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**Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology:
Centring the Embodied Experiences of young Māori and Pasifika
Wāhine in Physical Activity and Everyday Life**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

at

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by

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Abstract

Young Indigenous Māori and Pasifika wāhine (women) in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa) have too often been framed as vulnerable, 'at risk' and problematic in the media, policy and research. This thesis moves beyond these deficit framings and uses an Indigenous feminist, strengths-based approach by centring the voices and lived experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who are agentic in their everyday lives, celebrate their strong brown bodies and are physically active.

Being an Indigenous feminist early career researcher of Māori-Samoan ancestry, I intentionally weave Mana Wahine (Māori) and Masi (Pasifika) methodologies throughout all aspects of this research. Employing wānanga (focus group discussions), individual interviews and digital methods, I gather knowledge from a total of 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine residing in two low socio-economic urban regions (Porirua and South Auckland) in Te Ika-a-Maui, the North Island of Aotearoa. Centring their voices and lived experiences, I examine how the young wāhine embrace and weave their intersectional identities with culture, body image and physical activity.

This is a PhD with publication. It begins with an introductory chapter and a literature review chapter that locates the project in the context of Aotearoa and the local and international literature. In the methods chapter, which is a published article, I focus on the importance of creating culturally safe and supportive spaces for young wāhine to participate in research that feels meaningful to them. The empirical chapters are presented in three different manuscripts. Chapter Four contains a manuscript (currently under review) that focuses on the intersectional identities of the young wāhine. It is structured using three key themes, including 1) ethnic and cultural identities, 2) navigating, and 3) how they embrace cultural pride, particularly through family values, customs and responsibilities. Chapter Five is a published manuscript that explores body image through an intersectional Indigenous feminist lens. This publication examines cultural perspectives that influence their views on body image and provides insights into how the young wāhine navigate body image stereotypes. Chapter six is the final empirical manuscript (currently under review) that evaluates the motivations the young wāhine have for participation in physical activity. It examines the types of activities they enjoy and provides insights into how and why they use cultural knowledge as a motivator for participation.

This research contributes to international literature conducted with, for and by Indigenous feminist scholars on young women's identities, body image and physical activity. It responds to the limited academic scholarship that explores the lived experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa and their nuanced cultural knowledge of their bodies. In so doing, this research offers insights and new ways of understanding the complex lives of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine, and highlights the importance of intersectional approaches and localized Indigenous methods that listen to, and amplify the voices of young wāhine.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by acknowledging the strong, independent young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who willingly contributed their precious time and knowledge to be the focus of this thesis. Your lived experiences, resolve and resilience is empowering, and I hope that I have represented you authentically throughout this thesis. Thank you for your raw honesty and for unashamedly standing strong in your respective cultures and identities. My life is so much richer because of you.

Thank you so much to my wonderful star-studded supervisory team, Holly, Keaka, Anna and Justin. I am so grateful and appreciative of your individual contributions in time, knowledge and counsel that has contributed to my growth over the past few years. You have helped open my eyes to this wonderful world of research and I feel more confident and comfortable with standing proud in who I am as an Indigenous early career researcher. I am so blessed to have had such an amazing group of experts guide and grow me through this journey. I am deeply indebted to you all.

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List and Summary of Publications

This thesis follows the University of Waikato guidelines for a “Phd with Publication” where at least one chapter must be published in an academic journal. In this thesis there are four manuscripts distributed across four different chapters. Two are published and two are currently under review. As these manuscripts are part of this research, there is inevitable repetition with content in the introduction, methods, methodologies, and discussion sections of these chapters. It should also be noted that the manuscripts included in this thesis will differ from published versions as APA 7th referencing and a specific formatting style has been implemented for the purpose of consistency throughout this thesis. Also, all references across all chapters, including the manuscripts, are combined and listed alphabetically in the [references section](#) at the end of this thesis. Published versions of the manuscripts can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

This thesis is the intellectual and analytical work of Mihi Nemani, Professor Holly Thorpe, Assistant Vice-Chancellor Pacific Dr. Keaka Hemi, Dr. Anna Rolleston, and Associate Professor Justin Richards. The contributions of co-authored manuscripts are detailed in the Statement of Authorship in [Appendix 2](#). In this section I provide a brief description of each manuscript, the chapter where it can be located, how it is modified for this thesis, and external links to published manuscripts where available.

[Chapter 3: Methodology – Manuscript Title: ‘You made us feel at home’: towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise](#)

Authors: Mihi Nemani, Holly Thorpe, Keaka Hemi and Anna Rolleston.

This chapter takes a novel approach to methodology by weaving together two Indigenous feminist methodologies – Mana Wahine and Masi methodology. Throughout the paper we provide detail on the practices that were implemented throughout thus illustrating the weaving process throughout this project. We provide this knowledge for future Indigenous researchers looking to engage young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. This thesis chapter was published in *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* in August 2023.

This chapter has been modified using formatting and referencing styles consistent with this thesis. The Co-Authorship Form can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

The full reference for this article is:

Mihi Nemani, Holly Thorpe, Keaka Hemi & Anna Rolleston (2023) 'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, DOI: [10.1080/2159676X.2023.2250536](https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2023.2250536)

Link to full article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2023.2250536>

[Chapter 4: Manuscript Title: 'I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me': Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa](#)

Authors: Mihi Nemani, Holly Thorpe, Keaka Hemi and Anna Rolleston.

This manuscript is currently under review at the *International Indigenous Policy Journal*. In this chapter we use Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology to centre the voices of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine as they share aspects of their identity that affect them on a daily basis. We discuss aspects of their identities that intersect and analyse how these shape and impact their lives.

This manuscript has been modified using formatting and referencing styles consistent with this thesis and the table is included at the end of the chapter.

The Co-Authorship Form can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

[Chapter 5: Manuscript Title: "My Thighs Can Squash You": Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies](#)

Authors: Mihi Nemani and Holly Thorpe.

This chapter is a published article in *Youth* journal. The publication was invited as part of a special issue titled 'Body Image: Youth, Gender and Health' published in September 2023. This publication has also been included as a [Child and young voice research findings](#) resource on the Child and Youth Wellbeing website. In this article we provide new culturally informed understandings of body image for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. We provide examples of how they enact body pride and draw upon cultural knowledge to reject dominant framings of beauty and reclaim power in their own bodies.

This manuscript has been modified using formatting and referencing styles consistent with this thesis and the table is included at the end of the chapter.

The Co-Authorship Form can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

The full reference for this article is:

Nemani, M. J., & Thorpe, H. (2023). "My Thighs Can Squash You": Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies. *Youth*, 3(3), 971-990.

Link to full article: <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-995X/3/3/62>

Chapter 6: Manuscript Title: Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand

Authors: Mihi Nemani, Holly Thorpe, Keaka Hemi, Anna Rolleston, and Justin Richards.

This manuscript is currently under review with *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. In this chapter we focus on the physical activity motivations for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in low socio-economic urban cities in Aotearoa. We provide insights into their physical activity choices and discuss how cultural factors are woven into these choices.

This manuscript has been modified using formatting and referencing styles consistent with this thesis and the table is included at the end of the chapter.

The Co-Authorship Form can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Waiting for my appointment at Pasifika Physio in Otara (a low socio-economic community in Auckland, New Zealand), I start scrolling through my social media pages. “Undesirable”, “overweight”, “inactive”, “high teen pregnancies”, “uneducated”, “unemployable”. The language repeatedly used to describe the young Māori and Pasifika women in my community leave my stomach churning. These are not fair or accurate representations. The young Māori and Pasifika women I know are kind, passionate and driven. They play sport, have dreams of helping others and want to achieve to make their families proud. It makes me wonder, who writes these pieces and where are those writers from? What assumptions do they bring to their journalism? Do they know the effect of their repeatedly negative headlines? ‘Mihi, come through now,’ calls Mairangi (my physio) breaking my chain of thinking. As she’s massaging my leg, I ask what she thinks and how she feels about the negative media around young women such as herself. ‘Well, that’s what they think about us, but I know that’s not who we are’, she replies. Laying on the table, I nod in agreement. This is what drives my research; to create safe and supportive spaces for these young women’s voices where I can provide more accurate representations of who they are.

Sport, fitness and recreation has played a major role in my life through participation, education and employment. My lived experiences with sport, fitness and recreation has shaped my life in a positive way. However, it wasn’t until embarking on post-graduate study that I realized the voices of Māori and Pasifika in academia and research were often marginalized. I discovered that research and narratives on Māori and Pasifika communities in the fields of physical activity, sport and recreation did not align with the narratives I had experienced. For example, The Sport New Zealand ‘Spotlight on Deprivation’ report (2019) found that Māori and Pacific people are over-represented in high deprivation areas in Aotearoa and that this was negatively associated with participation in physical activity. Interestingly, this negative participation appears to be particularly pertinent for women (Brocklesby, 2019; Forneris et al., 2013; Haughey et al., 2015; NZ Hillary Commission for Sport, 1994).

There is emerging evidence for how quality physical activity experiences foster social connections and community cohesion (Burke et al., 2008; Cradock et al., 2009; R. E. Lee et al., 2012). However, to date, only a small body of research has explored the facilitators and barriers for Māori and Pasifika young wāhine (women) to participate in physical activity in Aotearoa (Heke, 2022; Ni Mhurchu et al., 2019; O’Brien, 2018; O’Brien et al., 2019). A few

scholars have explored the unique cultures that Māori and Pasifika wahine have redefined for some sporting pursuits (i.e. bodyboarding, netball, rugby) (Kanemasu, 2023; Nemani & Thorpe, 2016; F. Palmer, 2016, 2016; Schaaf, 2011; Sotutu, 2022; Teevale, 2001), but there has been little research that focuses specifically on the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine and their engagement in physical activity. There is also limited research in Aotearoa, about how culture and identity influence the perspectives and experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. The challenges of maintaining engagement of Māori and Pasifika wāhine in physical activity across the lifespan are widely recognised and although the health benefits of being physically active are well known, statistics show that the engagement of Māori and Pasifika wāhine declines after the age of 18 years (Brocklesby & van Bergenhenegouwen, 2019; Sport New Zealand, 2023a).

In this research I focus on a group of young wāhine identified in recent Sport New Zealand reports to have some of the lowest rates of participation in sport and active recreation: Māori and Pasifika who live in high deprivation communities (Spotlight on Deprivation: Key Findings, 2019). However, rather than reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating a deficit model, this research focuses on young wāhine in these communities who are actively participating. My intention is to learn and develop knowledge and understanding from their lived experiences and stories. To do this, my research prioritizes and amplifies the voices of 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine as they share their lived experiences that influence their cultural identity, views on body image, and engagement with physical activity. The location for this research takes place in two urban low-socioeconomic communities in the largest cities of Aotearoa; Porirua in Wellington and South Auckland. To align culturally with the young wāhine, this study weaves together two Indigenous feminist methodologies - Mana Wāhine (Māori) and Masi methodology (Pacific). Culturally appropriate qualitative methods were used including wānanga¹, kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui², digital diaries, and wherever possible the sharing of kai³. These methodologies and data gathering methods were implemented purposefully to respect and acknowledge the young wāhine in their respective cultures. The intent was to create a culturally safe space where they felt comfortable sharing their knowledge and experiences.

¹ A meeting to discuss and deliberate.

² A face-to-face meeting.

³ The Māori word for food.

The overall objective of this research is to show how the experiences and knowledge of young wāhine who are active can be translated to positively influence the lives of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who are less active. By amplifying the voices of young wāhine who are physically active, the findings in this project have the potential to inform policy and practice that better supports the unique needs of Māori and Pasifika wāhine particularly in relation to cultural identity, body image, and physical activity. This research will also make an original contribution to literature and knowledge with, for, and by Indigenous women.

This chapter will provide context with myself as lead researcher, and cultural context for Māori and Pacific peoples within Aotearoa, as well as introduce a few key concepts. As an Aotearoa born Māori-Samoan, Indigenous feminist who has resided in South Auckland for most of my life, my worldview and mixed ethnic life experiences provide a unique insider Indigenous research perspective. Starting with my pepeha (traditional Māori introduction), I present the complexity of my lived experience and positionality in this research as it affects and shapes the nature of this research. Next is a brief overview of Aotearoa and Māori worldviews (Indigenous people of Aotearoa), followed by Pacific knowledges, and values. After outlining the historical and cultural connections between Māori and Pacific peoples an explanation of physical activity terminology will be provided along with a brief on current programmes and policy for young women in Aotearoa. This chapter will then conclude with a brief description of the topics in each of the following chapters.

My Pepeha

(Māori language)

Ko Māori me Sāmoan ahau – I am Māori-Samoan

Ko Huruiki te maunga – *My mountain is Huruiki*

Ko Mokau te awa – *My sea is Mokau*

Ko Mātaatua te waka – *My canoe is Mātaatua*

Ko Ngātiwai te iwi – *My tribe is Ngātiwai*

Ko Mokau te marae – *My meeting place is Mokau*

Ko Te Uri o Hikihiki te hapū – *My sub-tribe is Te Uri o Hikihiki*

(Samoan language)

O lou igoa aiga Samoa o Po – *My Samoan family name is Po*

O lou nu'u Samoa Lauli'i i Upolu – *My Samoan village is Lauli'i in Upolu Samoa*

Na ou tuu faatasi i Aotearoa – *I was born in Aotearoa*

(Samoan/Māori)

O lo'u igoa o Mihi Nemani /Ko Mihi Nemani toku ingoa – *My name is Mihi Nemani*

A pepeha answers the question of, Ko wai au?/Who am I? When answering this question through a Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) lens, it is much more than just a brief introduction. It connects an individual to their whenua (land) historically and genealogically and it holistically situates an individual in society (Kenny & Fraser, 2012; Mutu, 2013; Rameka, 2016). Barnes, McCreanor and Huakau (Barnes et al., 2008), insist “that no research is objective and that the values and the positioning of the researcher are never absent” (2008, p. 137). My identity and history inform my values, perspective, positioning, and approach to this research. This includes the choice of methodology and methods used. As a scholar, my research is strengthened by an identity and history that is not unlike the young wāhine with whom I have worked. I now briefly explain relevant aspects of my cultural upbringing and engagement with physical activity and sport through participation, employment, and education.

I was born in Te Kuiti Hospital in Aotearoa as it was the closest hospital to a small town called Piopio where my parents and older siblings were living. My late Father was an electrician and due to the transient nature of his employment we often moved around the North Island. We eventually settled in Otara (a low socio-economic suburb in South Auckland, Aotearoa), which is where I have lived most of my life. As a young Māori-Samoan wahine (woman), life consisted of church, school, sport, and family. My siblings and I were not overtly taught Māori or Samoan customs as our Latter-Day-Saint (LDS) religion was the over-arching ‘culture’ that was practised in our English-speaking home. My mother who was born and raised in Samoa spoke fluent Samoan but my late Father was part of a generation that was physically punished and beaten in schools for speaking te reo Māori (the Māori language) so he had not learned it. Based on their experiences living in Aotearoa as Māori and Samoan people, my parents believed that teaching my siblings and I Samoan and/or Māori language or culture would not improve or benefit our future. They had been colonised into believing that learning Samoan and Māori cultural practices and language would not help us progress economically in Aotearoa, so preferred to place their faith in religious ‘culture’. This upbringing affected my identity and beliefs about being Māori-Samoan.

My experience growing up as an Indigenous woman of mixed ethnicity in Aotearoa lends itself to the complex aspects of identity that the young wāhine in this research deal

with. For example, in my childhood and teen years my experiences with my Māori and Samoan cultures stemmed from extended family gatherings and events where I sometimes felt out of place due to not being accustomed to the protocols from either side. While I felt like I belonged in both Māori and Samoan communities, there was always a sense of not being fully accepted. It wasn't until I was an undergraduate studying in Hawaii where I worked at the Polynesian Cultural Centre as a Māori and Samoan performer that I began to feel more connected with my mixed heritage. This connection deepened throughout my post-graduate studies where I was able to explore my mixed Māori-Samoan identity and find authenticity and confidence with who I am through and beyond my sporting experiences (Nemani, 2013). I was also able to reflect on and realised that many cultural practices in my home were rooted in Māori and Samoan values and ways of being.

The young wāhine in this study have diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds that could potentially shape their engagement with physical activity. Through my own experiences, I offer perspectives on cultural ways that physical activity and sports may have impacted their involvement. My initial engagement with physical activity was influenced by church activities where values of looking after your physical well-being by being active were taught. The Church environment and youth programmes were also where my passion for playing basketball and competing was fostered. My father was a very active water man who swam and dived for kaimoana (seafood) with his family when he was younger. His love for the water had a big impact on my life and many childhood summers were spent at Oakura Beach (30km from Whangarei), with my Māori whānau. This developed into a deep appreciation and love for the ocean and waves and eventually into a passion for surfing, more specifically, bodyboarding. This took on a more competitive role in the late 2000's where I competed nationally and internationally.

My insider knowledge and perspectives as a participant in physical activity and sport lends further relevance and depth to this research. Additional participation and engagement with sport included social team sports in basketball, touch rugby, volleyball, water polo and ice hockey, while also playing individual sports socially such as squash, tennis, and badminton. My adventurous nature also led to participating in lifestyle sports such as snowboarding, skateboarding, rollerblading, and longboard surfing. Importantly, strength and conditioning training was constant throughout all levels of participation and was the foundation for success in many sports that I participated in. Eventually, my passion for strength and conditioning led

me to Olympic Weightlifting and CrossFit that resulted in my husband and I starting our own weightlifting club and opening a CrossFit gym. During this time, my competitive nature came to the fore, where I also competed in Weightlifting and CrossFit.

In addition to insider knowledge from a participant perspective I have also been able to concurrently increase my technical and esoteric knowledge on sport, fitness and physical activity through education, volunteer work, and employment. My education and ensuing qualifications were guided by my passion for physical activity and include a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science, Masters in Sport and Leisure Studies, and my current pursuit of a Doctor of Philosophy in Health, Sport and Human Performance. Volunteer work with different sport organisations included Surfing New Zealand and Olympic Weightlifting New Zealand, as well as coaching the Niuean Weightlifting Team at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow has provided me with rich knowledge of structural management and governance at different levels and my employment opportunities also align with physical activity and sport where I have worked with and for my Otago community. These include being a group fitness instructor (eg. zumba, box-fit, step, CrossFit trainer), a personal trainer, a recreation programmer, a gym owner, and an Academic (20+ years of teaching higher education).

My positioning in this research is unique and privileged as the extensive and diverse experiences I have had with physical activity as a Māori-Samoan wahine provides cultural insider knowledge, insights, and perspectives. Clarifying my positionality in this section by sharing my lived experiences and history demonstrates that my connection to this project is deep and complex. I also have a heightened sense of responsibility to the young wāhine in this project to ensure their voices and stories remain authentic. To do this, constant and frequent self-reflexivity has been practised throughout this entire research project. In the next section I introduce and provide more detail on Aotearoa and Māori people. Understanding the culture, the people, and the country of origin for this research will offer cultural knowledge and context for this study.

Aotearoa and Māori

Recognising that Māori are tangata whenua, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, is fundamental to understanding the cultural context of this research. Māori have a rich cultural heritage, and it encompasses beliefs and ways of being that provide a foundation for this study. Moreover, it is also important because this research is being conducted in Aotearoa is

done so with, for, and by, wāhine Māori⁴. In this section I begin with a concise history of Aotearoa and founding document Te Tiriti o Waitangi, followed by an exploration of the historical roles of wāhine Māori. I also discuss Māori ways of being and how different elements and values of Te Ao Māori are woven through this research.

The history of Aotearoa and Te Tiriti o Waitangi form an important anchor for this research because they affect the current social and political climate in Aotearoa thus affecting the lives of wāhine Māori. Māori were part of the Polynesian migration and were the first people to arrive on the shores of Aotearoa around AD 1280 (P. Borell & Kahi, 2017). Nearly 500 years later, in 1769, the first white man arrived in Aotearoa and this marked the beginning of colonisation by pākehā (Europeans) (Erueti & Palmer, 2014). As pākehā influences and colonisation of Māori progressed, countries including Britain, France, Australia, and America, visited Aotearoa and impacted Māori ways of life through trade, settlement, land purchases, and by introducing Christianity. In the 1830's the British Crown (hereafter the Crown) began to make steps to formalise their position in Aotearoa including gathering Northern Māori to choose a national flag, and drafting a Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand document that was signed by thirty-one Māori chiefs in the North Island (Orange, 2021). Eventually the Crown drafted a treaty in English, had it translated into te reo Māori, and on February 6th, 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (hereafter Te Tiriti) was signed by 540 Māori chiefs. Important to note is that there are two treaty documents; The Treaty of Waitangi is the pākehā version and Te Tiriti is the Māori version that was signed by the Māori chiefs. Given that Te Tiriti was the version that was signed by Māori, it is considered the correct version.

Te Tiriti is a formal agreement between Māori and the Crown and is considered the founding document of Aotearoa. The goal for the British was to have Māori agree to British sovereignty, and for Māori, they believed that they would benefit from British protection and that their cultural beliefs and rights as Māori were protected including having full control over their own affairs (Erueti & Palmer, 2014; Orange, 2017, 2021). Decades later, uncertainty and disagreements continue to arise between Māori and the Crown about the interpretation and implementation of Te Tiriti (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998; M. L. Hudson & Russell, 2009; Orange, 2017). To this day, there are ongoing tensions between Māori and the Crown around

⁴ The correct use of te reo Māori when speaking of Māori women (wāhine) and Māori men (tāne) places the words in this order: wāhine Māori and tāne Māori. This differs from Pasifika wāhine as Pasifika is not a Māori word.

Te Tiriti and recently due to a new coalition government, these tensions have led to grave concerns about the rights of Māori and some of the tenets of Te Tiriti that are at risk (Duff, 2023).

Te Tiriti holds significant importance in this research for young wāhine Māori as it impacts their lived experiences and physical activity participation in various ways. For example, Te Tiriti recognises the rights of Māori as the Indigenous people in Aotearoa (Orange, 2021). This knowledge affirms cultural identity for young wāhine Māori and their connection with the whenua (land). It also emphasises their right to self-determination as wāhine Māori including their choices to participate in various types of activities. It places responsibility on the Crown to work in partnership with wāhine Māori through collaboration, support, and by providing resources to help improve and enhance participation. However, recent statistics show otherwise where participation in physical activity is low for wāhine Māori in areas of high deprivation and that it steadily decreases as they reach 18 years of age (Brocklesby & van Bergenhenegouwen, 2019). Herein, my research focuses on understanding and addressing this disparity using strengths-based knowledge from young wāhine Māori who are physically active.

In Aotearoa, young wāhine Māori have often been portrayed in society through a deficit lens where their lives are too often shaped by negative statistical narratives including having the highest rates of teen pregnancies in Aotearoa (Pihama, 2011; Ware, 2019), high rates of smoking (Wehipeihana et al., 2018), and incarceration (Department of Corrections, 2016; Mita, 2021; Quince, 2010). These narratives often fail to acknowledge the systemic and structural impacts of colonisation that have shaped a society that discriminates against young wāhine Māori. However, recent strengths-based Indigenous scholarship conducted with, for, and by wāhine Māori shares how cultural knowledge strengthens their self-determination despite the challenges they face in their every-day lives (Adcock et al., 2019; Gerbic et al., n.d.; Moir, 2023).

