social supports vary, each type of aid can be beneficial for students' academic and social engagement within, and beyond, the university environment. For example, social supports can provide emotional support in periods of doubt over one's own academic abilities. A further example can include appraisal support being provided for students who have specific academic queries, or conflicting feelings regarding the decision of which pathway to take (whether to continue to study or not).

The reason why received social supports are important, particularly in times of difficulty, relates back to resilience research suggesting that utilisation of aid can help individuals (Ungar, 2012). It was then of interest to investigate the different types of social supports, particularly those available to students at the University of Waikato.

## **Types of social supports**

The two categories of perceived social supports are usually distinguished as being informal and formal supports. The first category, informal support, pertains to relationships that are forged socially, through work environments, or through blood ties.

**Informal social supports.** Sources of informal support can prove a valuable resource for any person, especially in periods of difficulty (Zimet et al., 1988). The different types of informal supports are those formed within the inner systems of their social ecology, such as:

- Whānau/immediate family;
- friends;
- acquaintances;
- neighbours;
- work colleagues;
- and significant others.

The different types of support can provide individuals with one or more types of received support (such as emotional or instrumental). According to Hobfoll (2009), if an individual had a secure attachment with their parents or caregivers, they are more likely to continue to create social relationships with others in order to build a network of support. Social networks can be defined as the different sources of support available to an individual (Heaney & Israel, 2008). In addition, should an individual's relationship with their parents or caregivers continue to be strong and secure, they generally become a constant source of support throughout an individual's lifetime, as long as no major life events compromise these (such as a death; Hobfoll, 2009).

In regards to one's family, a distinction can be made between immediate family (mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles) and the vastness of whānau. Walker (2006) states that “on the one hand, [whānau] is based on whakapapa or the ‘intrinsic whānau’; on the other hand, individuals who have established a special relationship can become whānau” (p. 28). In other words, the extent of whānau can include significant others who may be beyond the classification of an immediate family member.

Wider whānau and collective support are valued and important within Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview; The Families Commission, 2001). In addition to the receipt of support outlined earlier, whānau can also prove to be a crucial element for Māori students' academic engagement (McKenzie, 2005; Merritt, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002) through provision of the before mentioned types of received support - emotional, instrumental, and appraisal for examples.

One's cultural identity can also be formed within the transaction of relationships with whānau members (Moeke-Pickering, 1996), and consequently foster a sense of belonging (Herbert, 2011). In the context of tertiary education, informal supports have been linked to the successful transition to university (McKenzie, 2005; Pooley & Cohen, 2010) as well as social belonging within the environment (Wilcox et al., 2005). Although, in individually focused research, there is a contrasting suggestion that students need to sever ties with family and previous friends (prior to attending university) in order to acculturate into the academic environment (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Santrock, 2001). The results of this viewpoint seem detrimental for Māori students in particular, given the importance these have, and the links previous researchers have made to academic engagement (McKenzie, 2005; Merritt, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002).

Although the abovementioned informal sources of support have been portrayed as largely positive, it is important to note that perceived informal supports are not exclusively positive. Costs from the utilisation of informal support have also been noted in previous research, discussed next.

***Cost of informal support.*** Given the nature of social support is a relationship between two or more parties, Adelman (1988) suggested that there is an element of uncertainty through accessing and utilising perceived social supports. As a result of the uncertainty, the uptake of support is highly dependent on the relationship between all parties (the resulting perception of social supports). Further, Adelman (1988) also suggested that there may be a potential cost involved through use of the social support, which can add to the uncertainty of utilisation.

The costs involved in the utilisation of informal support may be "...negative consequences for the relationship, [and] incurring possible obligations" (Adelman, 1988, p. 186). Particularly for Māori students, Jefferies (1997) and Masters (1997) have also suggested that the utilisation of whānau support may come with expectations (costs), which they described as being a double-edged sword (have positive results whilst also being costly at times).

The costly side of whānau support can translate through expectations and obligations placed on tertiary Māori students. Expectations can include the

student's need to achieve highly at university, and further obligations, which can be vast (from meeting requests such as event attendance, or childcare, for examples; Jefferies, 1997).

Declining requests from whānau can prove difficult (Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997; Williams, 2010). These obligations and requests take time away from a student's academic engagement, but the alternative, saying no to requests made by whānau, can compromise one's identity (Williams, 2010).

Although the costs of whānau support have been presented as taxing to student's academic engagement, perceived support from these sources have been linked to aid Māori students' academic engagement (Williams, 2010). In addition, the receipt of support from whānau are also crucial and beneficial for Māori students' academic engagement (Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997; Nikora et al., 2002; Williams, 2010). Examples of the receipt of support from whānau can include instrumental support (financial aid, for example; Masters, 1997; Williams, 2010), and emotional support (motivation and encouragement, for examples; Williams, 2011).

Other sources of informal social support can be established within the tertiary environment, and can aid in providing a sense of belonging.

***Perceived social supports and a sense of belonging.*** Social integration into a tertiary environment has been advocated as important for tertiary students by researchers (Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, & Brooks, 2010; Thomas, 2002; Wilcox et al., 2005). Wilcox and colleagues (2005) interviewed 22 students who had completed their first year, and 12 who did not.

Wilcox et al. (2005) found that perceived social supports were paramount in participants' progression through their studies, as they provided students with a sense that they were valued (a result of emotional support) and a part of the tertiary environment. In addition, research conducted by Kantanis (2000) in Australia, who administered 50 questionnaires in a pilot study to first year Arts undergraduates, also found that establishing friend networks were valuable for students' transition to university.

In contrast, those who dropped out felt isolated and unsupported at university (Wilcox et al., 2005). Again, it can be summarised that social integration within the tertiary environment, and establishing a sense of belonging, are important

elements for successful academic engagement (Herbert, 2011; Wilcox et al., 2005). One way students can forge new social supports within their tertiary environment can be done through the establishment of friends/ whānau units of support.

**Whānau units.** Walker (2006) describes the process in which Māori students establish supportive whānau units, as finding peers who “have a shared vision and goal” (p. 22). The whānau units can provide pivotal support when needed and can be knowledgeable of the difficulty at hand (as they are likely to be from the tertiary environment themselves).

The university environment can provide a platform for students to make informal social supports, through classes, tutorials, and halls of residence (Thomas, 2002). Researchers (Nikora et al., 2002; Thomas, 2002; Wilcox et al., 2005), suggest that provisions from the tertiary environment are needed to allow students to make social connections. Provisions of support from tertiary environments can also help aid students who do not have social characteristics (particularly extraversion) outlined by Reed-Victor & Stronge (2002), to establish those relationships. Therefore it was necessary to outline what formal supports entail and what sources are available at the University of Waikato for Māori tertiary students.

**Formal social support.** Formal support can be from any organisation that provides a service aimed to help individuals, through their meso and/or macro level systems. Within the context of the University of Waikato, formal support systems pertain to services students can access, which include:

- Student Support Services (who provide counselling for example);
- Faculty Information Centres (who can help students with enrolments);
- and other targeted supportive units for adult learners, international students, and Māori students (for examples).

Targeted support services for Māori students are available at each of the seven schools of study at the University of Waikato, in addition to general Māori support units university wide (2013e). All of these units provide academic and/or pastoral care for students who approach them. Pastoral care can range from the nourishment and encouragement of students (Bailey, 2007), through to more

practical assistance in their university experience (such as referrals to additional support to aid in financing or medical issues that may arise).

The Māori student support units and groups at the University of Waikato include:

- Te Aka Matua (the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences).
- Te Puna Tautoko (School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences).
- Te Kura Toi Tangata Mentoring Unit (Faculty of Education).
- Te Piringa Mentoring Unit (Faculty of Law).
- Nga Kairahi Matauranga (Waikato Management School).
- Te Ranga Ngaku (the Māori Management Student Network).
- Te Putahi o te Manawa (School of Science and Engineering).
- Te Pua Wananga ki te Ao (School of Māori and Pacific Development).
- Waiora (Māori students' association).

Māori-targeted supportive units and programmes in general were formed in order to support Māori students through tertiary education (Masters et al., 2004). An importance is placed on the appropriateness (sources who foster whanaungatanga, and are aware of barriers felt by Māori students) and accessibility of targeted Māori support services (Nikora et al., 2002; Rua & Nikora, 1999), as doing so increases the likelihood of uptake from students (Levy & Williams, 2003).

Appropriate targeted support services can also aid in fostering cultural identity within an academic environment, especially important given the feelings of isolation and alienation felt by Māori tertiary students in a predominantly Pākehā/New Zealand European system (Hunt et al., 2001; Jefferies, 1997; Ministry of Education, 2001; Nikora et al., 2002). Appropriate formal supports are in place in an effort to counteract feelings of alienation, and have the capacity to “...help students decipher unfamiliar college customs and rituals, [and] help mediate problems that arise between students’ cultural traits and the prevailing campus culture” (Nikora et al., 2002, p. 6).

The before mentioned formal support services are available for students enrolled at the University of Waikato to utilise when needed. Formal sources aim to address queries ranging from health, through to learning difficulties.

To summarise, the perception one holds of available social supports plays a role in students potential uptake of services, provided the sources are available and known to students. The use and importance of social supports have also been linked to the successful transition to university (Wilcox et al., 2005) and as such, can be important in successful academic engagement.

In investigating perceived social supports and resilience of Māori tertiary students, a context is needed to view the barriers and adversities (Ungar, 2012) to educational attainment; presented next.

### **SECTION THREE: BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT**

It was necessary to outline any barriers felt by tertiary Māori students, as found by previous research, because I had recruited Māori students who had failed. By outlining potential barriers, the focus was to be aware of what can and previously has impacted on Māori students' engagement. Doing so is not to suggest that all Māori students encounter these barriers, but to simply outline and highlight what previous researchers have highlighted.

The barriers and difficulties faced by Māori students in academic engagement and achievement have a wider and historically based context. One example is in regards to the dominance of a Pākehā frame in mainstream education, the results of which acted as a barrier for Māori students who felt alienated and isolated in individualised tertiary environments (Hunt et al., 2001; Nikora et al., 2002).

In an evaluation conducted by Nikora, Levy, Henry and Whangapirita (2002), a literature review was conducted highlighting further barriers identified for Māori tertiary students, and those which related to my participants' experiences included:

- The transition into the university environment.
- Lack of adequate (and preferable) social supports for Māori students.
- Feeling isolated and unsupported as a result of the above mentioned examples.
- External Commitments.

The above mentioned barriers have been consistently noted by research highlighting Māori students' experiences within a tertiary education environment,

and are important to highlight given the evident disparities between Māori and non-Māori students, particularly in regard to participation, retention, and completion rates (Ministry of Education, 2012). While the abovementioned barriers are not exclusively felt by Māori students, Jefferies (1997, p.2) states that:

such barriers often impinge on a larger proportion of Māori and in many instances, Māori appear to face a number of barriers - some of which are likely to be Māori specific - which work cumulatively to have a more profound impact on the educational outcomes of those involved.

The abovementioned barriers are particularly important to highlight for Māori students, given certain expectations felt by students simply because they are Māori (one example are cultural obligations; Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997).

In regards to external commitment, examples can include providing time for the childcare of students' children, as well as the resulting costs incurred (Hunt et al., 2001; Te Tari Matauranga Māori, 2007). Wanting to spend time with one's children, yet needing to engage with tertiary studies can prove a difficult barrier. The cost and having sufficient care on specific times and days, when students need childcare, were also reported as being barriers in the 2009 New Zealand Childcare Survey (Ashley-Jones, 2010).

Through use of an ecological perspective, the impact barriers have on students' engagement can be addressed through provision of additional support. In turn, students' utilisation of social supports also encompasses resilience in their pursuit of goal completion. My research focus sought to investigate Māori students who had failed, yet overcome their barriers and adversities in order to become successful in their pursuit of goal attainment. In order to do so, a context was first needed.

**Use of the appeals process as a research context.** The context of my research was the appeals process at the University of Waikato. The appeal process is an intervention from the University of Waikato, which provides two avenues for students who fail more than half of their course load within a single academic year, with a second chance to continue to pursue their degrees.

During both of the appeal stages, students are required to write an appeal letter highlighting the factors that resulted in their failure of over half of their courses. Additionally, students are required to nominate how they intend to change the factors that resulted in their failure in order to succeed in the future. By overcoming and addressing those factors experienced, successful appellants were academically engaged. Participants, who were successfully engaged with their studies, and continued to pursue their goal of degree attainment, were deemed as displaying the marker of resilience which I have utilised in my research.

Through the investigation of successful Māori student appellants, Ungar's (2012) social ecological view of resilience relating to the availability and utilisation of perceived social supports, helped to form my research aims and questions. The exploration of the availability and utilisation of perceived social supports provided my overall research aim, in addition to the objectives of investigating: the concept of resilience, the difficulties students' faced that lead to their initial failure, cultural identity (given my targeted recruitment of Māori student), and barriers associated with making an appeal. These themes then elicited the following research questions and objectives:

1. Māori cultural identity, and investigating whether participants had any cultural obligations or expectations.
2. What contributed to participants' decision to appeal?
3. What barriers are in place leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?
4. What support systems are in place leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?
5. What were the Māori student enrolment numbers from 2003-2012, and appeal numbers from 2003-2011, at the University of Waikato?

The first research question was posed in order to identify why Māori students wished to overcome the difficulties that led to their failure in order to continue to

pursue their academic goals. The second question was asked to see what expectations or obligations Māori students had in particular, and what impact these had on their appeal.

The third and fourth questions were posed as part of viewing what difficulties participants perceived, and what aided them in overcoming these. The fifth research question was posed in order to provide a background picture of how many Māori student enrolments there were at the University of Waikato, and how many appeals had been made.

My research highlights the experiences of 13 Māori students, who were successful in their appeal for re-entry, and continued to pursue their degree. The appeals process, an intervention from the University of Waikato, allowed such an opportunity for students. As participants in my research continued to pursue their degree post appeal, the benefits of the appeal process can then be seen in potential and future efforts to raise retention and completion rates of Māori students. Therefore, my research makes a contribution to the body of knowledge regarding what constitutes Māori student resilience. In addition, through showcasing participants' experiences with the appeal, my research highlights one way in which the University of Waikato has made efforts to increase in retention and completion rates for Māori tertiary students.

To help answer my research questions, I employed a mixed methods approach. The methods I utilised are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

In this chapter, I first provide my research purpose and aim in investigating the social supports of successful Māori undergraduate appellants. To help answer my research questions, I chose to implement a mixed methods approach.

The first method was to analyse the statistical data that was gathered by a staff member at the University of Waikato. Statistical data was analysed to see how many Māori students enrolled at Waikato from 2003 through to 2012, and how many had appealed from 2003 through to 2011. The statistical data analysed is then presented by graphs and tables.

As I chose to recruit successful Māori appellants for my research, I also discuss in this chapter the appropriateness of employing an overall Kaupapa Māori framework in my research process.

The third method utilised in my research were interviews. The interview process is also presented in regards to the recruitment, interview schedule and analysis of participants' data. The frames I employed to analyse participants' data (perceived social supports, resilience, and the barriers) are then discussed. This chapter then concludes with how participants' data is presented over the next three chapters.

### **Purpose and aim of my research**

Investigating Māori students' academic journeys was conducted out of personal interest. I am of Māori decent (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāpuhi), with a positive Māori cultural identity (self identifying as Māori, but however having limited access to, and knowledge of, certain aspects of the Māori world). I have witnessed as many have before me, a steady decline of Māori students as one continues through the education system (from secondary schooling through to tertiary studies). From my own personal accounts, I have always been interested in investigating the reasons there are high attrition rates for Māori students, recognising that there are a myriad of different factors.

The importance of gaining tertiary qualifications has been eloquently discussed by the Waitangi Tribunal (1999) as a means of counteracting “rising crime, suicide, substance abuse, welfare dependency and negative health statistics” for Māori (1999, p. 9). With the view that tertiary qualification attainment can be important for overall wellbeing, the topic to investigate students who appeal and re-enter university was interesting and formed through discussions with my supervisors.

The aim of my research was to investigate the social supports of Māori undergraduate students who had successfully appealed to engage with their studies. The appeals process was used as a context to investigate successful Māori appellants’ journeys, as this process allowed participants’ to continue to pursue attainment of their degrees. It was also of interest to investigate what barriers students may have faced throughout their appeal.

The flow on effects of the appeal process can be seen to contribute to a rise in retention and completion rates, as students who have failed are provided this second chance to continue to study. The appeal process fitted well with my own personal interest in contributing to the body of research looking at ways to increase retention rates for Māori tertiary students. I was also interested in the resilient aspect of Māori student appellants who had failed, and yet still continued to pursue their goals of degree attainment; highlighting ways Māori students have successfully done so.

The abovementioned themes of social supports, resilience, and barriers were formed into research questions, which are discussed next.

## **Research questions and objectives**

The appeal process provided a context to investigate my participants’ experiences, of which three noticeable time frames were evident: leading up to, during, and after the appeal. To help investigate participants’ social supports, barriers encountered, and cultural expectations (given my recruitment of successful Māori appellants), five research questions and objectives were formed:

1. Māori cultural identity, and investigating whether participants had any cultural obligations or expectations.
2. What factors to participants’ decision to appeal?

3. What barriers are in place leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?
4. What support systems are in place leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?
5. What were the Māori student enrolment numbers from 2003-2012, and appeal numbers from 2003-2011, at the University of Waikato?

To help answer the abovementioned research questions/objectives, a mixed approach was adopted through conduction of statistical analysis, interviews and the adoption of an overall Kaupapa Māori framework for my research process.

### **Quantitative analysis**

Statistical data was gathered and analysed in order to determine the number of Māori enrolment and appeal numbers at the University of Waikato. From 2003 through to 2012 there were 143, 388 total enrolments, and 5,777 appeals made from 2003 to 2011. Statistical data was gathered at my request, by a University of Waikato staff member, who obtained figures from existing statistics compiled by the university.

I received enrolment and appeal statistics in two separate and student-anonymous Microsoft Excel data sets (done so to protect the privacy of students). Once these were received, I transferred certain demographic data from these data sets into SPSS (a social sciences statistical package). I used four demographics for analysis (the classifications listed for each are determined and used by the University of Waikato):

- age group (20 and under, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, and those 41 and over);
- ethnicity (Māori, European, Asian, Pacific peoples, Other, and No response);
- gender (male or female);
- and School of Study (Computing and Mathematical Sciences, Management, Māori and Pacific Development, Arts and Social Sciences, Education, Science and Engineering, and Law).

The enrolment and appeal data sets were kept separate, with each demographic within the two sets being analysed separately. Analysis was conducted by first finding the frequencies of each demographic in both data sets, and then graphs were formed to view any apparent trends. I then split filed each data set (first according to ethnicity, and then by age group and gender), and again found the frequencies and constructed graphs (presented in Chapter Three) for the three groups:

1. Ethnicity split from age group, gender and School of Study.
2. Ethnicity and age group split from gender and School of Study.
3. Ethnicity, age group and gender split from School of Study.

As the appeal data had an additional independent variable (outcome of appeals), I also split filed this classification with the three before mentioned groups. The extent of my statistical analysis ended as a visual presentation of graphs and tables, as the purpose of analysing my data was to see how Māori student enrolment and appeal numbers compared to non-Māori.

The statistical data found was useful to see enrolment and appeal numbers for the demographic categories, but students' own experiences with the appeal and their reasons for doing so were not apparent. Interviews were then conducted, as it is recognised that contextual and rich data can be gained in doing so, and further provides a means to highlight participants' lived experiences with a phenomenon under investigation (the social construction of knowledge; Costain Schou & Hewison, 1998).

As my research involved the investigation of Māori students' experiences, it was also pertinent to conduct research in adherence to both Psychology research ethics, as well as a Kaupapa Māori framework. The use of a Kaupapa Māori framework was also important, in order to protect participants and their knowledge, which is discussed next.

## **Kaupapa Māori research**

Kaupapa Māori research has emerged in response to the historical tradition of researching 'on' Māori, rather than 'with' Māori stakeholders (Barnes, 2000). Bishop (1999, p. 2) in addition, states that:

Researchers in Aotearoa/New Zealand have developed a tradition of research that has perpetuated colonial values, thereby undervaluing and belittling Māori knowledge and learning practices and processes in order to enhance those of the colonisers.

As a result of the conduction of research with the values of colonial views in mind, a disregard of Māori world views and research co-construction with stakeholders became apparent (Barnes, 2000). It is from the tradition of research which conveyed colonial views, that Kaupapa Māori research has emerged (Bishop, 1999). The emergence seeks to counteract the dominance of individualistic research, and the disregard of the interests of Māori stakeholders (Barnes, 2000).

Kaupapa Māori research is not universally definable, but one overall concept is to practice and invoke Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) for Māori. Self-determination seeks to develop an "empowering relationship" (Bishop, 1999, p. 3) between the researcher and the participants. The research relationship is established in order to use findings in a way to benefit Māori aspirations, address concerns, and to legitimize theoretical perspectives and values that differ to traditional Western research practice (Thompson & Barnett, 2008).

As I recruited Māori appellants who were successful with their appeal, it was important to utilise a Kaupapa Māori framework to provide guidance for the research process (recruitment and data collection), and for my accountability to participants.

### **Research process: participant recruitment**

All students who identified as being a Māori student, had successfully appealed between 2003 and 2012, and re-entered their studies (from all subject areas, academic backgrounds, and undergraduate levels of study) were recruited via email. The recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent directly by a staff member at the Student and Academic Services Division to 909 Māori students who had successfully appealed; done in this way in order to respect students' privacy. The recruitment email was sent to the last known email address listed in the University of Waikato data base for each of the 909 Māori students.

Within the recruitment email, it was explained why students were contacted (having successfully appealed), what the research involved (two interviews), and in addition, asked students to express interest in participating by emailing me directly (see Appendix A for the recruitment email). The recruitment email also provided an opportunity for me to introduce myself, and the reasons why I was conducting this research (to investigate the social supports of participants' who were successful with their appeal).

In total, 38 students emailed expressing interest in my research. One reason for the disparity between potential recruits (909) and the 38 interested participants, could be due to the time frame of my recruitment (students who had appealed from 2003 through to 2012), and that the last known email address for students may have been outdated.

On average, I emailed each of the 38 interested students two to five times in order to negotiate a time and date to meet for the first interview. The reason for the continual emails was to begin to establish a rapport with students, and to respect the time they were willing to give up in order to discuss their successful appeal journeys.

The concept of beginning to establish a rapport with students was informed by the process of *whanaungatanga* (the establishment and maintenance of relationships; Bishop, 1999) in Kaupapa Māori research. It was important to begin to do so not only for potential recruitment of participants, but also because my role as the researcher was not one of an outside objective party. Rather, a researcher should facilitate "identifying and connecting with those participating in the research process... [allowing] for detailed information to be shared...and entrusted [to researchers]" (Thompson & Barnett, 2008, p. 1). In other words, given potential participants' willingness to discuss their personal experiences, it was pertinent that I began to establish a rapport with potential participants.

Efforts were made to accommodate student's schedules in order to partake in an interview. Unfortunately, 25 of the interested students could not meet for an interview because of the following reasons:

- Living outside of the Hamilton area.
- Commitment clashes.
- Family emergencies.

- Uncertainty of the appeal process.
- Had made an appeal as a postgraduate student.
- Other unforeseen circumstances (rescheduled a maximum of three times before they were not interviewed).
- Had emailed after the cut off date (which was the end of September after the maximum desired number of participants, 10, had been exceeded).

After rescheduling and emailing interested students, 13 people (aged between 21 to 54 years old) agreed and participated in my research (three men and 10 women). These 13 participants were all sent an information sheet (see Appendix B), which outlined:

- What the research involved (two interviews).
- What participants had to bring (their appeal letter, if they still had this).
- Their rights in participating (discussed later in this chapter).
- The details of the counselling services available to students on campus as well as the webhealth website (which lists counsellors available in the Hamilton area).

The counselling service's details were listed in the information sheet in the event that students became uncomfortable and upset during the interviews, as per the requirements of the School of Psychology's (2012) Ethics Committee regarding the reduction of potential risks to participants (in case of emotional distress when discussing their experiences).

As the 13 participants agreed to be a part of my research, times and dates were then negotiated to meet for their first interview.

## **Interviews**

The first interviews were conducted after the teaching recess in mid B semester, and were negotiated to suit all participants' schedules. Once participants arrived at the interview (held at one of the rooms at the University of Waikato's library or at a desk at the Hamilton City central library, whichever suited the participants'

schedules), a hardcopy of the participant information sheet was given to them (see Appendix B for the information sheet). Once participants had read the information sheet, I gave them the opportunity to ask any questions they had involving the research process, and explained their rights as participants.

**Research ethics.** I gained ethical approval to conduct this research from the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee on the 31st of July, 2012 (application number 12:48). The 13 participants were told of their rights in partaking in this research prior to every interview (in adherence to the requirements of the School of Psychology's Ethics Committee), which included:

- the right to refuse to answer any questions that may make them feel uncomfortable;
- the right to withdraw from the research project up until two weeks after receiving their summaries (with no negative consequences; after this time their participation was still assumed to be agreed to);
- the right to anonymity with their participation (accommodated by not recording or publicising their names);
- and seeking permission for their interviews to be recorded for transcribing purposes.
- In addition, they were also told that I may take notes to aid the interview recordings.

Once the research process and their rights were explained, participants were asked to sign a consent form if they wished to participate (see Appendix C for the consent form). The interviews were then conducted using the interview schedule (see Appendix D for the interview schedule). The interview schedule was structured around the three time frames of the appeal (leading up to, during and after the appeal), and contained the research questions mentioned previously.

**Interview schedule.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and involved the main research questions presented at the beginning of this chapter. Introductions, and further attempt to establish whakawhanaungatanga with participants, were the first point of discussion in the interview schedule. I introduced myself once more, and also discussed my background (upbringing, and my Māori cultural identity). In addition, I discussed my interests in this research,

and why I was doing so. Participants were then asked to introduce themselves, and I also specifically asked for their Iwi affiliation, and motivations to attend university.

After the introductions, participants' Māori cultural identity was discussed using probes such as: "*what does it mean for you to be a Māori student?*" and, "*were there any expectations of you, or attitudes towards you for being a 'Māori student'?*" After the cultural identity questions, events leading up to the appeal were then discussed, followed by:

- reasons for deciding to appeal;
- the appeal process itself;
- studying after the appeal;
- reflective questions of their time during the appeal;
- and any advice they would give to future appellants.

Participants were also asked throughout their interviews about the different support systems they had available to them at different stages of the appeal, as well as any barriers experienced or identified. The interview schedule was amended as interviews progressed, as some questions did not work as well as anticipated (specifically cultural identity).