Understanding how wāhine Māori roles have changed over time is important as it provides ethnic and cultural context for this research. The role of wāhine Māori in Aotearoa pre-colonisation was very different to the roles in the current colonised society. August (2005) and Simmonds (2011), explain that pre-colonised Aotearoa viewed tāne Māori and wāhine Māori as equals where they operated in society on complementary terms. Although the roles for tāne Māori and wāhine Māori differed, neither gender was placed above the

other. For example, Murphy (2019) recounts numerous stories where wāhine Māori were engaged in war and their physicality, prowess, strength and leadership played pivotal roles on the battlefield. Colonisation introduced patriarchal societal views and practices that gradually demoted the view, role and positioning of wāhine Māori below tāne Māori. This has resulted in a myriad of social inequities including poor health, poor education, and low employment rates. While these social inequities also affect tāne Māori, wāhine Māori were often the sole parent for children and assist in child rearing labour and so some of these inequities had greater implications (Heke, 2022; L. T. Smith, 1993; Warburton, 2008). Importantly, wāhine Māori often had different experiences than tāne Māori yet these were often overlooked. In response to these social inequalities and the impending negative effects on wāhine Māori, the Māori Women's Welfare League was established to provide wāhine Māori, a platform and space that addressed their specific needs. The Māori Women's Welfare League continues to work with and for wāhine Māori in helping them achieve their aspirations and providing support to enhance and improve their wellbeing (*Maori Women's Welfare League: Tatau Tatau*, 2015). In academia, many strong wāhine Māori have paved and led the way for other wāhine Māori by providing space for them as researchers and participants in efforts to reclaim and celebrate their stories (August, 2004; Forster et al., 2016; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2009, 2011; L. T. Smith, 2012a).

For Māori, individual connections with ancestry are informed through whakapapa (genealogy), that "connects an individual to multiple whānau (family), hapū (subtribes), and iwi (tribes)" (O'Connor, 2019, p. 3). It is very important to acknowledge that being Māori is by no means homogenous. Factors such as location of upbringing and exposure to Te Ao Māori will influence individualised practices, behaviours and beliefs. Diversity in cultural practises exists in most ethnic groups and this includes Māori (Erueti & Palmer, 2014; Hippolite, 2010; D. Wilson, 2008). This means that some Māori embrace cultural practises and beliefs, and others may not. Despite these differences in cultural practice, there are underlying values and beliefs that are important to Māori and these can be described through Te Ao Māori.

Māori have a proud and rich ancestry that is cloaked in tradition, values, and principles so to frame Te Ao Māori, it is important to explain some of the terms to have a better understanding of how they relate to this project. However, it is essential to firstly understand historical aspects of Māori participation in physical activity and sport. Smith and Smith (2023) explain that Māori have always been physically active. Pre-colonisation, Māori played games

and sport and these activities engaged the whole community regardless of gender, ability, or age. Māori also had views on the body in terms of how it could be trained physically to improve performance related to maintaining their livelihood such as hunting and fishing. Importantly, for Māori, sport and physical activity continue to be “primarily about a unique world view, a knowledge system of mātauranga and the application of knowledge to practice which we call tikanga that defines how sport was understood” (G. H. Smith & Smith, 2023, p. 3). The Kia Eke Panuku Academic team explain that “Mātauranga Māori is about a Māori way of being and engaging in the world – in its simplest form, it uses kawa (cultural practices) and tikanga (cultural principles) to critique, examine, analyse and understand the world” (Kia Eke Panuku, 2016, p. 1). Tikanga used in sport, physical activity and fitness in Aotearoa play a role in the way Māori participate and embody these types of activities. Examples of tikanga that are used in sport, physical activity, and fitness contexts include “building relationships (whānaungatanga), developing an ethic of caring (manaakitanga) and bonding (kotahitanga)” (Thompson et al., 2017, p. 33). Scholars have also used principles like *tino rangatiratanga* that relates to Māori having the power to make their own decisions about their own issues (Henwood, 2007; G. H. Smith & Smith, 2023). These concepts are important to Māori as they explain how and why they do things in many different social settings including sport, physical activity, and fitness.

An extremely important component of Te Ao Māori is te reo Māori. Simmonds (2011) explains that “Within Te Reo Māori there exists a uniquely Māori way of explaining and relating to the world” (p 12). As an example, Simmonds (2011) points out that a number of authors attempted to provide an understanding of ‘mana,’ but it was so complex because it was “multi-layered, relational, spatial, and informed by spiritual influences” (p. 12). I acknowledge that there may be interpretations of Te Ao Māori that may not resonate with those raised and immersed in Te Ao Māori. However, I will use the resources and knowledge available to me to proudly present Te Ao Māori through the experiences, knowledge, and voices of the young wāhine Māori whose voices I to amplify in upcoming chapters. In the next section, I will present the history of Pacific people in Aotearoa to provide cultural context for the young Pasifika wāhine in this study.

Pacific People in Aotearoa

Aotearoa is home to the world's largest Pacific population and as such, Pacific people have been an integral part of Aotearoa for over a century. Although many Pacific people migrated to Aotearoa, 66% were born here. In fact, some Pacific families have up to three generations born and raised in Aotearoa (Pasefika, 2016; Thomsen et al., 2023). Pacific people have made significant contributions in Aotearoa socially, politically, economically, and culturally (Pasefika, 2016; Thomsen et al., 2023). Furthermore, the Pacific population in Aotearoa is a younger, growing population, that is diverse, and culturally rich. Interesting to note, is that of Pacific people with multiple ethnicities, those of mixed Pacific-Māori heritage have the most significant increase (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020; Thomsen et al., 2023). As a growing and young population this research focussing on young Pacific wāhine is important for long term community, regional, and national outcomes. In this section I will provide more detail and context about the Pacific Island community in Aotearoa and provide insight into the cultural practices and ways of being that are unique to Pacific people and young Pacific wāhine living in Aotearoa.

The Pacific Island Countries are comprised of 25 different nations that are spread over the Pacific Ocean. There is immense cultural diversity amongst these nations that “have been traditionally grouped along racial and cultural lines as Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia” (Costa & Sharp, 2011, p. 2). In Aotearoa, these nations have been portrayed as a combined group categorised as Pacific People and they currently form the third largest ethnic group in Aotearoa (Statistics NZ, 2018). Pacific people living in Aotearoa are comprised of a group of 17 distinct ethnic groups and the seven ethnic groups with the largest numbers in order are “Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan” (Thomsen et al., 2023, p. 9). Important to note is that the number of Pacific people living in different areas across Aotearoa varies significantly. For example, 63.9% of the Pacific population live in Auckland, 11.2% in Wellington, and 5.4% in Hamilton (Thomsen et al., 2023). Although Pacific people are often categorized as one ethnic group in Aotearoa, it is important to acknowledge that each individual ethnicity has a unique and rich cultural history that links back to their country of heritage.

Acknowledging how different population groups want to be named provides respect and self-determination. Therefore, before providing more detail and context about Pacific people in Aotearoa, it is imperative to clarify and define the use of Pacific and Pasifika in this

research. Importantly, both terms represent people whose heritage is from the collective Islands that form the Pacific Islands yet they are complex and debated as minority Pacific groups such as those from Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea do not feel included with the term 'Pasifika.' The most significant difference between the terms relate to where a person was born, which therefore respects individual history and lived experiences. Fa'avae (2022) provides an explanation that resonates with this research when explaining that 'Pacific' represents all individuals whose heritage is from the Pacific Islands and that 'Pasifika' represents Pacific people who were not born in their respective islands of heritage. This is important because the ways that Pasifika have been raised, and the way they 'live' and experience their culture is significantly different than Pacific people who were born and raised in the Pacific Islands. There are differences in identity and self-determination for Pacific people who were not born and raised in their country of heritage. Pacific scholars have explored these identity and diasporic differences in Australia (Akbar et al., 2022a; Durham et al., 2023), America (P. Spickard et al., 2002; P. R. Spickard & Fong, 1995) and Aotearoa (Enari & Haua, 2021; Enari & Lemusuifeauaali'i, 2021). Mila-Schaaf (2010) explains:

The term 'Pasifika', coined by Aotearoa born Pacific Islanders, reflects a lived urban reality. . . Pasifika speaks to the urban reality of islanders and their attempts to balance notions of identity and loss, migration and place, youth and age, tradition and change (cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 23).

Like many other Pasifika academics (Enari, 2020; Gordon et al., 2010; Mila-Schaaf, 2010), I acknowledge that while the term 'Pasifika' is problematic because it does not address the nuances and richness between each ethnic group and indeed may marginalise some Pacific groups, it identifies individuals who were not born in the Pacific Islands and acknowledges the diasporic differences in identity. Pasifika is used in everyday language in South Auckland (which is one of the locations of relevance for this thesis), and it is also the term numerous young Pasifika people use to identify themselves. Drawing from Pasifika scholars and experiences with Pasifika in South Auckland, I will use 'Pasifika' to represent and respect the urbanised young Pasifika wāhine who are participants in this project and 'Pacific' will be used to represent all Pacific Island people.

Although being Pacific in Aotearoa is not homogenous, there are values and practices that span across these groups and these impact and affect the way they engage and view society. These include spirituality, faith, respect, family, community, and reciprocity (Kapeli,

2021; Naepi, 2019b; Ponton, 2018). One of the foundational attributes is that many Pacific people are spiritual and religious and as such, their cultural practises and values are often interwoven with a strong, deeply rooted belief in Christian God. Belonging to a religious group or church is a central factor of family life for Pacific people and this can take up their entire week with church activities such as youth, or bible studies, in addition to attending church on Sundays (Gordon et al., 2013). Balancing family, work, community, and church commitments can sometimes be challenging for Pacific families who are typically in lower socio-economic regions such as South Auckland and Porirua. Many Pacific families also live in inter-generational homes where grandparents, parents, and children collaboratively contribute to the running of the home (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022; Stats NZ, 2023). Pacific wāhine play integral roles in the home that include childcare, cleaning and cooking, while also working (Soa-Lafoa'i et al., 2023). Young Pacific wāhine often shoulder the responsibility of attending and doing well in school while also looking after and taking care of younger siblings while both parents are working. Some young wāhine also help support their families financially by working, and some are young mothers themselves (Kapeli, 2023; Moosad et al., 2022; Thorpe, Ahmad, et al., 2023).

In 1976, a group of Pacific women living in Aotearoa created and established an organisation called PACIFICA (Pacific Allied (Women's) Council Inspires Faith Ideals Concerning All Incorporated) with the intent of uniting their voices and intentions to work towards more positive outcomes for Pacific women and girls (Crawley & Morgan, 1993). A recent report commissioned by PACIFICA sought to better understand the challenges faced by Pacific women and girls in Aotearoa, and to understand their motivations behind their strength and resilience (Soa-Lafoa'i et al., 2023). The survey had 173 participants aged 15-60+ years where most respondents were from Auckland and Wellington. The main challenges reported included navigating cultural roles and obligations, intersectionality biases they face being Pacific and female, struggles with identity, and socioeconomic hardships (Soa-Lafoa'i et al., 2023). With regard to their motivations to staying resilient, the three most common and highest responses included being connected to family, their faith and spirituality, and their friends (Soa-Lafoa'i et al., 2023). These provide some helpful insights for Pacific wāhine living in Aotearoa however, of the 173 participants, only 31 were aged between 15-25 years. To date, little to no research has focussed specifically on the experiences of young Pasifika wāhine between the ages of 16-25 years, which is a gap that my research aspires to address.

In Aotearoa Pasifika scholars are using their lived experiences to amplify the voices of Pasifika in their communities. A few examples are Sandra Kailahi (2007, 2017), an Aotearoa born Tongan-New Zealand European woman who amplifies the voices and stories of successful Pasifika Women in Aotearoa. Another academic who is using a Pasifika platform and challenging the University sector is Sereana Naepi (2019c; 2020). Using voices of Pasifika academics and her own lived experiences, Naepi provides a space for the voices of Pasifika wāhine academics that has highlighted disparities in Universities in Aotearoa (Naepi, 2021). Aotearoa born Samoan scholar Melanie Anae (1998), uses her lived experiences to shed light on the identity struggles of Samoans born and raised in Aotearoa. Pasifika wāhine's voices are being amplified in different areas of research in Aotearoa due to their experiences and cultural knowledges being absent in research. This is one of the reasons this research project is important as it can provide knowledge for academics, policy makers and facilitators who work with and support Pasifika communities. Now that a better understanding of Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa has been provided, the next section will explore the historical and cultural connections between Māori and Pacific peoples.

Māori and Pacific Historical and Cultural Connections

Māori and Pacific peoples are historically connected through ancestral links where it has been widely documented that all Polynesians (Māori included) migrated from the same shores (Hill, 2010; Liu, 2005; Mackley-Crump, 2015; Somerville, 2012). Indeed, in many parts of the world being Polynesian or a Pacific Islander includes being Māori, Samoan or Tongan ancestry to name a few. However in Aotearoa, being Pacific or Pasifika means that your ethnicity originates from one of the Pacific Islands such as Samoa or Tonga, yet this does not include Māori (Somerville, 2012). This is an interesting dichotomy where everywhere in the world Māori are categorised as Pacific Islanders, except in Aotearoa. From a research perspective, it is important to acknowledge the land and the Indigenous people where the research is conducted. In this case, Māori are tangata whenua of Aotearoa and Te Tiriti provides a legal and constitutional relationship between Māori and the Crown. This creates the foundation for this research and explains why Māori will be acknowledged separately throughout this thesis.

Early interactions in Aotearoa between Māori and Pacific people are documented by Hill (2010), who explained that Māori urbanization was at a high when significant numbers of

Pasifika people began their migration to Aotearoa. Initial tension between Māori who were continuing their quest for recognition from the Crown and the migrant Pasifika people related to a competing workforce. However, from these early years both Māori and Pacific people were grouped together as they shared similar socio-economic marginalization and they aspired for the enhancement of their cultures socially and economically. Hill (2010) explains that Māori and Pacific people have a camaraderie that “was strengthened by shared attitudes and values on fundamental issues such as the relationship between indigeneity and the land . . . [and] on the significance of spiritual dimensions to life” (pg. 297). Ongoing struggles for resources for Māori and Pacific communities are also prevalent in modern day society in Aotearoa with Covid having huge negative impacts on these vulnerable communities due to not meeting their specific needs (Enari, 2020; Fa’avae, 2022; Kukutai et al., 2020).

There are also deeper cultural connections that are identified by the Pasifika participants in Mila-Schaafs’ (2010) research such as, the Pasifika participants explaining that they felt close to Māori due to shared social experiences, intermarriage, camaraderie with being brown, as well as often being mistaken as being Māori. As previously mentioned, it should be noted that their experiences with their ethnicity are very different than those living in the Pacific Islands. Aotearoa is their home and as such, it forms their identity, which in turn reflects unique experiences when negotiating their culture and ethnicity. Here we see complex cultural commonalities that link Māori and Pasifika people. This is even more prevalent with those who have mixed Māori and Pasifika heritage.

Currently in Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika continue to be framed in negative contexts in the media (Gabel, 2022; Loto et al., 2006; Rākete, 2021), statistically with poor health such as high obesity and cardiovascular illnesses (Mcauley et al., 2003; Tupai-Firestone et al., 2016), lower educational outcomes (Nakhid, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1993), a deficit lens in academia and policy statements (Alamri, 2018; Mack et al., 2022), and living in lower socio-economic areas. The areas in society that Māori and Pasifika do shine and are honoured are in sports such as rugby and netball, which is why it is surprising that current statistics around physical activity show lower rates of participation. This research will address these views using the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine from these communities who are physically active to show how and why they weave physical activity into their lives. The next section will provide explanations of the philosophy and language that will be used regarding physical activity, sport and fitness and how it will be contextualised and used in this project.

Physical Activity and Sport in Aotearoa: Indigenous Approaches and Current Initiatives

Physical activity can translate into multiple meanings for different groups of people and different organisations. To the 75-year-old widowed grandmother, it could mean line-dancing or gardening, and to the 16-year-old teenage high school student it could mean playing rugby league or netball. Importantly, physical activity participation and engagement has multiple meanings and can be interpreted and individualised by people from different age groups, genders, and ethnicities. Government organisations such as Sport New Zealand and the Ministry of Health use physical activity as a means to improve and measure wellness in populations to inform policy (Dudley et al., 2017; Physical Activity Tables New Zealand, 2017; Sekot, 2010), and health scholars use it as a measure to improve health factors such as cardiovascular disease and obesity (Bouchard & Katzmarzyk, 2010; Penedo & Dahn, 2005). Research on different populations and ethnic groups has also been conducted in relation to physical activity as interventions for poor health (Guerin et al., 2003; Pelletier & Baker, 1987; Taylor et al., 1998). An overwhelming consensus among all of these groups is that physical activity is inextricably linked with being healthy and well. The objective of this section is to introduce and contextualise the approach that I will be taking regarding the use of the language around physical activity, sport and fitness.

There are a number of different health and wellbeing models in Aotearoa for Māori and Pacific people that help provide practitioners and health experts knowledge about what is important to them (Chant, 2011; Kapeli, 2021; Minister of Health, 2023). The most common theme across both Māori and Pacific health is that health and wellbeing is viewed as collective and holistic, rather than compartmentalised and individualistic (Firestone et al., 2020; McIntosh et al., 2021; Minister of Health, 2023; Reweti et al., 2023; D. Wilson et al., 2021). For this project we draw from Emeritus Professor Sir Mason Durie's health model called Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985). Durie's (1985) model aligns with and provides a structure for hauora, which is a Māori philosophy of health and wellbeing. This model and concept that has been adopted by the Education and Health sectors in Aotearoa is an Indigenous perspective that addresses wellbeing with, for, and by Māori (Meier & Culpan, 2020). Te Whare Tapa Whā uses four cornerstone aspects to well-being and draws from the figure of a Wharenui, which is a focal point and communal meeting space for Māori people. This model and the four cornerstones illustrate a holistic view of well-being. The cornerstones are, taha hinengaro (Mental and Emotional well-being), taha whānau (Social well-being), taha wairua (Spiritual

well-being) and taha tinana (Physical well-being) (Salter, 2000). What is important to acknowledge here is that hauora, as used in the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, takes an Indigenous holistic view of wellbeing and health in comparison to the individual compartmentalised Western view of wellbeing (Meier & Culpan, 2020; Salter, 2000). For this project, hauora as depicted in Te Whare Tapa Whā, will be used to frame the embodied experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wahine while also taking into consideration the complex intersections of their ethnicity and gender.

Drawing from Māori and Pacific concepts of wellbeing that takes a holistic approach, I address the use of physical activity, sport, and fitness. From a Westernised academic view, the definitions of sport and fitness are often individual and distinct, but these do not resonate with the cultural holistic meanings used by Māori and Pacific peoples. Categorising and compartmentalising these terms limit the capabilities of a deeper and richer understanding. Therefore, in this research I use the term physical activity to refer to and encompasses all and any forms of activity including sport, fitness, recreation, and leisure activities.

In 2018 low physical activity participation rates for women and girls in Aotearoa had been identified as an area of concern by Sport New Zealand. To address this, a Women and Girls Action Plan consisting of ten actions was launched in 2018 to help increase and support participation (Sport New Zealand, 2023c, 2023d). Some of the goals included increasing leadership across all levels of sport, encouraging participation through play, active recreation and sport, and increasing visibility of womens sport (Sport New Zealand, 2023e). Four years later in 2023, there has been significant progress. For example, more women are in leadership positions in sport, there has been an improvement in participation, and the value and visibility of women and girls in sport and recreation has increased (Sport New Zealand, 2023e). One strategy that has been gaining momentum since it's inception in February 2022 is titled 'It's my Move.' This campaign encourages and supports young women to start being active the way they want and to choose activities that they enjoy doing. It is structured to encourage and provide support for young women, education for parents and caregivers, as well as ideas for practitioners and providers (Sport New Zealand, 2023b). These strategies have documented participation for all women and girls but do not provide specific information and support for Māori and Pacific young women from low socio-economic regions who have lower participation rates (Sport New Zealand, 2023a). This research project will meet this gap by providing current knowledge on Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa.

Further to contextualising and providing Indigenous knowledge for academics in Aotearoa, my research also contributes to international scholarship by, with, and for Indigenous peoples. Many scholars have indicated the necessity to provide Indigenous knowledge and research that is contextualised to their unique needs (McGuire-Adams, 2020a; J. Nelson et al., 2023; Seiler & Chepyator-Thomson, 2023; G. H. Smith & Smith, 2023; Van Uchelen et al., 1997). Recently, scholars who have explored earlier Indigenous scholarship argue against the deficit lens that has permeated Indigenous studies when focussing on initiatives in sport for development contexts (Hapeta, Stewart-Withers, et al., 2019; Seiler & Chepyator-Thomson, 2023). Going forward, they support and encourage Indigenous scholarship that is conducted with, and by Indigenous scholars and recommend when engaging in research with and for Indigenous communities, it is imperative to consider “*who* is doing this work and *how* this work is being done” (Stewart-Withers et al., 2023, p. 97). Herein, my research contributes to international Indigenous scholarship on sport and physical activity experiences, body image views, and cultural identity, for young Indigenous women.

Research Questions

Now that a broad introduction, context, and the significance of this research has been provided, I will introduce the research questions to provide a focused direction and structure for upcoming chapters. The questions that will guide the following chapters are as follows:

Primary Research Question:

What are the embodied experiences of physically active young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. How does culture and ethnicity shape young Māori and Pasifika wāhine identity, everyday experiences, and sport and physical activity?
2. What perspectives do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine have about body image in their everyday lives, physical activity, and sport?
3. How and why do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine prioritise physical activity in their lives?

The final sub-section of this chapter includes a conclusion and chapter summary that will provide an overview of how these research questions will be answered.

Conclusion and Chapter Summary

This chapter has set the scene and structure for this research by highlighting the significance and importance of this project for young Māori and Pasifika wahine followed by my positioning as a Māori-Samoan researcher in this project. An introduction of Māori in Aotearoa and Pasifika in Aotearoa has also helped introduce and contextualise the participants in this project along with the historical and cultural connections for Māori and Pasifika communities. Next, I explained why I will be using a hauora and Indigenous feminist approach to the use of terms associated with physical activity, sport and fitness, while also sharing some of the current initiatives in Aotearoa focussed on young women. Importantly, the research questions guiding the remainder of this research have been stated to provide direction and structure for the remaining chapters. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the topics for the remaining chapters.

In Chapter Two the whakapapa (geneology) for this project will be provided by examining and linking key literature that provides the foundation for this project. International perspectives on women's socio-cultural responses to fitness will be examined followed by literature that examines young women's experiences. Indigenous, and ethnically diverse literature on physical activity and sport will then be explored followed by Māori and Pacific scholarship that provides insights on wāhine and their experiences with physical activity and sport in Aotearoa. Tying up this chapter will be a restatement of the research questions as they will reinforce the context in which the review was conducted and reset the focus going forward.

Chapter Three contains the first published article from this research titled; 'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise (Nemani et al., 2023). In this co-authored article we (all authors) provide culturally specific ways of engaging young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in research. We discuss the methodological approaches and practices that were used in this project as well as details of the Indigenous and cultural considerations. Particular focus on weaving Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies (Naepi, 2019a; Pihama, 2001) are presented along with the rationale for the use of these methodologies for this project. Participant recruitment and locations are further detailed throughout this chapter as well as details on the actual cohort of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine whose voices are amplified throughout this project. Practices of data

collection are also provided as well as feedback from some of the young wāhine in regard to their experiences with this project.

Chapter Four is the first empirical data and is presented in the second manuscript that is currently under review. The article is titled, 'I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me': Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa (n.d.). In this manuscript we provide insights into the identities of the young wāhine by presenting their cultural and ethnic identities, how they navigate stereotypes that impact their identities, and how they embrace cultural pride. Our objective for this article is to provide a deeper understanding of the identities and lived experiences of the young wāhine.

The second empirical chapter is comprised of the third publication titled, "My Thighs Can Squash You": Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies (Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). This publication was part of a special issue in a journal titled Youth that focussed on understanding body image for young Indigenous women. In this chapter we extend the understanding of body image for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine by drawing from the concepts of body pride. We share how the young wāhine embrace their bodies through enacting cultural and body pride and how their experiences are nuanced at the intersection of gender and culture.

Our last empirical chapter, which is a manuscript that is currently under review, is titled, 'Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand'. This manuscript centres the voices of the young wāhine and explores their motivations for participating in physical activity, the types of activities they enjoy, as well as their perspectives on participation. In this manuscript we use knowledge on cultural identity to develop and understand the views of the young wāhine as they engage in physical activity.

The concluding chapter summarises the essence of this research project by providing a recap of the key findings that aim to answer and address the research questions posed in Chapter Two. These findings will provide recommendations for further research with, for and by young Māori and Pasifika wāhine with a particular focus on cultural identity, body image and physical activity. The final chapter will not only serve as a condensed version of the entire thesis, but it will also provide suggestions and recommendations for ongoing future research and guidance for other Indigenous feminist researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – The Whakapapa of this Research

Inā kei te mohio koe ko wai koe, I anga mai koe I hea,

kei te mohio koe, kei te anga atu ki hea

If you know who you are and where you are from,

then you will know where you are going

Whakapapa (genealogy) is considered one of the central values of Te Ao Māori, and it enables a person to know who they are, where they come from and how they are connected to their ancestors (Cunningham, n.d.; Graham, 2009; Walsh-Tapiata, 2020). Principles of whakapapa have been used in research projects that have extended beyond the human realm (M. Roberts, 2013) and they have also been used as a methodology (Graham, 2009). Furthermore, Mahuika (2019), states that whakapapa “has been described by some as the skeletal structure of Māori epistemology because all things have their own genealogies” (p. 1). Building on this, Barlow (1991, as cited in Graham, 2009) explains that “whakapapa is a basis for the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things” (p.1). It is in the context of Māori epistemology and the organisation of knowledge that whakapapa will be used to structure this chapter. The ancestry of this project will be traced using relevant literature that will illustrate how each strand of knowledge is linked. Ultimately, through this presentation of whakapapa, the direction and purpose of this research will be clarified.

To begin, the whakapapa will start by examining global and historical perspectives on socio-cultural research on women in fitness. Next, there will be a focus on key literature related to young women’s experiences with physical activity and fitness followed by the growing body of research conducted on, with, and by women from different Indigenous, ethnic and culturally diverse groups. Lastly, the focus will shift to Māori and Pasifika scholarship that specifically explores wāhine and their experiences in physical activity and sport in Aotearoa. Notably, this section will privilege the research of Māori and Pacific people by paying particular attention to literature that has used decolonised methodologies to engage with Māori and Pacific communities (Naepi, 2015; Ponton, 2018; L. T. Smith, 2012a). It is also important to note that a Māori-Samoan wahine lens and worldview will be used throughout the presentation of this whakapapa.

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, the use of the terms fitness, exercise, physical activity, sport and physical education (PE), are intertwined to match the perspectives

of the young wāhine in this project. This view also matches the interpretations of Māori and Pasifika communities where sport, fitness and leisure activities are not differentiated (P. Borell & Kahi, 2017; Gordon et al., 2010). Maintaining a decolonised view of these terms is also an important part of this whakapapa as it aligns with Mātauranga Māori and Pacific world views.

Socio-Cultural Research of Women's Fitness

The whakapapa for this research begins with the body of literature that has examined women's experiences in fitness and exercise. Doing this helps provide knowledge on how women's fitness has evolved over time, and this is crucial to understanding and providing context for the experiences that are being explored. Differing societal norms throughout history, including gendered and cultural expectations, all shape and impact women's embodied experiences. In this section, it should be noted that the specific literature traces the ancestry of this project relates to women's fitness and physical activity rather than sport. Research on women's health and fitness have provided a platform for women to share their experiences and knowledge to educate practitioners, policy makers and scholars. From these studies a range of topics emerge that are interrelated and connected to fitness and exercise for women. A few examples of research topics include the types of exercises women choose to participate in (Craig & Liberti, 2007; Knapp, 2015; Molnar et al., 2019), the health and social benefits of exercise (Barranco-Ruiz & Villa-González, 2020; Kannel & Sorlie, 1979; Uritani et al., 2013), the barriers and constraints to participation (Fahlman et al., 2006; Prewitt-White et al., 2018; Sawrikar & Muir, 2010), as well as the embodied experiences of exercise for women (Gimlin, 2002a, 2002b; Markula, 2004). While these topics are all important and connected to women's fitness and exercise, the whakapapa for this project stems from the literature on the socio-cultural history of women's fitness. This knowledge provides a backdrop for understanding the different cultural and social pressures women have faced and how these have shaped their participation in physical activity.

Research on exercise and fitness was solely focussed on male physiological (Morris et al., 1973) and health (Cruse & Rosato, 1979; Kannel & Sorlie, 1979) effects and benefits that referenced a 70kg male as the norm, rather than on female, ethnically diverse, or sociological perspectives. It was not until the early 1980's where socio-cultural forms of research in exercise and fitness began as a result of the popularization of group fitness in the form of

aerobics (Collins, 2002; Gimlin, 2002a; Markula, 2003). Participation in aerobic classes increased women's participation in the exercise and fitness industry and in turn helped initiate the "field that we now characterize as socio-cultural research of fitness" (Markula, 2018, p. 213). The following paragraphs will discuss some of the overlying themes of this type of research from the leading scholars who conduct research in women's socio-cultural research on fitness.

One particular scholar who has conducted a significant amount of socio-cultural research into women's fitness is Professor Pirrko Markula. According to Markula (2018), two main themes exist in socio-cultural research on exercise and fitness. These themes are 1) "critiques of the fit body ideal in the popular media" and 2) "accounts of exercisers' lived experiences with 'working out'" (Markula, 2018, p. 214). What is crucial, is that it is in and through women's bodies that the cultural appropriation of fitness and exercise are manifested. The ways that women choose to participate in exercise, the way they embody this practice and the influences for participation are all areas that have been of interest to scholars and practitioners in this field of study. This interest has led to a plethora of research investigating the role of the media on women and the influences that it has on their reasons to participate in exercise (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015a).

An extensively researched topic of women's fitness experiences relates to beauty and body image (Davis, 1990; Gimlin, 2002b; Koyuncu et al., 2010; Krane et al., 2001; Markula, 2001; Thøgersen-Ntoumani & Ntoumanis, 2007). The Western feminine ideal of the fit, thin and toned body (Lobaskova, 2017) has been plastered across a number of media platforms for decades, thus putting pressures on women to strive towards this largely unobtainable 'ideal'. Various feminist scholars, however, critiqued the discursive constructions of this feminine ideal and the powerful affects it has on women participating in exercise (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Javier & Belgrave, 2015; López-Guimerà et al., 2010; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015a; Willis & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). With the influences of media and social pressures to be thin and toned, exercise has become a commodity whereby many women who participate are in the pursuit of this ideal body shape. Social media platforms further promote and glorify this 'ideal' body shape through the use of "Fitspiration", an online trend "designed to inspire viewers towards a healthier lifestyle by promoting exercise and healthy food" (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015a, p. 61). Feminists have argued that the images

portrayed in the media are unrealistic and oppressive. For those drawing upon Foucauldian perspectives, such dominating discourses are fuelling a modern-day Panopticon where individuals are encouraged to constantly monitor their exercise (and nutritional) behaviours in the pursuit of the ideal body (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Gimlin, 2002b; Sassatelli, 1999).

The history of women's fitness and trends are provided by Dworkin and Wachs (2009) in an historical socio-cultural analysis of *Women's Sports & Fitness* magazine. Through their research, they present the demise of the magazine that "sheds light not only on the trials of a particular magazine, but on the struggle to redefine feminism in consumer culture" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 131). The magazine was sold over a 26-year period and during its lifespan the content, focus, and images mirrored what was happening in the sport and fitness industry during specific time periods. Initial issues of the magazine focussed on collective concerns for women such as advocating equal opportunities. Following this phase, the magazine began to transition from a group perspective to individualized perspectives such as issues that focussed on self-help and self-improvement (Dworkin, 2009b). Consequently, in Westernised societies, fitness has now become more of an individualised affair where women can choose from an array of fitness activities that has the potential to encourage more women to participate.

Young Women's Physical Activity, Fitness and Health

While less research has focused on young women's experiences of physical activity and fitness, some important contributions have been made that are all part of the whakapapa of this project. However, it should be noted that a lot of the literature on young people has been connected to their experiences in Physical Education (PE) (Burrows, 2008; Halas, 2011; F. R. Palmer, 2000; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). According to this literature, key factors that influence youth experiences include educational focus and types of classes offered in PE, mixed versus same sex classes, or whether PE is compulsory or optional. External influences that affect experiences and shape perceptions around physical activity, fitness and health include social media, friends, family, socio-economic status, space, place and opportunity. All of these aspects are important because they contextualise participants experiences within broader social institutions (family, school, community) and recognise generational considerations. Herein I focus on research relating to young women's engagement with physical activity, fitness, health and PE.

One of the overarching themes that encompasses much of the research conducted on young people includes their views of body image and what they normalise as being fit and healthy (Azzarito, 2009; Duncan, 2007; J. Lee & Macdonald, 2010). A study conducted in two American high schools with 28 high school students (15 were girls) explored their perceptions of what they believed the ideal, fit healthy body looked like. Participants were selected with the intention of providing a range of perspectives, including ethnicity, body size and shape, gender and skill level as observed during field observations. Despite the range of participants, the results showed that they all viewed the ideal female body as being a white, slender, cheerleader (Azzarito, 2009). In response to these findings, Azzarito (2009), recommended that PE facilitators create a safe place where these socially constructed ideals on body image be challenged to allow and empower young women to go against normalised and limited-range of physique, and to embrace individualised self-constructed views of a fit and healthy body. In this study, Azzarito (2009) also explored the intersection of gender and race in constructions of the idealistic female body.

In addition to the young women's perceptions of socially constructed 'fit' and 'healthy' bodies, research has also explored the environments that enable or constrain young women's participation in physical education. A study conducted on 23 female high school students at a high school in Canada produced insights into improving participation in PE classes by using an alternative approach (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). For this project, an elective PE class that was solely for females in grades 10 to 12 was offered and facilitated. The class was called "Girls Getting Active" (GGA) (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010, pg. 4), and was designed to provide the young women a variety of options and activities that were more lifestyle based to enhance participation. Four themes were identified through the implementation of the GGA class. The first theme was that the girls were able to make their own choices in terms of how to co-construct their curriculum and what they could wear. The second theme related to how the environment created by the teacher was challenging but inclusive, the third showed that the absence of young men enhanced the 'fun' aspect of participation and enhanced confidence and cooperation. The fourth and final theme linked with the girls making new friends, learning new skills and having a positive attitude towards PE in general (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). This research demonstrates the impact and importance of positive participation in physical activity through autonomy coupled with supportive, encouraging non-threatening environments for young women.

Another important theme that is being explored in current literature is the influence of social media on young women's fitness and physical activity experiences (Bryant, 2018; Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; Depper & Howe, 2017; Wiklund et al., 2019). This is important as engagement with social media and digital technology can sometimes shape and construct ideas that affect and change views on physical activity, health and fitness. A key theme across some of the literature is that young women reconstructed the ideal feminine physique as being 'strong and skinny' (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). Discussions around this concept had the young women trying to negotiate their way around not becoming too muscular through participating in resistance training exercises. While much literature has focused on the negative affects of social media on young women's body image, some research shows they are critically engaging with photos and videos of individuals who 'look' fit and healthy on social media platforms. These young women acknowledged and understood that some of the bodies of fit, healthy looking individuals who posted on social media were sometimes unrealistic to achieve, and that they were not always indicative of what the individual actually looked like. Images and videos were also not an indication of 'what' the individual did either (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). Importantly, however, very little of this research focuses on the voices from ethnic and culturally diverse young women and their engagement with social media.

As young women choose from the vast array of fitness and exercise opportunities available, the actual lived experiences of these young women provide rich and diverse knowledge for socio-cultural researchers. Beyond body image, research reveals an array of motives, including getting fit and healthy (Malin, 2012; Markula, 1995a, 2018; Markula-Denison et al., 2007; Schrank, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015b; Vertinsky, 1998), getting stronger (Washington & Economides, 2016), being part of a community (Dawson, 2017; Lau, 2011; Lobaskova, 2017; Sassatelli, 2010) or just having fun (Nieri & Hughes, 2016; Sassatelli, 2010). With the increase in young women's participation in fitness, the socio-cultural research on young women's experiences has also increased, which is a positive sign for sociologists and feminists. The next section of this whakapapa examines literature on Indigenous and culturally diverse women's sport, fitness, physical activity and exercise with a particular focus on socio-cultural experiences and views.

Indigenous and Culturally Diverse Women

Research on women from Indigenous, ethnic and culturally diverse groups offer opportunities for fresh perspectives and unique cultural experiences that provides socio-cultural academics and practitioners new ways of enhancing participation for these otherwise marginalized communities. The unique socio-cultural experiences from ethnic and culturally diverse women form part of the whakapapa for this project as they illustrate the role of culture in sport, fitness, physical activity and exercise. Examples of Indigenous and culturally diverse women's groups that have been part of research involving sport, fitness, physical activity and exercise include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women (Canuto et al., 2014), African American and Hispanic women (Bopp et al., 2009; Dornelas et al., 2007; Vella et al., 2016), Indian women (Bharathi & Dinesh, 2018; Sawrikar & Muir, 2010), Muslim women (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2013; Maxwell & Taylor, 2010; Summers et al., 2018; Wray, 2002), and women from refugee backgrounds (Guerin et al., 2003; Hurly, 2019; Sundquist et al., 2010; Wieland et al., 2012). Some of this research has been conducted 'on' culturally diverse groups as opposed 'with' or 'as' themselves, which often changes the perspective of the overall results and outcomes of the research. Herein, my research will be aligning interactions with Indigenous communities using 'as' to indicate the positioning and intention of the focus of research using Te Whetū Rehua (*Te Whetū Rehua / Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa*, n.d.), which is a framework that helps shape culturally responsive approaches 'as Māori'. Accordingly, this section will review research on women from diverse ethnic backgrounds to show how their experiences connect with the whakapapa of this project.

One of the common issues that has permeated research being conducted on Indigenous, or culturally diverse communities is that it takes a deficit approach. McGuire-Adams and colleagues (2023) explain that deficit research takes on colonised perspectives and ideologies throughout the research design and analysis. This also includes disproportionately emphasising negative outcomes without taking into consideration broader historical, social, and systemic failings. Also, deficit research fails to acknowledge cultural strengths and/or resilience of Indigenous communities. Brown (2019) further explains that deficit discourse frames Indigenous people and their entire identity "in a narrative of negativity, deficiency and failure" (p. 402).

A group of researchers from Canada, Sarah Hyett, Chelsea Gabel, Stacey Marjerrison and Lisa Schwartz (2019), contested the use of deficit-based research and argued that the impact this type of research was detrimental to Indigenous communities as it failed to contextualise the lives of the participants. Some of the negative impacts of deficit-based research that were observed included the reinforcement of negative stigmatization and stereotypes such as unhealthy lifestyles that resulted in First Nations people being obese and diabetic. To remove the negative impacts of deficit-based research Hyett et al. (2019) recommended using strength-based research and provided guidance for researchers on how to better engage with Indigenous First Nation communities. An important point that was raised were that critical factors involving historical structural inequalities. For example, the effects of colonization and the lack of resourcing were often omitted from these projects. Hence, the blame was placed on the Indigenous communities rather than contextualising their circumstances in colonised societies (Hyett et al., 2019). Their recommendations for more strength-based research included partnering with Indigenous communities and amplifying their voices and experiences through all stages of research. They also acknowledged the strengths within communities by magnifying and drawing upon their existing capacities. Lastly, they highlighted the use of traditional and culturally appropriate methods to provide richer understandings of the topics being studied (Hyett et al., 2019). These recommendations explain the whakapapa for this project as it shows why strength-based research is required and used and signals a gap in literature for Māori and Pasifika young wāhine.

A strength-based research project that focussed on women from different ethnic backgrounds was conducted by Wray (2007) who aimed to develop “theoretical insights that went beyond immediate surface description” (p. 134). The ethnic groups that were interviewed and observed included “women who self-defined as Pakistani, white English/British, African Caribbean, black, and West Indian” (Wray, 2007, p. 133). One of the main goals of the study was to “gain insight into how women from different ethnic backgrounds, experienced physical activity and exercise” (Wray, 2007, p. 133). According to Wray (2007), the exercise classes that the women participated in enabled the “women to celebrate and maintain particular ethnic and religious collective identities” (p. 139). Here we see that the environments created for these women were culturally ‘safe’ and in so doing enhanced their participation. Cultural differences that were highlighted in this study were

the responses from the different ethnic groups relating to their feelings at the end of the exercise class. The “Pakistani and British Muslim women [were] more likely to focus on physical health and well-being . . . African Caribbean women were more likely to say they felt less tense and stressed . . . [and] those participants who identified as white British were more likely to refer to the appearance of their bodies” (Wray, 2007, p. 140). Interestingly, this investigation also showed that some of the women were not happy with their bodies irrespective of their ethnicity. These responses show that there were distinct differences between the ethnic groups, indicating different cultural perspectives and experiences even though they were overshadowed by Western paradigms such as body image.

Some uniquely cultural perspectives on how Westernised paradigms and body image are constructed through the beliefs and practices of ethnic minoritized youth were presented through studies conducted by Azzarito and colleagues (Azzarito, 2019b; Azzarito & Hill, 2013). Using visual research methods with young African American and Latino youth in high schools in the United States, the participants photos were analysed along with illustrations to unpack their self-representation of identity in relation to physical activity, fitness, sport and exercise. It is important to note however, that through their self-representations, the participants negotiated the negative framing of ethnic minoritized young people as being at risk, overweight, lacking motivation and being viewed as irresponsible when it comes to health and fitness (Azzarito, 2019b). The findings revealed that the young women negotiated their ways through Westernised beliefs of fitness, body image and health through a multiplicity of ways. Some embodied it by complying to the Westernised norms and measuring themselves against the trim White body ideals, some recognised and were aware of it as being stereotypical White behaviour, while others entirely disregarded it in forming their own self-representations (Azzarito, 2019b). What is enlightening is that the participants “countered the invisibility of ethnic minoritized people’s fit and healthy bodies in the media and the widespread discourse of the body- at-risk, while teasing out, articulating, and performing their “cultural difference” in creative and unique ways” (Azzarito, 2019a, p. 90). Here we see the complex ways in which ethnic minority youth negotiate dominant framings of identity, health and physical activity, and how their experiences differed from their westernised counterparts. This study also highlights the need for more research that explores young women’s culturally constructed ideals and beliefs around physical activity, sport and fitness.

Further cultural insights into women who are marginalised in fitness and exercise are provided in a study on Australian Muslim women (Summers et al., 2018). One of the stereotypes that Australian Muslim women faced was that they were not interested or motivated to participate in fitness programmes. However, when the women were given an opportunity to share their own perspectives, it became apparent that they did indeed value fitness and exercise and that they wanted to engage in exercise that was appropriate to their cultural beliefs and lifestyles. These included fitness programmes and physical activities that had low to moderate intensity, a women's only area in the gym, and social acceptance of their modest full body attire. The researchers concluded that these factors would more than likely provide a safe place for Australian Muslim women to exercise comfortably (Summers et al., 2018). Muslim Pakistani women's experiences with exercise reiterated those of the Australian Muslim women with an added aspect of socialising and spending time with friends. With both groups of Muslim women, strong elements of their religious beliefs shaped their exercise motivations and importantly, their participation (Wray, 2002). A key factor here is that "They did not express a desire to regulate their bodies to the westernized feminine ideal but instead constructed feminine identities that were circumscribed by ethnic and religious identities" (Wray, 2002, p. 137). These articles emphasize the complexities that exist whereby identity can be shaped by religious affiliation thus affecting cultural beliefs and influencing exercise choices.

Indigenous research often includes having communities engage as themselves such as Indigenous feminist scholar Tricia McGuire-Adams (2017). McGuire-Adams's research focuses on physical activity, health and wellness among the Anishinaabeg women from Canada and she has been advocating and providing a voice internationally as a woman in her community (McGuire-Adams, 2017, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018). One of the challenges that McGuire-Adams (2017), issues to Indigenous researchers includes the need to shift from a Westernised lens and embrace Indigenous epistemologies. Equally, it is important for Westernised societies and systems to shift their lens and accept those from Indigenous societies. In this article she challenges Indigenous scholars and practitioners to seek for "ways that Indigenous peoples understand wellbeing through culturally significant ontologies" (McGuire-Adams, 2017, p. 92). Taking an approach that centred the Anishinaabeg women's stories and experiences, McGuire-Adams (2017) identified three themes that were culturally important and relevant to these women. These themes are, "personal

empowerment and confidence; wellbeing for oneself, family and community; and the importance of group mentorship” (McGuire-Adams, 2017, p. 93). Here we have an Indigenous female scholar who used Indigenous methodologies and methods. As an Anishinaabeg woman she has provided an Anishinaabe worldview and shared how women in her community engage in physical activity, exercise and wellbeing. In doing this, McGuire-Adams also paves the way for other Indigenous feminist scholars to provide their own worldviews from their respective parts of the world.

When conducting research on Indigenous and ethnic minoritized women, it is important to acknowledge that each ethnic group has its own set of cultural nuances, beliefs and ways of being. These deeply rooted knowledges and behaviours would also be different for women from the same ethnic group who were raised in different countries other than that of their ethnic background or who come from different regions. Further complexities arise with women who do not have access or connections to their ethnic culture. Hence, women’s identities are complex and fluid and when considering cultural differences, generational differences and individualised lived experiences, there is an opportunity for rich dialogue and knowledge to be gained and shared. As an Indigenous researcher embarking on projects with women from similar ethnic identities to my own, it becomes important to truly value, respect, and reflect their voices and experiences throughout the entire process. I believe that this needs to begin with presenting their cultural and ethnic beliefs and nuances based on the places and spaces that they occupy. Hence, the next part of this whakapapa will present whakapapa that explores research conducted as or with Māori in Aotearoa who engage in sport, physical education and physical activity.

Māori – Indigeneity and Physicality

Sport is an area where Māori are deemed to be successful and for many it has served as a site for success, identity and well-being. Despite these successes, numerous Māori scholars and scholars who have conducted research with Māori have identified forms of racialisation and prejudice through their research (Hapeta, Palmer, et al., 2019). Some examples of sport related research that involves bias, prejudice and stereotyping includes research conducted on Māori athletes and their engagement in team sports (Erueti & Palmer, 2014; Hippolite, 2010; F. Palmer, 2016; Te Rito, 2007), Māori participation in physical education (Hokowhitu, 2003a, 2018), and Māori engagement and narratives in the media (McCreanor et al., 2010).

Hokowhitu (2003a, 2003b, 2008a) elaborates on one particular stereotype that is faced by Māori where they are portrayed as being good at sport and physical education, but lack intelligence in academia and other areas of society. These show some of the racialised perceptions around Māori in Aotearoa but it is important to point out that these ideas and beliefs tend to only be related to westernised measures. Furthermore, these stereotypes fail to recognise Māori who are successful in negotiating both westernised and Māori worlds through sport and academia.

A couple of research projects that connect to the whakapapa of this project although conducted through a positivist lens are guided by Wāhine Māori who provide examples of how Te Ao Māori can be embedded and used in a research environment. The first is a Pilot study that investigated the use of a 12 week exercise programme for Māori with cardiovascular disease risk factors (Rolleston et al., 2016, 2017). In this project the researchers embedded kaupapa Māori philosophies by ensuring that Māori were involved at all levels “including planning the methodological approach, critiquing the way that findings are presented, and guiding dissemination” (Rolleston et al., 2017, p. 118). Where this research and the ensuing articles connect to this project is through the Māori-centred exercise and lifestyle management programme that was used with participants, the cultural nuances in the research design and process, and also the introduction of a space titled the ‘interface space’ where the Māori and western worlds are able to “find common ground without compromising the foundations of either world view” (Rolleston et al., 2016, p. 62). Here we see the importance of Māori being at the forefront of research for, by and as themselves, and although the focus was on Māori with Cardiovascular Heart Disease with an intention of providing a culturally appropriate intervention, the philosophies and underpinning values resonate with Indigenous research.

A second research project that also has a positivist lens but focuses solely on inactive Māori Women was conducted by Deborah Heke (2017), as part of her Master of Health Science Degree. In her research Heke (2017), wove Māori Values and principles into a specifically protocolled training regime that was implemented as an intervention to improve participation and engagement in physical activity for Māori women. The whakapapa connections to this project contribute to the virtually non-existent literature around Māori women’s experiences with physical activity whilst drawing upon Māori values such as whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building) and manaakitanga (support) (Heke, 2017).