Cultural identity was a difficult concept to analyse and measure (Durie, 1995). Given my limited knowledge of Te Ao Māori, cultural identity questions changed to instead focus on any obligations and expectations participants experienced throughout their appeal (to investigate the impact these had on student engagement). Furthermore, as interviews progressed I asked participants for specific demographics that I did not obtain during their initial interview (such as age).

With regards to the adoption of a Kaupapa Māori framework, Bishop (1999) states that the involvement of participants and stakeholders should be considered from the beginning of research (shaping and initiation). For my research, I unfortunately did not involve participants in the early development and shaping of research questions, as this was done through consultation with my supervisors.

Once all 13 participants' first interviews were completed, they were told that a summary of their transcripts (along with some chosen direct quotes), would be sent to them within a week of each interview. Participants were asked to read their

transcripts to make sure that I had written their stories as they wished and to make sure I had not misinterpreted any material. In addition, participants were also asked to clarify themes I saw as Māori knowledge (in case I did not describe these correctly or appropriately).

Participants were asked to make changes to their transcripts where they saw fit, and in some instances compromises were sought. For example, three participants did not want identifying demographics to be associated with their pseudonym (such as Iwi affiliation), given the small number of Māori students with specific affiliations within certain faculties. As a result, demographics are listed separately to participants' stories and pseudonyms (where requests were made), although in some instances, Faculty affiliations are included with participant data given the nature of their discussions in order to provide a meaningful context. For example, certain staff within mentor groups at certain schools were praised and therefore discussed.

The collaborative review of participants' transcripts was paramount to the Kaupapa Māori framework adopted in my research, which was also conducted to protect participants' anonymity and knowledge. Although, not all participants negotiated their stories, as they were satisfied with the way I had presented these.

After all 13 participants were interviewed, they were then invited to participate in a follow up interview.

**Follow up interviews.** It was anticipated that follow up interviews would be scheduled for the commencement two months after the first, and were intended to be face to face. However, face to face interviews did not eventuate as these were scheduled to be held during students' exam week (and close to the Christmas break in 2012), and therefore were conducted via email.

The follow up interview was used as a means to clarify specific points in participants' first interviews, and to gain data that was not requested during their initial interview (such as demographic questions, which were added to the later versions of the first interview schedule). Each of the 13 participants were sent follow up interview questions, and of those, six volunteered to participate. Once all transcripts were approved by participants, they were then analysed.

**Analysis.** All interview data was analysed using grounded theory methods by first using open coding (a process of identifying main recurring themes that related to the research objectives) as well as determining new themes apparent in the data (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Once these codes were determined, axial coding was carried out by identifying the differences and similarities between participants' data, and further selective coding was used to bring the main highlights of all participants' stories together (Curtis & Curtis, 2011).

Grounded theory methods were chosen as it allowed analysis and interpretation of all themes that arose. Through use of my research questions as a frame for participants' data, all arisen themes were compared and contrasted to find patterns and differences.

As I had initial themes to investigate with my research questions (factors encountered leading up to the appeal, perceived social supports, resilience, cultural obligations and expectations), I employed markers (codes) to analyse participants' data.

**Factors encountered.** The factors participants attributed to their failure of more than half of their required course load, have been grouped by using the University of Waikato's categories when experiencing difficulties leading up to an exam (University of Waikato, 2013c):

- Medical reasons.
- Compassionate reasons.

The third category I have determined myself, and encompass factors that do not lie within the above - other commitment factors. These categories will be expanded further in the next Chapter.

**Perceived social support categories.** There were two noticeable perceived social support categories utilised by participants throughout their appeal, which are reflective of previous research: informal and formal sources. I have employed these two categories in my analysis of participants' discussions regarding the support they perceived and utilised throughout their appeal. Further discussions of these social supports are presented in Chapter Four.

**Resilience.** Participants who had overcome their difficulties (or factors) attributed to their failure of more than half of their required course load, and re-

entered with a strategy to overcome these with the aid of perceived social supports (in order to attain their goal of degree completion), were determined to be resilient in my research.

It is important to note that my measure is only one potential marker of what Māori student resilience may look like, as the concept of resilience can also include students who realise that university study is not part of their goal in life and instead find another career path. However, the latter was not the focus of my research.

**Researcher accountability.** The findings from my research present the experiences of the 13 participants in their journey of gaining a successful appeal, through to their re-entry and continued pursuit of their degree. The benefits of the appeal process can be seen in the retention of students, and a future contribution to increased completion rates.

The purpose of highlighting the experiences of the 13 successful Māori appellants is to showcase how they did so, and how they had continued to attain their degrees. As I utilised a Kaupapa Māori framework, I am accountable to relay the findings to my participants, and to disseminate these in a way that will contribute to Māori aspirations (Bishop, 1999) in regards to higher degree attainment (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999).

**Presentation of my findings.** The abovementioned markers aided my analysis of participants' data. From my analysis, participants' experiences and journeys have been shaped according to the three time frames of the appeal. The three time frames are presented over the next three chapters of my thesis:

- Leading up to the appeal (Section Three of Chapter Three).
- During the appeal (Chapter Four).
- After the appeal (Chapter Five).

Within each chapter, participant examples are utilised to discuss the different themes that were apparent in my analysis, and also to provide consistency and context across the three resultant chapters. Additional participant quotes and experiences are provided where contrasts or additive information was found.

Before the findings leading up to the appeal are presented, it was first important to provide a context of Māori tertiary students.

# **CHAPTER THREE:**

## **CONTEXT OF MĀORI TERTIARY**

### **STUDENTS**

In this chapter, I discuss the context of Māori tertiary students in regards to their academic engagement. In addition, I present previous research investigating the social supports and barriers for students. To provide a context for both Māori tertiary students nationally, and for those at the University of Waikato, this chapter has been separated into three sections. Section One presents the national statistics and research regarding Māori tertiary students' academic engagement, done in order to provide.

Section Two presents the research conducted specifically at the University of Waikato pertaining to student engagement (social supports and barriers). In addition, section two also includes my statistical analysis of the enrolment and appeal numbers at the University of Waikato. The section concludes with my research participants' demographics and summative introductions.

In the third section of this chapter, the findings from participants' experiences leading up to their appeals are presented, as well as their reasons and motivations for making an.

#### **SECTION ONE: MĀORI TERTIARY STUDENTS - NATIONAL CONTEXT**

In 2011, there were 178,000 domestic students enrolled in bachelor's degrees or higher qualifications in New Zealand. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), approximately 12 percent of total enrolments (21,400) self identified as Māori. In comparison, New Zealand European/Pākehā students make up approximately 69 percent of total domestic student enrolments. The before mentioned figures highlights a large gap between Māori (12 percent) and Pākehā student enrolment numbers. The purpose of highlighting enrolment statistics is to

provide a context of the disparity between Māori and Pākehā students, and to advocate the need to address these.

Another smaller disparity (in comparison to enrolment numbers) evident between Māori and Pākehā tertiary students are retention and completion rates. Five-year retention rates for students who started studying in 2006 (either still enrolled or had completed their qualifications), was 54 percent for Māori university students nationwide. In comparison, retention rates were 69 percent for Pākehā university students (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The disparities in retention and completion rates between Māori and Pākehā tertiary students have been highlighted by previous research in two different ways. The first group of research highlights Māori student education in a deficit light (presenting low statistical figures). In contrast, a second group of research focuses on highlighting Māori tertiary student success (achievement gains; Durie, 2001).

Although Durie (2001) suggests that comparisons should not be made between Māori and Pākehā, as doing so "assumes that the non-Māori benchmark capture whānau aspiration" (p. 16), he also states that ignoring disparities is not sensible either. Therefore, research which highlights ways in which Māori have been successful in educational areas is more preferable, and can showcase how they have come to be successful (Durie, 2001).

The two groups of Māori tertiary student research, deficit and success oriented, are presented next.

**Māori tertiary student engagement viewed in a deficit light.** Research pertaining to low retention and completion rates for tertiary Māori students has historically placed blame on Māori students themselves (Williams, 2010). A deficit viewpoint is then suggested in placing blame on individual, as low statistics of academic success are seen as a lack of pre-determined individual traits. From research which takes an individual focus, such traits pre-determined to be of importance to academic engagement includes student IQ (Mayes et al., 2009; Neisser et al., 1996), academic self-efficacy (Cassidy, 2011), and coping mechanisms, for examples.

Individual focused research dominates what academic success may involve, using the individual characteristics mentioned above. Further, emphasis of individual students' responsibility to have knowledge of organisation and time

management skills prior to attending university are of high importance (Yorke & Longden, 2008), within the individual focus of academic success.

In contrast, van der Meer and colleagues (2010) suggest learning how to effectively engage with tertiary studies should not fall on students (resulting in blaming an individual) rather, that extra support should be given to help students to learn to do so.

By taking a supportive view of tertiary education, we can move away from a deficit view of Māori student achievement. In doing so, considerations can be made for a more holistic perspective and supportive view of Māori tertiary education, taking into consideration the importance that whanaungatanga has (McKenzie, 2005; Nikora et al., 2002). The concept of whanaungatanga can be seen as a process to facilitate a supportive and safe environment, where students make connections with tutors and others to find connections (whakapapa links for example; Masters et al., 2004). Through use a more positive based view of Māori tertiary education, finding more supportive means to address retention and increase completion rates are put forth.

**Research focus on successful Māori tertiary student engagement.** First it is important to highlight that the Ministry of Education (2010) suggests that there is a link between degree attainment and higher earning potential. In addition, degree attainment can aid in the increased wellbeing for individuals and communities. Examples of increased wellbeing for students and whānau (wider Māori community) can include increased job opportunities (the flow on effects can include health benefits; Stephens, Alpass, Towers, & Stevenson, 2011), as well as wider economic development (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999).

Research pertaining to Māori tertiary engagement has highlighted barriers (rather than a deficit of characteristics) faced by students in their journey to attain a degree.

Barriers found from previous research include:

- financial difficulties;
- childcare;
- high workload;
- financial difficulties;
- and the feeling of isolation and alienation.

(Hunt et al., 2001; Jefferies, 1997; Levy & Williams, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002; Scott, 2005; Te Tari Matauranga Māori, 2007).

The implications of the abovementioned barriers are external factors which stem from students social ecology, within and beyond the university environment. As a result, barriers mentioned above have contributed to low retention and completion rates of Māori tertiary students.

Instead of dwelling on the barriers in a deficit light, researchers mentioned above and the Ministry of Education (2009) propose a Māori potential approach (a positive and supportive view) as a different means to address barriers. Examples of the different suggestions devised to address barriers include:

- Attempts to provide a more inclusive approach to learning and teaching (where a focus is on Māori succeeding as Māori; Ministry of Education, 2008).
- Targeted support from tertiary institutes (such as Kaupapa Māori mentor units; Ministry of Education, 2001; Nikora et al., 2002).

Research has also been conducted to evaluate the teaching style of lecturers and students' academic work load (Hunt et al., 2001; Zepke & Leach, 2010) with the view to investigate the impact they have Māori students' engagement. Evaluations of the tertiary education curriculum (teaching and workload) and impacts workload have on Māori students are important to highlight, but are beyond the focus of my research.

The purpose of highlighting academic barriers is to move away from viewing Māori students as having a problem (deficit), to instead recognise those felt by previous students which have impacted their academic engagement.

**My research position.** Previous researchers who advocate to move away from a deficit model (Durie, 1998; Nikora et al., 2002; van der Meer, Scott, & Neha; 2010) and to look at a positive and Māori potential view (Ministry of Education, 2009); have informed the research position I have taken. Through a positive and supportive view, my research investigated Māori students who had reached a point where they had failed, but successfully appealed to re-enter and continue with their studies. Through use of the appeals process as a context to view Māori tertiary engagement, my research is the first of its kind.

Through shaping my research aim, I chose to recruit Māori undergraduate students specifically. Reasons for doing so were formed by previous Waikato research (Ashwell, Nikoa & Levy, 2003; Levy & Williams, 2003) which suggests that retention of Māori tertiary students is paramount in the first and second year of study. Students who move beyond the first two years of undergraduate studies were more likely to continue through to the completion of their degree (Levy & Williams, 2003).

I also recruited students from the University of Waikato as it is my place of study. As such, it was of interest to view enrolment and appeal numbers for Māori students enrolled at Waikato. Therefore in the next section, I first present the statistical data for Māori students pertaining to enrolment and appeal numbers. In addition, because I utilised I conducted research specifically within the University of Waikato, I searched for previous research which investigated the perceived social supports and resilience of Māori tertiary students. The purpose of my search was to see what previous research has found, and how my research could contribute to that body of knowledge. The results of my search are also presented later in the following section.

## **SECTION TWO: MĀORI STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO**

Of the 21,400 Māori students (12 percent of the total population) enrolled in bachelor's degrees or higher in tertiary institutes nationwide, the University of Waikato enrolled approximately 15 percent of these students (University of Waikato, 2012). The University of Waikato recognises the high number of Māori

students who chose to enrol with them, and as such, have a commitment to help raise retention and completion rates (University of Waikato, 2012).

The national qualification completion rate of Māori tertiary students is 62 per cent (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). The University of Waikato measures close to the national qualification completion rate, at 61 per cent for Māori tertiary. The overall qualification completion rate of students at the University of Waikato was 78 per cent, which shows Māori tertiary completions are slightly lower in comparison.

Of further interest are the successful course completion rates of Māori tertiary students at Waikato in comparison to the national rate. According to the Tertiary Education Commission (2012, p. 5) the successful course completion rates are:

...measured by the EFTS-weighted successful course completion rate (where EFTS means 'equivalent full-time students'). This is the successfully completed enrolments in courses at a TEO [Tertiary Education Organisation] each year, as a proportion of the total enrolments in courses, weighted by the EFTS value of the enrolments.

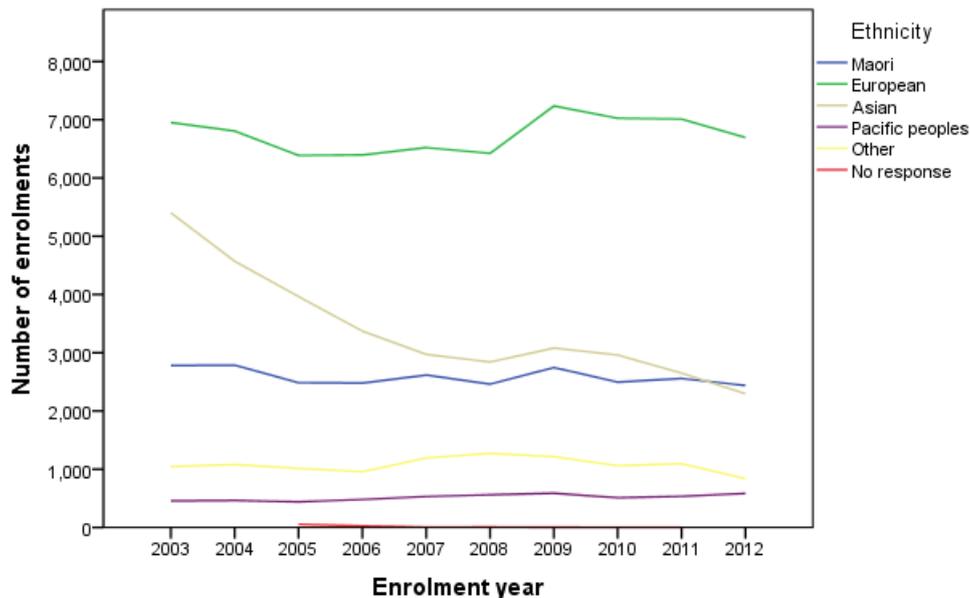
The national course completion rates for Māori tertiary students are 80 per cent, and at Waikato it is 82 per cent. The implications of successful course completion suggests that Māori at the University of Waikato are doing well, but the remaining 18 per cent of students who do not complete may be those who are faced with the decision to appeal. These statistics provide a glance of how Māori students at the University of Waikato compare to national figures, which are similar in regards to qualification completion rates, and are slightly higher for course completion rates.

It was also of interest to see which Schools of study Māori students enrol in, and what the appeal numbers were at the University of Waikato, the results of which help to provide a context of Māori tertiary students at the University of Waikato.

As I chose a mixed methods approach in my research, I also conducted 13 interviews in order to provide a voice for students' lived experiences in navigating the appeals process. The results of these interviews are presented later in this section, but first, I present the enrolment and appeal statistics found.

## Enrolment numbers

As I recruited students' who had appealed from 2003 through to 2012 (in order to recruit a larger pool of students), it was important to see what enrolment numbers were for Māori tertiary students. Figure 1 shows the overall enrolment numbers according to ethnicity.



<sup>1</sup>Figure 1. Enrolment numbers from 2003-2012 according to ethnicity.

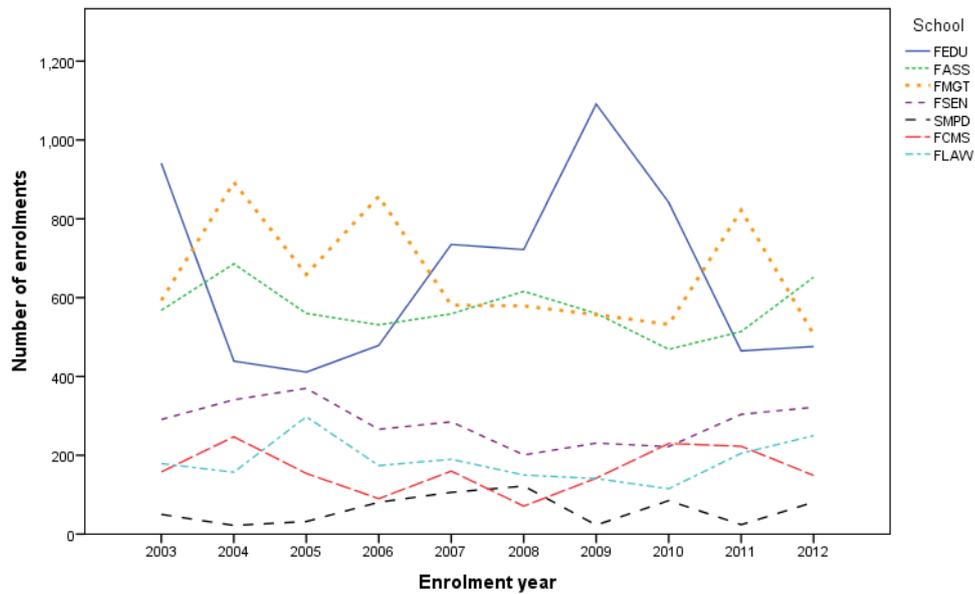
The total number of Māori student enrolments at the University of Waikato are approximately half those of European/Pākehā students. The disparity between Māori and non-Māori enrolment numbers mirror national statistics (as outlined previously in Section One). Māori student enrolment numbers have steadily fluctuated from 2003 through to 2012. Due to a slight decrease from Asian student enrolment, Māori students had the second highest enrolment numbers in 2012.

Although it is useful to draw comparison and see where Māori student enrolment numbers sit in comparison to non-Māori, performance of students cannot be seen. Retention and completion rates are important as this suggests students' pursuit and attainment of their tertiary qualification; the end goal for most students.

The different Schools of Study Māori students enrolled in was also looked into, and are presented in Figure 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the ethnicity labels shown are the ones used by the University of Waikato.



<sup>2</sup>Figure 2. Enrolment numbers from 2003-2012 for Māori students, according to Faculty of study.

Figure 2 shows that Māori student enrolments were highest at the Faculties of Education; Arts and Social Sciences, and Management. The School of Māori and Pacific Development housed the fourth highest number of Māori students, followed by the Faculties of Law; Computer and Mathematical Sciences, and lastly Science and Engineering. With these figures in mind, I expected to gain interested participants from Schools with the highest number of enrolments.

I also analysed the appeal numbers at the University of Waikato, which is presented next.

## Appeal numbers

Through analysis of the appeal data, a primary question was raised regarding the reasons why Māori students decided to appeal. A second question was also raised pertaining to the number of eligible Māori appellants who chose not to do so. Unfortunately data regarding the eligibility of Māori student appeals was not able to be obtained. Due to this limitation, there was no baseline to compare eligible Māori student appellants who did make an appeal, to those who chose not to do so

<sup>2</sup> FEDU: Faculty of Education; FASS: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, FMGT: Faculty of Management, FSEN: Faculty of Science and Engineering, SMPD: School of Māori and Pacific Development, FCMS: Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Science, FLAW: Faculty of Law.

from 2003 through to 2011. Therefore, the graphs devised in my study only show a comparison between Māori students at each appeal process (Deans and the Admission Appeals Committee), and the outcome of each appeal (approved or declined). For additional appeal statistics regarding comparisons between ethnicity and Schools of Study, please see Appendix F.

Table 1 has been constructed to show the differences between successful (approved) and declined appeal numbers according to Māori students' submissions to both their Dean and the Admission Appeals Committee (AAC). The AAC is a select committee which receives Dean declined appeals from students, and is a student's last appeal avenue for re-entry. A further explanation of the Appeals process is presented in the next Chapter.

Table 1.

*Appeal outcomes for Māori students from 2003 through to 2011*

| <b>Outcome of appeal</b>      | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------------|
| Dean Approved                 | 216  | 224  | 229  | 203  | 160  | 174  | 122  | 79   | 101  | 1508  | 95%        |
| Dean Declined                 | 6    | 1    | 0    | 3    | 5    | 8    | 24   | 6    | 3    | 56    | 4%         |
| AAC Approved                  | 2    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 2    | 1    | 1    | 9     | 0.7%       |
| AAC Declined                  | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 0    | 2    | 1    | 3     | 0.3%       |
| Total number of appeals: 1576 |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |            |

Large proportions of Māori students who make an appeal are successful, and are granted re-entry predominantly from the Dean of their respective School of Study. Few appeals are submitted to AAC, but again are generally accepted.

Of concern from Table 1, however, is that of the four percent of Māori students appellants who had been declined re-entry between 2003 and 2011 from their Dean, only 12 further appeals were made (1%) to the AAC. As such, these figures suggest that if Māori students are declined by their Dean, few make further appeals to the AAC (3%). It was then of interest to compare Māori appeals statistics to Pākehā students to see if there were similarities or differences to appeal statistics. Table 2 shows the differences between successful and declined appeal numbers according to Pākehā students' submissions to both their Dean and the Admission Appeals Committee (AAC).

Table 2.

*Appeal outcomes for Pākehā students from 2003 through to 2011*

| <b>Outcome of appeal</b>      | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------------|
| Dean Approved                 | 274  | 245  | 260  | 226  | 251  | 227  | 184  | 123  | 159  | 1949  | 97.1%      |
| Dean Declined                 | 3    | 2    | 1    | 1    | 2    | 6    | 31   | 5    | 0    | 51    | 2.6%       |
| AAC Approved                  | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 2    | 2    | 0    | 5     | 0.2%       |
| AAC Declined                  | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 0    | 2    | 0    | 2     | 0.1%       |
| Total number of appeals: 2007 |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |            |

Table 2 also shows a gap between Pākehā students who were eligible to appeal further to the AAC and did so (7 students, or 0.3%), in comparison to those who did not make a submission (44 students, or 2.3%). Therefore the concern regarding students eligible to make a further appeal to the AAC, but do not do so, is evident and similar for both Māori (3%) and Pākehā (2.3%) students.

Immediate questions were then raised around students' motivations to appeal, as it is evident that some students do not exhaust the AAC's avenue to re-enter. Here is where interview data can provide reasons for students' motivations to appeal and for my research in particular, a means to highlight Māori students' experiences.

As I am enrolled and have access to staff and resources at the University of Waikato, recruiting students from Waikato was preferred. As my research aims involved investigating perceived social supports and Māori tertiary student resilience, conducting interviews with students to voice their experiences was important. Furthermore, it was also important to see what research had been conducted at Waikato pertaining to perceived social supports of Māori students, as more meaningful discussions of the formal sources at Waikato could be made.

### **Previous research at the University of Waikato**

It was of interest to find research that had been conducted at University of Waikato pertaining to Māori tertiary students' perceived social supports and their academic engagement. The search of previous research helped inform areas to investigate in my thesis, as well as areas my research can contribute to. From this

search, four main research projects were found, of which two discussed Māori resilience (one was conducted in a secondary school setting).

The first piece of research found in my search was a master's thesis conducted by Masters in 1997, who recruited nine Māori graduate students in order to investigate their support networks. The importance of the availability and perception of social supports were found to outweigh network density (Masters, 1997). Further results pertaining to Māori tertiary students' informal support were interesting, specifically regarding the double edged sword nature of whānau support (where support was beneficial, yet time consuming when requests were made). Therefore, Masters' (1997) research provided informed considerations for my thesis to add to placing importance on the perceptions of social support, and variability of these sources.

In addition, two evaluations of support initiatives found in my search were conducted at the School of Science and Technology (now the Faculty of Science and Engineering; Rua & Nikora, 1999), and the other the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Levy & Williams, 2003). These two evaluations found that participants were satisfied with the formal supports at each school. Although formal supports were useful for those who utilised them, both evaluations also found barriers students felt in accessing these (discussed later in this section). These evaluations highlighted additional barriers faced by Māori tertiary students, particularly regarding potential reasons why formal supports were not accessed.

Another research project conducted by Hunt et al. (2001) specifically recruited undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the Department of Psychology. The finding of interest to my research from Hunt and colleagues (2001), also pertained to the barriers of accessing social supports. The implications of highlighting barriers can create the discussion regarding the importance of social supports for Māori tertiary students, and whether these barriers are still experienced today or whether they have been reduced.

More recently, for her Doctorate, Williams (2010) looked specifically at special admission Māori students enrolled with the Faculty of Education, who also completed their undergraduate degrees. Williams (2010) discussed the resilience of her participants, in that they continued to pursue their degrees regardless of their previous educational history. In addition to their determination to succeed, Williams also found three other contributing factors which aided participants in

completing their degrees: "Whanaungatanga (strong social support networks with peers and faculty), Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and Whānau (extended family)" (2011, p. 58). The importance of whānau support and social connectedness within the faculty were also highlighted by Williams (2010), and how these factors aided in participants' journeys of degree attainment.

Specific themes found from each of the abovementioned studies are presented next according to the themes of their findings, done so in order to highlight areas that my research can contribute to and build upon. The themes found that are of interest to my research include barriers faced by students, perceived social supports, resilience, and motivations to attain tertiary education.

**Barriers identified to Māori student engagement.** As discussed in the previous section, barriers faced by Māori students are multiple and complex, and have been highlighted nationally as well as in research from the University of Waikato (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Rua & Nikora, 1999; Williams, 2010). Specific barriers found by researchers at Waikato included:

- feelings of isolation;
- unwelcoming academic environments;
- being new to the Hamilton area;
- and other commitments (such as childcare, work hours, and obligations to whānau/hapū, and sickness and family).