Heke's (2024) more recent work also provides a framework that supports Indigenous methods and methodology as it relates to physical activity. All of this research provides immensely important research for Māori, Māori wāhine and Indigenous communities and the Māori values and principles utilised can also be implemented in the socio-cultural realm of sport and physical activity.

An individual who provides socio-cultural perspectives with a group of young Māori wāhine at high school level is Professor Farah Palmer. As a wahine Māori academic who has captained the most successful women's rugby team in the world, the Black Ferns (New Zealand women's rugby team), Palmer brings insider status to a high level of sport and an immense amount of credibility to the sport sociological field of study. Her extensive work has given Māori wāhine a space, a unique identity and voice in sport as participants (Erueti & Palmer, 2014; F. Palmer, 2007a, 2016; F. R. Palmer, 2000), as leaders (Forster et al., 2016; F. R. Palmer & Masters, 2010) and has helped provide a platform and template for engaging in academia for Māori scholars (Hapeta, Palmer, et al., 2019; Hapeta, Stewart-Withers, et al., 2019; Heke, 2022; Heke et al., 2024; G. H. Smith & Smith, 2023; Stewart-Withers et al., 2023; Watene et al., 2023).

Many valuable Indigenous values are provided in Palmers' PhD thesis titled, "Māori girls, power, physical education, sport, and play:" being hungus, hori, and hoha" (F. R. Palmer, 2000). Palmer's research was conducted in a low socio-economic high school based in the Waikato region of Aotearoa, and focused on the physical education experiences of 13 to 18 year old high school girls who identified themselves as Māori or part-Māori. One particular aspect she presented were strategies that are adopted by Māori families from high deprivation areas. These strategies include "discouraging greed (being hungus), encouraging sharing (tatou tatou), looking after each other (tautoko, aawhina, manaaki), settling for less (i.e., being laid back, funny, and hoha), and being thrifty rather than extravagant (i.e., being hori)" (Palmer, 2000, p. 302). When describing the type of physical activity that the Māori girls in her study enjoyed participating in, the characteristics included something competitive, activities involving strength, activities where you are looking after others, humour, social interaction and teamwork (Palmer, 2000). Here we see that the strategies and values adopted by the families were also inherent in the choices of and engagement in physical activity for the young Māori wāhine.

Pasifika, Sport and Physical Activity in Aotearoa

The identity of Pasifika people living in Aotearoa has been of interest to a number of scholars who have highlighted the cultural nuances that exist within this diverse community. Here I draw on the work of Pasifika scholars who have contributed to research on the Pasifika identity within Aotearoa. Through their research Pasifika scholars have identified key values that shape Pasifika ways of being (Anae, 1998; Baba et al., 2004; Gordon et al., 2010, 2013; Mackley-Crump, 2012; Manuela & Sibley, 2014; Mila-Schaaf, 2010). These features include “family, society, religion, positive affirmation and a sense of belonging” (Manuela & Sibley, 2014, p. 972). At face value these aspects would be congruent with many ethnic groups, however it is the way they are lived and practised in the everyday life of Pasifika people that provides the nuanced understanding of Pasifika cultures. For example, for many Westernised religions, church activities are often just conducted on a Sunday but in Pasifika religions, church activities are scheduled for almost every day of the week with youth groups, cultural practices, and bible studies to name a few. Furthermore, religion permeates every aspect of a Pasifika household such as family prayers, family scripture study and the blessing of food at every meal.

Family, society and religion play an important role in Pasifika communities within Aotearoa and these features influence their relationship and experiences with physical activity, sport and recreation. An in depth study conducted by Gordon, Sauni and Tuagalu (2013), conducted interviews with Pasifika communities and individuals with the intent of exploring their experiences and cultural connections with sport and recreation. The participants were divided into six focus groups comprised of males and females from different age groups. Through interviews and focus group discussions using a Talanoa⁵ approach, a number of themes emerged that showed some of the Pasifika cultural nuances in relation to sport. Some of these themes included ‘Spirituality and Church’ - where sport was seen as a strong motivator for youth participation; ‘Family and Community Gatherings’ – where sport was used as a way for people to get to know each other and develop relationships; and ‘Fitness and Health’ – where sport was used to control weight and manage stress (Gordon et

⁵ Talanoa is a word that originates from the Pacific and is translated as a form of conversation, dialogue and storytelling that is deeply rooted in Pacific Island traditions. It is a Pacific methodology that is used by Pacific scholars and/or scholars who are conducting research with and for Pacific people (Stewart-Withers et al., 2017; Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019; Vaioloti, 2013).

al., 2013). One particular theme that provided a different view and featured Pasifika females was titled 'Negative Experiences with Sport.' Most of the females in this study had experienced restrictions to participate in sport based on their gender. Most of these restrictions were enforced by the ideologies of parents who believed that girls should not play sport. Had it not been for brothers who played sport, and youth activities at church, some of the girls and young women might not have been able to play sport at all. In regards to sport, one of the participants stated, "So I think there are barriers that were there growing up in a PI [Pacific Island] family, growing up was quite negative, but once I did play it was a great experience" (Gordon et al., 2013, p. 21). Here we see gendered and cultural differences within the Pasifika community that affect participation.

A few scholars have conducted research on Pacific women and their motivations and experiences in sport (Dorovolomo et al., 2018; Kanemasu, 2018, 2023; Kanemasu et al., 2021; Schaaf, 2011; Teevale, 2001) as well as participation in physical education (Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018), and also body image (Schaaf, 2005). Of these, three focussed on Pacific wāhine living in Aotearoa. Teevale (2001) and Schaaf (2011) research on the motivations and embodied experiences of Pacific Island netball players provided insights into the lives of Pacific Island women including their deeply rooted connections to family, community and church. Greene and Stewart-Withers (2018), provided insights into participation in Physical Education for Pacific Island young women where they felt more comfortable and experienced confidence when working in groups. My study contributes to this literature by providing physical activity experiences and motivations of young Pasifika wāhine aged 16 to 25 years. In the next section literature on Māori and Pasifika cultural connections will be explored.

Māori and Pasifika Cultural Connections

As previously discussed, Māori and Pasifika share common ground and are often grouped together in research related to educational contexts, media representations and research projects. There are also many individuals with mixed Māori and Pasifika ethnicities so are able to identify with both cultures. In this part of my projects whakapapa, I review literature from Māori and Pasifika academics and discuss interconnecting themes between both ethnic groups.

Similar to Māori, Pasifika people are also categorised as being good at sport or physical activities, but not very good academically (Fitzpatrick, 2010, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2008). This

stereotype has even become part of the narrative of how young Pasifika and Māori affiliate themselves to being good at physical activity and sport and as Hokowhitu (2008b) states, this can limit their potential in other areas of life. Fitzpatrick (2013) provides some examples of this narrative with a group of young Pasifika youth who indicate that they take PE in school because they're good at it and that it is easier than topics that are more scientific or academically challenging. A contrasting perspective was provided by 13-year-old Samoan participant Mary, who states, "PE is the only subject that will help me to go through my university skills. It keeps me active, also it helps me lose weight" (Fitzpatrick, 2013, p. 136). What is important to note, is that Mary identifies that PE could help her academically, and then links it to body image by using weight loss. Here we see cultural and gendered narratives that are self-inscribed using Westernised stereotypes. Mary's response indicates that she believes she can only be successful academically using Physical Education, and that she is overweight because Pasifika people are often stereotypes as being overweight. These stereotypes and self-inscribed narratives are extremely problematic as they can lead to self-identity issues, as seen in Mary's comments about physical education and her chances of higher education.

Negative body and health issues plague research conducted on Pasifika people and unfortunately the lens researchers often utilise is from a deficit approach. In terms of physical activity, fitness and health, a common focus in research on Pasifika people is risks of obesity and cardiovascular health diseases (Maredia et al., 2018; Novotny et al., 2007; Pawson & Janes, 1981; Stoner et al., 2016; Sundborn et al., 2008), as well as strategies to increase physical activity and therefore reduce health-risks (Mavoa & McCabe, 2008; O'Brien, 2018; Rosenkranz & Kolt, 2013). A quantitative study conducted by O'Brien (2018) used an online survey to examine physical activity profiles on Māori, Pasifika and European wahine in Aotearoa, including body composition and metabolic health measures. Data was used to determine some of the existing preferences for Māori, Pasifika and European wahine and suggestions and recommendations to increase engagement were provided from this. What was missing in this study, were the voices of the participants and engagement of the author with the cultural considerations towards the Māori and Pasifika groups. Acknowledgement of this shortcoming was highlighted where O'Brien (2018) explains that "Understanding social/spiritual differences between people of different ethnicities, and how these relate to exercise participation, will enable better understanding of the specific exercise regimes and

contexts most appropriate and acceptable to women from different ethnicities” (pg. 158). Hence, this project will fill this gap for young Māori and Pasifika wahine, using a socio-cultural approach underpinned by Indigenous methodologies.

Opportunities for Research and the Pathway Forward

Through reviewing the literature on socio-cultural research on women, young women, Indigenous and culturally diverse women and concluding with research on Māori and Pasifika women’s experiences in sport and physical activity in Aotearoa, this chapter highlights key gaps. The voices of young Māori and Pasifika wahine living in Aotearoa deserve a place in academia where they can provide insights into how and why they engage and participate in physical activity, and the barriers they face and navigate in doing so. Through an Indigenous, Ethnic Minoritized Feminist strength focussed lens they will be able to provide their own unique perspectives.

Providing insights into lived experiences has the capacity to provide rich and detailed information for practitioners, researchers and policy makers. Māori and Pasifika wahine living in Aotearoa have too often been portrayed and researched under a deficit research lens where statistics are not favourable in regard to participation in physical activity and fitness regimes. In this project I aim to centralize the lived experiences and amplify the voices of Māori and Pasifika young wahine who are engaging in physical activity. In doing so, this project will make an original contribution to socio-cultural Indigenous literature in Aotearoa. Following is a reiteration of the research questions which will position this study within the existing literature while showing the unique contribution it will make.

Research Questions

Considering the gaps in current research that have been unveiled through this whakapapa chapter, this research aims to answer the following questions:

Primary Research Question:

What are the embodied experiences of physically active young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. How does culture and ethnicity shape young Māori and Pasifika wāhine identity, everyday experiences, and sport and physical activity?

2. What perspectives do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine have about body image in their everyday lives, physical activity, and sport?
3. How and why do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine prioritise physical activity in their lives?

Chapter 3: Manuscript 1 – Methodology

‘You made us feel at home’: towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise

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Preface

This chapter is the first published article of this thesis and it presents the methods and methodologies adopted throughout this research. Contributing to literature on Indigenous feminist research methodologies, this chapter provides the rationale and reasoning behind the choice to weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology in the research design. While the following chapter presents the methodology as originally published, it is important to provide the decolonised lens in which I use the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist.’ Drawing from Indigenous feminist scholars who call for decolonising language and lenses (McGuire-Adams, 2020b; Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2011), I steer away from the use of the Westernised definition of feminism as a political movement that advocates for equal rights for women, and purposefully use ‘feminist’ to represent the centring of women’s voices and experiences. Doing so, my focus is on the use of Indigenous methodologies to intentionally centre the voices of Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Along with providing detail of participant recruitment and data gathering, practical examples of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology are provided. Importantly, this chapter introduces the young wāhine whose voices and knowledges are amplified throughout the empirical chapters. The voices of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine are also present in this chapter as they provide their insights and thoughts on how they felt about being part of this research. It should be noted that there are repetitions in the introduction, literature review and author positionings due to this chapter being published as a stand-alone article that required context and framing.

Abstract

Decades of research on Indigenous and culturally diverse young women in sport and exercise has been underpinned by deficit models where these groups are portrayed as ‘lacking’, ‘at risk’, and/or ‘vulnerable.’ Such approaches have been heavily critiqued for ignoring broader structural and systemic inequities that have produced such health disparities. These approaches also reproduce racialized ideologies of Indigenous and culturally diverse women where they are seen as a ‘problem group’ in sport, exercise and health research. Over recent years, a growing body of research is advancing culturally appropriate methodologies and methods that aim to prioritise the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous and culturally diverse women. This paper contributes to this literature by providing an example of research that used Indigenous methodologies (Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology) to engage young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa New Zealand. We start by positioning this paper in relevant literature, then detail the cultural underpinnings of the methodological approach we used. We then outline the research and offer some practical considerations in, i) recruiting young women within one’s community, ii) using methods such as wānanga (meetings), digital diaries and kai (food), and iii) weaving care and reciprocity. In so doing, we highlight the importance of using locally specific feminist methodologies throughout research with, by and for young Indigenous and culturally diverse young women.

Keywords: feminist methodologies; young women; Indigenous; Mana Wahine; Masi methodology; Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

Indigenous and culturally diverse young women are often viewed as problematic and their multiple ‘vulnerabilities’ are negatively highlighted in media and policy (Clark et al., 2021; Deckert, 2020). This deficit view is often reproduced in the methodologies used by researchers (often those outside of these communities) investigating their sport and exercise participation. In response to such problematic approaches, a growing body of Indigenous feminist scholarship is providing alternatives including strengths-based approaches with, by and for Indigenous and culturally diverse women (McGuire-Adams, 2020b; Ratna & Samie, 2017). Much of this research is being led by women from these communities who use culturally-specific methods and methodologies that resonate with the women in their communities. While methodologies and methods are contextualised to place and location, underpinning this work are efforts to develop ‘decolonized methodologies’ with and for their

communities (L. T. Smith, 2012a). By using culturally-specific methodologies for Indigenous and culturally diverse women, researchers work to create spaces where participants feel comfortable sharing their lived experiences.

We contribute to this growing body of literature by using the current PhD research of the first author which focuses on the sport and exercise experiences of young Māori⁶ and Pasifika⁷ wāhine⁸. In this article we use the first author's research as an example of how culturally-specific methodologies and methods were used to recruit and engage young wāhine in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa). In respecting the culturally diverse lives of these young wāhine, we wove together two feminist Indigenous methodological approaches: Mana Wahine (Pihama, 2020) and Masi Methodology (Naepi, 2019a). We start by providing context for this project and the researchers positionings. Next, we examine Indigenous feminist literature followed by our rationale for weaving Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology. We then explain the project and provide practical examples in i) recruiting young women within one's community, ii) using wānanga⁹, digital diaries and kai¹⁰, and iii) weaving care and reciprocity. In so doing, we highlight the importance of using culturally-specific methods and methodologies when conducting research with and for Indigenous and culturally diverse young women.

Cultural Context and Positionality: Māori and Pasifika Cultural Connections in Aotearoa

Māori have a rich culture¹¹ that shapes their worldview and how they engage in society. As the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, Māori ways of life continue to flourish despite the physical, economic and symbolic violence of colonialism (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011; Taonui, 2010). Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), a treaty of cession signed between Māori and British Crown representatives in 1840, is a significant and contested document that continues to shape relations between Māori, Pākehā (NZ Europeans) and all other peoples in Aotearoa (Byrnes, 1999; Hill, 2010; Thomas & Nikora, 1996). Te Tiriti principles of reciprocity, active

⁶ Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa.

⁷ Pasifika is a word often used by Pacific People who live in Aotearoa to describe themselves and their communities.

⁸ Wahine is woman; Wāhine is women.

⁹ A meeting to discuss, share, and deliberate.

¹⁰ Food.

¹¹ We use the term culture to refer to the behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and practises of a group.

protection, partnership, equity, and equal treatment shape policy and practice in health, education, research (L. T. Smith, 2012a; Wilkie & Whakataukī, 2005), and sport and exercise (Hapeta, Palmer, et al., 2019; Hapeta, Stewart-Withers, et al., 2019).

Pacific peoples are a collective group living in Aotearoa. They are Indigenous¹² to their respective Islands (Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Niue, etc) and have distinct cultures. In Aotearoa they are identified using terms such as Pacific and/or Pasifika. Although Pacific and Pasifika are used interchangeably, we align with Fa’avae (2022) who explains that Pacific refers to anyone with Pacific heritage and Pasifika refers to Pacific people who were born and raised in Aotearoa. Most Pacific people living in Aotearoa are Pasifika so their lived experiences with their Indigenous cultures differ from those born and raised in the Islands (Mila-Schaaf, 2011).

Māori and Pacific Cultural Connections

Māori and Pacific peoples are connected through ancestral links as all Polynesians (Māori included) migrated from the same shores and are part of Oceania (Hill, 2010; Somerville, 2012). Cultural connections also exist such as shared social experiences, intermarriage and a camaraderie with being brown (Matika et al., 2021; Mila-Schaaf, 2011). Māori and Pacific peoples are often framed negatively in wider social contexts including health, education, crime and poverty (Enari & Haua, 2021). As various critical sport and physical education scholars have highlighted, they are often unfairly stereotyped as ‘gifted’ in sport and exercise and inept in education (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2003b, 2003a). Conversely, while disproportionately honoured and recognised for their achievements and athleticism in sports (F. Palmer, 2016; Schaaf, 2005), various studies show lower levels of sport and physical activity participation (Stoner et al., 2016). For example, Sport New Zealand identified young Māori and Pasifika wāhine as having a heightened ‘risk’ of low participation in sport and exercise (Spotlight on Deprivation: Key Findings, 2019). Such reports often fail to include the knowledge and experiences of young wāhine that would help understand ‘why’ they are identified as being ‘at risk’. This is where Indigenous feminist methodologies and methods could assist with engaging these young wāhine in research.

Another connection includes individuals with mixed Māori and Pacific ancestry. A YouTube series named Duality (Tahi, 2023) unpacks the lived experiences of mixed Māori and

¹² For clarity and consistency we will use Indigenous to represent Māori and Pasifika peoples.

Pasifika rangatahi¹³ who are described by Sir Aupito William Sio (Minister for Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa) as being, “the Generation [of young]... people who are brown, ... brainy, ... beautiful and bicultural¹⁴” (Vaka’uta, 2021, p. 1). Despite this growing group of mixed ethnic rangatahi, such hybridity is rarely acknowledged in research and policy (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). To date most research in Aotearoa has kept Māori and Pasifika separate and very few combine methods and/or methodologies (Mayeda et al., 2014; Wikaire et al., 2017). We aim to address this gap by 1) conducting research with and for Māori and Pasifika wāhine (including those of mixed ethnicities), and 2) intentionally weaving culturally-specific methodologies and methods to recruit and engage them.

Researcher Positionality and Cultural Reflexivity

As an Indigenous feminist researcher of Māori-Samoan (Pasifika) descent, the first author has unique insider positioning for this research. She has a similar ethnic and socio-economic background as the young wāhine and has worked with hundreds of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine for over thirty years as an educator, trainer, coach and church group leader. This extensive lived experience provided cultural knowledge and authenticity to this research. However, she is a different generation to the participants and as feminist youth scholars have revealed, there are generational complexities when doing research by, with and for youth from the same cultural backgrounds (Miled, 2019). Given the diversity in Pasifika ethnic groups, there are also nuanced cultural differences between the young wāhine and the first author. We acknowledged and addressed these generational and cultural differences through constant thorough reflexivity.

The broader research team included Pākeha¹⁵, Pacific, and Māori scholars that contributed different strengths, experience and knowledge. Throughout this project we regularly reflected on our individual and collective positionings and were particularly mindful of how our cultural and disciplinary positionalities were shaping this project. We came together with a shared interest in understanding how Māori and Pasifika methodologies could amplify the voices of young wāhine in research.

¹³ The Māori word for young people or the younger generation. This usually refers to teenagers and young adults.

¹⁴ In this example the term bicultural means having mixed Māori and Pasifika ancestry.

¹⁵ Māori word for New Zealand European.

Literature Review: Sport and Exercise Research on/with and by Indigenous and Culturally Diverse Women

Decades of research on Indigenous and culturally diverse women's participation in sport and exercise has been underpinned by deficit-models where they are often seen as 'lacking', 'at risk' or 'vulnerable'. In such research, young women are portrayed as requiring interventions to improve individual sport and exercise levels, and thus overall health (Meharg et al., 2020; V. Roberts et al., 2017). These approaches have been heavily critiqued for ignoring broader structural and systemic inequities that have produced such health disparities. Furthermore, these approaches often reproduce racialized ideologies of Indigenous and culturally diverse women where they are portrayed as a 'problem' in sport, exercise and health research (Hyett et al., 2019; Krieg, 2016). Indigenous scholars have argued that for better representation of Indigenous and culturally diverse women, the methodologies and methods used need to be culturally-specific (Ryder et al., 2020; L. T. Smith et al., 2016). In this paper we build upon and extend these arguments by focusing on methodologies and methods used with sport and exercise research by Indigenous and culturally diverse women.

Over recent years various research approaches have been developed to advance culturally-specific methods and methodologies that prioritise the lived experiences of Indigenous and culturally diverse women. These include community-based participatory research (CBPR) (Coppola et al., 2017; Sanz-Remacha et al., 2022), Postcolonial Feminist Participatory Action Research (PFPAR) (Hayhurst et al., 2015), and Narrative Inquiry (Hamzavi & Brown, 2023). While there are undoubtedly strengths in such approaches, our research specifically contributes to the small but significant body of literature led *by* feminist Indigenous and culturally diverse women who are creating methodologies and conducting research *with and for* women in their communities (Ahmad et al., 2020; McGuire-Adams, 2020a; Ratna & Samie, 2017). Ratna and Sammie (2017) explain that Indigenous or ethnic 'Other' feminists "privilege theoretical frameworks that 'speak to them', and which inform their methodological choices and methods, to provide new and original approaches to analysing sport, physical culture and the lives of ethnic 'Other' girls and women" (p. 3). Such research is guided by culturally-specific intersectional feminist and cultural practices that may not always be fully understood or acknowledged by Westernised research approaches. However, we draw strength from Lorde (2003) when stating that "the master's tools will

never dismantle the master's house" (p. 27) and resonate with Stewart-Withers et al. (2017) when explaining that while research approaches such as PAR "can work with indigenous people it is not informed by an indigenous worldview" (p. 56).

Importantly, and most relevant to this article, are culturally-specific methods and practices used by sport and exercise researchers to engage participants from Indigenous and culturally diverse communities. In Canada, methods including sharing circles and storytelling as well as cultural practices like offering tobacco have been implemented with Indigenous communities (B. W. Hudson et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020a; McHugh et al., 2013). In Australia, an Indigenous method named 'yarning'¹⁶ is used by Indigenous scholars to conduct research with their communities (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Walker et al., 2014). Indigenous research approaches using digital technologies and social media has also been gaining traction due to it being used by many young Indigenous peoples (B. Carlson & Frazer, 2021a; Rice et al., 2016). Importantly, culturally-specific methods and practices help provide respectful and familiar spaces for Indigenous peoples engagement in research.

An example of research that uses a culturally-specific Indigenous feminist methodology and method is the work of Tricia McGuire-Adams (2017, 2020a). In her position as an Anishinaabe woman and scholar, she developed an Anishinaabeg research paradigm for sport sociology and used it to recruit and engage women in her community. Her methods included sharing circles and story-telling and she used Anishinaabeg cultural protocols, such as offering tobacco and drawing upon spirits (McGuire-Adams 2017). Using culturally-specific practices the Anishinaabeg women authentically engaged with research in environments that they were accustomed to. Further Indigenous feminist ethics of care included encouraging the women to share their stories in their own ways and having full editing rights in their transcripts (McGuire-Adams, 2020a). Here we see the implementation and practice of a culturally specific research methodology and methods by an Indigenous feminist with and for women in her community.

In Aotearoa, several research projects provide insight into the methods and methodologies that have been used to investigate the physical education and sport experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Indigenous feminist researcher Farah Palmer (2000, 2007b), conducted research with young Māori wāhine and their experiences in

¹⁶ Relates to conversation that has Indigenous cultural meaning for Indigenous Australians.

physical education using Kaupapa Māori¹⁷ methodologies and methods. More recently, Pacific scholar Sotutu (2022) employed a Pasifika research paradigm and used Talanoa¹⁸ as the method to investigate the experiences of young Pasifika girls in junior rugby. Building on this Indigenous feminist scholarship (Palmer 2007b; Sotutu 2022), we aim to contribute to literature on research with and for young Māori and/or Pasifika wāhine using culturally-specific methodologies and methods.