Furthermore, Levy and Williams (2003) found that the uncertainty of university policies and terminology, was another potential barrier faced by Māori students. Uncertainty of policy and terminology contributed to a hesitance in utilisation of formal support. As a result, students felt they were unsupported in their studies (Levy & Williams, 2003). The unfamiliarity of policies pertaining to university environments is an aspect worth investigating, especially in the context of making an appeal.

The underutilisation of formal support avenues (namely specific Māori mentoring units) was found to be of concern, and reasons for this can stem from students being whakamā (shy and/or embarrassed as a basic definition of the concept), highlighted in previous research (Hunt et al., 2001; Rua & Nikora,

1999). Making potential barriers felt by Māori students known to non-Māori lecturers, was suggested by researchers (Hunt et al., 2001; Williams, 2010) as a means to help address these.

Another suggestion made by the abovementioned researchers, was that formal supports (particularly those in a mentoring role) should actively seek out students and offer support (Rua & Nikora, 1999). In doing so, the feeling of being whakamā could be reduced. It was of interest to see if these barriers are still felt by Māori students today, especially in facing the decision to make an appeal.

The next theme found from Waikato research was perceived social supports.

**Importance of perceived social support.** The importance of having positive perceived social supports was consequently a means to overcome the abovementioned barriers (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Rua & Nikora, 1999; Williams, 2010). These social supports included informal and formal supports. Informal supports included:

- friends;
- university peers;
- whānau;
- and significant others.

Formal supports included those provided by the University of Waikato, such as:

- lecturers;
- tutors;
- Kaupapa Māori tutorials;
- other school specific and university wide academic support sources;
- and Māori mentoring units.

Ways in which perceived social supports aided students included, but were not limited to: providing encouragement, empowerment, financial and other resource support, as well as academic support (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Rua & Nikora, 1999; Williams, 2010). Overall, students perceived the formal support on offer from the University of Waikato to be helpful, but again it is the uptake and utilisation of those resources that was a barrier faced by Māori students.

Finding ways to develop and foster social connections within the university environment has been discussed by Wilcox and colleagues (2005), who are not however from Waikato. It is important to highlight that social connectedness has an effect on student engagement, which mirrors findings from the research conducted at the University of Waikato (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Rua & Nikora, 1999; Williams, 2010).

Ways in which social connectedness can be created has been documented to include students' time at the Halls of Residence at the University of Waikato (Masters, 1997), through Kaupapa Māori tutorials (Hunt et al., 2001), and from other cultural events (such as kapa haka practices; Masters, 1997). Therefore, the spaces created by the University Waikato for students' to make new connections can be paramount to form perceived social supports.

**Motivations to succeed at university.** Social supports were also found to be a motivation for Māori students to continue to pursue their degrees regardless of struggles they may face. Motivations for students to complete their degrees included a self-determined goal, and findings suggest that this goal was to contribute somewhat to the wider Māori community and to the wellbeing of their whānau/hapū/Iwi, highlighted by Masters (1997) and Williams (2010). Motivations can therefore stem from support networks, particularly informal sources. As such, it was pertinent that I ask participants about their motivations to continue to pursue their degree, and their decisions for making an appeal.

**My research contribution to the existing body of knowledge.** As previous research based at the University of Waikato has recruited at specific Faculties of study (namely Science and Engineering, Arts and Social Sciences, and Education), I decided to recruit Māori undergraduate students across campus to draw from different students' experiences. Through presentation of the abovementioned research, findings suggest that the factors which impede student achievement can be varied and complex (Hunt et al., 2001). In addition, there is an evident gap in research surrounding Māori tertiary student resilience, and here is where my research can also make a contribution.

Positive social supports and students' own goals to attain their degrees can provide ways to overcome external factors (Williams, 2010). As such, my

research adds to the body of knowledge that highlights the important role perceived social supports play in academic engagement. Further, my research also adds to advocating that external factors can inhibit students' academic success and highlights what these may be. Equally important are the barriers faced by Māori tertiary students, particularly in regards to utilising formal support. Therefore my research can contribute to the body of knowledge around both the nature of perceived social supports for Māori tertiary students (using the appeal as a context), as well as what barriers they may have faced that inhibited support uptake.

In order for students to complete their qualifications, they must pass at least half of their course over two semesters (for full time students) in order to advance and continue on to the next year of study. For those that do not do so, there is an appeal process to gain re-entry. The appeal process was used as a context to investigate the social supports of Māori students, within an overarching branch investigating student retention (in that they wish to continue on with their degree).

The use of the appeal process as a context to view the resilience of Māori tertiary students has not been conducted to my knowledge. The appeals process provides a new area to view Māori tertiary students who have failed, yet continued to pursue their goals of completing their qualification.

The appeal context has also been used to investigate the perceived social supports utilised by my 13 participants, and contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding what and how social supports play a role in academic engagement (and reduction of barriers).

Before I discuss my research findings, I first introduce the 13 participants and present their demographics.

**Summary of participant descriptions.** The 13 participants in my research were aged 21 to 54 years old, and were enrolled at the Faculties of: Arts and Social Sciences (two students), Law (six students), Management (two students) and the School of Māori and Pacific Development (three students).

With the exception of one participant who was unsure, participants affiliated with the following Iwi:

- Ngāti Maniapoto.
- Ngāti Porou.
- Ngāi te Rangi.
- Ngāi Tūhoe.
- Ngāpuhi.
- Te Arawa.
- Te Whānau-ā-Apanui.
- Tūwharetoa.
- Waikato-Tainui.

A brief summary of each participant is presented next, which includes the reasons why they wished to attend university, and also the reasons why they needed to appeal (factors they encountered). The introductions exclude some identifying materials (namely Iwi affiliations, faculty enrolled in, and year of appeal/s) as per their requests and to ensure anonymity.

#### Maia:

Maia is a 27 year old student who is the second eldest of five children. After completing high school, Maia attended a different tertiary institution, but was unsure of the path of study she wanted to take. Maia's uncles mapped out a path of study for her, which she did not wish to pursue at the time. Instead, she decided to take a two year break to reflect on what she wanted to study at University.

Once Maia returned to New Zealand, she enrolled at the University of Waikato with the goal to complete her degree. During her enrolment at the University of Waikato, she aided a friend of hers who was experiencing a personal difficulty. In addition, Maia was also working part time; all the while studying full time. As a result of her contributing factors, Maia consequently failed more than half of her required course load.

Maia then appealed successfully to re-enter her studies, and is near completion of her degree.

### Tama:

Tama is a 25 year old father of one, who completed studies at another tertiary institution prior to commencing studies at the University Waikato. Tama wanted to attain a tertiary degree to further his knowledge in Te Ao Māori, as well as having the expectations from his whānau to do so.

During Tama's first year at university, he found trying to balance his studies and living on his own to be difficult, and as a result failed more than half of his required course load. Tama decided to make the appeal to continue with his studies, and has since completed his degree.

### Mon:

Mon is a 40 year old student who came to Waikato University once she completed high school. Mon knew she wanted to attain a tertiary degree, and did so with expectations from her whānau. During Mon's enrolment her grandmother passed away, and she decided to take a break from her studies. Mon travelled after this time, and also undertook studies at another institute.

Mon returned to the University of Waikato 12 years later to complete her initial degree. Upon Mon's return, she was told that she needed to appeal in order to re-enter. Mon continued to study until she needed to leave once more in order to work full time. Unfortunately Mon did not withdraw from her papers, and when she later returned to study, she needed to appeal once again.

Mon has since completed her degree.

### May:

May is a 24 year old student who was raised by her grandparents. It was her whānau who placed expectations on her to attain a tertiary degree, coupled with her own desire to learn about Te Ao Māori. During her enrolment at the University of Waikato, she faced trying to find a balance between socialising with other students and engaging with her studies. Unfortunately as a result of trying to balance her commitments, she failed more than half of her required course load, and therefore needed to appeal.

May decided that perhaps the University of Waikato was not the place for her, and undertook study at two different institutes. During May's time away from Waikato, her aunty questioned what it was she wanted to do in life. As a result of

that conversation with her aunty, she returned to the University of Waikato and appealed to re-enter.

May has since completed her degree.

Em:

Em is a 38 year old who first enrolled and attended Waikato University after completing high school. Em has had to appeal two times during her time at Waikato University. The first appeal Em made was largely due to a family issue she was dealing with, as well as trying to balance her work commitments.

Em decided to return to study part time at Waikato, and also undertook full time employment. A miscommunication around Em's applicability to graduate, she decided to leave Waikato to work full time.

After a period of three years, Em decided to complete the remaining papers she had in order to complete her degree. Upon her return Em needed to appeal for a second time. Em was successful, and has since completed her degree.

Rhaegar:

Rhaegar is a 25 year old who first enrolled at the University Waikato after completing high school. Rhaegar was raised by his parents who encouraged him to attain academic excellence, and as a result he was expected to attend university.

During Rhaegar's first year at university, he lived at the halls of residence whilst undertaking part time employment. Rhaegar tried to balance working late nights at his place of employment, socialising with his peers, and engaging with his studies. Unfortunately as a result of trying to balance all of his commitments, he failed more than half of his required course load. Rhaegar decided to appeal, and continued on with his degree.

During the second year of Rhaegar's degree, his work commitments were still affecting his academic engagement. As a result, he needed to appeal for a second time to continue with his degree.

Rhaegar has since completed his degree.

Robin:

Robin is a 22 year old who first enrolled at the University of Waikato after completing high school. Robin knew she wanted to attain a tertiary degree, and was also encouraged by her whānau to pursue higher education.

During Robin's first year at Waikato, she decided that her chosen path of study was not one she enjoyed, and took a two year break to work full time. Robin later returned to the University of Waikato to undertake a different degree, and needed to appeal to gain re-entry.

Robin is currently finishing her degree.

#### Hayley:

Hayley is a 24 year old mother of two children under the age of five, who undertook tertiary studies at a different institution after having a year break post high school completion.

Hayley moved to Hamilton with her partner, and enrolled at the University of Waikato because she wanted to learn more about Te Ao Māori. The same year she enrolled at Waikato, she also had her first child. Because of complications during, and difficulties well after Hayley's pregnancy, she failed more than half of her required course load.

Hayley wanted to attain her tertiary degree, and had made two appeals to gain re-entry (one was declined, and the second was successful). Hayley is currently completing her degree.

#### Hana:

Hana is a 21 year old student who undertook tertiary study at a different institute after completing high school. Hana was raised by her parents who place a great importance on attaining tertiary education, and this coupled with her own desire to attain a tertiary degree, influenced her decision to attend university.

Hana moved to Hamilton with her then partner, and enrolled at the University of Waikato. During Hana's first year at Waikato, she broke up with her long-time partner, and was also diagnosed with a fairly new illness. As a result of her break up and illness, she failed more than half of her required course load.

Hana decided to appeal to continue with her degree, and is currently completing this.

#### Mina:

Mina is a 41 year old single mother of two (one four and one 16 year old). Mina has already completed a degree in education, and worked in this field for a

number of years. After experiencing a work discrepancy, she decided to return to the University of Waikato to learn more about New Zealand's legal system.

Since Mina's enrolment at Waikato, she has had to try and balance running a household (and taking care of her children) with studying fulltime. As a result of these commitment clashes, she failed more than half of her required course load.

Mina has had to appeal three times in order to re-enter her studies, and was successful on her third submission. Mina is near completion her degree.

#### Laura:

Laura is a 28 year old single mother of two children under 10. Laura was working fulltime prior to deciding to undertake study at the University of Waikato, as she wanted to attain a tertiary degree.

During her enrolment at the University of Waikato, she had suffered from depression. In addition, Laura also tried to balance studying full time with raising her children. As a result of her depression and trying to balance her commitments, she failed more than half of her required course load.

Laura decided that she would make the appeal, and is near completion of her degree.

#### Wyn:

Wyn is a 33 year old student who completed medical studies, and had worked in that field prior to enrolling at the University of Waikato. During her time working in the health sector, she witnessed many work related disputes. Because of witnessing those disputes (coupled with an interest in Law), Wyn decided to pursue a Law degree at the University of Waikato.

During her first year at the University of Waikato she tried to balance socialising with her Halls of Residence peers, as well as working part time with her study commitments. As a result, she failed more than half of her required course load, and appealed to gain re-entry.

During Wyn's second year at university, she was diagnosed with an illness which affected her studying abilities. As a result of her illness, she failed more than half of her required course load, and again needed to appeal to gain re-entry. Wyn has since completed her degree.

### Jax:

Jax is a 54 year old father of three who worked in Law enforcement for a number of years prior to enrolling at the University of Waikato. Jax decided that he wanted to help people navigate the legal system through legal representation, and as a result decided to undertake a Law degree at the University of Waikato.

During his time at university, he tried to balance fulltime work and his home life, with studying fulltime. As a result, he failed more than half of his required course load, and decided to appeal to re-enter his studies to continue to pursue his degree.

Jax is near completion of his degree.

The abovementioned 13 participant summaries provide a brief introduction into what participants experienced during their time at the University of Waikato. All 13 participants had failed more than half of their required course load at some point during their undergraduate degree, and faced deciding to appeal to gain re-entry at the University of Waikato.

Participants' experiences in making the appeal have been divided into three time frames: leading up to (discussing factors encountered contributing to their failure), during the appeal, and after the appeal (re-engaging with their studies).

## **Presentation of interview data**

Each of the three time frames used to analyse participant data are presented in chronological order over the next section, and the two following chapters:

1. Factors participants encountered leading up to the appeal are presented in the section three of this chapter.
2. Chapter Four discusses participants' experiences during the appeal.
3. Chapter Five presents students' re-engagement with their studies after their appeal.

Each chapter presents participant experiences which are reflective of their appeals, and also uses two participant examples to highlight each chronological theme. In addition, further participant experiences will be used to highlight different themes to either strengthen or provide alternative discussions.

There were two different types of categories used to analyse participants data; the perceived social supports utilised, as well as the types of factors they encountered leading up to the appeal. The two different categories are presented next in order to introduce the concepts, and to provide contexts for the following chapters.

The first category outlines the perceived social support utilised by participants. From my analysis, both informal and formal types of social supports were utilised by participants.

The second category used in my research was determined by the different factors participants' encountered leading up to the appeal, which have been grouped into three types:

- Compassionate reasons.
- Medical grounds.
- Other commitment factors.

A further expansion on the three types of factors encountered is presented next in Section Three.

### **SECTION THREE: LEADING UP TO THE APPEAL**

At some stage during the 13 participants' undergraduate degree, they encountered factors which affected their studying ability and led them to fail more than half of their required course load. The factors that participants encountered varied, and a snapshot of these will be presented later in this section.

Having failed, participants were notified by the University of Waikato that they were not eligible for automatic re-entry. The notice also stated that students needed to appeal in order to gain re-entry (University of Waikato, 2010).

Participants who had appealed from 2010 onwards were given an appeals brochure (University of Waikato, 2010). This brochure outlined the appeals and the withdrawal processes. The withdrawal process was discussed by participants who were not aware of its existence up until receiving the appeals brochure. Therefore, a brief overview of the withdrawal process has also been included in this section.

The appeals brochure also outlined what was involved in making an appeal, and participants were then faced with the decision of what to do. In deciding whether or not to appeal, participants had influential motivations to aid them (particularly the result of perceived social supports). These motivations are discussed later in this section, as the factors that participants experienced leading up to their appeal are presented first.

### **Factors encountered leading up to the appeal**

In Section One, successful academic engagement has been argued to be beyond individual characteristics (academic self-efficacy, and IQ for examples), as consideration is needed for students' social ecology (the resources and perceived social supports available to them). Therefore, it was important to investigate what factors the participant's encountered leading up to their appeal. Multiple factors were identified, reflecting findings from previous researchers (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002).

Table 3 provides an overview of the different types of factors that each of my research participants encountered, according to the year level of undergraduate study (first, second or third) they had appealed in. Participants who had appealed successfully more than once, have been listed accordingly. In addition, participants who had appealed but were declined on previous appeals, prior to gaining their successful appeal, have also been listed.

Table 3.

*Participants' descriptions categorised by year of study*

|                      | Type of factor  |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Year level of appeal | Compassionate reasons   | Medical grounds   | Other commitments   |
| <b>First year</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For <b>Mon's</b> first appeal, she had experienced a death in her whānau.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Hayley</b> made two appeals (successful on the second). She experienced a problematic childbirth, and had resulting medical complications.</li> <li><b>Hana</b> was diagnosed with a fairly new illness. She also experienced a break up with her partner.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Tama</b> had home environment and transport difficulties.</li> <li>For <b>Rhaegar's</b> first appeal, he had work and socialising (engaging with other students) commitments.</li> <li><b>Robin</b> had work and socialising commitments.</li> <li>For <b>Wyn's</b> first appeal, she also had socialising and work commitments.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Second year</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Maia</b> was helping a friend through a major personal issue, which affected her wellbeing. In addition, Maia also had work commitments.</li> <li>For <b>Em's</b> first appeal, she had experienced a major family issue which affected her wellbeing. In addition, she also had work commitments.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Laura</b> had been diagnosed with depression, affecting her wellbeing and academic engagement.</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Third year</b>    |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For <b>Wyn's</b> second appeal, she had experienced a medical illness which affected her wellbeing.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>May</b> had committed herself to socialise with other students, which lead to her failure of more than half of her required course load.</li> <li>For <b>Mon's</b> second appeal, she had work commitments that took time away from her study.</li> <li>For <b>Em's</b> second appeal, she also had work commitments leading up to her appeal.</li> <li>For <b>Rhaegar's</b> second appeal, he had work commitments leading up to his appeal.</li> <li><b>Mina</b> had made two appeals, and was successful on her second. She is a single mother of two, and had childcare and household maintenance commitments.</li> <li><b>Jax</b> experienced work commitments.</li> </ul> |

The abovementioned factors have been separated as medical, compassionate reasons and other commitments. The reason for the separation is due to the University of Waikato's consideration of compassionate reasons and medical factors, and the impact these have on students' academic engagement (University of Waikato, 2013c, para. 2). Students who encounter compassionate and/or medical factors can be given compassionate consideration (such as a rescheduled time) for their absence in examinations (University of Waikato, 2013c, para. 2). The factors participants experienced are discussed next, beginning with medical and compassionate factors.

**Medical and compassionate factors.** Participants who experienced medical factors leading up to their appeal were diagnosed with either medical illnesses and/or depression. The Compassionate factors participants experienced included:

- Issues affecting their friends/family which impacted on participants who aided them.
- The death of a loved one.
- Separations from partners.

The abovementioned factors affected participants' wellbeing, as well as their ability to successfully engage in their study. Participants' wellbeing was affected as a result of aiding their families and friends with their issues, grieving for the loss of important people in their lives, and/or dealing with depression and other medical illnesses.

The definition of successful academic engagement was suggested by participants to entail: allocating time for assignment completion, time to study and complete tests and exams, as well as lecture and tutorial attendance. As a result of trying to negotiate the factors encountered, participants' academic engagement suffered as their time and personal wellbeing were affected.

To further highlight the impact medical and compassionate factors had on participants' academic engagement, two participant examples are presented.

***Example one.*** Hana had broken up with her long time partner with whom she shared a home and finances, prior to making her appeal. The separation resulted in time being taken away from Hana's academic engagement, as she needed to deal with the huge changes in her life. Additionally, Hana was also diagnosed with a

newly discovered medical illness which not only affected her health, but also required her having to defend the legitimacy of it.

These factors both impacted on the time Hana needed to engage with her studies (such as the completion of assignments and attendance of lectures):

*I was really depressed, and I didn't know why I was doing all these strange and out of things for me... I went to the Doctor and they were like 'you've got this'...my hormones were all up in the air, and like depression and bla bla bla...At one point I had four doctors: A specialist, nutritionists, a trainer...That same year, I broke up with my boyfriend, and we'd been together since we were 14. We lived together since we finished high school...that coupled with like moving (coz we, like, lived together), then there was, like, joint accounts – so it was all really disrupted. I did my best...just to get up and carry on... [but] I didn't do the studying that I'm used to doing.*

*Hana, 21; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

The time Hana needed to devote to her studies was impacted by the illness she experienced. In addition, the upheaval with Hana's living environment (as a result of her break up) also negatively influenced her academic engagement.

**Example two.** Hayley had recently moved to Hamilton with her partner prior to undertaking tertiary study at the University of Waikato. As a result, she only knew one other student through socialising with her partners' friends, and described the unfamiliarity of the university environment to be academically and socially isolating.

During Hayley's time at Waikato, she had her first child, and decided to balance raising her child with her study commitments. Unfortunately Hayley had medical complications throughout and after her pregnancy, which affected her wellbeing. As a result of Hayley experiencing difficulties with her pregnancy, as well as her feelings of isolation; academic engagement with her studies suffered:

*While I was pregnant I had really bad back problems, really bad sciatica...and didn't have a normal birth...so those kind of everyday things that maybe a normal person who had a normal birth - [to] be*

*able to pick up their baby and give them a bath - was actually really hard [for me]... I think had it been I could have been like 'ok let's put down the baby and ok, let's do some study and do what I'm supposed to be doing – maybe I may have passed. Doing those everyday things, and caring for a baby, was so much harder than I thought – and trying to study at home. And being quite lonely – I'm here day in and day out, and I've got to study and run a house – it was too much for me.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at Waikato*

Hayley's experience provides two different discussions. The first involves her feelings of isolation within the university environment, which affected her academic engagement (Nikora et al., 2002). The isolation proved to be a barrier to access support within the university environment.

The second discussion point Hayley's experience raises is the impact that her medical complications (sciatica) and balancing childcare had on her academic engagement (Hunt et al., 2001). The daily tasks Hayley needed to do regarding the care of her child took time away from her studies, and understandably impacted on her academic engagement.

Other commitment factors that participants experienced leading up to the appeal (the third factors category) also contributed to participants failing more than half of their required course load, which are discussed next.

**Other commitment factors.** Participants who experienced other commitments leading up to their appeal, also discussed how these impacted on their academic engagement (lecture and tutorial attendance, as well as completion of assignments and tests). The commitment factors participants encountered leading up to the appeal included:

- socialising and establishing new relationships taking priority over study;
- being new to Hamilton and not having the social supports they were used to;

- being unprepared for university study (structure wise, and preparedness from school);
- a combination of commitments in their home lives which conflicted with their study time;
- and work commitments conflicting with study time.

These factors affected participants' ability to engage with their studies, as their time and energies were focused on trying to balance other commitments they had in their lives.

To expand further on these commitment factors, three different participant examples are presented: May, Rhaegar, and Mina.

**Example one.** May was a high school leaver, and she stated socialising and establishing new relationships was of a priority to her leading up to her appeal. As a result of May placing priority on socialising, the time needed for academic engagement suffered (completion of assignments and tests, as well as lecture attendance). May stated that her priority was on socialising because:

*Study was...just a given, I probably took it for granted that I was able to go to university...uni work was probably playing second string to [socialising] all the time.*

*May, 24; appealed in her third year at Waikato*

May's experience reflects the transition to university and the importance of socialising and finding a connection with other students, which has documented to be helpful and aided in academic success (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). May suggests that a balance is needed between socialising and engagement with studying, as she had made a financial commitment to attain her degree.

The second participant example used is Rhaegar.

*Example two.* Leading up to his first appeal, Rhaegar was living in one of the halls of residence at the University of Waikato. Due to the social nature of the halls of residence environment, Rhaegar stated that interacting with others and socialising became a commitment of his. In addition, the halls of residence environment was described as being of stark contrast to the scheduled home life he was accustomed to prior to enrolling at Waikato.

Rhaegar also suggested that the high school he attended did not teach him how to study independently (away from the structure of school hours). Consequently, Rhaegar felt that he was unable to balance the commitments he had made between socialising and his studies. In addition, Rhaegar was also employed leading up to both his first and second appeals, and discussed that his long work hours affected his ability to engage successfully in his studies:

*When you come out of a small town, first year [at university] is mostly a life of not studying; lots of drinking, partying, too much living – but added on top of that for me, [was that] I lived in such a settled life [beforehand]. School was exactly 9 to 3, you went home and there was dinner. When I got to university, I didn't know anything about life. I didn't know what it meant to juggle work with study...and to socialise with people... Life was more trying to adjust to the real world, what everyone else has to face...I was unprepared to face the actual challenges of university life.*

*Rhaegar, 25, discussing the first appeal he made in his first year at  
Waikato*

Rhaegar's experience highlights three main discussion points. The first is that participants' home lives can greatly impact on their successful academic engagement, where any disruptions can result in time and energy being taken away from their study requirements (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Williams, 2010).

The second point raised by Rhaegar pertains to secondary schooling preparation for tertiary study. His concerns were due to a lack of awareness around organisational skills, and here is where formal supports such as a learning workshops can help students.

The third point of discussion was in regards to work commitments. The late and long hours Rhaegar was required to work affected his academic engagement, particularly in regards to tutorial and lecture attendance.

Mina's experience leading up to her appeal is presented next.

**Example three.** Mina also attributed trying to balance her home life with her studies to have contributed to her needing to appeal for re-entry. A single mother of two, Mina described needing to devote time to care for her children as well as maintain a household on her own. In Mina's experience, the need to balance her home life and taking care of her children understandably took time away from her study commitments. Consequently, trying to balance all her commitments ultimately led to her failing more than half of her course requirements:

*[I have to] get the work done; get the assignments done, go home feed the kids, deal to teenage dramas (that's an added)... [As] a single mum you know... I have to learn how to juggle that.*

*Mina, 41; second appeal was successful in her third year at Waikato*

Mina's experience also highlights the importance of providing consideration towards students' social ecology as these can impact on successful academic engagement. Home lives, and caring for children understandably takes time needed for academic engagement, especially for Mina who is a sole parent.

A central theme found from participants who experienced other commitment factors was a difficulty in finding balance between those factors with their study commitments, and their personal and working lives. Although in stating balance as an important element, the purpose is not to suggest participants' individual characteristics are at fault (such as organisational skills for example). On the contrary, highlighting the difficulties of finding a balance with commitments was done in order to advocate for the importance that perceived social supports can have to alleviate these. Therefore, it was important to investigate the availability and the different types of perceived social supports that participants utilised during and after their appeal.

All three categories of factors impacted on participants' ability to successfully engage with their studies. The purpose of providing an overview of the different factors participants experienced is to highlight the impact ones' social ecology has

on academic success, as external factors can take time away from studying commitments. As a result of the factors encountered leading up to the appeal, all 13 participants failed more than half of their required course load.

Participants were notified by the University of Waikato that they had failed and were no longer eligible for automatic enrolment. Participants were informed that should they wish to continue to pursue their degree, they needed to make an appeal to re-enter.

Participants who had appealed after 2010 were sent an appeals brochure (University of Waikato, 2010). The brochure outlined both the appeal and withdrawal processes at the University of Waikato. I first highlight the participants' experiences of not being aware of the withdrawal process, and the resulting consequences for them.

## **The withdrawal process**

The withdrawal process is in place for students to drop or change papers they are enrolled in. The process can also be used as a means for students who encounter medical or compassionate factors, to discontinue study without the consequences of having a 'failed' grade on their academic record (University of Waikato, 2013a) or needing to appeal for re-entry should they wish to study in future.

The withdrawal process allows up to 11 days (from the start of the semester) for students to remove papers they have enrolled in with a full refund of fees (some conditions do apply; University of Waikato (2013a). Past the 11 day free withdrawal point, there is a 38 day opportunity for students to withdraw from papers without a refund of fees.

After the 38 days, students who have experienced exceptional circumstances can petition to their School of Study and/or the Head of Student and Academic Services for further withdrawal options. Exceptional circumstances includes medical or compassionate factors (such as illnesses or deaths), as they are acknowledged to have detrimental effects on students' studying abilities (University of Waikato, 2013c).

Medical and compassionate reasons were experienced by my research participants, and if they had of been aware of the option they could have applied to withdraw on those grounds. It was therefore important to highlight the

implications pertaining to the lack of awareness of the withdrawal process, given that Hayley and Laura may have been eligible.

Hayley and Laura both experienced medical factors leading up to their appeals (illness and depression), and discussed their lack of awareness of the withdrawal process. When Hayley read about the withdrawal process in the appeals brochure, she stated that she was not aware that she was eligible to do so. Both Hayley and Laura had thought that their extended absence in lectures would inform lecturers that they had decided to leave their studies:

*I didn't know the whole process of the uni....I didn't even know that you had to withdraw if you're not going to come the next year...I didn't know any of that. I just thought that if you're not going to come, then they just know that you're not there for the next year...I didn't know you had to withdraw from your course.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at Waikato*

Laura is a sole parent to her two children. Leading up to her appeal, she not only had childcare and study commitments, but she experienced depression. When the withdrawal process was discussed in her interview, Laura stated that she was not aware of it:

*I don't know why, but I didn't know that you had to un-enrol yourself, like I honestly thought you could just leave – you paid the money, you didn't go, [so] just leave sort of thing... I [also] didn't know you could tell them what was going on.*

*Laura, 28, appealed in her second year at Waikato*

From Hayley and Laura's experiences, it was evident that the formality and protocols involved in withdrawal process was unknown during the time they encountered their medical and compassionate factors. As a result, Hayley and Laura had to make appeals.

The purpose of highlighting the withdrawal process was to show the implications for participants' lack of awareness of the process, which consequently involved having to make an appeal. The barrier of the unawareness

of university policy and protocols for Māori students has been discussed by Nikora et al. (2002). Laura and Hayley's case of being unaware of the withdrawal process consequently resulted in both of them needing to make an appeal for re-entry.

In addition to the withdrawal process, the appeals brochure also outlined the process to gain re-entry. Participants were encouraged to do so if they wished to gain re-entry. Facing the decision of the appeal, participants described a process of contemplating their decision as well as experiencing motivations to do so.

### **The decision making process involved in making an appeal**

Participants were informed that they needed to appeal upon their decision to re-enter. Those who took a break from study (for a variety of reasons, one including taking time to reflect on degree choice) were informed of their need to appeal upon their return to the University of Waikato. For participants who did not take a break after failing, the appeal process was a decision they needed to make quickly in order to continue on to the next year of study.

Rhaegar and Jax, described a contemplation process of deciding whether or not to appeal, and needed to do so at haste if they wished to proceed to the following year of study. Contemplation of the appeal process, and thereby making the decision to address the factors that occurred leading up to the appeal, ties into the stages of change research conducted by Prochaska and Norcross (2001). There are six stages according to Prochaska and Norcross (2001) to changing one's behaviour, provided as a continuum (thereby fluid):

1. Pre-contemplation (when the individual is still enacting the behaviour).
2. Contemplation (where the individual is aware that a change needs to be made).
3. Preparation (individuals have the intention to change the behaviour, and made small steps towards doing so).
4. Action (where the individuals have modified their behaviour).
5. Maintenance (where individuals prevent relapse of their initial behaviour, and continue towards making their change).

6. Termination (where the individual has successfully changed the behaviour and intervention is no longer needed).

The contemplation stage is where individuals realise a change is needed to be made, and they may further research ways they can do so (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). The appeal process was an intervention from the University of Waikato, and was also participants' contemplation stage to change and/or address the factors that contributed to their failure (medical, compassionate or other commitments). To highlight the contemplation of the appeal, Rhaegar and Jax's experiences are presented next as examples.

***Rhaegar and Jax.*** During his time at the University of Waikato, Rhaegar had to make two appeals. The first time he appealed was due to his focus being on socialising and balancing his work commitments, and his second appeal was further contributed to by his work commitments. Rhaegar discussed a reflective process he underwent in deciding to appeal. Rhaegar reflected on his reasons for attending and studying Law initially, and considered whether or not he should continue to pursue his Law degree or to follow another study path. Rhaegar stated that attaining a tertiary qualification was his ultimate goal, but needed to decide whether Law was for him:

*I thought to myself: what passion do I have in Law; if I had one?...Does that mean I shouldn't be doing Law, should I be doing something else? Studying to me was always a bottom line; I wasn't going to drop out of university, but it was a decision of whether or not to continue with Law because I thought -well if I've failed twice, if I fail a third time then that's a whole waste of that whole programme.*

*Rhaegar, 25, discussing the second appeal he made in his third year at Waikato*

Through Rhaegar's contemplation, he decided that he wished to continue to pursue his degree and had undergone this process twice.

The second example presented is Jax, who had a time consuming work commitment which ultimately led to his failure of more than half of the required course load. Jax described that his contemplation of whether or not to appeal was due to his perception of the process formed by discussions with other students.

The appeal process was perceived to be a difficult pursuit, with only a small number of people being successful in their attempts.

Jax stated that his Māori Liaison officer emailed him prior to the appeal deadline and asked if he had made an appeal, and offered support to aid in his attempt. Jax attributed the email he received from his Māori Liaison officer as the reason for his decision to appeal:

*[From] listening to other people... I was under the impression that it was quite hard to get in [through an appeal]...and they turned down quite a lot of people, so I didn't do anything...I just thought ...they probably wouldn't have known me from a bar of soap to be honest...If they picked up my transcript...they could think 'oh well he's not really worth it'... [So]I hummed and haa'd, hummed and haa'd...didn't do anything. I honestly thought that they wouldn't accept me back... Then two days before it was due to close...I was getting all these emails from the Māori liaison officer saying 'have you done [your appeal] yet? If you need any help come and see us' ...So it was two days or a day before that I put together [the letter] ...I'm very quiet and very shy unfortunately, so I didn't go in and see [the Māori Liaison officer]. If [my Māori Liaison officer] hadn't have emailed me I probably would have left [the appeal].*

*Jax, 54, appealed in his third year at Waikato*

From Jax's experience, he expressed doubt of his worth in gaining re-entry to university because he had failed more than half of his required course load (a barrier he faced). The resulting factor of self worth described by Jax is parallel to research advocating what the importance of self-efficacy (self-belief) has on academic achievement (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Pooley & Cohen, 2010). Although an absence of self-efficacy was a barrier factor for Jax, he further stated how his Māori Liaison officer contributed as a buffer against his doubt over his worthiness to continue with his degree. Therefore the importance of having a source of social support was important for Jax regarding his decision to appeal.

Once the contemplation of participants' worthiness to study at university, and reflection of their degree choice had been made, motivations to make the appeal were another driving force in their decision.

## **Motivations to appeal**

Usually, motivations to appeal were similar to reasons for attending university initially. As these participants were in a different position having just failed, their motivators appeared to differ. These differences in motivations to appeal, included:

- desire to avoid family disappointment;
- desire to avoid being labelled as failures;
- being close to obtaining their degree;
- and desire to continue to gain their chosen degree.

Participants' whānau expectations to complete their degrees were compromised through failing more than half of their required course load, and having to make an appeal. Participants who had these whānau expectations therefore wanted to restore these and achieve their intended goals. Although it is paramount to highlight that all 13 participants decided they wished to attend university and therefore the expectations were positive contributors.

May is the first participant example presented, who discussed a supportive pressure she had from her whānau to attend and complete her tertiary qualification.

*Example one.* As the eldest grandchild, May's whānau saw potential for her to do anything she wanted to do in her life; through tertiary studies (opening more employment opportunities) this could be realised. May had previously left the University of Waikato prior to making her appeal, during which time she undertook tertiary study elsewhere as well as having worked fulltime.

May had discussions with her whānau about what it was she wanted to do with her life, and stated that an aunt of hers had suggested that studying at Waikato was something she initially wanted to pursue and should therefore return to studying. Upon returning to the University of Waikato, May was informed that she needed to appeal to re-enter. May discussed that because she had those

whānau expectations, as well as her own desire to attain the degree, making the appeal was a decision she opted for:

*I'm the eldest moko... [my whānau] expect something from me; that I should accomplish things, so I did have a lot of pressure/support from my whānau to come back [to university]... [Sometimes you have to] get the hard word from everyone else and then you have to go away and think about it...and after that, my mind was set on it.*

*May, 24, appealed in her third year at Waikato*

May's experience highlights the impact whānau expectations can have on students; they can have both positive (in May's case) or negative (as the expectations and requests can be too great; Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997). For May, she took her expectations from her whānau in a positive way and used these to make her appeal.

The next participant example is Em, who encountered family issues leading up to her first appeal which required her time and energy in order to deal with these.

**Example two.** Em had decided to take a break in her studies after encountering the factors that impacted her degree. During her time away from Waikato, Em stated that she had family pressure (in a light hearted sense) to return to studies and complete her degree, especially since she was near completion.

Em also stated that gaining her degree was a financial motivator, as attaining her degree would place her in a higher income bracket at her place of work:

*[My family] were just like 'hurry up and finish...it's shameful taking 13 years to finish' – you know the teasing. My little brother was like 'far out sis, I've finished my degree before you!' But I think for them it was like – 'oh man, you've only had one paper left to do and it's taken you 7 years to decide to go back and do it'.*

*Em, 38, discussing her second appeal in her third year at Waikato*

Em's experiences show that she did not want to be labelled as a failure having not met the requirements of automatic re-entry. Em's whānau encouraged her to complete her degree, especially since she was near completion of her studies.

**Example three.** Tama also discussed that he did not want to be labelled as a failure, and therefore decided to make an appeal:

*It was the fact that I had been there for a year and a half, and I achieved nothing; got nothing out of it ... [When] I got a letter from university saying 'you didn't pass all your papers, you've got two options: you can re-apply or here's the door, and thank you for coming - that was a reality check...It was a pride thing also getting that, like I didn't want to be a failure, so that really motivated me.*

*Tama, 25, appealed in his first year at Waikato*

Tama also touched on a consistent motivation, also reflected on by other participants, that he made an appeal in order to avoid being labelled as a failure. In addition, he wanted to attain the degree that he had set out to achieve (parallel to findings from Williams, 2010).

Mina, a fourth participant example, also stated that gaining her degree was of high importance to her.

**Example four.** Mina's determination to attain her degree was to contribute to the Māori community, and a means to empower herself with the knowledge that she would attain that degree and have knowledge of the New Zealand legal system. As such, these motivated her to make the appeal:

*Coming back to university is more about me empowering myself as a Māori woman to come back and say – 'I've completed, I've finished'....From the knowledge I gain, I can help others, in particular – my own people, just to help them through the system really....I knew there was potential in what I could offer from coming back here, to continue with that study.*

*Mina, 41; second appeal was successful in her third year at Waikato*

Mina touches on having a sense of empowerment in studying Law, and how she intended to help Māori. Therefore making the appeal to gain her degree was not only important for Mina's personal interest, but also for the other people she aspired to help in the future.

As a result of these motivations (avoiding family disappointment and being labelled as failures) and wanting to gain their degrees, all 13 participants decided to appeal and continue to pursue their degrees. The decision to make the appeal was not an easy one, as participants described needing to reflect on their choice of study, as well as their suitability in the field.

Participants described further reflecting on their decisions to initially attend university and how these motivated them to appeal. The motivations to appeal ranged from increased employment opportunities, through to contributing to an increased wellbeing for their whānau/hapū/Iwi.

## **Chapter summary**

The factors participants' encountered leading up to the appeal varied. The medical and compassionate factors that are applicable for compassionate consideration as outlined by the University of Waikato (deaths, illness, or other unforeseen factors; 2013c), were more likely to be able to be proved through documentation and were also used to strengthen participants' appeals.

Factors that were not under the premise of compassionate consideration were harder to promote and defend; such as other commitment factors which influenced students' study abilities (maintaining households, caring for children, work, and social factors). All of these factors influenced students' abilities to engage with their studies at hand and resulted in having to appeal.

Once the appeal process was known to participants after learning that they had failed, they needed to consider whether the appeal was for them, or not. Motivations which aided in the decision to appeal included: attainment of their degree (for themselves, for their whānau, or for their hapū/Iwi/wider community), avoiding disappointment, and being labelled as failures.

In the next chapter participants' experiences with the appeal process, and the additional social supports they utilised, are discussed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DURING THE APPEAL**

This chapter presents the time period from participants submission of their appeal letter, through to the point where they were successful in doing so. First, the appeal process is outlined to provide a context for participants experience in making their appeal. Secondly, the perceived social supports to which participants had access are presented. Thirdly, the barriers experienced by participants during their appeal are discussed and conclude this chapter.

### **The appeal process**

As mentioned in Chapter Three, participants who appealed from 2010 onwards were given a brochure outlining the appeals process (University of Waikato, 2010). Participants who had appealed prior to 2010 did not receive the appeals brochure, and had raised concerns over having a lack of clarity of the appeals process.

Participants who had appealed from 2010 onwards described the process to be straightforward, as the appeals brochure outlined who and what was involved (University of Waikato, 2010). According to post 2010 appellants, the provision of the appeals brochure had successfully addressed concerns made regarding the lack of clarity of the appeals process.

To make an appeal, the brochure informed students that they needed to submit a letter to the Dean of their School of Study. Failing to gain re-entry from their Dean, students could submit an amended appeal letter (addressing concerns made by their Deans) to the Admission Appeals Committee (AAC). Figure 3 outlines the appeals process and the different types of enrolment statuses (automatic re-entry or ineligible).

## THE PROCESS

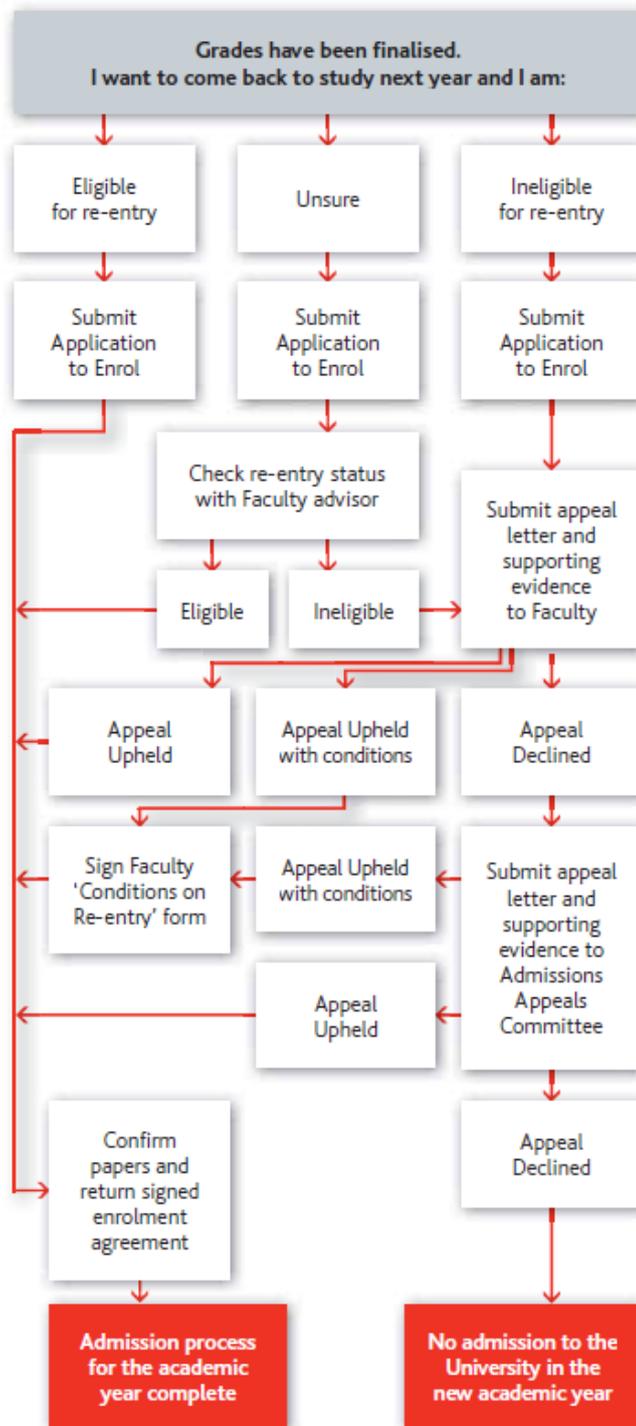


Figure 3. The appeals process. From *Re-entry for returning students: The appeal process*, the University of Waikato, 2010, Retrieved from <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/sas/files/pdf/AdmissionAppealsBrochure.pdf>. Reprinted with permission.

Participants who were ineligible for automatic re-entry had to draft and submit an appeal letter. The letter required participants to disclose what factors contributed to their failure, and to also nominate strategies to reduce and address these factors. An example of a participant's appeal letter is shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

*An example of a participant's appeal letter*

| Letter content  | Details within the letter  |
|---|--|
| <p>Dear Sir,</p> <p>I have made a number of mistakes this year as far as my study/work balance was concerned. I cannot and will not make excuses for my failures.</p> <p>I have needed to work to pay my way through my papers last year but this year I have parental support in this area. This being the case my study output will be so much higher as it needs to be and my outside work will be minimal.</p> <p>I will make sure more use of my academic advisor **** * and my mentor **. I have also engaged the services of a life skills coach to help me with issues that may arise. I will also make full use of the student centre with my assignments.</p> <p>I do know that I badly let myself down and I am please asking that I be given this opportunity knowing it will be my one and only to continue with a degree that I have a passion for and know in years to come will make a contribution to the law and society.</p> | <p>Factors that occurred</p> <p>Nominated strategies to overcome factors, which includes the use of formal and informal support.</p> |

The example of an appeal letter highlights the factors that occurred for the participant leading up to their appeal (work commitments). In addition, the letter nominates strategies in place to reduce those factors, such as reduced work hours, financial support from informal sources, and more uptake of formal services. Utilising formal support was a common strategy nominated by participants, and was also encouraged in the appeals brochure (University of Waikato, 2010).

When discussions were had regarding the perceived social supports utilised, a noticeable distinction could be made between formal and informal sources. Within the category of informal support a further distinction could be made between sources who had gained experience within, and were knowledgeable of, the university environment.

Informal sources who were knowledgeable and had experienced the university environment came to be valuable for participants who were related or had befriended them. These experienced informal sources came to have knowledge of university policies and protocols having been in a formal role at the University of Waikato themselves, or because they had studied previously. Due to their experience and intimate knowledge of the processes and protocols at Waikato, participants who utilised these informal sources had beneficial support for their appeal.

Table 5 outlines which participants accessed what types of support category. Participants have been placed in either category, depending on the discussions they had regarding different sources. For example, Hayley discussed having an instrumental source of informal support. In addition, Hayley also discussed having support from a formal group at Waikato. Therefore, Hayley appears in both categories depending on the source she utilised.

Table 5.

*Social support categories*

| <b>Informal</b>   | <b>Formal</b>  |
|---|--|
| <u>Em:</u><br>Whānau, friends and her significant other.                      | <u>Rhaegar:</u><br>Māori Liaison officer.                                    |
| <u>Hana:</u><br>Whānau and friends.   | <u>Robin:</u><br>Māori mentor, and utilisation of learning workshops.        |
| <u>Mina:</u><br>Whānau and friends.   | <u>Jax:</u><br>Māori Liaison officer, and utilisation of learning workshops. |
| <u>Wyn:</u><br>Whānau, friends, and her significant other.                    | <u>Hayley:</u><br>Waiora (Māori student association).                        |
| <u>Maia:</u><br>Whānau, in addition to a relative who was working at Waikato. | <u>Laura:</u><br>Te Ranga Ngaku (the Māori Management Student Network).      |
| <u>Tama:</u><br>Whānau, as well as a relative who was working at Waikato.     |  |
| <u>Rhaegar:</u><br>Whānau and significant other.                              |  |
| <u>Mon:</u><br>Whānau and friends who had studied before her.                 |  |
| <u>May:</u><br>Whānau, as well as a relative who worked at Waikato.           |  |
| <u>Hayley:</u><br>Whānau, and a friend who worked at Waikato.                 |  |
| <u>Laura:</u><br>Whānau   |  |
| <u>Robin:</u><br>Māori mentor, and utilisation of learning workshops.         |  |
| <u>Jax:</u><br>Whānau , friends and employer.                                 |  |

Both informal and formal categories of social support are discussed next, and are highlighted by participant experiences.

**Perceived informal social supports.** Informal sources of social supports that participants used were from their whānau, friends, significant others, and also from networks within the university environment (discussed later). Ways in which informal sources aided participants included:

- drafting the appeal letter;
- asking people in their network to provide character references for participants;
- and providing encouragement and motivation to appeal (sometimes the motivation was brought about by the wish to avoid disappointing social supports).

To highlight the benefits from utilising informal supports, I present Hana and Wyn's experiences next.

**Example one.** Hana stated that her whānau aided her appeal process through help with forming and drafting her appeal letter, and with further encouragement and self-belief that she could do so successfully. Hana went so far as to describe the appeal process as a 'whānau effort', as her whānau had utilised their social networks to provide her with character references:

*When [I was notified that I had to appeal] I sat my parents down and said I didn't get back into uni, and I told them why...[I told them] I need to do, this, this and this, [and asked] do you guys have any ideas?' They said "you need character references", so...mates of theirs [who are business people, gave]... character references – it was like a whānau thing [getting prepared for the appeal]... When I got the [successful appeal] letter; it was a whānau effort to get back into uni.*

*Hana, 21; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

Hana's experience of her whānau support is positive as they helped her navigate the appeal process through providing advice, the drafting of her appeal, as well as the use of their social network to reach out to colleagues to ask them to provide her with character references. Hana's parent's utilisation of their social networks to gain resources (in this case, character references), embodies the

concept of accessing one's social capital (Ferlander, 2007; Heaney & Israel, 2008). The availability and use of social capital was beneficial for Hana's appeal, as she had written support from people in her chosen field of study to advocate for her ability and worthiness to continue to study at Waikato.

The second participant example used to highlight whānau support (as well as significant other support) is Wyn.

**Example two.** During Wyn's time at the University of Waikato, she had made two appeals. Leading up to her first appeal, Wyn was living in a hall of residence and had tried to balance her socialising and work commitments with her studies. As a result of these factors, Wyn failed more than half of her required course load, and also made her first successful appeal for re-entry.

Leading up to Wyn's second successful appeal, she had been diagnosed with a relatively new illness which affected her wellbeing and the time she needed to engage with her studies, thus resulting in her failing more than half of her required course load.

Through both of Wyn's appeals, she discussed having support from her partner (who also made appeals at the same time), and her whānau (her father helped her outline her appeal letter, and her mother always provided encouragement). Additionally, Wyn had also had previous writing experience which strengthened her motivation to appeal. Although Wyn had support from whānau and her partner, she described the appeal process as scary due to the uncertainty of what her Dean's decision would be, concerning her appeals:

*Because I'm a mature student I knew how to write letters, I knew how to push my case...I made sure I wrote a really good letter... but it was scary and it was hard...my husband and I were both doing [the appeal at the same time], and that kind of helped having someone there...I did [also] get a little bit of help from my dad [who is a manager] – he knew about letters, and he knew how to set them out properly, so I did have that kind of help with him (how to do this and bold, and the paragraphs)...things that I wasn't too familiar with at that stage... my mum was [also] behind me going 'go for it, just fight' – so she was always a positive influence.*

*Wyn, 33, discussing her first appeal in her first year at Waikato*

Wyn's experience again highlights the positive result of whānau support (from practical through to emotional), which contributed to her successful appeal - reflective of Williams' findings regarding informal support (2010). Furthermore, utilisation of informal support provided a buffer for Wyn's fear of having an unsuccessful appeal verdict.

Within the category of informal sources of support, a further distinction could be made between participants who had direct support from whānau members or friends who worked at the university or had studied previously.

Participants who utilised informal sources who were experienced with the university system described having had a quick and easy appeal. The reasons participants felt an ease in making their appeal was due to their informal source who had knowledge of what to disclose in their appeal letter, and which formal sources of support to access for further help (such as counselling; doctors, or mentors for examples).

In addition, these informal sources also provided:

- Encouragement to retrieve supporting documents for the factors they encountered (such as medical certificates).
- References for participants to use in support of their appeal.

Participants who had access to these experienced informal sources were at a distinct advantage, given their relationship with these sources and their sources inside knowledge of university processes. The ways in which participants had an advantage are presented next, using Hayley and Tama as examples.

***Example one.*** Hayley's experienced informal source was a friend who worked at the University of Waikato at the time of her appeal. For Hayley's initial appeal she did not utilise her friends support. For her second appeal, Hayley asked her friend to help her, and she did so by:

- drafting the appeal letter;
- advising Hayley to ask for written documentation of the difficulties she faced post pregnancy (gained from the Student Counselling services);
- and writing a character reference to support her appeal.

Hayley stated that her friend supported her through the appeal because she had confidence in Hayley's abilities, and also knew it was her goal to attain her degree:

*At that time [my friend] was working here [at university] so I think that supported [my appeal] as well...She's the only one that helped me and said 'this is what you need to do' ... make an appointment at the counsellor [and] I'll write you a support letter [because] I know that you want to do this, I know that you are capable – so I will support you.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at  
Waikato*

Hayley attributed the success of her second appeal to her friend, as she was advised and supported in making a strong appeal letter, advising her to gain supporting documentation, and provided her with a character reference. Because of the support from her friend, Hayley's second appeal was successful.

Tama also utilised an informal source of support who worked at the University of Waikato.

**Example two.** Tama was living away from home for the first time leading up to his appeal. Due to the newness of living on his own, Tama described having difficulties maintaining a household, and balancing his studies. In addition, Tama described the course content to be relatively easy as he had learnt most of it at his high school, and therefore was not fully engaged. As a result of the factors mentioned beforehand, Tama failed more than half of his required course load.