Māori and Pasifika Feminist Methodologies

I think that when research is being done on a certain population, that the research methods and approach align with the population's values and culture. People are more likely to open up and feel comfortable with people who they can relate to, and with you I felt this wholeheartedly. I was able to be vulnerable and open up about things that I've never expressed before, I was given a safe space to be vulnerable and kōrero¹⁹.

Wairemana²⁰ (21, Māori-Pākehā)

This is the voice of a young Māori-Pākehā wahine in our research project²¹. Her response reinforced the importance of using culturally-specific practices throughout the data gathering stages of this project and it confirmed our resolve to weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology. In this section we present the tenets of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology and explain how and why we wove these together for our research.

Mana Wahine

Mana Wahine is a research approach designed by, with and for Māori wāhine. As a theoretical framework, Mana Wahine centres the lives, knowledge and experiences of Māori wāhine (Pihama, 2020; Toi, 2019). It is sometimes attributed to intersectionality which explores how ethnicity and gender intersect to impact women's lives in varied ways (Simmonds, 2011; Toyibah & Riyani, 2022). Simmonds (2009) explains that, "Mana wahine is about making visible Māori women's knowledges and making heard our voices and herstories. It has emerged to describe and analyse Māori women's lived realities" (p. 4). Mana Wahine is fluid,

¹⁷ Kaupapa Māori is research conducted with, for and by Māori.

¹⁸ Talanoa is a Pacific research methodology and method used by many Pacific scholars as it is flexibly used across Pacific ethnic groups and embraces cultural values, attitudes, and practices. As a method it is used to generate and share conversations and knowledge while creating relationships (Vaiolleti 2013).

¹⁹ The Māori word for talk or discuss.

²⁰ Pseudonyms are used in this article.

²¹ Full ethics approval was obtained and all participants provided consent.

relational and diverse as it acknowledges and respects the varied ways in which Māori wāhine live their lives. It embraces self-determination and cannot be defined to a single version or truth as it encompasses and embraces the diverse ways of ‘being’ a Māori wahine (Pihama 2020). In research, Mana Wahine embraces methods that centre the lives and experiences of Māori wāhine and it supports the choices of Māori wāhine in academia who conduct research with, by and for other Māori wāhine.

Masi Methodology

Masi Methodology is a Pan-Pacific methodology used to centre the lives and experiences of Pacific women (Naepi, 2016, 2019a, 2021). In practice, Masi Methodology is the implementation of Pacific values and principles when conducting research with Pacific women. The objective is to centre “Pacific women’s voices as authoritative and having something to offer beyond the limits of the academy’s understanding” (Naepi, 2019a, p. 238). Pacific principles include showing respect, acknowledging and valuing relationships, demonstrating and being aware of different cultural practices, reciprocity, and encouraging genuine participation through autonomy and decision making (Naepi 2019a). Masi Methodology is currently a framework that is intended to guide a researcher conducting research with Pacific women. Although in its infancy, “its potential to be a powerful tool for recording Pacific women’s experiences of this world is unlimited” (Naepi 2019a, p. 240).

Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology

Weaving is a practice and custom used by most Pacific nations including Māori, Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji (Griffen, 2006). This custom is predominantly performed by women and although each country has their own unique cultural techniques, it is understood that when weaving, women “share stories and ideas of family and community and the world and of a woman’s place in it” (Griffen 2006, p. 17). The act and art of weaving comprises values and cultural representations that embrace Māori and Pasifika wāhine and as such, is an apt metaphor for the methodological practices we employed in this project.

Our decision to weave two Indigenous feminist methodologies into the research design was based on the first author’s lived experiences as a Māori-Pasifika wahine. Understanding the tensions of having to choose either a Māori or Samoan identity and knowing the nuances between each culture, she was resolved to find a methodology that would respect the mixed cultural and ethnic identities of young wāhine. In our search for a suitable methodology, we

found Tangata Hourua which is a mixed Māori and Pasifika research methodology (Mullane, Harwood, & Warbrick, 2022). Although some of the tenets of this suited our research, it failed to acknowledge the intersections of gender and ethnicity. Aspiring surgeons Tutone et al. (2023) were the first Māori and Pasifika academics to weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology into their research design. Like us, their goal was to centre the voices and experiences of Māori and Pasifika wāhine while also honouring them “in their own self-determination” (Tutone et al. 2023, p. 108). Mirroring their intentions, we also weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology throughout our research design.

Various scholars have expressed concern over the watering down and loss of integrity of Māori and Pasifika knowledge when methodologies are blended (Naepi, 2019a; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017). Acknowledging such concerns, we worked reflexively with Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology throughout all stages of our research (Naepi, 2015). The metaphorical process of weaving required respect for the different strands of Mana Wahine and Masi principles. At times, depending on the context, the Mana Wahine strands took precedence, and other times Masi strands were used. Sometimes both strands were used concurrently. Importantly, each strand was equally valued in the weaving process. This is where a great deal of reflexivity, cultural care, deeply embodied cultural knowledge and intuition became important. We showed respect to all the young wāhine by centering their gendered cultural multiplicities throughout our research.

Discussion: Centering Young Wāhine using Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology

In this section, we introduce the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research project to provide context and understanding of how and why we wove Mana Wahine and Masi methodology. We then provide examples of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology in practice.

Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine

In this research there are 31 young Māori and/or Pasifika Wāhine aged 16 to 25 years old living in South Auckland(16) or Porirua²²(15). We use these locations as they are both low socio-economic communities with similar demographics situated in large, urbanised cities (Statistics New Zealand, 2018; Yong et al., 2017). Of the 31 participants, sixteen wāhine have mixed-ethnicities comprising of Māori-Samoan(7), Samoan-Tokelauan(3), Samoan-Niuean(2), Cook Island-Samoan(1), Samoan-Tongan(1), and Māori-Pākehā(2). Among the remainder of

²² A suburb in Wellington, Aotearoa.

the sample, seven identify as Māori and eight as Pasifika. The Pasifika wāhine come from a range of different ethnic groups (i.e., Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island) but the majority are Samoan(5). Seven were in high school, 10 in higher education, three had graduated with a qualification, 16 were employed, and four had children.

The lived realities of the young wāhine illustrate the expectations, responsibilities, and stereotypes they experience. Some come from families where they are expected to work to help pay family expenses because both parents are working – sometimes two jobs. Many have gendered domestic responsibilities (i.e. laundry, cleaning, babysitting) unlike their brothers who are encouraged to participate in sport. Some are from overcrowded intergenerational homes (two wāhine had 10 people living in a 3 bedroom home) with family members who have serious health conditions. The majority of these young wāhine described racial discrimination they face in social spaces including school, university and shopping. Mirroring other research on the everyday experiences of Māori and Pasifika wāhine (Gray & Crichton, 2019), the young wāhine in our study believed they were regularly targeted because they were ‘brown.’

As one young wahine expressed:

We are the main ethnicity that gets crapped on here [in Aotearoa] but I am proud to be Maori-Pasifika. I'll never want to change, you know, my ethnicity, ever!

(Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan-Māori)

These expectations, responsibilities and stereotypes frame their lives and reinforce the importance of using Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology to centre and respect their voices.

Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology in Practice

Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology centre and respect the voices and lives of Māori and Pacific wāhine. In practice this meant ensuring each young wahine felt important, valued and integral to the research. Once a young wahine committed to participating, the first author built on that relationship and created a meaningful connection. Meaningful relationships and connections are both integral strands of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology (Naepi, 2019a; Pihama, 2020). The remainder of this paper outlines some cultural practices we used, focusing specifically on the considerations with i) recruiting from within one's community, ii) Wānanga, digital diaries, and kai, and iii) care and reciprocity.

Recruiting Young Women Within Your Community

Our recruitment strategies were informed by research on recruiting young Indigenous women mixed with Mana Wahine and Masi principles. Mirroring current trends in recruiting young women for research, we used social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram (Thornton et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2017). Our recruitment was similar to research conducted with young Black and Latina women that were recruited using adults they knew and trusted (González & Grov, 2020). This form of recruitment also aligns with Mana Wahine and Masi Principles through Whanaungatanga²³ within one's community.

Positionality and location were key factors shaping our recruitment strategies. In South Auckland recruitment started with the first author sending personalised private messages to young wāhine who she was friends with on Facebook and Instagram. Our choice to use this approach related to culturally-specific knowledge of Māori and Pasifika young wāhine. In Māori and Pacific cultures, respect is given to those who are older than oneself which can lead to feelings of obligation. Sending private messages aimed to minimise this possible imbalance of power. Instead, young wāhine were given time to read the invitation before deciding to participate. If they were asked face-to-face, young wāhine were potentially put in a vulnerable position. Whanaungatanga was facilitated using personal contacts through home visits with friends and family, phone calls and informal conversations with past students²⁴. Some Western research approaches may define such recruitment strategies as strategic, purposive sampling among existing networks. However, when doing research with Māori and Pasifika, these relationships have deeper cultural meanings and are underpinned by respect, care and reciprocity (Naepi, 2019a).

Recruiting in Porirua was challenging because the first author had very few close contacts. The approaches used in this region differed from those in South Auckland but whanaungatanga was still a strong focal point. Drawing on research that encouraged Facebook as a recruitment tool (Thornton et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2017), the first author joined and shared a poster featuring a young Māori-Pasifika wahine on a number of Porirua community Facebook pages. She joined community fitness groups, sent emails and messages to different sporting communities (i.e., Porirua Basketball Association) and participated in

²³Relationships and connection.

²⁴ Students we refer to attend the educational institution where the first author works. We did not recruit current students.

CrossFit, F45 and community classes. Recruitment also included sending personal messages and emails with the poster to friends and family asking them to distribute it among their communities.

Interestingly, the recruitment method that yielded the most interest and engagement resonated with research by González and Grov (2020) where a trusted adult encouraged the young wāhine to participate. Many of the adults who encouraged the young wāhine in Porirua were their mothers or aunts who resonated with the research topic and the first author. As Māori and/or Pasifika wāhine, they wanted to support the first author and in so doing reflected Mana Wāhine (kotahitanga²⁵) and Masi (respect and support) principles. This demonstrates intergenerational support which highlights the importance of engaging whānau²⁶ and community in recruitment.

Māori and Pasifika peoples enjoy helping their communities progress. Sharing the purpose and importance of the research project gave the young wāhine a chance to feel they were being helpful and important. Replies from some young wāhine included that they were excited and happy to support this research. However, not all wāhine wanted to be part of this research (5). Using Mana Wahine and Masi principles, extra care was taken to ensure these young wāhine were not pressured by thanking them for their consideration by reassuring them that declining was not a problem. Given her prior relationships with many of the young wāhine (particularly those in South Auckland), the first author constantly reiterated that participation was free from obligation and that they had full control over decisions to leave without any repercussions.

Wānanga, Digital Diaries, and Kai

The methods used in this research included hosting two wānanga held six to seven months apart. Young wāhine who were unable to make the group wānanga had a kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui²⁷ at a local restaurant of their choosing. The young wāhine were asked to document their sport and exercise experiences between the first and second wānanga. To do this we used co-participatory methods by providing a variety of options. The options included a written journal (notebooks with empowering quotes on the cover and pens were gifted to each

²⁵ The concept of lifting each other up.

²⁶ Immediate and extended family and/or groups of people who view and treat each other as though they were family.

²⁷ Face-to-face meeting.

participant regardless of their preferred method), participant-created videography or photography (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook), or a google form specifically created to document their stories. Social media options were offered because we recognized the importance of digital technologies in young women's lives (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019) as well as the use of social media for Indigenous storytelling (B. Carlson & Frazer, 2021a; Iseke, 2011). These practices resonated with Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies as it involved collaboration and key decision making by placing the control of knowledge with the young wāhine (Naepi, 2019a; Simmonds, 2009). At the first wānanga, one young wahine asked if she could choose more than one option. We hadn't considered this, but holding fast to the Mana Wahine and Masi principles, the response was, 'Of course you can!'

The digital method options recognize that many young people use social media regularly and view it as an integral part of their everyday lives (Hsu et al., 2015; Seo et al., 2014). For Indigenous and culturally diverse communities, social media can provide opportunities for young people to reinforce their identities and build acceptance within their communities (B. Carlson & Frazer, 2021a). Some of the wāhine embraced the variety of digital methods available to record and capture their stories. One young wahine had an Instagram page which she allowed the first author to join and follow, and another created a beautiful word document with photos and reflective comments about her experiences. Others took photos which showed them in different outdoor environments including beaches, waterfalls and walking tracks. Importantly, the young wāhine embraced these digital options as they enabled them to 'show and tell' their movement stories in a range of creative ways. Their activities included skateboarding, dancing, 'gymin²⁸,' waka-ama, walking and netball. When given the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own ways, these young wāhine were far from the inactive, 'at risk' group described in policy documents. Instead, they enjoyed participating in a range of physical activities in their own ways and on their own terms.

Prayer, religion and food play an important role in Māori and Pasifika peoples lives. Many family, church and community gatherings involve prayer and sharing kai. Māori and Pasifika peoples have deep cultural connections with kai and it is often used to demonstrate care and respect (Akbar et al., 2022b). Understanding this culturally-specific knowledge and demonstrating Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology principles, we provided kai for all

²⁸ A term used by the young wāhine to describe their actions of going to train at a gym or fitness centre.

wānanga and hui. The menu consisted of multiple main and side dishes, dessert, non-alcoholic beverages and snacks. This may seem excessive in Western research frameworks, however, this resonates with Māori and Pasifika values and is an important way of showing appreciation. Our provision of kai was an overt action to show the young wāhine that they are important, and that we respected them to a level where they could see we took great efforts for them. Another Māori and Pasifika cultural practice that we used included providing more food than was necessary. We also provided extra plates and cling wrap for participants to ‘make a plate’²⁹ they could take home and share with their families. These cultural practices align with Mana Wahine and Masi methodology by showing respect, reciprocity and appreciation for the young wāhine and their whānau.

Care and Reciprocity

When communicating with the young wāhine, Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology principles were used. This included a reassuring and gentle approach where the importance of ‘having your say’ and ‘sharing your story’ was reinforced. Mana Wahine and Masi principles were also portrayed through the flexibility, patience and problem-solving applied when working with the young wāhine. For example, transportation was often an issue. Many young wāhine needed transportation to and/or from the wānanga. This was resolved with offers to pick them up and/or drop them off wherever they needed to go (Figure 1). This occurred many times in South Auckland and Porirua illustrating that accessibility was an issue for the young wāhine. Mana Wāhine and Masi principles of care were evident in the actions of taking the young wāhine to and from their destinations without hesitation. The first author was cognisant of the additional roles required of her to support the young wāhine with their participation in the research.

Being flexible also included being mentally and logistically prepared for anything. For example, some young wāhine were late, or they had to leave early, or they wanted to change times and days at short notice (Figure 2). At the very first wānanga the first author had prepared the room with extra care. She had borrowed her mother’s tablecloths and bought food for more than 12 participants, yet only three turned up. Despite the initial disappointment at the low turnout the discussion was authentic, deep and meaningful.

²⁹ A phrase used to describe the action of packing food away after a meal for guests to take home and consume later.

Painful experiences were shared, tears were shed, and hugs were given. Empathy and understanding of the lived realities of the young women became paramount and it reinforced the importance of being calm and kind, and always showing the young wāhine that they were indeed important.

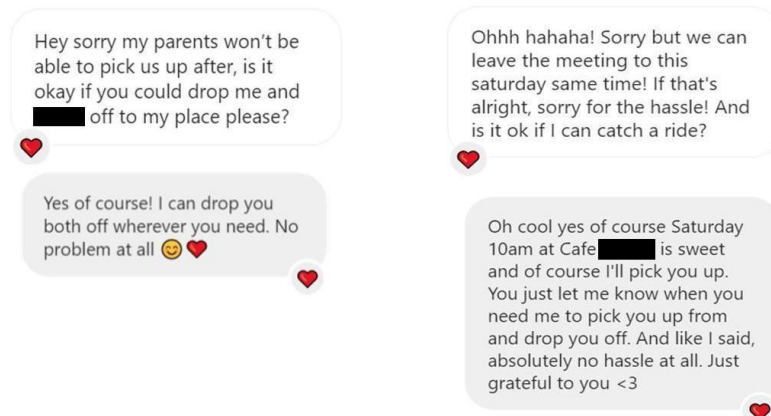


Figure 1: Examples of texts from young wāhine to the first author demonstrating the need for support with transportation.

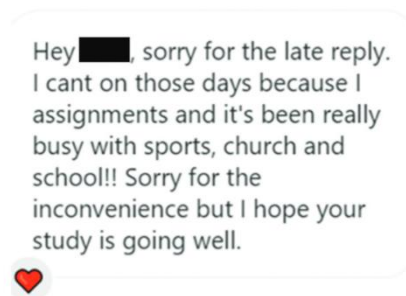


Figure 2: Example of text from a participant to the first author showing the range of commitments that needed to be navigated and why flexibility and understanding is important.

At times it can be hard to know whether young women are interpreting such gestures as they were intended. However, when asked to participate in a voluntary online post-wānanga survey, it was evident that they felt safe, valued and comfortable throughout the research process:

I did. It felt as if I could open up without getting judged with what I had to say (Tati, 16, Māori-Samoan).

OMG YES!! Very much never experienced this kind of research to recognise Pacific and Māori women in sports. Very comfortable (Paige, 20, Samoan-Tokelauan).

Yes definitely made me feel safe and it made me open up a bit more because you are so kind and welcoming. As Māori/Pasifika people we have this nature where we naturally draw to our people whether we know them or not. But you made us feel at home and like we were just having a conversation (Rya, 23, Samoan-Tokelauan).

With these thoughts in mind, it was important to make known to them that the choices and stories they shared throughout the research would be valued and not taken for granted. As a final gesture of gratitude, at the end of the project the young wāhine were given a koha³⁰. This was a t-shirt that had a print of an original design created by the first author specifically for the young wāhine (Figure 3). The uniquely designed t-shirt combined Māori and Pasifika themes and was appreciated by the young wāhine who expressed their excitement and pride in wearing it. Upon receiving the t-shirt that had the words, 'Mana Wahine – Weaving our stories of health and physical activity' printed on it, Nina (19, Samoan-Māori) responded via text message: 'Thank you so much for the t-shirt. It fits perfectly! I love it so much.'



Figure 3: Nora (19, Samoan-Niuean) - Modelling the Mana Wahine t-shirt designed by the first author and given as koha for participation (Photo used with full permission).

The importance of Mana Wāhine and Masi methodological practices implemented throughout this project acknowledge the intersecting cultural and gendered identities of young Indigenous and culturally diverse women. Furthermore, Mana Wāhine and Masi methodological practices were adapted to the lives of young wāhine (i.e., use of social media methods; driving to pick up and drop off; t-shirts as koha). Through creating environments where they felt comfortable and respected, they were able to share their knowledge freely and authentically in ways that resonated with them. Existing within spaces where their voices

³⁰ Gift or donation.

are often not sought after or listened to (i.e., school, public spaces, policy, research), it was important to ensure that they were always welcomed, acknowledged, supported, appreciated and valued. We contend that the Mana Wāhine and Masi methodology principles and values implemented in our research empowered the young wāhine by creating environments that felt familiar to them and they were able to engage authentically in their own ways.

Final Reflections

Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology was no easy feat and it required listening and responding to the multiplicities of the cultural and gendered identities of the young wāhine. In so doing, the metaphorical process of ‘weaving’ required the researcher/s to ‘feel’ the embodied, ethical and culturally appropriate responses to and with the young wāhine. There is a weight of responsibility that comes with this work, and such approaches cannot be directly replicated. While always guided by the dual strands of Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, there were times when one strand took greater significance, but always as part of the whole. The metaphor of weaving is powerful and useful here and we acknowledge that the researcher/s is/are integral to the process. The final product will be shaped by the aroha³¹, care and culturally-specific approaches used with and for their community. Using the words of Pihama (2020), we agree that “we must not allow the colonial preoccupation with finding the singular ‘truth’ deter us from seeking forms of analysis that can support the affirmation of our roles, status and positioning” (p. 353). While the processes detailed in this paper are specific to the communities of young Māori and Pacific wāhine, we hope that others can take our learnings into consideration as they weave their own research in ways that are responsive to the multiplicities within and for their own communities.

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature focused on developing culturally-specific feminist methodologies with and for Indigenous and culturally diverse young women in sport and exercise (McGuire-Adams, 2020a; Ratna & Samie, 2017). Applying Indigenous feminist methodologies are necessary to create environments and spaces that feel comfortable, respectful and familiar for young Indigenous and culturally diverse women. This allows their authentic lived experiences to be valued and acknowledged. Contextualising the

³¹ Māori word for Love.

experiences and finding culturally-specific methodologies for amplifying the voices of young Indigenous women is not only necessary for producing richer qualitative data, but also for providing accurate representations of who these young women are and what their needs and hopes might be.

Chapter 4: Manuscript 2 (Currently under review)

‘I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me’: Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa

Mihi Nemani, Holly Thorpe, Keaka Hemi, and Anna Rolleston

Currently Under Review with the International Indigenous Policy Journal

Preface

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clearer explanation, description and analysis of the complex intersectional identities that the young wāhine embrace and navigate daily. This is an important chapter as it provides insight into the lived experiences of the young wāhine and provides nuanced knowledge for researchers and policy makers who make decisions about these young wāhine. Drawing upon Mana Wahine and Masi methodology we (all authors) amplify the voices of the young wāhine as they describe how they navigate and embrace their culture and how they address and reject stereotypes that frame their ethnic and gendered identities. Please note that there is repetition in sections of this chapter due to it being a stand-alone article that requires framing and context.

Abstract

Research conducted with, for and by Indigenous women should be initiated by developing an understanding of their identities. In this article we draw upon interviews with 31 young Indigenous wāhine (women) (aged 16-25 years) living in low socio-economic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand to understand their processes of identity development, and how they navigate societal stereotypes. Framed by Mana Wahine and Masi methodology, this project sought to create respectful spaces for the lived experiences of young wāhine, with the aim to amplify their voices. In so doing, we contribute to international Indigenous feminist scholarship about the importance of understanding the identities of young Indigenous women when conducting research and shaping policy with and for them.

Keywords: Aotearoa, Māori, Pasifika, Indigenous, wāhine, identity

Introduction

Identity construction is an extremely important factor in shaping an individual's life. In the lives of young women who are navigating cultural, societal, peer, and familial expectations, experiences of identity formation, negotiation and conflict can become overwhelming. Understanding identity is important as it influences perceptions, interactions, and experiences in society which affects behaviours, values, and beliefs. Studies on young people whose identities are 'othered' have complex layers that need to be considered and it is important to understand what these layers are and how to respect and acknowledge them (Krieg, 2016; Mokaraka-Harris et al., 2018). Recent research conducted with and for Indigenous young people has taken a strengths-based approach where their voices and lived experiences are seen as critical factors to understanding their identity and how this influences beliefs and aspirations (Bassett & Geron, 2020; Faircloth et al., 2020). Knowing these critical factors is imperative when engaging in research and designing policy with, and for, Indigenous young women as deeper nuanced understandings of identity advocates knowledge that is authentic.

Intersectionality provides a framework that acknowledges the different social categories and factors that construct identity. Intersectionality was originally coined in US-based research to understand how identity constructs impact Black women in ways that are similar and different to Black men and White women (1989, 1990). Since then, intersectionality has been used in a range of ways, and across disciplines, to understand how intersecting aspects of one's identity (i.e., gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, class) shape

the opportunities and constraints experienced in everyday life (Simien, 2007; Velez & Spencer, 2018; Walby et al., 2012). Indigenous youth scholars have applied the concept of intersectionality to understand the diverse ways in which young people navigate life including how they engage with their culture, sexual orientation, and social media (Leurs et al., 2013; Njeze et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2021). Notably, when some of these identity attributes intersect, they create complexities that can privilege or disadvantage young women (Bowleg, 2012). Gaps in policy can be highlighted using an intersectionality lens so that young Indigenous women are not negatively impacted or misrepresented. In this article we focus on the intersections of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status and explore how these shape the identity of young Māori and Pacific Indigenous wāhine (women) living in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa).