After having decided to appeal Tama had perceived support from a relative who was working at the University of Waikato. Tama stated that accessing his relative was easier and more preferred than accessing other formal support because they were whānau, and were always there to support him when needed. Furthermore, Tama stated that accessing his whānau member took away his feelings of being whakamā, as well as the fear that his peers would discover that he had failed:

*[It was probably just being] Whakamā...it was easier to confide in my own [family member who] already knew the steps...than [the Māori mentors and Liaison officers]... I didn't really want too many people to know; because sometimes the student support people...are students...most of them are master's students... [and] they're the same age as me, so I didn't really want to confide to them.*

*Tama, 25, appealed in his first year at Waikato*

Tama's experience also highlights the benefits of having an experienced informal source, in that their relationship created an ease in accessing the sources support. Having personal access to an informative support person, which also mirrors findings from Jefferies (1997) and Williams (2010), can help students navigate the university environment (in terms of knowledge of policies and protocols).

In addition to the ease associated with accessing whānau members for support, Tama also discussed how doing so counteracted the shyness and/or embarrassment (whakamā) associated with asking for help (Hunt et al., 2001; Jefferies, 1997; Nikora et al., 2002; Rua & Nikora, 1999). Additionally, through accessing informal support, Tama described avoiding his fear of peers (particularly those in a formal mentor role) judging and potentially discussing his failure with others.

The shame associated with accessing support and the perceived stigma felt in having failed, was an important finding to highlight. The feeling of stigmatisation can be narrowly defined as exclusion or blame from another person/s (Weiss, Ramakrishna, & Somma, 2006). As a result, feeling stigmatised and ashamed at having failed acted as a barrier for Tama in the utilisation his Māori mentors within his School of Study.

Although the utilisation of whānau and other informal supports are highlighted to be of positive influence, previous research (Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997) suggests that there may be costs in doing so (the double edged nature of their support).

*Costs associated with the utilisation of perceived informal support.* Through the utilisation of informal social support, participants were exposed to expectations and possible obligations. The obligations participants experienced (which were not always associated through utilisation of their support) ranged from expectations to attend events (hui for example) as well as to tasks being assigned (having to draft reports, in Maia's case).

Participants who faced obligations and expectations from whānau stated that they tried to maintain a balance between these and their studying commitments, parallel to findings from Williams' (2010) research participants.

For participants who utilised informal support who were knowledgeable of the appeal process, their perceived expectations were greater. The reason for participants having a greater perceived expectation was due to their sources direct knowledge of:

- participants' progression through their studies;
- what participants had outlined in their appeal letters;
- and the strategies participants nominated to overcome the factors they encountered leading up to their appeal (such as reducing work hours).

Participants who had an experienced and knowledgeable source therefore had greater perceived expectations to be academically successful, given their sources instrumental aid in their appeal.

The last category of perceived social supports utilised by participants were formal sources.

**Perceived formal social supports.** Participants discussed having knowledge of the many different formal supports throughout the University of Waikato (outlined previously in Chapter Three), however few were nominated as utilised by participants. The formal supports utilised by the participants (outlined in Table 5) included: Māori Liaison officers, the Student Counselling Service, lecturers, and other Administrative staff.

Formal sources of support aided participants in similar ways to those nominated for informal sources, with the addition of gaining knowledgeable information pertaining to the appeal process. Outcomes of formal supports utilised included:

- advice on the process of the appeal and how to do so (what to include and exclude from their appeal letter);
- advice on where to seek further help (student counselling services for example);
- provision of encouragement to appeal;
- provision of character references (for Rhaegar specifically);
- and/or provision of references for the factors that occurred (specifically from the Student Counselling services and other medical professionals).

Formal supports were helpful during the appeal in an advisory and/or as a reference (such as providing formal documented proof that participants had experienced the factors they nominated in their appeal letters, or attesting to students' character). Participants who utilised the Student Counselling services (Hayley, Laura and Em) were satisfied with the aid they received. Reasons for their satisfaction was not only because they received help with their personal factors, but also from the provision of supporting documentation from these sources for their appeal (medical certificates or letters).

As there were different formal sources nominated as having been utilised by participants, I have chosen to highlight support provided by Māori Liaison officers. Jax's experience with utilising his Māori Liaison officer has been discussed previously in Chapter Three (where she emailed and encouraged him to appeal).

As Jax had discussed being whakamā (translated as shy and/or embarrassed in my thesis) with regards to seeking out formal sources (a barrier for him), the direct approach his Māori Liaison officer took in contacting him directly helped him feel supported and motivated to make his appeal. Another two participant examples of utilisation of Māori Liaison officers are presented next.

***Example two.*** Rhaegar stated that he approached his Māori Liaison officer at his School of Study to ask for advice with his appeal. In addition to helping Rhaegar with his appeal letter, his Māori Liaison officer also offered to provide a character reference:

*[My Māori liaison officer] proved to be a great help...by providing a letter to the Dean saying 'yes I support him, he's done well'.*

*Rhaegar, 25, discussing the first appeal he made in his first year at Waikato*

Rhaegar stated that his Māori Liaison officer's provision of his character reference resulted in him feeling supported with his appeal, as well as strengthening his appeal application.

Robin also discussed having utilised her Māori Liaison officer, and her experience is presented next.

**Example three.** Prior to Robin's appeal, she was enrolled at a different School to the one she is currently with. During Robin's first area of study, she discussed trying to balance other commitments (work and socialising) with her academic engagement. Unfortunately Robin's commitments (or external factors) affected her studies, and she had failed more than half of her required course load. Robin then took a break from her studies, but later returned and enrolled in a different area of study. In order to gain re-entry, Robin was told that she needed to appeal.

Before Robin's appeal, she approached her Māori Liaison officer to seek advice on how she should go about appealing:

*[My Māori liaison officer] gave very good advice; that I needed to get these things, like time management sorted, [that] I need to get my priorities sorted...and to get that appeal letter in.*

*Robin, 22; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

Robin's experience with utilising her Māori Liaison officer was also positive as she was given advice on how to address the factors she had encountered leading up to the appeal. Participants who utilised support from formal support, particularly Māori Liaison officers, were satisfied with the aid they had received.

Although all 13 participants utilised some category of perceived social support from informal and/or formal sources, they also discussed perceived barriers (or difficulties) experienced during their appeal. Barriers have been highlighted next, done so to re-iterate how social supports can act as a buffer and help to overcome these.

## Perceived barriers during the appeal

During participants' interviews, one of the questions asked of them was in regards to barriers experienced throughout the appeal. As part of my analysis of interviews, the barriers (or difficulties) perceived during their appeals are presented. The appeal barriers varied, ranging from difficulties experienced with the appeals process itself, through to a hesitance to access a formal support. More specifically, perceived barriers included:

- Questioning how to structure and format of their appeal letters.
- Disclosing the factors they had encountered (leading up to the appeal) in their letters.
- The wait time to get the appeal decision.
- Accessing of staff towards the Christmas/summer break.
- Difficulty in gathering supporting documents from medical professionals (particularly for Hana).

Due to the variability of barriers experienced by participants, I have chosen to highlight two in this section: disclosure of the factors participants encountered leading up to the appeal, and the time wait involved to hear of their appeal decision.

**Barrier one: disclosing the factors participants encountered.** One barrier experienced by Maia during her appeal was in disclosing the factors she experienced. Leading up to her appeal, Maia experienced many different factors. Maia had work and commitments to aid her hapū in projects they were undertaking (she contributed by drafting reports and attending hui).

Additionally, Maia also encountered compassionate factors as she was supporting a close friend who was experiencing personal issues (which she preferred I not disclose here). As a result of Maia's commitments and support of her friend, her own wellbeing and capacity to engage with her studies suffered.

As a result of the personal nature of the factors Maia encountered (regarding her friend), she described a hesitance in disclosing them in her appeal letter:

*I felt like I couldn't be honest and include the personal stuff as it didn't seem like the environment where I could share it.*

*Maia, 27; appealed in her second year at Waikato*

Maia discussed a barrier in nominating the factors she experienced, as she did not feel it was a safe environment to do so. The reason Maia felt this way was due to the formality of the appeals process, as her letter would be shown to the Dean of her School of Study. It is important to highlight this barrier in nominating factors as a means to forewarn future appellants in case they feel this way. In addition, the barrier in discussing factors can also provide a possible reason why Māori students may not make an appeal.

Luckily Maia had advice from a relative who worked at Waikato. Her whānau member advised her on the amount of information she would need to disclose in her appeal in order for it to be successful. The amount of information Maia then placed in her letter was in regards to the other commitments she had (particularly work).

Once participants had submitted their appeal letters, they were then left to wait in anticipation of the decision of the Dean and/or the AAC. Participants who discussed having to wait to gain their appeal decision described this as a barrier.

**Barrier two: time taken to receive appeal outcome.** Typically, participants who appealed in December experienced a two month time delay in receiving their outcome (successful or declined). Participants who experienced this time delay described it as a barrier because they were uncertain on what to plan for in the future; whether to continue study or to find employment. Maia for example discussed this time delay barrier:

*I didn't know if I was back in... and didn't know what to plan for.*

*Maia, 27; appealed in her second year at Waikato*

Furthermore, Rhaegar stated that because of the two month wait, he felt there was not sufficient time to organise himself for the new academic year:

*By the time they got back to you, I think it was like three weeks before we started... all I had time to do was organise my year...and then I was straight into uni.*

*Rhaegar, 25, discussing the first appeal he made in his first year at  
Waikato*

As a result of the wait, Rhaegar stated that he felt that there was not enough time for him to prepare for his academic engagement upon his re-entry. This barrier has been highlighted to acknowledge the implications of the waiting period (participants feeling uneasy and having little time to prepare for the new year), and to also inform future appellants of this.

## **Chapter summary**

Participants who received the appeals brochure found the appeal process to be straightforward. The feeling of ease was partly due to the brochure outlining what was expected of students, and also suggested where to go for extra support.

The appeals process also went well for participants as they utilised some form of support (informal, or formal). Participants who utilised informal sources of support were satisfied with their help, as they provided aid in letter drafting, reference seeking, and emotional support (for examples). Participants who utilised informal sources who had intimate knowledge of university protocols were satisfied with their support, and described having an easy appeal due to their experienced source. As a result, participants felt supported whilst managing their anxiety in waiting to find out the outcome of their appeal.

Although informal support was positive and beneficial to participants' appeals, they also discussed having perceived costs associated in doing so. One resulting expectation was for participants to be academically engaged post appeal.

Participants who utilised formal sources of support stated that they were satisfied with the aid they received pertaining to the appeal. This included gaining advice, letter drafting, and provision of character references as examples.

Although social supports aided participants through their appeal, barriers and difficulties were also experienced and noticed (letter writing and time delay in gaining their appeal decision, as examples). Even though these barriers were experienced, all 13 participants were successful with their appeals.

In the following Chapter (Five), I present participants' experiences after gaining their successful appeal, in addition to their process of academic engagement upon re-entry.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: AFTER THE APPEAL**

Once participants were informed that their appeal had been successful, they began the process of re-engagement. The process of re-engagement stemmed largely from the strategies they nominated in their appeal letter (such as utilisation of formal support at Waikato). The outline of this chapter is as follows:

- Participants' plans for re-entry are presented (those strategies nominated in their appeal letter).
- The perceived social supports utilised by participants are discussed.
- The concept of resilience and participants' appeal experiences are discussed.
- The barriers to utilising formal support systems are presented.
- Participants' advice to future appellants.

### **Participants' plans for re-entry**

Upon re-entry, 11 participants continued with the same initial degree in which they were enrolled prior to appealing. The other two participants enrolled in different degrees: Hayley who enrolled in Te Tohu Paetahi (a specialised Māori language course), and Robin whose study interests had changed. As part of participants' re-engagement with their initial degree, they had to re-enrol in the compulsory papers they had failed in order to work towards completion of their degree. Degree completion was the goal for all 13 participants.

Each School of Study at the University of Waikato has different degree requirements, but two generic examples of a three (Table 6) and four (Table 7) year degree are provided below.

Table 6

*Structure of a three year degree; an example*

| <b>Year 1</b>                          | <b>Year 2</b>                          | <b>Year 3</b>                 |
|--|--|-------------------------------|
| 100 LEVEL<br>Supporting subject papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major          | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Supporting subject papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major          | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major          | 200 LEVEL<br>Papers for Major |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           | 200 LEVEL<br>Supporting subject papers | 300 LEVEL<br>Elective papers  |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           | 200 LEVEL<br>Supporting subject papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Elective papers  |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           | 200 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           | 300 LEVEL<br>Elective papers  |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           |  |                               |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers           |  |                               |
| 120 Points                             | 120 Points                             | 120 Points                    |

*Note. Adapted from Bachelor of Social Sciences, The University of Waikato, Retrieved from <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/study/qualifications/bsocsc.shtml>*

Table 7

*Structure of a four year degree; an example*

| <b>Year 1</b>                  | <b>Year 2</b>                  | <b>Year 3</b>                  | <b>Year 4</b>                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 100 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 300 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 300 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 300 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 200 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 300 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   | 200 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   | 300 LEVEL<br>Compulsory papers | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   | 200 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers   | 400 LEVEL<br>Optional papers |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   |                                |                                |                              |
| 100 LEVEL<br>Elective papers   |                                |                                |                              |
| 120 Points                     | 120 Points                     | 120 Points                     | 120 Points                   |

*Note. Adapted from Bachelor of Laws, The University of Waikato, Retrieved from <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/study/qualifications/lb.shtml>*

Participants who mapped out their intended goals upon re-entry described this as encompassing paper selection (necessary for degree completion as shown in tables 6 and 7), as well as re-enrolling in compulsory papers they had initially failed.

Upon Tama's re-entry, he mapped out his degree plan which he stated was highly beneficial for his academic engagement. The reason mapping his goal was beneficial was because Tama could see what he needed to do in order to achieve his qualification:

*[By drafting] a good goal...you could see there was a finish line at the end of it, so that was really motivating...and there was a light at the end, where in my first few years there wasn't really a light at the end of the tunnel.*

*Tama, 25, appealed in his first year at Waikato*

In Tama's experience with mapping his study path (paper selection) resulted in an additional motivation to attain his degree, reflected in Bandura's (1993) discussion that doing so can be beneficial for goal attainment.

After participants' paper selection and formal re-enrolment were completed, they discussed having to implement the strategies they nominated in their appeal letters. These strategies were constructed as a means to address the factors participants initially encountered leading up to their appeal (in order to become re-engaged academically).

With the exception of Jax (who had committed himself to increased work hours prior to having a successful appeal), all other participants found ways to implement their strategies to balance and address the factors they experienced prior to their appeal. The factors participants experienced pertained to the categories of medical, compassionate and other commitments.

The strategies participants employed to address their factors included:

- Seeking medical advice and/or utilising the Student Counselling services.
- Reducing work hours and socialising time.
- Utilisation of their perceived social supports - both informal and formal sources.

The ways in which participants addressed the factors they encountered varied depending on the nature of these, as one off events were more straightforward to address than re-occurring commitments (such as child care). For example, participants who had experienced medical factors leading up to their appeal sought aid from medical practitioners in order to address these. In comparison, participants who had other commitments leading up to their appeal implemented strategies to balance their commitments (for example, Maia decided to reduce her work hours in order to re-engage with her studies).

A consistent strategy participants nominated in order to be academically engaged included the increased utilisation of support from both informal and formal sources. The nomination of additional support was interesting to note, as participants had placed importance of having and utilising supports available to them. To provide a context for the ways in which participants addressed their

factors, four participant examples are presented next: Hana, Hayley, May, and Mon. For an overview of all participants' strategies implemented, see Appendix E.

**Example one.** After her appeal, Hana overcame the breakup she experienced from her partner, and also sought medical help to address her medical illness. As a result, Hana stated that she became academically engaged:

*[I am] definitely in a better head space this year; like my doctors are all like sorting stuff out, and I have a good home situation as well. So studying is good, generally good... [School staff also] limited the amount of points I could do this year... so that was alright.*

*Hana, 21; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

Hana's experience highlights the benefits of utilising formal support for her academic engagement. The utilisation of medical practitioners (who were external to the university doctors) helped Hana to increase her overall wellbeing, which in turn allowed for her to apply energy into her studies. In addition, Hana's home environment was stable, which again allowed her to be academically engaged. Therefore, Hana experienced an increased sense of wellbeing and better health through her utilisation of perceived social supports (Stephens et al., 2011).

**Example two.** Hayley had experienced many factors leading up to the appeal, which included: medical complications pre and post pregnancy, being a new mother, and feeling isolated in a new city. Hayley's strategies to address her factors (those of a medical nature) and her commitments (raising her child) involved utilising formal support (Student Counselling services) as well as taking the offers of support given by her partner's family (to babysit whilst she studied).

*[It has] been way better studying this year...and [I] have more support now... [from] my mother-in-law, and my son is in Day care.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at  
Waikato*

Furthermore, because of Hayley's degree choice, she enrolled in Te Tohu Paetahi (TTP) after her appeal. Hayley stated that the TTP environment was friendly and socially inclusive, and as a result she had more perceived social

support from her peers. Encouragement from her peers prompted Hayley to also participate in Waiora (a Māori students' association), which gave her more opportunities to network with other students:

*When I first started here I didn't know anyone... But now [that I'm in TTP] there's other people and you kind of get to talking...with them around uni, and you find out [stuff about your course] ...I've opened up to a lot more things since I've been [in TTP], like Waiora (The Māori students' association)... [My friend] is in Waiora...she said come along...Had it not been for her, I probably wouldn't have really...known where it was or how to go about it, I would have never gone to look for it for myself...I think [Waiora is] a cool way for new students coming to uni to get involved...It's a cool little network to be able to meet people and say 'oh I'm in FASS, but I want to go to teaching – what's it like over there? Who do I go to?' – That's how you kind of get to meet other people...So I just feel a lot better, and I'm in a better head space.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at Waikato*

Hayley praised TTP and Waiora for their friendly, inviting and informative environments. The people involved with both groups became Hayley's friends and whānau units of support (Walker, 2006) as they had the same interests and wanted to support each other with their study.

Hayley's experience also touches on the approach that both TTP and Waiora provide for Māori students, where they have created a space to establish rapport and build relationships to support students (whakawhanaungatanga). Both of the formal sources were highly beneficial for Hayley, and provided her with feelings of social belonging (Wilcox et al., 2005) and connectedness through whakawhanaungatanga (Masters et al., 2004).

From the utilisation of TTP and Waiora, Hayley's feelings of being isolated beforehand have since been addressed. The implications of Hayley's experiences suggest that appropriate formal sources which appeal to Māori students who prefer a collective environment for support (like Waiora and TTP), can aid in students' feelings of social inclusiveness and overall academic engagement.

Appropriate formal supports who are inviting and responsive to Māori students learning and supportive needs, reflects previous research which has linked this support to students academic engagement (Nikora et al., 2002; Rua & Nikora, 1999).

*Example three.* Leading up to May's appeal, she had placed socialising as a high priority. May then took a break from Waikato University after experiencing her factors (in which time she undertook study at two different institutes), and had reflected on what she wanted to study in the future.

After returning to Waikato, and having successfully appealed, May stated that she was motivated and goal driven. As a result, May stated she had placed high priority on her academic engagement:

*I was here to finish, and that was the goal; there was nothing that was going to get in the way of it...[and] I think I felt a bit luckier to be here as well...[and]because I've been doing it properly [by] going to all my classes, and reading all my readings, and doing all my work.*

*May, 24; appealed in her third year at Waikato*

Post appeal, May placed high priority on her studies. Through her engagement, May committed her time and energy towards academic engagement, seen through her lecture attendance and study preparation (for examples). As a result of May's successful academic engagement, she has since completed her degree.

Through participants' commitment to re-engage with their studies after their appeal, they all described the process to be a motivator as they were aware it was a possible last chance for them to complete their degree (a goal for all 13 participants). Participants, such as May, stated that they were more determined and committed to their studies after their appeal.

For others, such as Maia, it also acted as a heavy burden to achieve. Maia for example stated that the appeal "*is constantly in the back of your mind*", given the premise that it may have been her last opportunity to attain her degree. Therefore Maia had an increased expectation on herself to achieve more than half of her required course load.

The implications of being goal driven (particularly in regards to degree attainment), and the process of addressing the factors that occurred leading up to the appeal, provided a basis of what successful re-engagement entailed for participants. The process of addressing those factors (particularly those who sought and utilised perceived social supports) highlights resilience displayed by participants, discussed later in this chapter. The last participant example presented next, is Mon.

*Example four.* Mon had experienced a death in her whānau leading up to her appeal, and as a result took leave from Waikato to pursue other study interests and career opportunities. Mon returned to Waikato 12 years later in order to complete her intended degree, during which time she left once more to undertake full time employment. Unfortunately, Mon did not withdraw from her papers at that time, and upon her return to Waikato, she needed to appeal to gain re-entry.

After Mon's successful appeal, she discussed the concept of manaakitanga (a basic definition is the concept of supporting others). Manaakitanga not only contributed to her successful academic engagement post appeal, but Mon suggested that it could potentially help other Māori students to do so.

Mon described manaakitanga as supporting others through meeting one's own commitments (contrary to the selflessness involved in a basic definition of the concept). She employed two examples to explain manaakitanga. The first pertained to group assignments, where the completion of your own work supports and meets commitments made to other students (who rely on you for their overall grade).

The second example to help explain manaakitanga was an in-flight oxygen mask analogy. Flight attendants tell passengers to place their oxygen masks on first before helping those in their care. By doing so, it ensures both passengers are safe rather than just one or neither passenger.

The concept of placing your own needs (therefore putting ones oxygen mask on first) may be difficult when practising manaakitanga, as this may involve having to say no to requests made by significant others. But Mon suggested manaakitanga is a necessary requirement for Māori students who have expectations and obligations:

*For me my first cultural obligation, in terms of what it means to be Māori, is that we're all brought up very strongly under manaakitanga... it's taking care of that person, and it's also taking care of yourself so that you aren't having a butterfly effect on everybody else around you... You don't stop being Māori at all [being a student] ... but you actually have to, at some point, say to yourself 'I have to learn to say no' ... I'm not saying it's easy.*

*Mon, 40, appealed twice in her first and third year at Waikato*

Mon's take on the concept of manaakitanga is important to highlight, especially for students who face having to complete study requirements when cultural obligations arise. In addition, Mon also discussed Māori students having an obligation to help one another. Previous research by Moeke-Pickering (1996) and Williams (2010) state that one's place within whānau/hapū/Iwi, and the cultural obligations that ensue, contribute to a Māori cultural identity. Therefore meeting cultural obligations and expectations are important for Māori students who have these.

Jefferies (1997) and Masters (1997) have noted that the obligations and requests made by whānau can be a doubled edge sword for Māori students. While cultural obligations and expectations can be part of students' identities, meeting requirements can also take time away from students' academic engagement. Mon's take on manaakitanga is important to highlight as a means to reduce the concept of a double edged sword from whānau, and provide another means for students to successfully re-engage with their studies.

Although Mon highlighted that practicing manaakitanga was no easy task, she advocated that it is a necessary concept for successful academic engagement. To facilitate manaakitanga, Mon suggested that further perceived social supports can aid in balancing obligations and commitments. When cultural obligations arose for Mon, she had the strategy to make the necessary arrangements in order to meet her study commitments; whether this encompassed completion of assignments well ahead of time, or the utilisation of formal support (for example, asking lecturers for extensions of assignment deadlines).

In addition to participants implementing their own strategies to be academically engaged, there were typical conditions for re-entry set out by their respective Schools of study. These conditions included:

- regular attendance at learning workshops;
- regular communication with Māori Liaison officers to check up on their academic progress;
- and the understanding that this may be their last chance to complete their degree, as the likelihood of being successful in another appeal is significantly reduced.

The abovementioned conditions re-enforced the importance of the utilisation of formal supports at the University of Waikato, and mirrors the strategies participants had after re-entry. Jax, for example, nominated use of both his academic advisor and mentor.

An outline of the perceived social supports utilised by participants after their appeal are presented next, in order to showcase how these aided their academic engagement.

### **Perceived social supports utilised after the appeal**

The perceived social supports that participants utilised during their appeal (informal and formal sources) continued to be useful after their appeal, as they had perceived these to be satisfactory (Stewart, 1989). Wyn for example, had support from her family during and after her appeal.

Wyn's family continued to encourage her to be academically engaged, and in addition provided financial support. One of the strategies Wyn nominated in her appeal letter was to reduce her work hours, which she did, and could do so through instrumental support from her whānau :

*I had a part time job which was really hard to deal with, [but had to] because we just didn't have the funds. I was lucky that my mother and father helped me out...So [after the appeal] I cut down my hours, and only had [work on] the weekends – it was ok; got to sacrifice something... [to] get me to my goal [completing my degree].*

*Wyn, 33, discussing her first appeal in her first year at Waikato*

The outcome of Wyn having financial support from her family, meant that she could reduce her work hours in order to be more academically engaged (attend lectures and complete assignments, for examples). In addition, Wyn's family also continued to encourage her to continue to attain her degree, which she has since completed.

Additional perceived social supports that were utilised by participants after their appeal included:

- friend support (Hana and Maia are presented next as examples);
- formal Māori mentor groups, which included Waiora and Te Ranga Ngaku;
- and learning workshops offered by the University of Waikato.

To demonstrate the ways in which the above mentioned social supports aided participants after their appeal, examples are presented next.

**Friend support.** The use of friend support after their appeals, was an additional source utilised by Hana and Maia, who each constructed friend pacts to avoid future failure of papers. The friend pacts resulted in additional motivation to be academically engaged, with Hana's friend pact further including a financial reward if the parties involved continued to do so effectively:

*Me and my mate... we sat down [and] made this contract up between each other – each person has to be at every lecture, every tutorial. If we miss it we have to tell the other person, and you've got to tell them why. If you don't, you have to give money to the putea, and at the end of the year we'll just go out and do something with it. [It's our way of] keeping each other on track; like I'm really bad with handing my assignments in late, and she was just like 'yeah and if you hand it in late, that's like \$20 bucks just there'. But yeah, [I'm] generally getting pretty good marks at the moment.*

*Hana, 21; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

Maia also discussed having a friend pact after her appeal, as they both had failed a paper. The friend pact that resulted included a motivator and encouragement to avoid failing more papers in the future:

*We're not failing; we're not going through that again.*

*Maia, 27; appealed in her second year at Waikato*

As a result of making friend pacts, Maia and Hana's academic engagement increased. In addition, Maia and Hana were also motivated to complete assignments on time and to attend lectures and tutorials from their friend pacts.

Friend support can foster a sense of belonging and provide a connection to the university environment (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Pooley & Cohen, 2010), which is also beneficial for academic engagement (Wilcox et al., 2005). A connectedness and commitment to be more academically engaged was reflected in Maia and Hana's experience, as their friends were like minded and were committed to avoid future failure.

Another source of support that fostered a sense of belonging and encouragement during the appeal was found through utilisation of Māori mentor units. Laura in particular, utilised Te Ranga Ngaku (the Māori Management Student Network).

***Formal support: Te Ranga Ngaku.*** Laura had felt isolated during the start of her undergraduate degree, but had since become a part of Te Ranga Ngaku (TRN) at the School of Management after her appeal. The results of being inducted to TRN were highly positive, in that Laura had made new friend networks, and had become a part of a collective group of Māori students whose focus was on academic engagement:

*My friend took me to Te Ranga Ngaku...and it fully changed everything at uni for me...It's a whānau based group at the Management School...helping you get motivated and supporting you...So I'm [a part of TRN] because of how it changed me. I was ready to give up because I just felt like I didn't belong in university because there were no Māori's...now I've got more friends... more than just friends [more like whānau] and we're all about the same Kaupapa [helping other Māori students].*

*Laura, 28, appealed in her second year at Waikato*

Parallel to Hayley's experience with Waiora, Laura praised TRN for including her within their group and additionally providing her with a whānau unit of support (Walker, 2006). Laura attributed her inclusion and establishment of whānau units of support within TRN as being due to having the same kaupapa (agenda) as them, which encompassed aiding other Māori students with their academic engagement. As a result, Laura felt supported and connected in her academic engagement after her appeal.

The third category of additional support utilised by participants after their appeal included formal sources. The support received from the different formal support avenues varied according to the nature of participants' queries, from re-enrolment issues through to paper specific concerns. Additional formal support systems utilised by Robin and Jax after their appeal included learning workshops provided by different Schools of study.

***Learning workshops.*** Robin and Jax utilised learning support services and the different learning workshops after their appeal, and found these to be satisfactory. The learning services helped participants by providing study tips; a means to aid in successful re-engagement with their studies:

*[The university] provides students with services to help you with writing, or...oral skills... I attended all of those that they had on offer; that was very helpful.*

*Robin, 22; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

*[I went to a workshop] run by the Education department...it was quite good... [They gave us tips on] how to write, how to study, [and] all the resources [available]. We spent half a day at the library, so it was very good. The university is good, they really want to help you and they really do want you to pass.*

*Jax, 54, appealed in his third year at Waikato*

Both Robin and Jax praised the learning workshops they utilised after their appeal, as they taught additional study skills, such as writing and study tips for examples. These study skills were tools that Robin and Jax could implement to complete assignments and other tasks, in addition to their strategies for academic

re-engagement (which encompassed reduced work hours for both Robin and Jax). Through the utilisation of formal supports, participants perceived resulting expectations and obligations to achieve to a high standard.

After the appeal, participants who had a desire to prove to staff that they could achieve despite having failed previously, resulted in another motivation for them to be academically engaged.

**Motivation to be academically engaged.** Having the motivation to prove that they could achieve after the appeal, stemmed from participants who felt they had to:

- avoid family disappointment and live up to the expectations they had placed on them;
- and avoid being labelled as failures.

Participants who had high expectations from their whānau and other social supports explained that these were not always overtly positive influences, and created a type of supportive pressure on them, although some participants, including May, decided to use the expectations from their whānau as a motivator to be academically engaged.

May discussed that she used the supportive pressure of her whānau as a motivator for her to appeal. The motivation was to avoid disappointing her whānau, and May was therefore determined and used the pressure as a means of encouragement to continue with her studies.

A second type of motivation found, was participants desire to avoid being labelled as a failure, particularly from staff members in Wyn's experience. Wyn discussed that she wanted to show staff members and other support sources that she could be successful in her studies upon her re-entry:

*[The appeal was] like new beginning... I wanted to prove them [staff] wrong, and show [the appeals committee] 'yeah I'm ok'; it was kind of positive in that way. It's funny, it was a negative experience, but a positive result – I felt much more motivated to do it [because] I didn't want to feel that stigma [from failing]... [to] feel stink about stuff [like] repeating papers.*

*Wyn, 33, discussing her first appeal in her first year at Waikato*

From Wyn's experience, she was motivated to avoid being labelled as a failure, and to show staff that their investment and decision to allow her a successful appeal was the right decision.

The motivation to achieve despite previous failings relates to research conducted by Jamieson and colleagues (2010). Their research found that students who were instructed to change the nervousness they had for an upcoming test to that of a *challenge* response, do better than the control students who did not have these instructions. From Jamieson and colleagues findings (2010), Wyn's experience of feeling motivated to show staff members that she could achieve, can be seen as her viewing her re-entry as a *challenge* to excel past her previous failings.

From participants' accounts, it was evident that the perceived and utilised social supports were satisfactory and in some way aided in their post appeal academic engagement (providing motivation, encouragement or more instrumental support). Even though participants all utilised at least one source of perceived social support after their appeal, barriers to accessing formal support were discussed.

The underlying theme found when barriers to accessing formal supports were discussed by participants, was their perceptions of the sources of support (Stewart, 1989) and their past experiences of use (Hobfoll, 2009). Barriers to accessing formal support are important to highlight, as the implications of these can impact on future appellants.

As the 13 participants in my research had access to additional alternative informal support, the utilisation of those sources counteracted and addressed the perceived barriers they discussed in accessing formal support. Future appellants may not have access to additional support like my research participants, and therefore the barriers in accessing formal supports are discussed next to highlight and make these known for students and the sources themselves.

## **Barriers to accessing formal support**

Perceptions of formal supports, the different value systems of these sources to students (therefore inappropriate formal support; Nikora et al., 2002), and students' own personal factors such as being whakamā (Hunt et al., 2001; Rua &

Nikora, 1999) are examples of barriers felt by Māori students to accessing formal sources. In order to present the barriers found from my 13 participants, I have made distinctions between the perceptions of particular formal sources (presented first), and personal barriers felt in accessing support (such as fears of being discussed, pride and whakamā).

**Perceptions of the formal sources as a barrier.** The participants who discussed having a barrier to access formal sources, given the perceptions they had of these sources, included:

- staff at certain Māori mentoring units;
- a specific Māori Liaison officer;
- and other administrative staff.

To highlight the specific barriers participants felt in regards to accessing Māori mentoring units, Laura and Hana's experiences are presented first.

*Māori mentoring units.* Laura had initially perceived the Māori mentor services at her school to be 'cliquey', which left little room for outsiders to become included in their unit. As Laura was also a mature student, she perceived other students to be uninviting due to their younger age:

*When I [wanted to] drop out the first time, I felt like I didn't belong here...I felt isolated, it was really hard to make friends ...I'm naturally quite a friendly person, but it seemed like everyone had already had their little cliques. I had come as an adult student, so it was really hard.*

*Laura, 28, appealed in her second year at Waikato*

The implications of being a perceived outsider and having feelings of isolation in a tertiary environment have been described as a barrier for Māori students (Nikora et al., 2002). An additional difficulty described by Laura, was the fact that she was a mature student. The implications of having perceived a formal supportive source (Māori mentoring unit) as uninviting is crucial to highlight, and was a barrier experienced by Laura.

Laura's experience is important to highlight as she wished to leave university at one point. Since then, Laura has become a part of TRN, and has felt a sense of belonging in doing so, and has established friend networks. Hana also discussed her perceptions of the staff at the Māori mentor unit at her Faculty, and how these resulted in her reluctance to utilise their support.

Hana had expectations of the Māori mentor staff to act in a professional manner. As a result of what she knew of certain mentors' actions outside of the university environment, she did not access them for support:

*I said [in my appeal letter] that I'd use the mentor services, but they're never in their offices, they're never there...You know most of them because they're like the older students who have been there for ages, but like I swear half the time they're on the piss in town anyway...it is a lot of personal information for this stuff [to go and seek their for help for the appeal]...not that I'm a private person but, if you're going to waste my time I'm not going to do it...and I sort of have to respect the person, but when I see them all half cut in town I'm sort of like, nah.*

*Hana, 21; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

From Hana's experience, her perceptions of certain staff at the Māori mentoring unit at her school were low. Hana did not access her Māori mentoring unit as they did not meet her expectations of what a formal source of support should be, and in addition they were difficult to access when needed. Her perceptions were formed through her experiences with seeing staff from the unit in an intoxicated state outside of the university. As a result, those perceptions of staff outside of university changed Hana's perception of them within the university environment.

Given the nature of the factors Hana experienced (her break up and diagnosis of an illness), she did not feel accessing the Māori mentors was a safe place for her to discuss her factors given her low perceptions of certain staff members. Once again, students' own perceptions of their social support sources determine the uptake of their services (Stewart, 1989), and these were formed by previous experiences and use of sources (Hana for example).

Other barriers felt by participants in accessing formal supports encompassed their personal feelings (or internal barriers). There were four main internal barriers which inhibited participants from seeking formal supports (all of which may have occurred concurrently). The micro barrier felt by participants included:

- not wanting people to know that they had failed;
- an issue of pride;
- not wanting to discuss the personal issues they were facing leading up to the appeal;
- and being embarrassed and whakamā/shy to ask for help.

In order to provide a context of the internal barriers, particularly pride and being whakamā, participant examples are presented next.

**Pride as a barrier to accessing formal support.** The barrier of pride being a barrier to accessing formal support was felt by Robin, Mina, Rhaegar, and May. These participants felt pride as a barrier due to their perceptions that asking for help would result in the formal sources forming a low view of their academic abilities.

The barrier of pride is reflected in previous research conducted by Clegg, Bradley and Smith (2006), who interviewed 14 students at a university in the United Kingdom. Accessing support brought about the perception that one's own coping capabilities would also be viewed as substandard through their use of formal sources, which reflects the experiences of Robin, Mina, Rhaegar and May. Although they discuss the importance that self-efficacy had on students' progression through tertiary study, Clegg and colleagues (2006) also found that students' perceptions of sources were a barrier to accessing formal support.

In addition to feeling that their capabilities would be perceived as substandard, Robin, Mina, Rhaegar and May also felt pride as a barrier in that they did not want to be seen by formal sources as time wasters. Therefore, these participants chose not to risk being perceived in a lower regard.

To provide a contextual basis as to why pride was a barrier for the before mentioned participants, and the implications that this may have for future appellants, four examples are presented next.

**Example one.** When asked about the reasons why formal support was not accessed, Robin highlighted the barrier of pride which stood in her way of seeking formal support. Robin further discussed that she had a perception that she would be wasting staff member's time on matters that she felt she should have known herself, thus resulting in her barrier to accessing their support:

*Beforehand...I felt too proud to utilize the things out there for me...like I didn't want to waste their time sort of thing; [feeling like] I should know it myself".*

*Robin, 22; appealed in her first year at Waikato*

The implication of Robin's experience highlights her perception of the nature of student utilisation of formal support, where her difficulties or questions asked need to be substantial, otherwise she perceived herself as being a time waster. The perception that students may waste formal source's time in asking for help has been discussed by van der Meer et al. (2010).

Although in a secondary school context, van der Meer et al. (2010) discussed how students were found to deny themselves aid from teachers as a result of fears that they would think students were trying to find easy answers, instead of working problems out for themselves. The findings from van der Meer et al. (2010) reflect Robin's experience in her barrier to accessing formal sources, given that she did not want to be seen as a time waster or not knowing things that she expected she should.

Mina, the second participant example presented next, attributed pride as a barrier to be problematic for Māori students in particular. Mina highlighted a cyclical nature of pride being a barrier; not wanting to ask for help, yet not wanting to fail.

**Example two.** Mina discussed pride being a barrier in accessing support, and acknowledges this as being negative because she did not want to fail. She further stated that from her experience, the approach taken to support Māori students typically fails to utilise an ecological viewpoint for each student:

*Māori don't like going to ask for help, they just don't you know. It's just that pride thing...not wanting to fail, but not wanting to ask for help, it's a horrible cycle... I know as Māori, we need to get over that and just go and get the help...but you can't just say that to Māori and expect them to go...there's no consideration around 'ok, so what might be happening for this Māori person that are obstacles for them [asking for help]. You have to consider those sorts of things, because we're not all the same, we don't all think the same. We all have our unique weaknesses and strengths.*

*Mina, 41; second appeal was successful in her third year at Waikato*

Mina discussed the importance of viewing Māori students as individuals with different needs, and who experience different factors which may impact on academic engagement (taking an ecological perspective). The consequence of neglecting to take an ecological view fails to consider the different factors that are inhibiting those students to access the support (barriers to accessing support, as well as external factors occurring for them).

Mina's discussion of Māori students' barriers adds to a larger consideration of the impact that students' external factors have on their academic engagement. In addition, consideration also needs to be made towards the homogeneity of support on offer, as Mina's preference for support may differ to other Māori students. The need to consider different types of preferences of support, either collective or individual, reflects discussions made by Jefferies (1997), and Greenwood and Te Aika (2008) regarding the warning in assuming Māori students are homogeneous with similar needs and preferences.

It was important to discuss the learning preferences of Māori students, given the barrier of pride in accessing these sources. Students who do not access formal support and do not have access to support from other sources (like the 13 participants did), are at a disadvantage given the instrumental support these sources have in students academic engagement (Williams, 2010).

In addition to having different support preferences, the age of formal supports at different mentoring units were a barrier for Rhaegar in accessing their support. The Māori mentors at May and Rhaegar's Faculties were their peers at some stage

(as they were around the same age as them). As a result, Rhaegar chose not to access staff support:

*The difficulty there...for me (because I had failed twice) I knew those mentors from when I was a first year [at the] same [time] as them...so there was, for me...a pride barrier in terms of 'do I go see these people?', knowing that obviously I'm in a much weaker position than they are – because we were at one point equal.*

*Rhaegar, 25, discussing the second appeal he made in his third year  
at Waikato*

Rhaegar highlighted that his familiarity with the Māori mentors at his school was not positive. The familiarity was not positive for Rhaegar given his perception that asking for help would result in him being placed in a lower regard having failed and appealed for re-entry. Rhaegar's fears of being placed in a lower regard relates to the previous discussions from other participants regarding a perceived stigma having failed (Weiss et al., 2006). As a result of feeling stigmatised, the barrier of pride in accessing support is fuelled.

Rhaegar's experience also highlights the different preferences that students have for support, and again relates back to the importance that perceptions have in determining uptake of support when needed (Stewart, 1989).

Rhaegar's preference for support reflects Mina's, where a neutral and unknown source was discussed as an easier form to access given their objectivity. In addition to pride being a factor, May also expanded on a wider societal perception that people are expected to resolve difficulties themselves.

**Example three.** During her interview, May also discussed the embarrassment aspect of asking for help, because her school environment was small, and she feared people discussing the fact that she had failed. May also touched on a societal view that if people face problems, they should 'toughen up' and get over it.

The assertion that individual's need to toughen up and repress emotions and feelings has been discussed by Heifner (1997), who conducted a qualitative study with 14 males who had experienced depression. Although Heifner's (1997) study was in regards to male's experiences, the assertion that the 'toughen up' attitude

can leave individuals with an expectation to overcome any difficulty faced, resulted in detrimental effects. These negative effects relate to students who feel that they are expected and need to handle difficulties on their own. The result of doing so is not only negative for one's own wellbeing (Heifner, 1997), but can also result in the perceptions that failing to do so equates to a failure within themselves. Moreover, the result can lead to the assertion that seeking support suggests weakness.

May stated that in her experience, some students do not access supportive resources as a result of the perceptions and expectations to deal with difficulties alone:

*I think....Māori students, even though we're big on whanaungatanga and things like that around here, it's kind of embarrassing to go and ask for help as well...and you feel just a bit shamed...because there is that whole thing (and it's probably not just Māori but all of New Zealand) that you've just got to harden up and just [get through] it. And then when you're going through hard times you feel embarrassed, especially because it is so tight knit [with certain Schools], you don't want everyone to know your problems as well because you see all of them all the time- and Māoris talk about each other so much, especially when there's not many of us...So it's probably more of a pride thing as well – not wanting people to think you're useless...not being able to swallow your pride and go and ask for help when you need it.*

*May, 24; appealed in her third year at Waikato*

May's experience touched on many different aspects associated with the barrier of pride in accessing formal support. First, the familiarity with formal supports (also highlighted by Rhaegar) does not exclusively result in an increased uptake of services by students. The perceptions of the sources are crucial to participants not only accessing formal sources, but also determines their willingness to discuss the factors they had experienced (Merritt, 2003).

From May's experience, the barrier of pride resulted in a perception that one would be viewed as a weaker person if they accessed support (similar to Rhaegar's

experience). In addition, the barrier of pride also resulted in the perception that one could not handle what other students go through every day (related to Robin's feelings of being a time waster). Therefore the barrier of pride can be seen as a complex concept, as it can encompass perceptions of the formal source, be determined by the expectations participants had on themselves, and be additionally influenced by the pressure of societal views to individual's need to handle their own problems (Heifner, 1997).

Another barrier which was felt concurrently to pride by participants, was feeling whakamā (shy and/or embarrassed). Previous research suggests that whakamā can impact on participants' uptake of supportive resources, as well as their access to staff members (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Rua & Nikora, 1999). Hayley's experience with the barrier of whakamā is presented next to highlight how this affected her uptake of formal support.

#### **Whakamā as a barrier to accessing formal support - Hayley's experience.**

As Hayley was a new mother, and also continued to study in the lead up to her appeal, she had placed expectations on herself to balance her commitments. When the factors Hayley encountered occurred, she was too embarrassed to ask for help because of the expectations she had on herself for childcare, whilst continuing to study:

*I think I was ashamed and embarrassed that I said I could look after a baby and study at the same time. And when it all went pear-shaped [I should have said] - 'ok I need help now, woops I should have called on you when I needed to, when you said 'I'll take the baby, you study' – I should have taken the offer up instead of [thinking] 'oh nah let's play altogether'. – It was more being ashamed and embarrassed, that's why I didn't tell anybody.*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at*

*Waikato*

Being whakamā acted as barrier for Hayley to access support from both formal and informal sources at the time leading up to her appeal. Hayley also discussed her barrier in asking for help as she did not want to annoy others by doing so, and had hoped that things would somehow balance out on their own:

*I think a lot of students are shy...I was, I was too shy and maybe didn't want to annoy people. I just wanted to keep to myself...a lot of Māori students don't know how to just go out and ask anyone [for help]... even if you're in the wrong place. I think it's just whakamā/ shy, it's a real big thing for Māori students; too embarrassed maybe to say 'I'm failing, I need some help'. But we just kind of think, you know- 'oh we're alright, we'll get through it' Sometimes you don't...It pays off just to go in and ask anyone [for that help].*

*Hayley, 24; successful on her second appeal in her first year at  
Waikato*

Hayley's experience mirrors Robin's concerns over wasting other people's time in asking for help, and also being too whakamā to ask for help for fear of being labelled as a failure and to avoid being stigmatised as a result (Weiss et al., 2006). The way in which Hayley discussed addressing the concern was through her encouragement to seek out support. Even though it may result in feeling whakamā, Hayley stated that doing so was important especially if difficulties were felt by students.

The matters of pride, perceptions of social supports, and fears of others knowing participants had failed, all contributed to provide a multivariate nature of barriers in accessing formal supports. From these findings, this issue of familiarity with support mentors (through whakawhanaungatanga or establishing relationships) can also be seen as a double edged sword.

On one hand, research suggests that an established rapport (through whanaungatanga) between formal support and students, determines the likelihood of the uptake of services (Hunt et al., 2001; Levy & Williams, 2003; Masters, 1997; Rua & Nikora, 1999). On the other hand, some participants perceived that having familiar mentors could impact on their social standing (by placing them in weaker positions), as well as fostering fears of possible privacy breaches. The double edged nature of just what type of support is satisfactory for students (familiar or impartial) is interesting to highlight, and again pertains to students' own perceptions of the usefulness of the formal sources.

For all 13 participants, the barriers to accessing formal support were addressed or avoided through their use of additional perceived social supports.

Because all 13 participants were successful with their appeals, and with their academic re-engagement (seen through implementation of strategies to overcome the factors they encountered), they were deemed as being resilient. A further discussion of resilience, and participants' experiences in determining them as such, are discussed next.

## **Resilience**

The marker of resilience I used in my research was participants' ability to overcome the factors encountered, and to re-engage with their studies through use of perceived social supports - adapted from Ungar's (2012) social ecological view of resilience. It needs to be re-affirmed that this is only one potential marker of what Māori student resilience may be in successful academic engagement.

From participants' accounts, re-engagement was seen as a determination to achieve their degrees (conscientiousness; Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002), and to be additionally supported through utilisation of perceived social supports. In my research, participants did so by first finding ways to overcome the factors that inhibited their success prior to their appeal (the strategies they employed after the appeal; see Appendix E). Successful re-engagement was also seen by participants in their commitment to attend lecturers and tutorials, as well as completing assignments and tests.

Perceived social supports utilised by participants upon their re-entry were beneficial in their academic re-engagement, as they aided in the implementation and enactment of the strategies, as well as providing overall support. Through participants' use of social supports in overcoming adversities (factors leading up to the appeal), it provided a means for participants to be resilient by utilising extraversion to gain and utilise social support (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002).

Participants in my research displayed extraversion through seeking support, particularly seen by Hayley and Laura (aided by encouragement from their friends) to network with their respective support units (Waiora and TRN).

The appeal process provided participants with an additional opportunity to attain their degrees, the benefits of which could result in an eventual rise in completion and retention rates for tertiary Māori students. All 13 participants in my research are either continuing their degree to be academically engaged, or

have since completed their degrees. Since making their appeals, seven participants have already completed their degrees.

At the end of each participant's interview, they were asked to further reflect on their appeal and their process of academic re-engagement. Participants were also asked what they would do differently if given the chance to re-do their appeal, and they were also asked to give advice to future appellants. They were invited to do so given their unique and successful perspectives of the appeal process. Participants' suggestions for future appellants are presented next.

### **Advice for future appellants**

Participants noted that the appeal process was a second chance for them to attain their goals and their degrees. Through their reflection, participants were able to give advice for future appellants, which included:

- to appeal if this is what students really want;
- to sort out any conflicting commitments to ensure full priority is on studying and attaining their degree;
- to prepare themselves for the appeal (find references, find out about the appeal process or find someone who does know);
- to talk to staff and seek out all available support systems;
- to not feel any shame or stigma with appealing because it is a necessary step to continue with studying;
- and to ensure they write a good appeal letter by stating a sufficient number of reasons as to why they had failed.

My research participants stated that they would encourage students that find themselves trying to decide whether or not to appeal, to do so, especially if it was something that they truly wanted for themselves (their own goals):

*Be strong about it and to find ways to improve their studies...I would encourage students to appeal because I know it brought out the best in me after.*

*Tama, 25, appealed in his first year at Waikato*

Tama's advice highlights the importance the appeal process had for his academic engagement, and how he became a better student having gone through the process.

Participants also suggested that students need to have strategies in place as a means to address known commitments or priorities before returning to study, as they are important for academic engagement. Participants stated that social supports aided their implementation of strategies to be academically engaged. As a result, participants stressed the importance of seeking out and utilising any support that is on offer. Further to this, Maia suggested that students need to take the time to deal with failing, and pushing past any shame they may feel because of it:

*People take it differently; failing papers. You do have to deal with that in your own time as well....with my friends that had failed and not reapplied, it was shame- shame I failed...[So you have to seek help, or] look elsewhere; there's counselling, there's other services within the uni –don't give up. If it's what you want, if it's really what you want to do then just don't give up. It does get easier.*

*Maia, 27; appealed in her second year at Waikato*

Maia's experience suggests that within the contemplation stage of the appeal, participants need to seek support to deal with their failure, as doing so can aid in a successful appeal. In addition, through discussions with her social supports, the stigmatisation of having failed was reduced because of her goal to attain her degree.

Participants also suggested that future appellants be:

- prepared for the appeal;
- to seek out people to provide references;
- to come up with ways to address and reduce the factors that occurred leading up to the appeal;
- to find out what the appeal process involved;
- and to find people who did know.

Participants' parting advice for future appellants provided an overview of the importance they placed on the appeal process, as it gave them a second chance to actualise their goal of degree attainment.

## **Chapter summary**

After participants' appeals, they described being motivated to be academically engaged, and recognised it as their last potential chance to attain their goal of degree completion. Participants were determined to be academically engaged in order to actualise their goal.

The process of academic engagement entailed participants overcoming the factors that occurred leading up to the appeal, as well as completing paper specific tasks (assignment completion) and attendance, for examples. To aid in their academic engagement, participants continued to use their perceived social supports (informal or formal) and/or they utilised social characteristics to seek further supports. Participants who had overcome the factors that occurred leading up to the appeal, and reflected as having done so successfully, have been deemed resilient.

Barriers were nominated by participants as being reasons for the non-utilisation of formal supports. The reasons for the barriers stemmed from participants' perceptions of the support (including the anticipated stigmatisation from sources), as well as internal factors of pride and *whakamā*. The barriers encountered were addressed or avoided in their use of alternative sources of support. Overall, participants were grateful after their appeal, as they were on track to completing their degrees.

This concludes the findings from participants' interviews. In the following Chapter, the findings that have been presented in the previous Chapters (Three, Four and Five) are discussed. In order to discuss these findings, I return to my original research questions and objectives.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

With the implementation of student funding caps by the National government in 2008 (Engler, 2010), an additionally competitive environment for students to achieve has been created. While the creation of added pressure may be positive for some students who perceive this as a challenge to achieve (Jamieson, Mendes, Blackstock, & Schmader, 2010), it raises concerns for students who experience factors which affect their academic engagement. The implications for students who encounter factors, and especially those who fail their required course load, are at risk of losing their enrolment place given the funding caps (Engler, 2010).

The University of Waikato recognises the impacts factors can have on students' engagement (2013c, para. 2), and provides those who fail more than half of their required course load another opportunity to continue to attain their degree. The opportunity to gain re-entry is the appeal process.

Through the provision of the appeals process, the University of Waikato offers another opportunity for students to continue with the financial investment and time they have dedicated through their enrolment. Successful appellants were specifically recruited in order to highlight their experiences of how they did so, and what sources of support they utilised.

Highlighting participants' experiences of their successful appeal was done with the aim to help inform future potential appellants on what to expect during their appeal, and what may help their efforts. In order to further highlight participants' appeal experiences, this chapter returns to, and discusses, my original research questions (with exclusion of the fifth which were in regards to statistical analysis). The return to my research questions/objectives is done in order to answer these, which were:

1. Māori cultural identity and cultural obligations - did participants have these?
2. What contributed to participants' decision to appeal?
3. What barriers were experienced leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?
4. What support systems are in place leading up to, during, and after the appeal process?