One of the factors that affects the identities of young Indigenous women is loss of cultural connection due to colonisation. Krieg (2016) explains how young Indigenous women (in Canada) felt disconnected from their culture due to colonisation and continued to face stereotypes, racism and unwarranted assumptions. Subsequently, many were ashamed of their culture and struggled with self-confidence and 'self-continuity'. After the same young women engaged with their culture and cultural identity, Krieg (2016) concluded that "Reconnecting and reconstructing Indigenous women's identity is key not only to challenging current stereotypes and assumptions within the community but also to creating a foundation for growth for female Indigenous youth" (p. 40).

In Aotearoa, Pacific scholars found that teachers advising immigrant Pacific parents to speak English at home led to many young Pasifika not speaking their language, which in turn, led to loss of cultural identity (Si'ilata et al., 2018). Identity for young Pasifika who are not born in their country of heritage becomes complex. They sometimes refer to themselves as being 'plastic', or they are called 'plastic' by others, because although they have Pacific heritage, and they look Pacific, they are not familiar with and/or do not practice their culture or speak the language. 'Plastic' is also used in a derogatory and insulting way to frame individuals who act as though they understand or live the culture, but in the eyes of others are fake and 'pretenders' (Radclyffe et al., 2023; Tau'au Filisi, 2020). The term Pasifika is used in this paper to represent Pacific people who were born or have lived most of their life in Aotearoa. The majority of the young Pacific wāhine in our research are second or third generation born in Aotearoa and use Pasifika as an identity marker. Thus, our use of 'Pacific'

and 'Pasifika' throughout this article are intentional as they represent and acknowledge the differences in identity.

Many urban Māori experience cultural identity loss due to colonisation where they are distanced from their ancestral lands and the Māori world and ways including tikanga (Māori customs and practices), and Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview). Being raised in urban cities they are forced to navigate economic and social challenges that detract from cultural practices, and/or encounter challenges navigating their own culture against the backdrop of the dominant urban culture (B. Borell, 2005; Van Meijl, 2006). In support of these complexities, Fast et al. (2017) calls for a broader understanding of Indigenous identity for Indigenous youth living in urban areas as their experiences negotiating identity were significantly different than those in rural locations. In contrast, Houkamau (2010, 2011) shares that young Māori wāhine in her research are proud and connected to their Indigenous identity. She further notes that they "extended the concept of *whānau* to include nonbiological kin and saw their Māori identity as related to a psychological commitment to Māori people as a broader social category" (Houkamau, 2011, p. 305). The perspectives that are often overlooked in academic scholarship include the identity experiences of mixed-ethnic Māori-Pasifika wāhine and Māori and Pasifika individuals who may not exhibit the physical traits traditionally associated with their heritage, such as brown skin or dark hair. While this particular perspective is not explored in our research, we recognise this as an area requiring further examination.

In this article we amplify the voices of a group of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who live in low-socioeconomic urban regions in Aotearoa. Through their lived experiences, they describe how they navigate their ethnic and cultural identities. We begin by providing cultural context in Aotearoa followed by our author positionings and an overview of the broader research project. We then use Mana Wahine and Masi methodology (Indigenous feminist methodologies) to report our findings where young Māori and Pasifika wāhine share their lived experiences on 1) their ethnic and cultural identities, 2) how they navigate stereotypes, and 3) cultural pride. Having a better understanding of the complexities of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine identities provides research and policy designers with current cultural knowledge on how to recognise, respect, and authentically represent them.

Cultural Context: Aotearoa, Māori, Pasifika

Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa (Walter et al., 2017) who are descendants of the pioneering Polynesian navigators that used science, technology, engineering and mathematics to traverse the Pacific Ocean (Anderson, 2017; Crowe, 2018; Howe, 2009). After successive voyages from different Pacific Island groups, Māori purposefully settled in Aotearoa (Crowe, 2018). Approximately 500 years later colonisation began by the British Crown (hereafter the Crown). Over time, tensions grew between Māori and British settlers and to establish peace and understanding, in 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi - the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed between Māori and the Crown. In this agreement the Crown agreed to protect Māori self-determination and Te Ao Māori (Māori worldviews) (Terruhn, 2019). Initially, Māori had parallel legal and education systems but over time the rhetoric in the settler government changed and Māori went from being highly intelligent and good-looking to backwards, lazy and unintelligent (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019; Pool, 2016). Similar to Indigenous peoples elsewhere, Māori are colonised by education systems which denigrate their culture and identities, and aggressively try to eradicate their connection to their culture in order to 'civilise' (Battiste, 2004; Maaka & Andersen, 2006; Smallwood et al., 2021). As with other Indigenous peoples, there is a causal link between colonisation and the educational underachievement, poorer health outcomes, and employment that exists today.

Pacific people living in Aotearoa have similar disparities to Māori such as high rates of unemployment, health disparities, and lower educational outcomes. The Pacific population in Aotearoa represents 18 different ethnic groups from most of the Pacific Islands (Stats NZ, 2023). We acknowledge them as Indigenous in this paper as they are Indigenous to their respective countries (Finney, 1996; Ka'ili, 2017). Currently, two thirds of Pacific people living in Aotearoa were born in Aotearoa, and therefore experiences that shape their identities are different from those who were born in the Pacific Islands. Recent statistics show that 41% of Pacific people in Aotearoa identify with more than one ethnicity, highlighting a growing population of mixed-ethnic Pacific heritage which impacts identity (Stats NZ, 2023; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005).

Māori and Pacific people are connected historically through the Polynesian migration, and socio-culturally, through similar cultural practices, linguistics, shared disparities and lived experiences (Enari & Haua, 2021; Matika et al., 2021). While Māori are Indigenous to Aotearoa and are recognised by the Crown as such, they very often consider Pacific people as

their whanau (family) and feel a responsibility to support and uplift them in their own self-determination (Hill, 2010). It is a very complex relationship where Pacific people are very aware of navigating their relationship with Māori as they acknowledge Māori as Indigenous to Aotearoa (Naepi, 2015). Inter-marriage also connects Māori and Pacific people, and their mixed-ethnic tamariki (children) have unique experiences that shape their identities.

Identity research conducted in Aotearoa with Māori and Pacific people use the term 'mixed' to describe individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds (Kukutai, 2004; Rocha & Webber, 2017; Si 'ilata, 2017; Tahi, 2023). Although multi-ethnic and mixed-ethnic terms are often used interchangeably, we purposefully use mixed-ethnic as this term emphasizes the blending of different ethnic backgrounds (Ali, 2020; Ifekwunigwe, 2004). Mixed-ethnic Māori and Pacific people are garnering attention in media and research as their lived experiences provide different insights into identity research in Aotearoa (Calder-Dawe et al., 2023; Vaka'uta, 2021; Ward et al., 2010). It is important to acknowledge that the identities of Māori and Pacific people are complex in terms of lived experiences and cultural practices. While our research provides insights into the lives and identities of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in low socio-economic urban communities, these may not necessarily represent all young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

Methods

When conducting Indigenous research, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012b) explains that women's stories "have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place" (p. 145). To ensure that the stories of the young Māori and Pacific wāhine in our research were captured and presented authentically, we acknowledge and respect their gendered and cultural heritage by using a research design that reflects and honours them. To do this we intentionally wove together two Indigenous feminist methodologies; Mana Wahine and Masi methodology.

Mana Wahine is a Māori methodology that centres the lives, voices and experiences of Māori wahine (Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2011). Masi methodology centres the voices, knowledge and values of Pacific women in research (Naepi, 2019a). Weaving these methodologies together respects the lived experiences of Māori, Pasifika, and mixed-ethnic

Māori-Pasifika wāhine by acknowledging them as knowledge bearers and knowledge creators. Mana Wahine and Masi methodology were created for, by and with Māori and Pacific wāhine. The beauty and strength of these frameworks are that they are grounded in their respective cultural values and they intentionally centre the voices of Māori and Pacific wāhine voices as researchers and as research participants (Naepi, 2019a; Pihama, 2020). The voices, knowledge and lived experiences of the participants are valued as well as the knowledge and values of the researchers with Māori and Pacific heritage.

Two wānanga (group discussions) or individual interviews spaced six months apart were used. Drawing upon Mana Wahine and Masi methodology principles that encourage respect and reciprocity, wānanga and individual interviews included kai (food) and karakia (prayer) where appropriate (Naepi, 2019a; Pihama, 2020). In Pacific and Māori cultures, providing kai shows appreciation and reciprocity, and karakia is representative of respect by setting the importance of an occasion by connecting with the spiritual realm. Indigenous feminist ethics of care were applied throughout the entire research process from recruitment to the confirmation of transcripts where the young wāhine were valued, respected and overtly appreciated. Demonstrations of Mana Wahine and Masi methodology principles included driving young wāhine to and from their destinations, being flexible with their needs and other commitments, and designing a t-shirt to give as a koha (gift) at the final wānanga (Authors, 2023). These cultural understandings and practices were purposefully included to create research spaces where the young wāhine felt comfortable sharing their stories. The young wāhine were invited to share their thoughts on the research process through a post-wānanga google form questionnaire where we were reassured that they did indeed feel safe and comfortable as illustrated by Nina (18, Māori-Samoan) who states,

I have felt safe, valued and comfortable during our meetings. Not only that, I feel like my voice is being heard and understood. My truth is not filtered or hidden. You have created a safe space where I have been fortunate enough to share my experiences without holding back which doesn't happen every day.

Throughout this research we engaged in an ongoing practice of reflexivity, so it is important to share our cultural and ethnic positionings in this paper as they influence and shape our methodological and analytical choices. The first author, a current PhD student, is a Māori-Samoan wahine (woman) who has lived and worked in South Auckland Otara (a low socio-economic urban suburb in Aotearoa) for most of her life. The broader research team

includes Pākeha (New Zealand European), Māori, and Pacific scholars who each contributed according to their expertise, strengths and lived cultural experiences. While the data gathering was conducted solely by the first author, the methods, methodology, and analysis was done collectively with extensive consultation among all authors. Throughout this research, we were reflexive as individuals and collectively, but came together with a shared focus in amplifying the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine and their experiences of identity.

Full ethics approval was given by the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous studies at the University of Waikato and all participants voluntarily signed and consented to participate. Pseudonyms for young wāhine were self-selected or assigned based on the wishes of the participants.

Participants

Young wāhine who identified as Māori and/or Pasifika between the ages of 16 to 25 years old were invited to participate in this research. They were recruited from South Auckland (Auckland) and Porirua (Wellington) as they are both low socio-economic urban regions in large cities with similar Māori and Pasifika demographics (Statistics New Zealand, 2018; Yong et al., 2017). Recruitment methods included using friends and family, social media, and past students of the first author (González & Grov, 2020; Rice et al., 2016).

In total, there were 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this study. Sixteen were from South Auckland and 15 from Porirua. The ethnic identities of the young wāhine included 8 Māori-Pasifika, 7 Māori, 7 Pasifika, 7 mixed-ethnic Pasifika (eg. Samoan-Tokelauan), and 2 Māori-Pākeha. The most common Pasifika ethnicity was Samoan (19) and the most common mixed-ethnic group were (like the first author) Māori-Samoan (7). Within the sample some young wāhine were in high school (7), some in higher education (10), others had graduated with a higher education qualification (3), whereas others were working part time (7) or full time (10), and some were young mothers (4) ([Table 1](#)).

The diversity of this cohort allowed for a range of experiences on how young wāhine are navigating their social, cultural and educational lives and identities.

Analysis: Amplifying the Voices of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine

In this section we add to the international scholarship of identity and culture for young Indigenous women (Krieg, 2016) and present three dominant themes from the narratives of

the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. These are, 1) their ethnic and cultural identities, 2) how they navigate stereotypes that impact their identities and 3) how they embrace cultural pride. Their voices and experiences provide depth and insight into their lived realities as they share who they are, how they are viewed, and how they see themselves in society. We draw upon Mana Wahine and Masi methodological principles as we enhance the voices of the young wāhine who create knowledge that can inform research and policy that impacts their lives (Naepi, 2019a; Simmonds, 2011). As stated by Bird (2014), weaving Indigenous voices helps convey an understanding of lives, and provides unity and context to who they are and how they engage in society. Notably, the young Indigenous wāhine in this research live in urban areas so their experiences of identity may be different than young wāhine living in rural areas of Aotearoa. While our choices as authors influence which young wāhine are speaking in this article, their voices often represent the views of others and as such, provide a collective perspective. Furthermore, we took a culturally reflexive approach and the themes selected are those that were prevalent across the stories and experiences that were shared (Clarke et al., 2015). Important to note are their lived experiences and the intersections of their identities related to age, ethnicity, gender, location, and class.

Ethnic and Cultural Identities

Ethnicity and culture are aspects of identity that represented the young Indigenous wāhine in this project. Some spoke the language of their ethnicity and lived the culture in their homes while others did not. Regardless of this, all of the young wāhine navigated challenges with their cultural and ethnic identities. In this section we share experiences the young wāhine had with the language and culture of their heritage, we unveil and explore their gendered cultural responsibilities, and provide nuanced knowledge from wāhine with mixed-ethnic identities.

Identity and Language

Some of the young wāhine were confident and comfortable speaking the language of their heritage and understood and appreciated the importance of the language in regard to their identity. This was prevalent for Lene (20, Cook-Island) whose family came from a tiny Island called Penrhyn (also known as Tongareva). She explained that the island was flat and at risk of sinking and because of this the importance of preserving the language had a deeper meaning:

My nana always says, “you have to be grateful that you learn your native tongue because if my island doesn’t exist anymore, you have to be able to teach your kids and your kid’s kids, that our island was once an island. That we still have a language to speak.” That’s why I reckon they teach our languages .

For Lene, her family, and the people from Penrhyn, preserving the language was a way of keeping their history and culture alive amidst growing threats from climate change. This was clearly an important part of her identity as her posture and voice took on a more serious tone when she shared this information about her heritage.

Some young wāhine spoke their Indigenous language, but described experiencing challenges from some of their peers:

I’ve been exposed to a lot of different attitudes around speaking te reo Māori [Māori language]. I went to kura [short for kura Kaupapa which is a full immersion Māori school] in Porirua, so I grew up in a totally immersed Māori school. That was fun, and it was cool but once we got to college [high school], a lot of the kids had the mentality that you were ‘too cool’ if you were speaking Māori. Like hard out [a slang phrase used in this context to mean ‘a lot of effort’] if you were speaking Māori, so I think from college I suppressed it a little bit, which is sad, because that’s dumb, but it is what it is. (Wairemana, 21, Māori-Scottish-Swedish).

Being ‘too cool’ is viewed negatively in some high school settings in Aotearoa as it is linked with being arrogant and proud. It also places a spotlight on the individual who is ‘too cool’ and for young wāhine going through puberty in high school, this type of attention is usually not sought after. Wairemana shows elements of regret with suppressing her ability to speak Māori in high school by calling it ‘sad’ and ‘dumb’ but then brushes it aside using, ‘it is what it is’ to acknowledge that she has come to terms with it and accepted that it cannot be changed. This example resonates with research conducted by Krieg (2016), where some of the young women felt they had to suppress their culture as a result of peer pressure.

Extended familial pressure was also a challenge faced by young wāhine who spoke their Indigenous language. Mary (19, Tongan) shares her experiences:

In our home we speak Tongan and English but mostly Tongan. Because I was born and raised here [Aotearoa], when we go to Tonga to our grandparents, they don’t want us to speak English there because they can’t understand, but most of the time they try to

understand what we're talking about. But we speak too fast in English and they're like, "woah, what are you talking about?" So, every time we go to Tonga, I'm not allowed to speak in English unless I'm talking to my cousins. But to the elderlies, I still speak in Tongan. But then I'm so plastic. When I'm there they just call me plastic. I'm like I don't care, I can probably talk way better than you and you were born and raised in Tonga.

This experience indicates mocking by extended family when going back to the Pacific Islands. Mary's response to this discrimination is one of defiance where she turns the tables on her Tongan-born and -bred cousins by proudly stating that she can speak Tongan better than them. By comparing herself, a Tongan born and raised in Aotearoa, to her cousins who were fully immersed in the Tongan culture all of their lives, she takes back her power of being called 'plastic' or less of a Tongan by insinuating that they should be better than her at all things Tongan. Despite this defiance Mary also refers to herself as being 'plastic' which indicates that at some level, she feels less authentic in her Tongan culture than her cousins and family who live in Tonga. Navigating nuances and everyday experiences of Pasifika identity is also reflected in the work of Australian scholars who explore the ways Pasifika youth find ways of belonging across different communities (Durham et al., 2023; Radclyffe et al., 2023; Tupuola, 2004).

Unfortunately, not all of the young wāhine were able to speak the language of their heritage so their experiences were quite different. Feelings of being an 'outsider' and being treated differently for not being able to speak a language was a common theme among these young wāhine:

It sucks because I will go to family functions and family reunions and funerals and I wouldn't understand a thing that my aunties would say to me. I guess I always felt like the outsider – I still do – feel like an outsider, when I'm hanging around with my cousins and they're all fluent and they tease me about it (Norah, 16, Samoan).

They talk about you right in front of you. Right? Samoan neighbours, they talk about you right in front of you loud and clear. And right next to me, because even though not realizing that I understand what they're saying, I just can't speak the language back (Rangi, 24, Māori-Samoan).

The young wāhine were animated when sharing these experiences and the tension in their bodies and voices changed as though they were defending themselves. While their body language showed that their experiences were uncomfortable, they appeared more frustrated at being treated unfairly rather than ashamed for not being proficient in their ethnic language/s. Not being proficient in a language is a result of colonisation due to limited access for Pasifika to learn their language of heritage. This can then result in a diminished sense of cultural pride and a sense of not fully belonging. There are also cultural concepts that embody worldviews which can only be understood through language. Scholars have shared how this negatively impacts cultural identity for many young Aotearoa born Pasifika (Matika et al., 2021; Samu et al., 2019).

Despite language barriers that some young wāhine have shared, they still feel strongly connected to their culture. Norah (16) explains how she feels about not being able to speak Samoan but also shares her perspectives about 'being' Samoan:

People call me plastic and I wish I could say that I don't feel plastic. I'm sure that you don't have to speak Samoan just to be Samoan. You can do other stuff that's good to tap into your culture. I don't know, as I grow older maybe I'll find out, maybe I'll try to get into my culture more (Norah, 16, Samoan).

Like Norah and some of the other young wāhine, they do not necessarily have the access to 'learn' the language and some of the customs as, very often, their parents were not taught either. Ka'ili (2012) speaks passionately to the experiences of young Pasifika youth who are not fluent in their language of heritage and although she is from America, her call to action for those in positions of power to put systems in place where opportunities to learn their language and culture is very relevant for Aotearoa. Currently in Aotearoa, Pacific languages in Education are part of an Action Plan by the Ministry of Education that has identified the need for Pacific languages to be available in schools. This is being offered in some schools that have high numbers of Pasifika students. While this may not impact the young wāhine in this study, hopefully the next generation of young Pasifika peoples will benefit (*Pacific Languages in Education*, 2023). For many of the young wāhine, being able to speak the language of their ethnic heritage is an important part of their cultural identity and for those who did not have access to develop this skill, they experienced shame, guilt and frustration which led to them questioning their authenticity within their culture.

Gendered Identity Experiences

Young women are often tasked with gendered roles in their families such as babysitting younger siblings, cooking and cleaning (Espinoza, 2010; Kamenou, 2008; Thorpe, Ahmad, et al., 2023). Most of the young wāhine in the current study also took on extra roles in their family while navigating culturally gendered expectations from different family members. Many of the young wāhine helped babysit their siblings, nieces, nephews, and younger cousins. It seems they were 'the help' in the eyes of their siblings who had children, and in their immediate families. Some young wāhine also had to take on adult roles due to changes in family circumstances:

My siblings aren't even that young but I babysit them. I'm also helping mum out, by working as it help pays for their fees. When my parents split I was in school and then I had to work. I missed two whole terms of my high school years to work and help my parents. I feel like the struggle really helped me become the person I am today and I feel like I'm so much stronger now. It's sad because I love Pacific Islanders but they go through this struggle where kids have to drop out of school and help out (Tee, 24, Samoan).

I've been in like a few different households in the last couple of months. But where I was for the majority of the year, I was just helping aunty to take care of the kids because I don't stay with mum she's always moving around for work. I was like nah, I'm not moving schools every time you leave. And so I stay with her sister. I'd always just take care of the kids, which I loved, until they start fighting, of course. But yeah, it was really just that and just normal household, chores (Deena, 18, Māori).

Tee (24) and Deena (18) are both put in situations where circumstances outside of their control place them in positions where they see no other option than to help the adults in their lives. This results in them having to work at paid jobs or take on roles such as babysitting while parents or adults in their lives are working longer hours or extra jobs to meet basic family needs. These types of situations frame the lives of the young wāhine in our study and are commonplace for many families living in low socio-economic regions such as South Auckland and Porirua (James & Southwick, 2007; Mullane, Harwood, Warbrick, et al., 2022; B. Ross, 2017; Williamson & Ford, 2017).

While some of the young wāhine accepted and embraced the different roles to help the family, some mentioned the struggle and unfairness of the gendered cultural expectations placed on them compared to the men in their culture:

In our culture, girls have the inside duties like cleaning the living room, kitchen and all that, and then the males, the boys, they have the outside like mowing the lawns, taking the rubbish out. But the men in our culture, I can't talk for every Cook Islander, but the men are highly respected. It's like we have to slave around for them, which I hate. Oh my God I hate it! They just leave their stuff everywhere like they're kings. It's so annoying. Nana's like, 'you're the girl, when you get your own house and you have your own kids and your husbands at work, you're not going to call him on his work break to come clean the house'. I'm like, 'okay, okay, I'll clean.' It's pressure being a girl. Not so much a boy, they're lucky. Girls are more like you've got to go to school, no boyfriends. There's a certain timeline you have to follow. It's like school, uni, marriage then pregnant, then start a family. But it's just sad because the females get a whole heap of lists of things to do, plus children's needs and stuff. Then on top of that is the partner or husbands needs and you don't have any time for yourself. I'm staying single (Lene, 20, Cook Island).

There's pressure to be a good daughter, then a good sister to your siblings, then a good mother to your children, then a good wife to your husband. Then, also trying to look after yourself mentally and emotionally because man, that's a lot of people to impress. How do you balance all of that? (Mary, 19, Tongan).

Many Pacific people have multi-generational households where the elders (usually grandparents) are treated with respect. Very often families are influenced by the strong cultural beliefs of these elders whose cultural practices come from the Pacific Island of origin. For young Pasifika wāhine who are navigating social spaces that have primarily Westernised practices and beliefs such as school and sport, these cultural beliefs often seem restricting and unfair such as those mentioned by Lene (20) and Mary (19). Interestingly, these gendered expectations were only shared by the young Pasifika wāhine. This could be an indication of cultural difference between Māori and Pasifika where the gendered behaviours in the lives of young Māori wāhine are different. For example, copious evidence describes Māori wāhine in strong, leadership, warrior type roles (Forster et al., 2016; Heuer, 1969; Wolfgramm & Henry,

2015) and it is possible that these characteristics have impacted the lives of the young wāhine through the matriarchs in their whānau.

Comments on the expectations of marriage were also shared by some of the young Pasifika wāhine. Lene (20) explained that her Nana advised her to marry a Cook Islander because they “*knew the ropes around our culture and you don’t have to explain it to them*”. When asked if they would marry someone outside of their culture, Mary (19) jubilantly shares her views:

Oh my gosh. Praise the lord, halleluiah! That’s good, I wouldn’t have to deal with the Tongan drama, I wouldn’t have to deal with Tongan mats, Tongan aunties wanting to get all of these treasures. It’s rubbish, when they want the rubbish to come to stay inside the house and where’s the family going to stay? Outside? Where? Under a tent or something? Oh my gosh, that annoys me the most. After my sister’s Tongan wedding, I was like, mmm, no Tongans. My parents – I can’t speak for everyone else’s parents but for my parents they’re traditional.

In the Tongan culture, status, ranking and hierarchy are respected, and when individuals who have a high-status attend an event such as a wedding, the family of the bride are expected to provide them gifts (treasures) such as Tongan mats which are a cultural symbol of respect (Kaepler, 1999). Sometimes the volume of gifts that are required for such occasions take up a lot of space and impose on the family which is why Mary referred to them as ‘rubbish’. Addo (2015) provides an example of the value of these gifts in a case study where a Tongan family provided gifts to the value of \$2,000 NZD to each of the five sisters of the groom. Having experienced her sister's traditional Tongan wedding, Mary (19) vehemently voiced her disapproval of going through a similar experience. As an Aotearoa born and raised Tongan, Mary has had experiences of different cultures and ways of thinking through education and friendships with people from other cultures and these have influenced the way she felt about some aspects of her Tongan culture. This extends the work of a scholar in America who shares experiences of young Tongans and how their lived experiences affect the way they engage with their culture (Hansen, 2004).

Here we see the complexities that exist at the intersections of gender and ethnicity for the young wāhine in this study. As young wāhine they not only negotiate gendered expectations such as babysitting, but also cultural expectations that differ than young tāne

(men) such as serving tāne in the home. We also see how some young wāhine protest against some of the cultural traditions that do not align with their lived identities in Aotearoa.

Mixed-Ethnic Identity Experiences

Studies on young people who identify as having mixed-ethnic backgrounds show that their identity experiences differ than those who identify with one ethnicity (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Vásquez, 2012). Some of these experiences might include navigating and exploring multiple identities, complex extended family dynamics and identity ambiguity. The young wāhine with mixed-ethnicities in our study shared how they navigated these different dimensions of their identities. A group of sisters with Māori-Samoan heritage describe the dichotomy they navigate regarding their mixed-ethnicities. The oldest of the sisters, Rangi (24) starts by explaining, “you’re Māori but not Māori. You’re Samoan... (the other three sisters chime in) “but you’re not Samoan” (Lele, 22; Vaitala, 21; Hera, 17). When asked how they felt about their mixed-ethnicities, they provided some interesting perspectives. Hera (17, Māori-Samoan) explains;

For me, I’m closer with my Samoan side. But I’m still trying to get close to the other side. But then the Samoans speak Samoan, and I don’t speak Samoan, and the Māori’s saying that you don’t speak enough Māori, so you’re not Māori. You speak more English even though you’re trying to learn the language. So I don’t ever really feel like I fit in.

The second oldest sister Lele (22) shares her views and experiences;

We’d go up North with Grandpa to our Māori side then we’ll come down to Auckland to the Samoan side and we didn’t get the customs. So like when we go to our Samoan side, we don’t always understand their ways and why they do what they do and it’s the same with the Māori side (Lele, 22, Māori-Samoan).

Hera (17) and Lele’s (22) experiences provide insights into mixed-ethnic identities where they feel like outsiders from both sides of their extended family creating twice as many chances of feeling less authentic to their cultures. This knowledge is important for researchers, policy writers and practitioners as these intersecting identity features could be used to consider how to include rather than exclude Indigenous young wāhine. Fast et al. (2017) contributes to this consideration by suggesting that Indigenous youth with mixed-ethnicities may require extra encouragement and support to learn more about and engage in their cultures especially if they come from homes where they do not speak the language or practice the culture.

Notably, not all young wāhine experienced challenges navigating their mixed-ethnic identities with their extended family. Nina (18, Samoan-Māori) shares her experiences on how she feels connected to both her Samoan and Māori family:

I was brought up with both grandparents on my Mum and Dads sides but when I'd stay with my Samoan grandparents, I'd go to church with them and I feel like that's where I've got my faith from. I just developed my understanding, my connection from my Samoan culture through my grandparents and also going over to Samoa and meeting family that way. When it came to my Māori side, I also have connections that way through my mum, all of her siblings and how they're able to bring our family together for family reunions, and we have whanau meetings too.

Nina's experiences were similar to Si'ilata (2017), a Māori-Fijian-Pākehā scholar, who explores her mixed-ethnic identity and shares that she spent time in Fiji when she was younger and this formed deep connections with her culture and family.

Importantly, the young wāhine with mixed-ethnicities showed different identity experiences where their intersections of ethnicity were multiplied by having to navigate two different cultures. While some experienced conflict due to having less opportunities to live and learn the cultures, others felt connected and embraced both.

Navigating Stereotypes

Intersectional research on identity with Indigenous youth who live in urban cities has found that they experience disproportionate disparities compared to non-Indigenous youth and this includes experiences of racism and stereotyping (Benoit et al., 2019; Hayhurst et al., 2015; Tupuola, 2004). Research conducted in Aotearoa with Māori and Pacific peoples aligns with this literature where they regularly experience stereotyping and racism (B. Borell, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hippolite & Bruce, 2010). In this section we amplify the voices of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine as they share their lived experiences on the stereotypes and racism they navigate in different areas of society, including shopping, applying for jobs, and their experiences with education.

When asked about the stereotypes associated with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine that they had heard about, seen or experienced an overwhelming number said that they were racially profiled while they were shopping:

Once I went to see my friend at Mitre 10 and I had a hoodie on, but I swear I didn't look suspicious. But I just walked in, and a lady just started following me. Once I met my friend, I was like, that lady's been following me, and he said, 'She does it to heaps of Islanders.' I was like that's a bit racist. When I walked out, I was like "Bye" to her and she was like, "Huh?" I was thinking, come on lady, you don't need to be like that. (Toni, 20, Samoan).

One time before my ball I was at Lovisa, I think it had just opened. Anyway, I was in there and I was looking for ages, but I didn't end up getting anything. Then I went to go get my nails done and then the security guard had followed me the whole way there. He asked me to go back with him because the lady thought that I'd stolen something because I was taking so long to like figure out what I wanted. I walked back with him to Lovisa and the store was full. I went up to the counter and I was like "What?" and the lady, she was like, "So, where is it?" I was "Where's what?" She goes, "The stuff you stole." I was like, "I didn't steal anything. The things I were looking at are right there." I went and showed her and she didn't even apologize. My mate was with me too. I was so frustrated to the point where you know if you say anything you'll just cry so I didn't say anything. My mate was like, "Is she gonna apologize?" and then the security guard just said, "Probably not." It was embarrassing because the shop was full and he walked with me all the way through the mall (Wairemana, 21, Māori-Pākehā).

The young wāhine were very animated during these conversations as almost all of them had similar experiences to share. They were supportive of each other, and angry at the different situations where they openly shared their views: *"Oh my God, that pisses me off it really does. I'd turn away and tell them to get @#\$ed"* (Charlotte, 24, Māori-Pākehā). Although the young wāhine were defiant and stood up for themselves in different ways, the fact that they were unfairly targeted, mistreated and then dismissed shows how they are stereotyped by adults in authoritative positions. These experiences align with Shay et al. (2023) where the young Indigenous people in Australia also encountered and faced racism while shopping.

A few young wāhine shared that they had been discriminated against when applying for jobs or at work. For example, Hera (17, Māori-Samoan) explains, *"I had a job interview for an admin job and they were going to put me in a warehouse because that's where the majority of the Islanders were. And I said stuff your stereotype I'm leaving."* Similarly, Evelyn (25, Māori-

Pākeha) shared an example of how she is often treated by people at her place of employment where she does administrative work at a multi-sport facility:

I've got a predominantly Pākeha name so if I'm talking politely to you on the phone and you don't know me you would not know what colour I am. Then when people come to the front desk, and I'm sitting there looking the way I look, a brown Māori girl, and they say, 'Oh I spoke to someone called Evelyn' and I say, 'oh, that's me' their first reaction is one of confusion, like I shouldn't be sounding the way I sound. I've been told that I don't 'sound' Māori. I mean, what the hell does that even mean? Then all of a sudden I get an attitude and that's when my 'Māori' side comes out because apparently Pākeha's aren't supposed to scream and holler and do all that type of stuff.

Here we see young wāhine being discriminated against in work environments based on the way that they look. Hera (17) believes that because of her physical appearance (brown complexion, dark curly hair, brown eyes), her potential employers immediately thought that she would be better suited for a job in the warehouse rather than in an office doing administrative work. Evelyn Burns (25) on the other hand, was discriminated against because she did not 'look' the way she sounded so fielded confused looks and comments regarding this. Both Hera and Evelyn were clearly annoyed at these situations and they approached them in different ways; Hera – by walking away from possible employment, and Evelyn – responding to this behaviour with an 'attitude.' Interestingly, Evelyn links the 'bad attitude' behaviour with her Māori side and Pākeha side with being 'polite'.

Many of the young wāhine shared their views and experiences about education in school and/or university. These were sites where they experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity:

The expectations were Islanders, Maori/PI students need more help education-wise, which wasn't all a bad thing but I think they were just really downgrading us from the start of my primary. So even if someone was getting good grades in primary, you would still have to go to ESOL and do extra classes even if you're at the standards. And I think if you weren't good at sports, you would have to be good at music and if you weren't good at any of those, you were not good at all in our primary school or middle school. When people actually started realising that all the Maori and PIs were actually getting good grades, they started changing their ways and what they were doing. But

they only started changing that when I was, I think, in Year 9, when I was going through Mission Heights, but otherwise everyone just thought, Maori and PIs were just good at sports and that's it, or music (Tati, 16, Māori-Samoan).

Tati's (16) comments resonate with previous scholarship where Māori and Pasifika were seen to be gifted in sport and lacking in academia. This extends on the literature by academics in Aotearoa who argue against these stereotypes and point out the harmful affects they can have on individuals and their perceptions of who they are and how they fit in society (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2003a). While these views are problematic because they reinforce stereotypes that disadvantage young Māori and Pasifika people, sport can also be a site where they can be celebrated and acknowledged. Where it becomes problematic is when educators use this perception to inform their interactions with young Māori and Pasifika.

A particularly concerning experience shared by Evelyn (25, Māori-Pākehā) indicates an educator's perspective on Māori students:

I sat down with my English teacher because I had finished my internal assessments and she was taking her sweet time to sign my leaving slip. So she turned around and said to me, "You probably won't amount to anything because you're Māori." I told my Mum and she rang the school and talked to the Principal and the teacher was told to write me a formal apology. I never read it because it meant nothing to me. I went to my exam, and when my results came in I had passed it highly. So walked into her class, put my results in front of her then walked out. Ever since then there's been this drive to prove people like her wrong. I remember learning to not be a statistic, but to be somebody and that we're not allowed to slack off so that has also been a driving force for me (Evelyn Burns, 25, Māori-Pākehā).

Although Evelyn had the wherewithal to hold the teacher to accountability by using adults who could support her – her mother and the school principal - this situation should not have happened in the first place. Those in positions of power, such as this teacher, need to seriously reflect on their discriminatory and racist attitudes towards young Māori and Pasifika and the detrimental affects this could have on them.

The young wāhine believed that education was a site that disadvantaged Māori and Pasifika and provided insights into why they believed this was so:

I think generally we deal with a lot more anyway, a lot more trauma as well. Most of my friends that I know, they're the first of their family going to uni [university]. They come from families that are real interdependent on each other and a lot of their families, a lot of people have serious health issues. Some of them only have one parent who's working. That's the stuff that we've got to deal with that not a lot of other Pākehā students would be dealing with, maybe. It's an intergenerational trauma as well that we carry with us that they just can't – well, they can understand but they won't fully understand because they haven't lived it. (Wairemana, 21, Māori-Scottish-Swedish).

Wairemana's observations describe the outcomes of Māori who have suffered through inadequate opportunities to pursue higher education - *the first of their family going to university* - and poorer health – *a lot of people have serious health issues*. This illustrates failure by the Crown to meet the needs of Māori and uphold Te Tiriti provisions and articles and the impact of inequities across systems (Poata-Smith, 2013; Wylie, 2013). Education and health disparities for Māori and Pasifika peoples are prevalent in Aotearoa and while numerous strategies are being implemented to address these, such systemic inadequacies continue to shape the lives of Māori and Pacific peoples (Stats NZ, 2023; Yong et al., 2017). Importantly, Māori and Pacific peoples are not passively accepting these disparities as those who are in positions to help their communities progress, do so in various ways.

Some of the young wāhine provided additional insights into the disparities faced in education by Māori and Pasifika people indicating that they were set up to fail and that the learning systems in place do not match their specific needs:

They have all these scholarships and everything and that Māori and Pasifika to go to uni, but they don't ... how do I explain it, it's not built for Pasifika and Māori learning. They expect us to go and sit in a lecture theatre and just sit down for an hour and just listen to them. But we're quite interactive people that need hands on learning. (Mischa, 25, Māori-Samoan).

I don't know, it's not really fair. We're kind of in a system that wasn't made for us so how do they expect us to be academically all there if we're in a system that's kind of unfair to us? (Deena, 18, Māori).

These perspectives highlight an issue with the education system that educators have been aiming to address for decades and is likely one of the causes for lower educational outcomes for Māori and Pacific people (Marshall & University of Auckland School of Education, 2000). While this is still an ongoing challenge, Māori and Pacific educators and scholars continue to search for and provide solutions to meet the needs of their communities (Hancock, 2013; Tiakiwai, 2022; Tuagalu et al., 2014).

The stereotypes we presented in this section paint a picture of the challenges faced by the young wāhine in different areas of their lives and they show how their identities are framed through these societal influences. In the next section we share their responses to such stereotypes and how they enact cultural pride throughout their lives. In so doing, they provide nuanced insights for researchers conducting research with and for them.

Cultural Pride

Despite the challenges that the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine face regarding their identities they are grounded in who they are as young wāhine and who they represent. Their individual ethnicities and the way they embraced them are complex, but are also sources of cultural pride. This cultural pride shared by the young wāhine resonates with research conducted in Australia where the identity values enacted by young Indigenous people were pride (in culture), respect, being responsible and true to their families (Shay et al., 2023).

Cultural pride was enacted by the young wāhine through their desire to make their whānau proud. They embraced their positionality with the opportunities that were afforded to them because of the way that their parents and grandparents were treated in certain social spaces such as education. Wairemana (21, Māori-Scottish-Swedish) who is currently studying a Bachelor of Health Science shares her knowledge and experiences:

Our parents were told that they weren't very intelligent so it's kind of like we have to let go of that belief. I think that's why our parents were held back, or they were made to feel like they didn't deserve to be in those spaces, so it puts more pressure on us to perform or to make it in those spaces. We're not just there for us. We are doing this for our whole family and our grandparents because they did what they could so we could be there. I feel like we carry that responsibility and we feel that too. Even though those ideals haven't been specifically put on us, we carry our family and culture and everything that comes with that... We're literally their dreams and I think it's really empowering to remember that (Wairemana, 21, Māori-Scottish-Swedish).

Wairemana's critical reflections share the weight of responsibility as well as the motivations that young Indigenous wāhine face particularly when aiming to be successful in higher education.

Some young wāhine were driven to succeed for other reasons related to cultural pride. Nina (18, Māori-Samoan) explains her motivations for wanting to pursue higher education at university:

I just knew that I wanted to just do better. I wanted to go to uni, I wanted to pursue studying in health science, whether that was physio, physiotherapy, anything health related because that was something I was just really interested in. But with sport, yeah, we're [Māori and Pasifika peoples] so underestimated and it's just assumed that we're another statistic, not going to go anywhere, the only outlook for us is sport. I felt like I wanted to overcome those odds and go somewhere with school. I wasn't the smartest but I was always the most focused and hard working.

Cultural pride shared by Nina (18) is not overtly stated in her experience. However, she did not want to become another statistic and she wanted to overcome the odds with her education. She is referring to the statistics that show low educational successes for Māori and Pasifika. By being focused and working hard she demonstrates cultural pride by being successful.

The young Māori and Pasifika wāhine overtly shared their views on their cultural identities and in so doing, enacted cultural pride. We conclude this section by amplifying their voices as they state who they are and as they ground themselves proudly in their respective ethnicities:

I'm a proud Samoan-Tokelaun. We still do the Tokelaun tournaments and all the fatele dances and all those kinds of things. We practise our culture in other ways but unfortunately don't speak it (Rya, 23, Samoan-Tokelau).

I love being Samoan Niuean and I've even had experiences watching my Aunty and cousins, get their malu's [a traditional Samoan tattoo for Samoan women], receiving them, and just watching them during it I was like I am proud to be Samoan. One day this could be me but not yet. So I love being who I am. (Nadine, 24, Samoan- Niuean). I feel I embrace my culture the most by just being me, and just when I get a chance to play in a representative team, just any time I get a chance to express who I am, my culture, just by anything I do, I feel like just my family, my grandparents, and ancestors

I carry everywhere I go. I love my family dearly, I love my culture and where I come from, so anything I do, I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me.
(Nina, 18, Samoan-Māori).

As these comments highlight, the young wāhine gained much strength and confidence in their cultural identities and relationships with their whānau and communities.

Conclusion

Identities are part of the greater human experience and having an appreciation and understanding of the diverse and complex ways that these are embodied is important for research that engages young Indigenous women. In this article we contribute to international scholarship on Indigenous identities by amplifying the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who reside in urbanised cities of Aotearoa. Weaving Mana Wahine, Masi methodology and intersectionality, we centre the voices of 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who reveal the complexities of their identities. Through their lived experiences, the young wāhine share their ethnic and cultural identities in relation to language and gender as well as the stereotypes they navigate as part of their everyday lives. Their resounding statements demonstrated cultural pride and grounded them in their respective identities. While there were many complex layers to their identities, these young Māori and Pasifika wāhine stand firmly rooted in pride of their culture, ethnicity, and heritage.

Our contribution to the international literature on identity for young Indigenous women provides cultural context specific to Aotearoa and highlights the effects of colonization that are experienced by Indigenous youth worldwide. These include loss of cultural identity, stereotyping and racism (Hayhurst et al., 2015; Krieg, 2016; Shay et al., 2023). Amplifying their voices and understanding the challenges they face in society we provide nuanced insights and knowledge on the complex identities of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine residing in urban areas of Aotearoa. In so doing, we provide researchers and policy makers new knowledge and opportunities to implement and make necessary changes in formal education, employment, and society to better support these young wāhine in their future aspirations and goals.

Table 1: Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Social Situation
Deena	18	Māori	High school student.
Tanya	19	Māori	Full time work.
Anne-Marie	22	Māori	Full time work; University graduate.
Jean	22	Māori	Full time work. University graduate.
Cherie	23	Māori	Higher Education.
Rayena	23	Māori	Full time work; Mother of one.
Charlotte	24	Māori – Pākeha	Full time work.
Evelyn	25	Māori - Pākeha	Full time work; University graduate.
Wairemana	21	Māori – Scottish - Swedish	Higher Education.
Tati	16	Māori - Samoan	High school student.
Hera	17	Māori - Samoan	Higher Education.
Nina	18	Māori - Samoan	Higher Education.
Vaitala	21	Māori - Samoan	Part time work.
Lele	22	Māori - Samoan	Part time work; Solo mother of one.
Rangi	24	Māori - Samoan	Solo mother of two.
Mischa	25	Māori - Samoan	Part time work. Mother of one.
Rita	23	Cook Island Māori	Higher Education.
Lene	20	Cook Island	Higher Education.
Wenzie	19	Cook Island - Samoan	Higher Education; Part time work.
Norah	16	Samoan	High school student.
Sally	17	Samoan	High school student.
Tali	19	Samoan	Full time work.
Toni	20	Samoan	Full time work.
Tee	24	Samoan	Higher Education; Part time work.
Nora	18	Samoan - Niuean	High school student.
Nadine	24	Samoan – Niuean	Higher Education; Part time work.
Larma	16	Samoan – Tongan	High school student.
Paige	19	Samoan – Tokelau	High school student.

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Social Situation
Mia	20	Samoan – Tokelau	Full time work.
Rya	23	Samoan – Tokelau	Full time work.
Mary	19	Tongan	Higher Education; Part time work.

Chapter 5: Manuscript 3

‘My Thighs Can Squash You’: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies

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Preface

In this chapter, the voices of the young wāhine are amplified as they share their cultural views on body image. Using intersectionality and drawing from and extending cultural pride (as highlighted in chapter 4), I share how the young wāhine use cultural knowledge as they lean into concepts that align with ‘body pride³²’. Throughout this chapter, I use body pride and intersectionality to understand how the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine reject Westernised views of body image and embrace how their bodies look and function. Importantly, this chapter contributes new knowledge and a different understanding of body image for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in Aotearoa. Please note that there is repetition in sections of this chapter due to it being a stand-alone article that required framing and context.

³² Body pride has been used by some scholars working with young Indigenous women to explore and understand their views on body image (Coppola et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2014).

Abstract

Media representations and dominant social constructions of the ‘ideal’ physique for young women are often framed through a Westernized lens that focuses on heteronormative, White able-bodied aesthetics of beauty and femininity. Until very recently, the imagery available for young women to connect with and aspire to has been highly limited, failing to represent embodied cultural beliefs that Indigenous and culturally-minoritized young women may have towards the gendered body. In this paper we draw upon focus groups (wānanga) and digital diaries with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (women) in Aotearoa New Zealand to reveal how they are making meaning of dominant framings of beauty and drawing upon cultural knowledge to refuse such portrayals, instead reclaiming power in their own bodies. Working at the intersection of Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, this article amplifies the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who embrace and appreciate their strong brown bodies, and demonstrate agency in critically reading and rejecting dominant Western framings of beauty and femininity. In so doing, this paper contributes to a growing international dialogue about the need for new culturally-informed understandings of body image by young women from Indigenous and culturally marginalized communities.

Keywords: young women; body image; feminist Indigenous methodologies; Mana Wahine; Masi methodology; Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

Over recent decades, scholars around the world have examined the powerful role of the media in reproducing unrealistic feminine aesthetic ideals (Bedford & Johnson, 2006; Cash, 2004; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Gimlin, 2002b; Grabe et al., 2008). While the ideal body shape and type has changed over time, Westernised views of women’s bodies continue to influence socially accepted norms that often disregard, or are contrary to, the views and perspectives of ethnic minority or ‘othered’ bodies (Low et al., 2003; Nagar & Virk, 2017; Slater et al., 2019; Yamamiya et al., 2005). With significantly increased use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok), a greater diversity of visual representations of ethnic minority and traditionally othered women’s bodies (i.e., fat, disabled) are available (Ogden et al., 2020; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). Yet across many media outlets, the dominant narrative continues to focus on an ideal physique (i.e., thin, toned, young) related to White heteronormative standards. Numerous scholars have conducted research on young women and body image (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2017, 2019; Fardouly et al., 2018; Prichard et al., 2020), powerfully evidencing the impact of such media portrayals on young women’s bodily

dissatisfaction, with heightened risk of disordered eating practises and mental health issues. To date, only a handful of scholars have focused on the ways young women from Indigenous and ethnic minority communities make meaning of such imagery (Azzarito & Hill, 2013; McHugh & Kowalski, 2011).

In this paper we draw upon wānanga (focus groups) and digital diaries to examine how young Māori and Pasifika wāhine³³ (16 to 25 years) who live in Aotearoa (New Zealand) understand body image. Drawing on Indigenous Feminist methodologies Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology, and an Intersectional approach, we report the findings for this paper under two main themes; (1) Influences on body image and (2) Navigating body image stereotypes. As we amplify the voices of the young wāhine, this article illustrates how they navigate Westernised views and use their cultural knowledge of healthy bodies to powerfully reclaim what their bodies represent and how they believe their bodies should be viewed.