In addition to my research questions, what participants' academic engagement post appeal looked like, and their resilient qualities in their pursuit of degree attainment are discussed later in this chapter. But first, the factors that participants encountered leading up to the appeal are discussed. The factors participants experienced are presented once more in order to provide a context to discuss their resilience.

### **Factors experienced pre-appeal, and the influence these had on academic engagement**

The appeal process provided an opportunity for participants to nominate what factors they encountered (medical, compassionate and other commitments), and state how these affected their academic engagement. Academic engagement was nominated by participants' to be a combination of the completion of university tasks assigned, and lecture and tutorial attendance. In addition, participants stated that successful academic engagement encompassed the implementation of their strategies for re-entry; those nominated to address and overcome the factors they experienced leading up to their appeal.

Participants' factors took time away from their ability to engage with studies, and resulted in the failure of more than half of their required course loads. Two categories have been determined by the University of Waikato as influencing factors, which included both major medical and compassionate reasons. I categorised a third type of factor, other commitments for those who encountered factors that did not lie within the two determined by the University of Waikato (such as childcare, paid work hours, or socialising).

The medical and compassionate factors that participants experienced affected their wellbeing and studying ability. The medical and compassionate factors that participants experienced included: deaths in their family, separations from partners, and other medical conditions (inclusive of physical and mental illnesses).

Medical and compassionate factors are recognised by the University of Waikato (2013c) to inhibit students' study ability, and considerations are made for students who encounter these (for example, in missed examinations). As a result, participants who experienced the before mentioned factors could easily identify and nominate these in their appeal letters. However, discussing and making

compassionate factors known in the appeal letter was a barrier for Maia, given the personal nature of her experience.

Maia had access to a whānau member, who worked at the University of Waikato. This was a family member who aided and advised her on what to nominate in her appeal. This person advised instead of discussing the compassionate reason she had faced (aiding a friend in need), she could discuss the work commitments she had which also affected her study. Therefore Maia's whānau member, who was aware of the university systems and the appeal process, helped her avoid the barrier she experienced in disclosing the compassionate factor that had affected her.

Participants who experienced other commitments leading up to their appeal stated that these also took time away from their academic engagement. Other commitment factors affecting students' academic engagement is also reflected in participants' accounts in research conducted by Hunt et al. (2001) and Jane (2001).

For participants who experienced other commitment factors leading up to the appeal (such as work, home, or socialising), it was not as easy to nominate these factors. Participants such as Rhaegar, stated that it was difficult to identify what had actually affected their academic engagement as they were upset over the news that they had failed (particularly for Rhaegar's second appeal). These participants who were upset having failed, discussed needing time to digest the news that they had failed before contemplating the decision to appeal (discussed later in this chapter).

From my research participants' accounts leading up to their appeal, it was clear that factors (medical, compassionate or other commitments) that occurred within and outside the university environment, affected their academic engagement. Consideration is therefore needed for students who encounter factors which affect academic engagement (Hunt et al., 2001; Jefferies, 1997). In addition, consideration is also needed for Māori students who have cultural obligations which cannot be missed (tangi, hui, or tasks assigned by whānau/hapū/Iwi; Jefferies, 1997).

Although two participants discussed having cultural obligations and expectations, it was still important to highlight the ways in which they balanced these with their academic engagement. In addition, students' Māori cultural identity and the expectations and obligations they faced were also investigated

within the context of their appeals. These are discussed next using my first research objective.

## **1. Māori cultural identity, and investigating whether participants had any cultural obligations or expectations.**

The question of identity, and what it meant to be a Māori student, was posed to all participants. Participants answers encompassed perceptions from other students as well as expectations within and beyond the university confines. In addition, participants were also asked whether they had any cultural obligations, expectations and any attitudes experienced whilst studying at university. The expectations and obligations of participants were investigated in order to provide a picture of what they had experienced leading up to their appeal, and how they balanced these with their study commitments.

Rhaegar and Maia discussed having had expectations and obligations, which was due to their position and engagement with their own or other whānau, hapū and/or Iwi beyond the university environment, and these were therefore an external factor. What constituted cultural obligations encompassed tasks such as attending events (tangi and hui; Jefferies, 1997) and completing tasks assigned (writing reports as an example from Rhaegar and Maia). Within the university environment, May discussed an expectation for Māori students to support one another:

*Whenever you're in a Māori class...it's a whānau ...you're always meant to talk to each other.*

*May, 24; appealed in her third year at Waikato*

May touched on the establishment of whānau units, and how there is an expectation for Māori students in particular to foster these. The expectation and obligation to meet tasks, such as supporting other students, was one side of the double edged sword (Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997).

While these obligations and expectations may have been perceived at times to be costly to students' own academic engagement, meeting these not only provided an opportunity to make new networks (for May who was expected to support

others), but also to help their informal support networks (Rhaegar and Maia for example, who met obligations for their whānau /hapū/Iwi). Maia further discussed that the positive side of the sword from her completion of the tasks set out by her whānau, gave her a sense that she was helping her whānau and making a contribution.

In Mon's case, she suggested ways that Māori students could balance these cultural obligations and expectations with their study commitments through use of manaakitanga. Manaakitanga meant that she would make sure academic commitments were met before attending to cultural obligations. Mon stated that she utilised formal supports to ask for extensions or help in other ways when time did not allow for tasks to be completed, or unexpected events arose. By utilising support, Mon stated that this ensured that she would manaaki (support) and meet commitments set by her lecturers or other students who were relying on her to complete the task. Through utilisation of manaakitanga, Mon found a means to be academically engaged whilst meeting her cultural obligations and expectations.

The cultural obligations and expectations of participants created a platform to then ask why Māori students in particular made an appeal. The 13 successful appellants in my research were asked about their motivations and their reasons for making the appeal, which are discussed next.

## **2. What contributed to participants' decision to appeal?**

There were three different reasons participants came to make their decision to appeal. The first was by participants who decided to leave the University of Waikato prior to, or after, being told they had failed more than half of their required course load. These participants who had time away from university were determined to make an appeal once they had decided that they were ready to return to Waikato. The only option for those who had a break and then wished to continue to study was to make an appeal.

The second reason participants decided to appeal was for those who had failed half of their required course load through experiencing medical and/or compassionate factors, and still wished to study. These participants could easily identify what had affected their academic engagement, and they could also provide evidence that they had endured these factors. Once these participants had

a plan to address and/or reduce their medical and compassionate factors, they decided to make their appeal.

The third way participants decided to make an appeal was typically felt by those who had experienced other commitments leading up to their appeal, and decided to appeal in the next academic semester. In deciding whether or not to make an appeal, the third type of participants spoke of a contemplation process they underwent.

**The contemplation process.** Participants such as Rhaegar and Wyn (in regards to their first appeals), spoke of needing to first take time to overcome the news that they had failed more than half of their course load. Once participants had accepted the news, they then decided to contemplate the appeal.

For participants who were initially unsure of making an appeal, such as Jax, they described this feeling as a result of fearing the outcome of their appeal (whether they would be successful in the appeal or not). In addition, Jax also discussed that he also questioned his own worth of being allowed back into university.

The self-doubt of whether or not to make an appeal was an element in deciding whether or not to appeal. A second element was questioning their choice of study. Participants such as Rhaegar, discussed that they needed to reflect on the degree they had chosen, and to decide whether it was the right path of study for them. The contemplation process that participants underwent prior to making their decision to appeal, reflects Prochaska and Norcross' (2001) research regarding the stages of individual's type of change.

Within their research, Prochaska and Norcross (2001) state a continuum of six stages are seen for individuals to make a change. For my participants, the first stage, pre-contemplation (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001), was the initial time when they were informed that they had failed. The second stage, contemplation, was where participants (such as Rhaegar and Wyn) decided whether or not they would make the appeal.

To provide an overview of the contemplation process of the appeal, Figure 4 has been constructed with reference to Prochaska and Norcross' (2001) article; *stages of change*. The last stage of the change continuum is termination, but this is not shown in Figure 4, as six participants are still undertaking study.

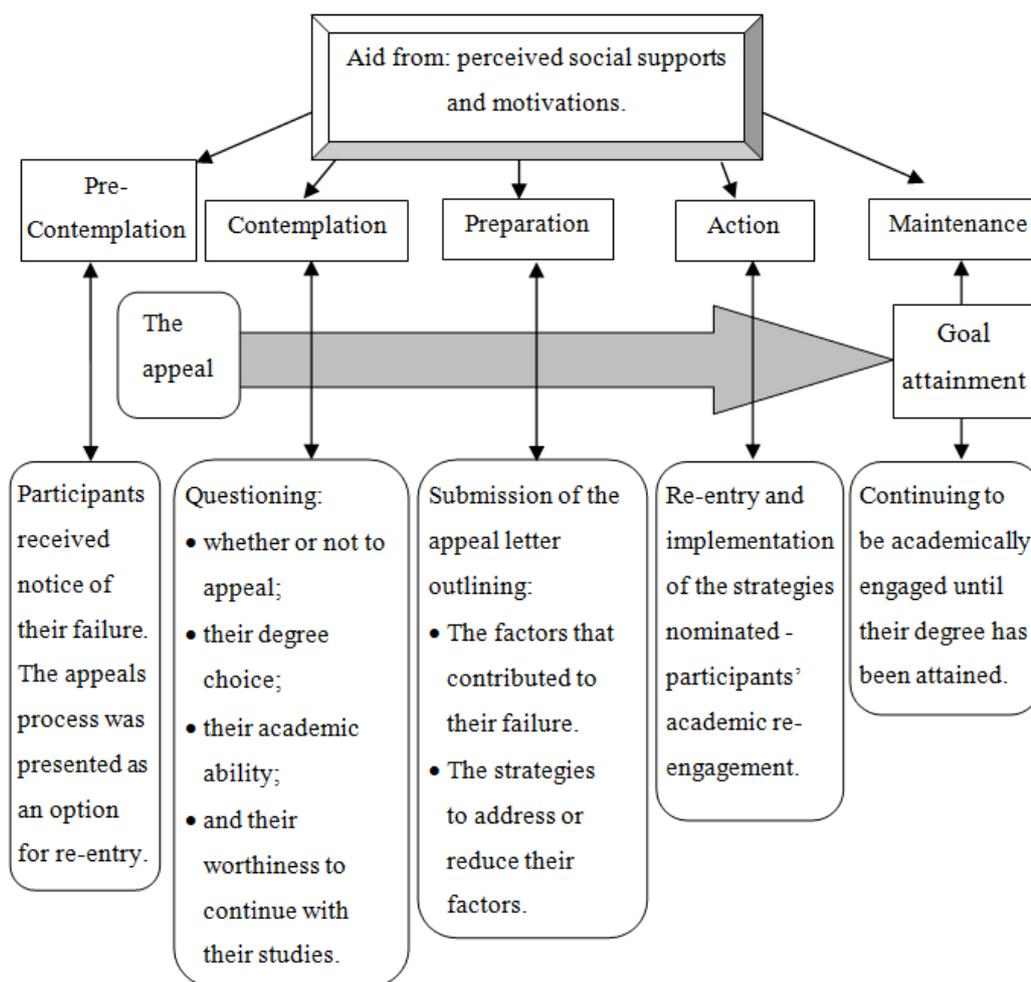


Figure 4. Stages of change: participants' contemplation of the appeal, through to academic engagement

Figure 4 is presented to provide a visual of how participants contemplated their decision to appeal, through to the continued pursuit of attaining their degree. The first stage, pre-contemplation, is the stage where participants found out that they had failed. The second stage, contemplation, was for participants who decided to appeal in the third way as outlined previously (Rhaegar for example, who had to consider his choice of degree).

The third stage, preparation, was seen as the time when participants submitted their appeal and the fourth stage, action, was also where they constructed strategies to overcome the factors which resulted in their failure (required for the appeal letter). In addition, the maintenance stage is also presented in Figure 4 to showcase that participants who implemented their strategies, continued to be academically engaged in order to attain their degree. To attain their degree was an overall goal felt by each of the 13 participants in my research. The desire to do so

has been described by Williams (2010) and Jefferies (1997) to be a strong motivator for Māori students to continue through the university environment.

The reasons why participants wanted to gain their qualification ranged from their own economic welfare, to contributing to their whānau or hapū and/or Iwi or their communities (Mina for example); parallel to Williams' (2010) participants. Furthermore, participants were also motivated to appeal because they had some forms of support systems encouraging them to attain their goal of completing their qualification. In addition, the goal of degree completion is also described by Reed-Victor and Stronge (2002) to require a resilient characteristic of being conscientious (being goal driven). The many different reasons participants wished to gain their degrees.

Through discussing the reasons for participants' decisions to appeal, consideration was made and questions were raised as to why Māori students do not make an appeal. As a result, barriers encountered throughout my participants' appeals were discussed in the hope of providing reasons why Māori students do not appeal (discussed next), and ways these could be addressed (utilisation of social supports). The most pertinent barrier discussed was that of accessing formal support services, and participants' experiences are discussed next using my third research question.

### **3. What barriers did participants encounter throughout the context of their appeal?**

Of the barriers experienced throughout the appeal, accessing formal support was the most notable. Participants' perceptions of the usefulness of their social supports determined their uptake (Stewart, 1989); the perceptions being from previous experience with the services, or initial judgements of these (Hana for example had a low opinion of her mentoring unit). Participants who had a barrier in accessing formal supports stated that these were particularly in regards to staff - a Māori Liaison officer at one particular School, and staff at certain Māori mentoring units.

Internal factors were attributed to the barrier of accessing formal supports (all of which may have occurred concurrently), which included:

1. an issue of pride;
2. fear of others knowing they had failed;
3. not wanting to discuss the personal issues they were facing leading up to the appeal (and needing to 'harden up');
4. and being too whakamā to ask for help.

*1. Pride.* Participants who felt that pride stood in the way of seeking support, disclosed that they did not want to be seen as failures by staff. The pride barrier was especially evident for those who had appealed beforehand (such as Rhaegar), as they felt that they were somewhat letting those staff members down that had helped them previously.

*2. Fear of others knowing they had failed.* With regards to the Māori support unit personnel, Tama, May, and Rhaegar all stated that they did not want to seek help from those involved in their respective Māori support units given that the members were close to their own age. As a result of these barriers, participants such as Rhaegar felt that it would be embarrassing to ask for help from their mentors, as they would then possibly be seen in a lower regard by doing so.

In addition, the embarrassment in asking mentors for help linked to participants having internalised (having failed and needing to appeal) and anticipated (perceptions) feelings of stigmatization (exclusion or blame from another person/s; Weiss et al., 2006). The implications of feeling stigmatised internally and in anticipation, can provide potential reasons why participants did not utilise formal supports. Therefore the implications of Māori students feeling stigmatised having failed is important to highlight, given that formal support were not utilised, because of this possible result.

Feeling internally stigmatised also relates to the third barrier of feeling whakamā. Previous research (Hunt et al., 2001; Nikora et al., 2002; Phillips, 2003; Rua & Nikora, 1999) has shown that feeling whakamā in educational environments is a major barrier for Māori students. Feeling whakamā was reflected in participants' experiences (such as Hayley), and was a barrier for them in asking for help. The reason they felt whakamā was due to not wanting to waste

formal sources time, in addition to feeling stigmatised having failed, as well as not wanting formal sources to see them in a lower regard. From the before mentioned barriers (pride, stigmatisation, and whakamā), it is clear that these affect Māori students' access of formal support. While having a barrier to accessing formal support is problematic, given these sources are in place to aid students, participants suggested two different ways these could be overcome.

The first group of suggestions came from participants who favoured formal supports from a non-familiar source (those who were not aware of students prior to seeking help).

**Non-familiar formal sources.** Mina suggested that she would be more likely to discuss any problems she faced with strangers, as she favoured the anonymity aspect of doing so:

*I actually feel more comfortable to strangers...and people that don't know me that well, because....I think I suppose it's because you don't want to be judged, you know; and to me strangers don't do that to you because they don't know you...I think it's more about the shame, and the shyness...the guilt, the failure...all those sorts of things.*

*Mina, 41; second appeal was successful in her third year at Waikato*

Mina described favouring a non-familiar formal support who was Māori, as she perceived that there would be less judgement from those sources regarding the difficulties she experienced, but a source who was familiar with Te Ao Māori (Māori world view). She felt that non-familiar sources would be less judgemental because they did not know her personally, and therefore the before mentioned personal barriers (pride, whakamā, and stigmatisation) would be reduced.

In contrast to favouring an impartial formal source, the second group of suggestions to counter barriers felt (such as pride and stigmatisation) were in regards to formal sources creating a rapport with students (whanaungatanga).

***Importance of whanaungatanga between student and formal support.*** Participants, who wished to feel included in the university environment, suggested that formal supports who created whanaungatanga achieved this. Te Ranga Ngaku (TRN) and Waiora were two formal sources nominated by Laura and Hayley to

have successfully created an environment in which whanaungatanga was created. As a result, Laura and Hayley both felt supported and included in their respective Schools of Study, thanks to TRN and Waiora.

The importance of formal supports establishing rapport with Māori students is parallel to findings from Nikora and colleagues (2002), Williams (2010), and Hunt et al. (2001). The before mentioned researchers suggested that having a rapport with students (through whanaungatanga), links to the higher uptake of formal support. The link to accessing additional support is reflected in Laura and Hayley's experiences.

Laura and Hayley utilised and became a part of TRN and Waiora (respectively). Their involvement was encouraged and fostered by the two formal supports' inclusive and sociable environment (done through whakawhanaungatanga). From the inclusion of Laura and Hayley within the formal supports, they also established whānau units of support (Walker, 2006). These whānau units were networks of other Māori students who had similar interests to Laura and Hayley, and who were also knowledgeable of university policies and protocols.

As whānau units were knowledgeable of university policies, protocols and of different subject areas (given the range of students who were from different Schools of Study in Waiora), Laura and Hayley were provided with answers to queries they had regarding academic problems. In addition, their involvement in TRN and Waiora helped to reduce the barriers they felt (whakamā and pride) as each group created an inclusive environment where Hayley and Laura felt safe enough to discuss any issues they had.

From Hayley and Laura's experiences, the use of formal support was important for their social engagement at university and were a means to address any barriers they felt, given the knowledgeable members of the formal sources. Further ways in which social supports aided participants, throughout their appeal and with their academic engagement, are discussed next using my fourth research question.

#### **4. What perceived social supports were in place for participants throughout the appeal?**

Given the variety of perceived social supports available to students throughout their appeal, it was of interest to focus on those utilised by participants. In addition, it was important to discuss how these perceived social supports aided in participants' appeals and academic engagement. The support participants received from social supports resulted from informal and/or formal sources, both of which are discussed next.

**Perceived informal support.** Having perceived informal social supports has been documented as helpful in the transition and retention of tertiary students (Wilcox et al., 2005; Williams, 2010). For Māori tertiary students, the importance of providing a welcoming university environment (Nikora et al., 2003) and suitable formal supports is additionally paramount to their academic engagement (Hunt et al., 2001; Rua & Nikora, 1999; Levy & Williams, 2003; Wilson et al., 2011; Zepke & Leach, 2010).

The importance of informal support was instrumental for aiding participants' decisions to appeal, in addition to the process itself, and also for their re-entry to pursue their degrees. In order to discuss the ways in which informal sources did so, different sources have been separated. First whānau support is presented, followed by friends and sources that were knowledgeable of the university system.

**Whānau.** When participants had positive perceived social support from whānau, they provided many ways of support through encouragement (Williams, 2010); advice and structural aid (Levy & Williams, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002), as well as providing monetary or other physical support (Masters, 1997).

Whānau support not only helped participants in the abovementioned ways, but also helped motivate participants to succeed throughout their appeal. One example of whānau motivating participants to appeal was in May's case, where the expectations of her whānau helped her to make the decision.

During participants' appeals, whānau support also provided instrumental aid, seen in Hana's case where her family sought additional character references for her appeal process. After the appeal, whānau who aided participants throughout

their appeal, continued to do. The result of whānau support was positive for participants who utilised this, although as previously mentioned, support that whānau provide can at times be a double edged sword (Jefferies, 1997; Masters, 1997).

The costly side of the utilisation of whānau support was seen as a result of expectations for participants to achieve (from May's experience), in addition to cultural obligations and requests. For example, Maia discussed having had tasks assigned to by her hapū. The cost of whānau obligations are also reflected in Williams (2010) research, which saw some of her participants' academic engagement suffer, as time was taken away from students' studies. Although in Williams' research, all participants had successfully attained their degree, as the overall support from whānau (both positives and costs) provided an overall sense of wellbeing and support for participants (Williams, 2011).

Another informal source of support that was helpful for participants were friends.

***Friends.*** The importance of having friend supports in an academic environment can combat feelings of isolation, and provide a positive way to achieve successful academic engagement (Wilcox et al., 2005). Successful engagement has been linked to the creation of friend networks by Wilcox et al. (2005), as the students who dropped out of university described feeling isolated within the university environment. In comparison, students who remained at university described being accepted and inclusive of the university environment as a result of having friend networks, which also resulted in emotional, instrumental, and appraisal support (Wilcox et al., 2005).

The establishment of friends within the university environment was discussed by Laura and Hayley, who had initially felt isolated prior to their appeal. As mentioned previously, their formal sources of support (TRN and Waiora) provided an environment where they could establish with whānau units of support. For other students, such as Hana, the establishment of friend networks was conducted through class interactions, parallel to Wilcox et al. (2005). In addition, the formation of friend networks required the use of extraversion (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002) to do so, as participants (such as Hana) needed to engage with other students to foster and maintain friendships.

After her appeal, Hana stated that she and one friend in particular reciprocally motivated each other through their establishment of financial pacts (where they had financial costs if assignments or lectures were missed). In addition to the motivation Hana's friend provided post appeal, she was also a source of emotional support to aid Hana's academic engagement. Hana's experience also reflects Wilcox et al. (2005) findings, and they further state that the friendships created within the university environment were critical factors in their participants' academic engagement (and persistence to attain their degrees).

Overall, friends were nominated as being helpful to participants who utilised their support, as they provided an extra route of support for those who were away from their family, or in Hayley's case (who did not tell her partner or his family), an impartial support system focused on aiding in a successful appeal. Further to this, the support friends provide is a somewhat less judgemental form of support (Santrock, 2001; Pooley & Cohen, 2010), and this is important to highlight for participants like Rhaegar and Wyn, who felt stigmatised at having failed.

In contrast, during her appeal, Mina experienced support from certain friend groups who discouraged her from continuing her studies after having failed more than half of her required course load. The reason why Mina's friends took a discouraging position was because they saw that she was struggling to balance her home commitments with her studying ones.

Mina stated that although those certain friends were attempting to be helpful, they were not so as she wished to attain her degree. She decided that she would appeal, and sought to attain her degree through the utilisation of conscientiousness (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002), in addition to motivations provided by her whānau. Mina also had encouragement from friends who had studied before her, and they also supported her through encouragement to appeal, as well as advising her post appeal. The knowledgeable sources of informal support were also utilised by other participants, and therefore are discussed next.

***Informal sources who were knowledgeable of the university system.*** Participants who had access to, and utilised informal sources of support that were knowledgeable of the university system (inclusive of policies, processes, and the appeal), were at an advantage to others who did not. These sources had either been employed by the University of Waikato, or had previously studied there.

As the knowledgeable sources knew of the appeal process, or could advise participants on what they could do (such as gaining references, or directing them towards formal sources), participants stated that there was an ease to utilising this type of support. As a result of the ease in accessing these informal sources, participants described the appeal process to be straightforward.

Participants who had knowledgeable family members included Maia, Tama, and May. Those who had friends who had worked, or studied previously included Hayley and Mina. In addition, through Hayley and Laura's establishment of whānau units, these could also be seen as knowledgeable sources of (now) informal support. Therefore it can be seen that the valuable support gained from informal sources, that are knowledgeable of the university system, can be created.

Through her partner's friend network, Hayley had made a friend who was knowledgeable of the appeal process. In addition, Laura and Hayley had established whānau units from their engagement with TRN and Waiora. Although it needs to be re-iterated that TRN and Waiora created an environment where Laura and Hayley could make these networks (whanaungatanga).

The discussion regarding the creation of knowledgeable sources within the university reflects previous research which advocates for the importance of formal sources to practice whanaungatanga with Māori students, in order to increase the potential uptake of these sources (Masters et al., 2004) and students' academic engagement (Williams, 2011). Further formal supports that participants utilised are discussed next.

**Perceived formal support.** Formal social supports are important to help students feel socially engaged (Wilcox et al., 2005), and for Māori students in particular, to feel supported in their academic engagement (Levy & Williams, 2003). The provision of formal support made by the University of Waikato has been documented as beneficial by previous Māori students at the School of Psychology (Levy & Williams, 2003) and at the School of Education (Williams, 2010).

The formal supports at the University of Waikato (2013d) provide aid for students' health, financing difficulties, academic queries, and other pastoral care (such as targeted mentoring units and chaplaincy services, for examples). Those utilised by my research participants, which were all found to be satisfactory, included:

- Māori Liaison Officers;
- Learning Workshops at Robin and Jax's Schools of Study;
- and Māori student groups (specifically TRN and Waiora).

Jax's experience described one way in which formal support was satisfactory. Jax received a direct offer of assistance from his Māori Liaison officer, who encouraged him to make the appeal. Without the direct offer, Jax would not have made an appeal. The direct approach also helped Jax to reduce the barrier of *whakamā*, as he had described himself as painfully shy. The preference for Māori students to have a direct supportive approach by formal supports, reflects findings from Levy and Williams (2003). The direct approach was favoured by participants in Levy and Williams' research, as they felt that they were valued as students as result (2003). As a result, Levy and Williams (2003) advocated that formal supports should engage with students early on in their undergraduate degree, in order to establish a rapport.

Four other participants (Rhaegar, Hayley, Laura and Robin) also utilised formal sources of support available at the University of Waikato. The reasons why more participants did not utilise formal supports could be explained through a combination of three reasons. The first reason pertains to the barriers associated with accessing these formal sources, such as perceptions of sources (Stewart, 1989) as well as personal factors such as pride and *whakamā* (Nikora et al., 2002).

The second reason could be that further clarification of the appeal process was not needed due to the provision of the appeals brochure, particularly for those who had appealed after 2010. The third reason could be that students had satisfactory perceived social supports from other informal sources, especially from those who were knowledgeable of the appeals process. A combination of the before mentioned reasons can all contribute to the reasons why more of my participants did not utilise formal social supports.

**Summary of perceived social supports.** To summarise the perceived social supports section, the informal and/or formal sources that participants utilised were all beneficial to them throughout their appeal. Without the support, encouragement and advice from participants' sources of support, participants who

had experienced other commitment factors (such as socialising and work) described having conflicted feelings over their decision to make the appeal.

By highlighting the importance of perceived social supports, considerations were then made towards Māori students who were eligible to appeal, but did not so. There were many barriers that my research participants experienced, all of which could have contributed to eligible Māori student appellants not doing so. Therefore, the importance of the utilisation of perceived social supports, and having different options available to those with different preferences (unknown or inclusive environments), can provide a picture of what aided my research participants throughout their appeal.

Social supports were also important for participants upon their re-entry, as these aided participants to implement their nominated strategies to help address and reduce the factors that they encountered leading up to their appeal.

The implementation of participants' strategies are discussed next, and framed using the theme of academic engagement and my research objective of resilience.

### **Academic engagement after the appeal**

Studying after the appeal was again a varied experience for each of the participants. For all participants, re-entry acted as a motivator, making them become aware that it could have been their last opportunity to continue with their studies. Upon re-entry, participants described having implemented the strategies they had nominated in their appeal in order to be academically engaged (see Appendix E for all participants' strategies).

The different strategies participants nominated included reduced work hours and increased utilisation of social supports. By doing so, participants were considered to be on their path to academic engagement (completing all assigned tasks and attending lectures and tutorials).

All participants, with the exception of Jax (who undertook additional work commitments), had successfully implemented their strategies. In doing so, participants have been determined as resilient, as they intended to and overcame the factors that they encountered leading up to the appeal. Figure 5 provides a visual overview of participants' academic engagement and resilience, post appeal.

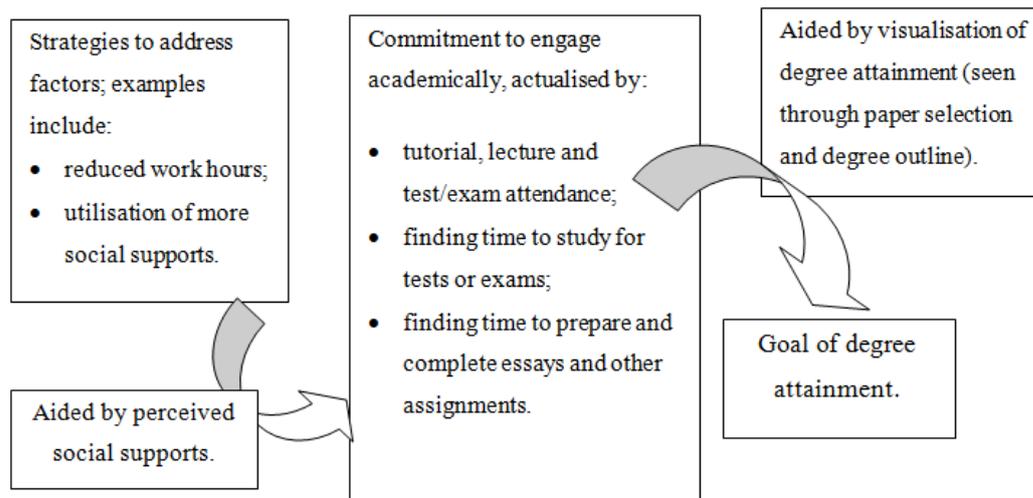


Figure 5. An overview of participants' academic engagement upon re-entry

In participants pursuit of degree attainment, through their commitment to be academically engaged, participants were seen to display resilience. In addition, participants demonstrated resilience in their utilisation of social supports, which in turn was established and facilitated through use of extraversion (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002).

Participants, such as May, also displayed experientialism (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002) as they addressed and reduced the factors which contributed to their initial failure. May for example, in her time away from Waikato, learnt that she had placed a priority on socialising leading up to her appeal, and was therefore adamant to place her academic engagement first upon her return.

Given the requirement of the appeal is to nominate and suggest ways students would address the factors encountered leading up to their appeal, a conclusion could be made that all successful appellants are resilient. However, this may not be the case for students who do not hold tertiary attainment to be their own personal goal, and are pressured from external influences to undertake tertiary study. In this case, even though they are continuing to study, this may not ultimately be a resilient thing for them to do. On the other hand, students may realise that further education is not appropriate for them and decide not to appeal – which could be an entirely appropriate thing for those individuals. Therefore, my marker of resilience includes the importance that participants placed on goal completion, bearing in mind this is only one potential marker of Māori student resilience in an appeal.

Further markers of Māori student resilience can be employed in different research contexts, but for the appeals process, the one before mentioned marker was utilised in my analysis. Consideration was also made for future research, which stemmed from highlighting the limitations of my research.

### **Limitations and areas for future research**

There were three main limitations identified in the conduction of my research. The first pertains to the co-construction of my research. It would have been beneficial to invite participants to aid in structuring my research objectives, as doing so would have rendered more meaningful results for them. In addition, the analysis of data was constructed utilising the research objectives and markers that I determined. Because these objectives were of my own choosing, analysis was limited given my use of a Kaupapa Māori framework.

Bishop (1999) states that in the conduction of Kaupapa Māori research, the means for validation for studies should come from the stakeholders (participants and others who have a vested interest). As I had constructed the objectives and analysis myself, a limitation is apparent.

The second limitation found was in regards to not investigating why Māori students do not appeal. It would be helpful to investigate these reasons as it could highlight further barriers that may be experienced throughout the appeal process, as well as those felt in accessing social supports.

The third limitation was in regards to the analysis of age as a factor for participants' appeals. A comparison between school leavers and mature students could be an interesting area for future research, in regards to investigating any differences they experienced whilst undergoing the appeal process and what social supports they utilised.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The attainment of tertiary education for Māori has been discussed by the Waitangi Tribunal (1999) as a means to address the disparities evident between Māori and non-Māori pertaining to crime rates, overall health, and welfare dependency. With the importance of degree attainment in mind, my research focus was towards Māori students who had failed, but overcame the failure to continue to pursue degree attainment. Through the positive focus of Māori students who had been successful in their pursuit, consideration was given towards the impacting factors that contributed to their failure. In addition, by participants overcoming their factors which contributed to their failure, they were deemed as displaying resilient qualities in their academic engagement upon re-entry.

The appeals process at the University of Waikato provided the context to investigate what factors contributed to the participants' initial failure, and ways in which these were overcome. My research opened up the reasons why Māori students had successfully appealed to continue on with their studies. The overall aim of my research was to investigate the social supports utilised to aid in participants' successful appeal.

To help explore students' appeal processes, three time frames were investigated: leading up to, during, and after their appeals (seen in Chapters Three through Five). The three time frames were used to identify the supports participants utilised at each time, as well as any barriers they had identified or experienced. In addition, further research objectives were employed to help expand on participants' experiences throughout their appeal. These objectives included:

- Māori cultural identity, and any cultural obligations or expectations participants' had;
- motivations for appealing;
- what perceived social supports were available to them;
- and what barriers participants' experienced.

The findings of my research highlight the importance that perceived social supports had in aiding students through the appeal process. Social supports also aided participants in their academic engagement post appeal. In addition, my research also contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to one marker of what Māori tertiary student resilience looks like (within the context of the appeal process).

## **The appeal process**

The appeal process provided an opportunity for students who had negative experiences during their study, to make changes to their study habits in ways that would facilitate the completion of their degree. The appeal process forced participants to identify factors that inhibited their academic engagement and then introduce changes in order to do so.

The contemplation of whether or not to appeal, was an initial difficulty experienced by participants who had experienced other commitment factors leading up to the appeal (such as socialising and work). The reason participants who had typically experienced other commitment factors underwent a contemplation process, was due to the difficulty in identifying what had contributed to their initial failure.

For participants who had experienced medical or compassionate factors (such as family issues), the impact these had on their academic engagement were easier to express and could be verified through references from health practitioners. It was found however, that discussing compassionate factors was a barrier felt by one of the participants, Maia, given the personal nature of her factors.

From statistical analysis of the appeal numbers, students are generally accepted by the Dean of their School to re-enter and continue with their degree. This was reflected in the large number of successes for students who had appeals approved their Dean. Students who had been declined by their Dean were few in number. Of students whose appeal had been declined, there was a further option to appeal to the Admission Appeals Committee.

Students who chose to utilise the AAC appeal avenue were likely to be successful. There was however, a small number of Māori and non-Māori students who were eligible to continue to make another appeal to the AAC, but did not do

so. Why students chose not to continue to exhaust the AAC appeal avenue was a consideration for future research. Given the provision of the appeal process, and the large number of successful appeals, it can be concluded that the process is encouraged by the University of Waikato as a second chance for students to continue with their studies.

The appeal process gave participants the opportunity to be academically engaged after having failed and perceived social supports have been determined to aid in this process. An investigation into participants' perceived social supports was my overall research aim, the importance of which has been highlighted to some degree by each of the 13 participants. The two categories of perceived social supports utilised by participants included informal and/or formal supports.

**Informal social support.** The informal supports nominated by participants included whānau, friends, significant others, and university peers. These informal sources of support helped participants emotionally (through encouragement), through provisions of advice and references, as well as other physical/instrumental support (such as financial aid for example). The resulting costs of utilising informal supports came with expectations to succeed, which acted as a motivator as well as a potential burden. In addition, cultural expectations and obligations were also resulting costs discussed by participants, such as Maia (who had tasks assigned to her by her hapū).

A further distinction was made within the category of informal social supports in regards to those sources that were knowledgeable of, or experienced with, the university system. These knowledgeable informal sources were either friends or whānau members, and provided participants with instrumental and appraisal support that was as knowledgeable as other formal supports (such as mentors or administrative staff). As a result from these knowledgeable informal supports, participants were able to overcome their barriers to accessing formal supports (such as Māori mentoring staff).

**Formal support.** The sources of formal support utilised by participants included:

- the counselling services on campus;
- Māori Liaison officers;
- tutors;
- Māori support units (such as Waiora and Te Ranga Ngaku);
- and other School specific personnel.

These sources of support aided participants in addressing their factors, either by provision of references, advice, or instrumental help. In addition, formal support also provided participants with additional academic skills (those who utilised the learning workshops), as well as provision of advice and references for the appeals.

The perceived costs from the utilisation of formal supports resulted in participants feeling that they were expected to be successfully engaged with their studies. The perceived expectation to be academically engaged by formal sources, was additionally felt by participants who had appealed more than once (Rhaegar for example).

The purpose of separating the three categories of perceived social support was not to suggest that one source was more beneficial than the other, but to show that having an avenue of support was important in the appeals process, although, the utilisation of informal sources outweighed the use of formal support provided by the University of Waikato.

Utilisation of social supports has been linked to resilient qualities, where social characteristics (such as extraversion) helped participants gain further aid when needed. In addition, barriers were also felt by participants in deciding whether to appeal, and in the utilisation of social supports (particularly formal services).

The initial barrier experienced, yet overcome by all participants, was in making the decision to appeal. Here is where social supports can be paramount in aiding students with their decision to appeal, through the provision of motivation and encouragement, as well as references (character or medical notes, for examples).

Participants' perceptions of the usefulness of their social supports resulted in the future use of these, where positive perceptions resulted in the likelihood of participants utilising these. For those who had negative perceptions of formal supports in particular, participants (such as May) chose not to utilise them. In addition, barriers were found by participants regarding their utilisation of formal supports, which included pride, internal and anticipated stigmatisation, as well as whakamā. However, as all 13 participants had access to at least one form of social support, they counteracted or avoided the barriers felt in accessing further formal support.

As participants overcame the factors (medical, compassionate, and other commitments) encountered throughout their appeal through use of their strategies (such as more use of social supports), and were academically engaged upon re-entry, they were deemed to be resilient according to my predetermined marker. All 13 participants were successful in their appeal process, and discussed having utilised perceived social supports to aid in that process, through to their academic engagement upon re-entry.

As participants experienced negative factors, the appeals process also provided an opportunity for them to address these, and continue to attain their degrees. Through recruiting participants who had successfully appealed, a more positive outlook was apparent as their experiences showcase how they did so, and can help inform future appellants. By providing the success stories of participants, my research aimed to move past an individual focus largely associated with blaming students' traits when they experience factors that affect academic engagement. Through participant's resilience after having successfully appealed, the benefits of the appeal process could be seen in a future increase of retention and completion rates for Māori tertiary students.

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# APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Tena koe,

my name is Danielle Diamond and I am currently doing my Master's in Community Psychology at The University of Waikato.

You are being sent this email because you are listed as a Māori student who has studied/or is still studying at The University of Waikato, and have successfully made an appeal to re-enter your study at some stage from 2003 through to 2012.

I am investigating the process of Māori students who have successfully appealed and re-entered study at The University of Waikato. By successfully appealing you have gone through a tough process that not everyone makes. Because you have successfully done so I would really like to hear your story of what/who helped you get there!

## **My research questions:**

5. Why Māori students appeal?
6. What it means to be a 'Māori student' and questions around cultural identity.
7. What barriers are in place leading up to and during the appeal process?
8. What support systems are in place leading up to and during the appeal process and what are the dynamics of these support systems (in terms support systems influences/their attitudes/cultural expectations and identity etc)?
9. What barriers are there after the re-entry process?
10. What support systems did you access after re-entry?
11. What was the outcome of the appeal and was it positive?

## **Why am I doing this research topic?**

I am passionate about seeing an increase in Māori student retention rates (seeing more Māori complete their degrees), as figure from 2010 show that Māori tend to have fewer higher-level qualifications than non-Māori.

The appeal process is one area that has not yet been researched, and you have the opportunity to tell your story of how you did it; why you decided to appeal, what was really helpful for you, and what may have been helpful to have. By appealing and re-entering study, you have already taken a step towards increasing the retention rates of Māori tertiary students!

## **What the research involves:**

- An interview (no longer than an hour) to discuss questions around the above mentioned goals (what helped you through the process/helped you reach the decision for example). These will be conducted in July/August.

For the interview I would appreciate it if you could hunt down your appeal letter and/or a plan you made (if you still have these). This will only be used to get you in the mindset of the appeal process and help jog your memory of the appeal process.

- There is also an opportunity to be a part of a potential follow up interview, which will ask you about studying after the appeal process and a reflection

of what you went through during the appeal (which will be no longer than an hour). These will be conducted in August/September.

**Does this sound like something you may want to be part of?**

This research will be based in Hamilton, so if you are still living in the area I would love to hear from you!

All interviews will be in one of the study rooms at the library at The University of Waikato, and exact times and dates will be arranged to suit your schedule.

**How do you sign up?**

If you are interested in taking part in this research, or for more information, please email me directly at: **[djd12@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:djd12@students.waikato.ac.nz)**

During all stages of this research, you will be guaranteed anonymity and your name will not be printed anywhere. Even though you are being emailed this recruitment poster as a group from a staff member at The University of Waikato, I will be the only one who knows who decided they would like to participate.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider being part of this research!  
Regards,  
Danielle Diamond

**Further information:**

This research has ethical approval from the School of Psychology's Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical procedure of this research, please contact Dr. Nicola Starkey: [nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz)

My supervisors are Bridgette Masters-Awatere [bridge@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:bridge@waikato.ac.nz) and Cate Curtis [ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz)

# APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET

Tena koe ano,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in these interviews!

This information sheet will tell you what you need to know as a participant in this research.

## **Where and when will the interviews be?**

- The first interview will be conducted in **September**. The exact dates and times of the interviews will be negotiated to suit your schedule.
- The second potential interview will be 1-2 months after the first interview. Exact dates and times will again be negotiated to suit your schedule.
- Both interviews will be in one of the bookable meeting **rooms at the library** on campus, for example room 3.03. I will send you the details once we have arranged a date and time that suits.

## **What do I have to bring for the interview?**

Please bring your appeal letter and/or plan that you had when you decided to appeal (if you still have it). This will only be used as a memory jogger to get you to think back to the appeal process.

## **What do I have to do?**

This research involves two 'one on one' interviews to discuss the research questions mentioned above. There is an opportunity to take part in two interviews.

1. The first interview will be an opportunity for us to get to know each other, and to discuss studying leading up the appeal, and the appeal process itself. This interview will not be any longer than 2 hours.
2. There is an opportunity to be a part of a potential follow up interview, which will ask you about studying after the appeal process and a reflection of what you went through during the appeal. This interview will be no longer than an hour.

## **The research questions:**

1. Why did you decide to appeal?
2. What does it mean to be a 'Māori student,' and questions around cultural identity.
3. What barriers did you experience (if any) leading up to and during the appeal process?
  - a. Barriers can include things you experienced which resulted in you facing appeal process, and things that you experienced during the appeal process that may have been difficult.
4. What support systems are in place leading up to and during the appeal process and what are the dynamics of these support systems (in terms support systems influences/their attitudes/cultural expectations and identity etc)?
5. What made returning to study easy or difficult?

6. What support systems did you access after re-entry?
7. What was the outcome of the appeal and was it positive?

### **What rights do I have as a participant?**

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions that may be uncomfortable to answer. You also have the right to withdraw from this research up until two weeks after receiving a summary of the first interview. You can do so with no negative consequences to yourself. This is in accordance to the ethical procedures at The University of Waikato.

This research project has ethical approval from the School of Psychology's Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical procedure of this research, please contact Dr. Nicola Starkey: [nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz).

### **Are you aware that there is a counselling service for students on campus?**

They are located at the student health building (Gate 1).

Appointments can be made at their reception desk, or by phoning **078384037**

This service is **free for all current students**, and confidential.

They can help find solution to problems that may arise, such as "loneliness, living arrangements, anger, study overload, grief" and much more (student counselling service).

For more information you can visit them online at:

<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/sasd/health/counselling.shtml>

or email [student\\_services@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:student_services@waikato.ac.nz)

For participants who are not current students at The University of Waikato, there are a number of different counsellors available in the Hamilton Area (and in other parts of New Zealand).

Here is an address for a website which has compiled a list of counsellors available in the Hamilton area:

<http://waikato.webhealth.co.nz/provider/search/category/3/>

These counsellors provided help for a wide range of issues, from substance abuse through to grief counselling.

Webhealth provides a page with 'tips on how to choose a counsellor'

<http://waikato.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/22/tips-for-choosing-a-counsellor/> which may be of some help.

Please note that these counselling services do cost – (on average this is \$90 a session).

You may be able to get counselling subsidised if you meet certain criteria.

Please visit this page from webhealth for more information:

<http://waikato.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/4/how-do-i-pay-for-counselling/>

# APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Appendix D: Consent form

## Consent Form



### PARTICIPANT'S COPY

Research Project:

Name of Researcher:

Name of Supervisor (if applicable):

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Nicola Starkey, phone: 838 4466 ext.6472, e-mail [nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz))

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Consent Form



### RESEARCHER'S COPY

Research Project:

Name of Researcher:

Name of Supervisor (if applicable):

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

[Admin.com/psychology/forms/consentform](http://Admin.com/psychology/forms/consentform)

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Introduce myself
- Explain research goals and what is involved
- Ask if they have any questions?
- Ethics:
  - Right to refuse to answer questions –we can just skip uncomfortable questions
  - Right to withdraw two weeks after receiving the summary, after this time is up I will assume you still wish to participate.
  - Do you mind if I record this interview?
- Sign consent form
- Ask for email address- confirm I have the right one
- Explain I may take notes, just to remind myself of an idea later
- Start questions
- End of interview:
  - Thank you for participating, I will email you a summary within a week.
  - With the summary I would like you to read through what was said today to make sure I have understood you correctly
  - Please don't hesitate to email me if you have any questions
  - Again you have two weeks once you have received this to withdraw from the research.

### First Interview questions:

1. Whakawhanaungatanga
  - E.g: Where are you from? What Iwi to you affiliate with? Where did you grow up – what was your upbringing like? What/who helped you make the decision to attend university? What did you whānau and friends think of your decision to study at university?
  - Demographics: how old are you? What degree are you doing/did you do?
2. Cultural identity: What does it mean for you to be a 'Māori student' – Prompts:
  - Were there any expectations/attitudes on you as being a 'Māori student'?
  - Both positives and negatives?
  - From others and/or whānau?
3. What was studying like before appealing?
  - What happened before this time/leading up to the appeal (barriers that lead to failing?)
  - Discuss contributing factors

4. What helped you reach the decision to appeal (support systems, realisation of barriers, attitudes, expectations)?

- Was there anyone/people you went to for advice?
- Why did you seek these people out?
- What did your whānau/friends think of your decision?
- What were some of the stand out positives/negatives during this time?

5. What happened next with the actual appeal process (writing the appeal letter, getting a staff mentor for example).

Prompts:

- Was there anyone you went to for advice or help?
- Was there anything that was particular difficult to deal with/write (any barriers to making the appeal?)
- Was there anything that was particularly easy to deal with/write?

6. What happened when the decision came through – what was next?

Prompts:

- Did you have to appeal to the Appeals Committee?
- What was your next move? Did you go and talk to someone about your course of study?
- Did you have a nominated staff mentor? What were the expectations of you once you successfully appealed?

7. What was studying like after successfully appealing?

Prompts:

- Were there any difficulties/positives? Did studying ‘feel’ different? What was it like having a staff mentor (if you had one)?

8. Looking back, is there anything you may have done differently?

Prompts:

- Is there anything you would tell yourself back then that you know now?
- Are there any skills that you’ve learnt going through the appeal process?

9. What would you say to other students looking at appealing? What advice would you give them?

Prompts:

- Are there any things you did that others may not have thought to do (for example ask for support from a tutor/lecturer etc)?

# APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANTS' STRATEGIES

| Participant  | Factors experienced leading up to the appeal  | Strategies nominated to address factors  |
|--|---|--|
| <u>Maia:</u><br>Utilised whanau, in addition to a relative who was knowledgeable of the university system. | <u>Compassionate reasons:</u><br>1. Aiding a friend experiencing a personal issue,<br>2. and additional work commitments. | 1. Her friend had addressed her personal issue.<br>2. Reduced her work hours.  |
| <u>Tama:</u><br>Utilised whanau, in addition to a relative who was knowledgeable of the university system. | <u>Other commitments:</u><br>1. Living environment, and maintaining a household   | 1. Moved back home in order to focus on studying   |
| <u>Mon:</u><br>Utilised whanau, in addition to a friends.  | <u>Compassionate reasons:</u><br>1. Death in family,<br>2. and additional work commitments                                | 1. Took time away from study to deal with the death.<br>2. Reduced work hours  |
| <u>May:</u><br>Utilised whanau, in addition to a relative who was knowledgeable of the university system.  | <u>Other commitments:</u><br>1. Socialising   | 1. Placed high priority on academic engagement (more time and energy dedicated to assignment completion and lecture attendance, for examples). |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><u>Em:</u><br/>Utilised informal support (whanau, friends, and her significant other).</p>  | <p><u>Compassionate reasons:</u><br/>1. Family issue,<br/>2. and additional work commitment</p>                                       | <p>1. Reduced study to part time in order to address the family issue, and also allowed Em to continue to work full time.</p>  |
| <p><u>Rhaegar:</u><br/>Utilised formal support (Maori Liaison officer). In addition, Rhaegar had perceived informal support (whanau and his significant other).</p>  | <p><u>Other commitment factors:</u><br/>1. socialising,<br/>2. work,<br/>3. and living environment</p>                                | <p>1. Reduce socialising time and focus on academic engagement.<br/>2. Reduce work hours.<br/>3. Focus on academic engagement.</p>   |
| <p><u>Robin:</u><br/>Utilised formal support (Maori Liaison officer, and learning workshops). In addition, Robin had perceived informal support (whanau and friends).</p>  | <p><u>Other commitment factors:</u><br/>1. Socialising,<br/>2. and work.</p>  | <p>1. Severely reduce socialising time and instead focus on academic engagement.<br/>2. Reduce work hours</p>  |
| <p><u>Hayley:</u><br/>Utilised whanau and her significant other. In addition, she utilised a friend that was knowledgeable of the university system, as well as the friends (whanau units) made from Waiora.</p> | <p><u>Medical and compassionate factors:</u><br/>1. medical complications post pregnancy,<br/>2. isolation,<br/>3. and childcare.</p> | <p>1. Seeking medical aid.<br/>2. New study environment was supportive, and further facilitated induction into Waiora.<br/>3. Utilising offers of babysitting, and also enrolling her child in Kohanga</p> |
| <p><u>Hana:</u><br/>Utilised informal support (whanau and friends).</p>  | <p><u>Medical and compassionate factors:</u><br/>1. Relatively new medical illness,<br/>2. and a break up</p>                         | <p>1. Sought help from medical practitioners.<br/>2. Took time to deal with her break up, and has a good home environment.</p>   |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><u>Mina:</u><br/>Utilised informal support (whanau and friends).</p>   | <p><u>Other commitment factors:</u><br/>1. Being a solo mother of two (childcare and household maintenance).</p>   | <p>1. Utilising more support systems; both informal and formal.</p>   |
| <p><u>Laura:</u><br/>Utilised whanau. In addition, she utilised knowledgeable friends (whanau units) from TRN.</p>  | <p><u>Medical and other commitments:</u><br/>1. Depression,<br/>2. as well as being a solo mother of two (childcare and household maintenance).</p>  | <p>1. Utilisation of Student Counselling services.<br/>2. Being a limited full time student (which allowed more time with her children).</p>                |
| <p><u>Wyn:</u><br/>Utilised informal support (whanau, friends and her significant other).</p>   | <p><u>Other commitments and medical factors:</u><br/>1. Wyn's first appeal regarded socialising and work.<br/>2. Wyn's second appeal was a result of being diagnosed with a relatively new illness).</p> | <p>1. Reduced socialising and work commitments.<br/>2. Sought medical aid.</p>  |
| <p><u>Jax :</u><br/>Utilised formal support (Maori Liaison officer). In addition, Jax also had perceived informal support (whanau, friends, and employer)</p> | <p><u>Other commitments:</u><br/>1. Work</p>   | <p>1. Jax had nominated to reduce his work hours (but did not eventuate due to a job offer). Jax also nominated and utilised formal academic workshops.</p> |

# GLOSSARY

A glossary has been provided to give meaning to particular words used in my thesis. Where appropriate, the definition of Māori words and concepts have been gained from Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary (2013), retrieved from <http://www.Māoridictionary.co.nz/>

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Hapū                 | Kinship group, sub-tribe.                                    |
| Hui                  | To gather, assemble, meet.                                   |
| Iwi                  | Extended kinship group, tribe.                               |
| Kaupapa              | Agenda, subject.   |
| Manaaki/Manaakitanga | Hospitable, kind and helping others.                         |
| Putea                | Fund, finance.   |
| Tangi                | Mourning, grief.   |
| Te Ao Māori          | A Māori world view.  |
| Tino Rangatiratanga  | Self-determination.  |
| TRN                  | Te Ranga Ngaku.  |
| Whakamā              | Be ashamed, shy, embarrassed.                                |
| Whakataukī           | Proverb or saying.   |
| Whakawhanaungatanga  | Process of establishing ties, or relationships, with others. |
| Whānau (taha whanau) | Extended family.   |
| Whanaungatanga       | Relationship with others, fostering a sense of belonging.    |