Literature: Context, Positioning and Theoretical Framing

Many academics have contributed to researching the complexities related to body image and have provided insights, perspectives and knowledge on the nuances of this topic (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Markula, 2001; Puius & Janowsky, 2010; Thøgersen-Ntoumani & Ntoumanis, 2007). This paper takes a socio-cultural approach drawing upon the intersections of gender and ethnicity in relation to body image with a particular focus on body positivity. In this section we focus on literature that examines body image in relation to the experiences of women from Indigenous, ethnic-minority or 'othered' communities. We begin with an examination of literature on Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1990) to understand the nuanced experiences of women at the intersections of gender and ethnicity, then present literature on body image conducted with Black women in America, Aboriginal women Canada, and finally young Māori and Pasifika women in Aotearoa.

Intersectionality is a theory created and developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989), a Black African-American civil rights advocate and Professor of Law who saw the need for a theory that acknowledged Black women and their nuanced lived experiences. Using the intersections of gender and race, Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989, 1990) centered the voices of Black women and through their lived experiences began to unveil the

³³ Wāhine is the Māori word for woman, and wāhine (hyphenated) is the Māori word for women.

systems and structures that discriminated against them in policy and practice. Intersectionality has been used by many scholars who understand the complexities of identity for Indigenous, ethnic minority and othered women by revealing the structures of power and privilege that create their multiple minoritized positions in Westernised societies (Melton & Bryant, 2017; Toyibah & Riyani, 2022; Triandafilidis et al., 2017). We echo the use of intersectionality by Watson, Lewis and Moody (2019), who explain that it “provides a more nuanced understanding of the ways that the history of Black women’s gender and racial oppression influence their specific body image concerns” (2019, p. 2) (p. 2). This paper contributes to scholarship on Intersectionality by providing knowledge from young Māori and Pasifika wāhine about their body image experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Recent literature on body image is showing a shift away from slim ideals and towards more voluptuous bodies or the ‘slim-thick’ ideal that includes having a slim waist, large breasts and large buttocks (Appleford, 2016; McComb & Mills, 2022). Some literature identifies the turn towards more curvaceous ideals as heavily influenced by Black and Hispanic cultures, and particularly celebrities such as the Kardashian women, Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce, Serena Williams among others (Appleford, 2016; Sastre, 2014a). While these ideals have resonated with Black, Brown and White women around the world, the new ideal to be both fat-free, toned and curvaceous presents another largely unrealistic ideal (Wise, 2018). Other literature is also showing a shift from slim to strong where the slim muscular fit body is also being signalled as an ideal body (Markula, 1995b; McComb & Mills, 2022; Wiklund et al., 2019). Although the ideals may have changed from slim to slim-thick, or slim to slim-strong, they are still unrealistic and unattainable by many women.

A handful of scholars have conducted body image research on women from Indigenous, ethnic-minoritized and othered communities and identified nuanced cultural understandings that differ from White Westernized views (Azzarito, 2010, 2019a; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Lowy et al., 2021; McHugh et al., 2014; Nagar & Virk, 2017; Rubin et al., 2003; Watson et al., 2019). For example, body image research on Black women in America highlighted a need for culturally informed methods and measures that considered their unique body image concerns (Lowy et al., 2021). Lowy et al. (Lowy et al., 2021) explains that in addition to the influences of White standards of ideal body image, they also face cultural pressures that relate to Black women’s standards of body image relating to hair style, skin colour and curviness. Similarly, Viladrich and colleagues (Viladrich et al., 2009) found Hispanic women living in the US

experiencing a paradoxical body image, between the thin-fit White ideal and “Latina curvy shape as its counter-image” (Viladrich et al., 2009) (p. 20). Importantly, scholars recommend that research which enables culturally-specific ideas and knowledge of body image is necessary as it has the potential to show the agency of Black, Brown and Indigenous women and their lived experiences despite the pervasiveness of White, Western ideals and social pressures they navigate (Lowy et al., 2021; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). While some scholars have focused on the ways women navigate conflicting body image ideals between their own cultures and the dominance of white Westernized versions of femininity and beauty, others recommend taking strengths-focused approaches where body positivity can emphasize the ways that Black, Brown and Indigenous women appreciate and embrace the uniqueness of their bodies (Watson et al., 2019).

Historically the research on body image has focused on body image dissatisfaction (Curtis & Loomans, 2015; Davis, 1990; Koyuncu et al., 2010; Padgett & Biro, 2003). However, recently there has been a growing body of scholarship focused on body positivity, or having a holistic positive evaluation of your body (Poulter & Treharne, 2021). Scholars have documented how the ‘body positive’ movement that proliferated via social media has been shaped by postfeminist discourses and is connected to neoliberal capitalist values (i.e., consumerism, empowerment, ‘love thy self’)(Darwin & Miller, 2021; Sastre, 2014b). As Sastre (Sastre, 2014b) found, online body positivity discourse “more closely mirrors than challenges a neoliberal paradigm of bodily compliance” (p. 929). Despite this, a number of scholars argue that conducting research on participants with body positive perspectives, and understanding the diverse sources of such positivity (i.e., social media, families, peers, cultural knowledge, religion), can provide a set of unique insights relating to body image that have the potential to provide tools for practitioners working in body image related fields (Andrew et al., 2016; Avalos et al., 2005; Holmqvist & Frisén, 2012; Poulter & Treharne, 2021; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Some of these characteristics include having a higher self-esteem, having a broader view on beauty ideals that go beyond physical appearance, rejecting and criticizing media representations of unrealistic body images, an appreciation of the functionality of their body and a desire to practise self care and compassion (Holmqvist & Frisén, 2012; Webb, 2015; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010).

Leboeuf (Leboeuf, 2019) extends the concept of body positivity and explains that while it is an important factor to help women embrace the unique features of their bodies, “body

pride marks a step toward overcoming unwarranted shame about one's own body and valuing all body types, especially stigmatized ones" (p. 122). Body pride is a concept that has been used across an array of contexts, including among disability, queer and Fat communities. As Leboeuf (Leboeuf, 2019) writes, "body positivity should be understood as a response to limiting body shame that can be achieved through the cultivation of proper body pride" (p. 124). Body pride has also been used to understand the body image ideals of Indigenous, ethnic-minority and culturally diverse groups who are influenced by Westernized body image ideals (Webb, 2015). Such work starts from culturally-informed ways of knowing the body that lead to distinctive forms of body pride and positivity, shaped less by popular social media discourse and more by local communities and ways of knowing health and wellbeing. Thus, coupled with Intersectionality, body pride has the potential to provide a framework which can be used to empower and amplify the voices of young Indigenous, ethnic-minority and culturally diverse women.

The work of Coppola and colleagues offers a powerful example of scholars using a body pride approach to amplify the voices of young Indigenous people (Coppola et al., 2015; McHugh et al., 2014, 2015). One of the studies focused solely on young Aboriginal women in Canada where the participants explained how body pride created a space for their cultural understandings of body image (McHugh et al., 2014). The young Aboriginal women in this study linked their cultural identity to body pride and how they embrace all aspects of their bodies which included embodied cultural practices such as song and dance. While they acknowledged the negative body image stereotypes associated with Aboriginal youth, they argued that body pride was more important as it was a direct influence of their cultural identity. For them, body pride meant having resolve in their identity which included "Being proud of who you are, [and] not being ashamed of your background" (McHugh et al., 2014) (p. 324). Interestingly, the young Aboriginal women also placed the responsibility on their elders to do something to change the way Aboriginal people are viewed in society and suggested that this would also help increase body pride for other young Aboriginal women (McHugh et al., 2014). Here we see young Indigenous women being agentic and using their knowledge of body image in ways that are culturally specific for them, while placing the role of facilitating positive narratives for their culture in broader society on their elders.

In Aotearoa, a few scholars have conducted research on body image specifically for Māori wāhine (Ngamanu, 2006; F. Palmer, 2007b), and Pasifika wāhine (Schaaf, 2005;

Teevale, 2011). Some of the themes from this work include recognizing that Māori and Pasifika people generally have bigger bodies but lower levels of ‘body dissatisfaction’ compared to other ethnic groups, and that they have an appreciation for how their bodies function (McCabe et al., 2010; F. Palmer, 2007b; Schaaf, 2005; Talwar et al., 2012; Teevale, 2011). While this research has provided some important cultural understandings on body image for young wāhine, over the past decade or so since these studies were conducted there has been a significant increase in societal influences specifically with social media which indicates a need for more current research. There is also potential for fresh perspectives on the body image experiences of young wāhine in Aotearoa from a mixed-ethnic background. These are both areas that this research aims to address through an intersectional lens using culturally-responsive body positivity and body pride.

A handful of scholars have conducted body positivity research on young women in Aotearoa, with the majority of the samples consisting of NZ European University students. To date, none of this research has focused specifically on the experiences of young Māori, Pasifika or culturally-othered³⁴ wāhine (Campbell, 2022; Jones, 2019; Poulter & Treharne, 2021). Acknowledging the gap in their research and echoing the findings of other international academics (Azzarito, 2019a; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Coppola et al., 2017), Poulter and Treharne (Poulter & Treharne, 2021) highlight the need for further research to be conducted that will help with cultural and religious understandings of body image for Indigenous, ethnic minority and othered young women.

Herein, this paper aims to contribute to the work conducted by academics internationally and in Aotearoa who have identified the need to understand and draw upon knowledge of body image for young women from Indigenous, ethnic minority, and othered communities. We do this by focusing on both young Māori and Pasifika wāhine and use intersectionality, with culturally learned body positivity and body pride to unveil the ethnic and gendered experiences that frame their lived realities.

Context: Māori and Pasifika Connections in Aotearoa

Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa who were part of the Polynesian migration around AD 1280 (P. Borell & Kahi, 2017). Over 500 years after Māori first landed on and

³⁴ We use the term ‘culturally othered’ to acknowledge young wāhine who are part of groups that share similar beliefs and experiences such as religion or disability.

claimed Aotearoa as their homeland, the first white man arrived marking the beginning of colonization by the British Crown (hereafter the Crown) (Erueti & Palmer, 2014). In an attempt to maintain peace between Māori and the Crown, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), was signed and is a living agreement between both parties. As part of this responsibility, the Crown agreed to enhance, preserve and protect all things Māori including people, language, land and culture (Erueti & Palmer, 2014). This also means that all government agencies in Aotearoa are required to include and embed Te Ao Māori (Māori worldviews) in policy and practise.

The history of Pacific People migrating to Aotearoa is rich and diverse as it involves the stories of people from many different countries including Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, and Niue (Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005). Currently, the majority of Pacific People living in Aotearoa were born and have lived in Aotearoa all their lives. They are also second or third generation to their parents or grandparents who initially migrated here so their lived experiences are very different than those born and raised in the Islands they are Indigenous to. Navigating their cultural identities can often be challenging particularly if they are raised in a more Westernised or mixed-ethnic family environment (Mila-Schaaf, 2011; Tau'au Filisi, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that the term 'Pasifika' is heavily contested with many Pacific Scholars due to it not addressing the nuances and richness from each ethnic group. It also tends to exclude some Pacific Island people such as those from the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu (Enari & Haua, 2021; Gordon et al., 2010; Mila-Schaaf, 2011). Fa'avae (Fa'avae, 2022), unpacks the use of the words Pasifika and Pacific by grounding them in the identity that they represent as well as their respective whakapapa³⁵. He explains that the word 'Pasifika' relates to Pacific Island people who whakapapa from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands, as well as Pacific Island people who have been born/or who have lived most of their life in Aotearoa (Fa'avae, 2022). Resonating with Fa'avae (Fa'avae, 2022), we use Pasifika throughout this article as it represents the identity of the young Pasifika wāhine in our research.

There are important connections between Māori and Pasifika people, including historically through Polynesian migration (Fornander, 1880; Somerville, 2012; Walter et al.,

³⁵ The Māori word that relates to genealogy and ancestral lineage. Whakapapa is not only used to describe familial genealogy but is also used in the context of ideas and non-living concepts in terms of their history and how they evolved into their current meanings.

2017), and culturally through language and identity (Matika et al., 2021). They have also experienced similar social experiences relating to health, education, lower socio-economic living conditions, inter-cultural partnerships, and negative media representations (Hill, 2010; Hokowhitu, 2008; Hunter et al., 2022; Lanumata et al., 2008; Nakhid et al., 2007; T. Ross, 2014, 2021; Wolfgramm-Foliaki & Smith, 2020). Māori and Pasifika people have also often been grouped together in research, policy and media due to cultural similarities and the disparities they experience in society compared to other ethnic groups (Kukutai et al., 2020; McCullough, 2021; Ni Mhurchu et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2017). Lastly, connections also exist with Māori and Pasifika who have a mixed-ethnic heritage which in turn provides nuanced lived experiences that are gaining recognition in the academy (Mullane, Harwood, & Warbrick, 2022; Rocha & Webber, 2017).

Cultural Context: Body Image and Hauora in Aotearoa

Indigenous scholars of Aotearoa focused on young people's (rangitahi) health and wellbeing are showing that having a strong connection to their culture is highly important for better mental health (T. Carlson et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2018). These researchers have found that cultural identity and Indigenous ways of knowing health and wellbeing are important for supporting youth in a context where racial discrimination, inequities and injustice continue to impact their everyday lives. In particular, Whare Tapa Wha (an Aotearoa health model) has shown to impact and influence their engagement with health and well-being (Rochford, 2004). Whare tapa wha uses the analogy of a wharenuī³⁶ which is upheld by four strong pillars. These four pillars include, "te taha tinana (physical wellbeing) . . . te taha hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing) . . . te taha whānau (extended family and social wellbeing) . . . [and] te taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing)" (Ripia, 2013) (p. 61). For total wellbeing, all four pillars need to be attended to, strengthened and balanced, much like the pillars of a wharenuī (Kiyimba & Anderson, 2022; Ripia, 2013; Rochford, 2004).

The Whare Tapa Wha model is taught in schools as a critical part of the health curriculum (Rochford, 2004), and it also shapes the everyday experiences of rangatahi (young people) with whānau (immediate and extended family) and their wider communities. A recent qualitative report on rangatahi views of wellbeing in Aotearoa demonstrates the use of Te

³⁶ A Māori meeting house that forms part of a Marae which are meeting grounds that have a spiritual and cultural significance for Māori people. Each Marae belongs to a specific Māori tribe or sub-tribe (Moeke-Pickering 1996).

Whare Tapa Wha where the Māori and Pasifika rangatahi referred to and used the framework to help understand their own wellbeing (Calder-Dawe et al., 2023). Research focused on body image in Aotearoa has further illustrated that Māori and Pasifika draw upon their cultural ways of knowing to make meaning of their own and others bodies, health and wellbeing. For example, Houkamau and colleagues (Houkamau et al., 2021) conducted a large-scale study that documents how participation in traditional cultural practices that affirm cultural identity are strongly associated with higher levels of body satisfaction and self-esteem among members of the Māori population.

Methods

Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology are Indigenous feminist methodologies that we have used to frame this research. Mana Wahine magnifies the lived experiences and knowledge of Māori Wāhine and it respects, protects and centres their voices (Sharman, 2019; Simmonds, 2011; Tomlins Jahnke, 2013). Similarly, Masi Methodology centres and protects the voices and lived experiences of Pasifika wāhine (Naepi, 2016, 2019a; *Naepi - 2019 - Pacific Research Methodologies.Pdf*, n.d.). We chose to weave Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies as it is important that we acknowledge the cultural heritage of both Māori and Pasifika wāhine as well as those with mixed ethnicities. We resonate with recent scholarship that has used both Mana Wahine and Masi Methodologies where we “seek to honour both wāhine Māori and Pasifika in their own self-determination” (Tutone et al., 2023, p. 108) (p. 108).

This study draws upon the doctoral research of the first author who conducted all of the data collection and led the analysis. Participants for this study were selected based on self-identifying as a wahine, aged between 16 to 25 years old, having Māori and/or Pasifika ancestry, and who were either currently or had previously lived in South Auckland (a group of suburbs in Auckland) and/or Porirua (a suburb in Wellington). South Auckland and Porirua were selected as locations for this study as they have similar demographics including a high Māori and Pasifika population, lower socio-economic status, and being highly urbanized regions within large cities.

In total, there were 31 young wāhine that were recruited using the current connections of the first author through family, friends, social media contacts, and attendance at different group fitness venues. There were 16 young wāhine from South Auckland and 15 from Porirua and of these young wāhine, 17 identified as Māori and 22 identified as Pasifika ([Table 1](#)). The

majority of Pasifika wāhine were of Samoan descent and sixteen young wāhine had a mixed-ethnic background with the most common being Māori-Samoan. Participants were given an information sheet and they all voluntarily signed a consent form agreeing to be part of this study. The young wāhine were also given the opportunity to select a pseudonym or have one assigned for them. Their self-selected or assigned pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

The varied characteristics for this cohort was typical for young women aged between 16 to 25 years in Aotearoa where their lives are transitioning in many ways that can often be challenging. For example, this cohort of young wāhine ranged from being in high school to moving out of home, being full time mothers, or pursuing tertiary studies (Crino et al., 2019). The range of participants for this research spans across a range of mixed Māori and/or Pasifika ethnicities, it covers a varied range of ages and stages of life, and as such, provides rich depth representative of the young wāhine whose voices we amplify in this research.

Two data collection methods were used for this study: i) wānanga and individual interviews, and ii) digital diaries. Two wānanga and individual interviews were conducted six to seven months apart. In the first wānanga, the young wāhine participated in semi-structured kōrerorero (discussions) after which they were given the opportunity to choose their preferred method to diarize their sport and fitness experiences. These experiences were discussed at the second wānanga. For young wāhine who were unable to make the scheduled wānanga, an individual interview was conducted at a time and place that best suited them. At each wānanga or interview, kai (food) was provided for participants and, where appropriate, karakia (prayer) was offered to begin the proceedings.

Recognizing the importance of social media and digital technologies in the everyday lives of young wāhine, we drew inspiration from research where young wāhine were given the option to use digital methods to document their stories (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019). The digital method options recognize that many young people, including those in low socio-economic communities, use social media regularly and view it as an integral part of their everyday lives (Hsu et al., 2015; Seo et al., 2014). Building upon and extending this work, we offered participants a range of options to diarize their experiences. This practice aligned with the principles of Mana Wahine and Masi methodology where participants are given full control of creating and recording their own stories (Tutone et al., 2023). The options suggested and provided included keeping a written journal (which was provided for them),

participant-created videography and/or photography, shared social media posts (Tiktok, Instagram, Facebook), and also the option to use a google form to record and document their stories. When asked by the young wāhine whether they could use a mix of the options available, aligning with Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, the first author wholeheartedly agreed.

We made extensive efforts to ensure the young wāhine felt valued and appreciated for their time and this was demonstrated from recruitment to the final wānanga. Some of the ways that Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies were woven throughout the data gathering included nuanced cultural practices such as opening wānanga with a karakia, providing more kai than needed so the young wāhine could make a plate of food to take home to their whanau (family), and a koha³⁷ in the form of a t-shirt specially designed and printed by the first author. The Mana Wahine and Masi methodology values that were practiced and implemented throughout all engagements with the young wāhine included respect, reciprocity, and authentic connections (Naepi, 2019a; Simmonds, 2009). Practices that were adapted to the young wāhine based on their stages of life and age, included being flexible with timeframes for interviews and/or wānanga, and picking them up or dropping them off to their homes.

It is important to note the positioning of the first author in relation to this research project as she is Māori-Samoan who has lived and worked in the South Auckland community for most of her life. Her diverse roles in South Auckland over the past few decades include lecturer, gym owner, trainer, group fitness instructor, and world champion athlete. These roles have provided insights into the lived experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research and many of them have been an important part of her life. While it would be remiss to assume she understands all cultural aspects of Māori and Pasifika, or that she shares the same experiences of the young wāhine in this research project, her embodied practices and lived experiences as a Māori-Samoan wahine in and from the South Auckland community provides nuanced insider perspectives.

³⁷ Māori word for a gift or a donation.

Analysis: Amplifying the Voices of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine on Body Image Ideals

“How do you find beauty, when what is deemed beautiful, is never the reflection you see in front of you? How do you change the narrative when the stories that have been told are never the ones of your own people? Maybe it’s time for a new voice. The dawning of a new day” (Tahi, 2023).

This is a quote from a young Cook Island-Ghanian wāhine who is part of an Aotearoa based online YouTube series where young rangatahi with mixed ethnic identities share their lived experiences. We include it here as it powerfully speaks to some of the themes in our research and it highlights what we are aiming to achieve in this article which is to share informed cultural knowledge of body image. In this section we show how the young wāhine in our research are changing their narratives on beauty and body image. In presenting our findings, we draw upon Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology which centres the voices of the young wāhine and their lived experiences and we acknowledge them as knowledge creators, knowledge holders and knowledge bearers (Naepi, 2021; Pihama, 2001). Using a selection of quotes from wānanga, interviews and diaries, we amplify their voices across two different themes; (1) Influences on body image and (2) Navigating body image stereotypes.

Influences on Body Image

Interestingly, for the young wāhine one of the biggest influences in their understanding of body image was connected to taha hinengaro which is one of the pillars in the Te Whare Tapa Wha model (Ripia, 2013). Taha hinengaro is explained as being “your mind, heart, conscience, thoughts and feelings. It’s about how you feel, as well as how you communicate and think” (Te Whare Tapa Whā and Wellbeing, 2022). Rather than focusing on the aesthetics of looking a certain way, or having a particular body type or shape, the young wāhine felt that working on and strengthening the mental and spiritual aspects of their bodies were more important. This was an overwhelmingly shared belief among all of the young wāhine.

People chase that image of looking good and having a six pack. I guess it’s different for different people, but my approach to my health is looking after my mental state and it’s spiritual things too. Like if I’m going to work out I’m working towards a goal, whether it is rugby-related, it doesn’t really have to be sports related to be honest. It’s

more working towards a better version of myself. I know that if I'm fit and well it just opens up so many opportunities because I'm ready, I'm prepared I know my body's prepared for opportunities (Nina, 18, Māori-Samoan).

I think it's all about being mindset healthy and knowing when to put yourself first. Because for myself, I go out of my way a lot for other people, so knowing when to put my foot down and knowing when you deserve better. So, mindset-healthy kind of thing (Charlotte, 24, Māori-Pakeha).

I think healthy looks when you're feeling more energised or looking better, glowing and feeling happy, and just looking after yourself more and having those positive thoughts about yourself, your body. You're not worrying about anyone else's opinion about your own body. I think healthy, like you want to change in your own way, not to fit someone else's type of body shape or what you need to look like as a woman or a girl. I think that's the best (Tali, 19, Samoan).

The young wāhine acknowledge the benefits and necessity of being physically active (i.e., going to the gym, doing sports) and good nutrition (i.e., eating vegetables). For example, Charlotte (24, Maori-Pākeha) identified health as “Eating the right vegetables and all that kind of stuff. Maybe going to the gym once a week” (Charlotte). But importantly, the reasons behind this behaviour is not related to body image in the Westernised sense (physical aesthetics), but rather to improve self-confidence and taha hinengaro. Importantly, they are agentic in embracing their cultural knowledge through sharing their views and beliefs of body image. These views also align with body pride as they are encouraging confidence among the young women to embrace their bodies in a way that feels good to them (Leboeuf, 2019). Here, at the intersections of gender and ethnicity we see a different view on body image for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine when compared with previous research on New Zealand European women that showed a focus on body image and aesthetics (Poulter & Treharne, 2021).

Although the young wāhine expressed their beliefs about how body image and well-being relates to having good mental health, and taking care of their bodies through physical activity, they were also conscious of the influences of social media in their lives and those around them.

I think it's hard not to get influenced by social media, because hell, it's everywhere. Especially in this generation, social media is the number one thing...it influences the people that are growing up and that's what makes them kind of lose themselves in the process of their health, wellbeing and stuff like that (Mary, 19, Tongan).

Some of the young wāhine were affected by some of the images on social media and commented on how they navigated these spaces:

I used to buy into having a certain body type when I was Year 9 [roughly aged 13] on the insta-explore page. I really under-appreciated my body, but then as I got older it's really not realistic. I also noticed that a lot of models for some reason they were all white. I don't know why. I wish I had some black or some brown models on my explore page. That would have been nice. That would have influenced me. Mental health is just basically for me, it's not trying to get your mind sucked into all the social media stuff. It's all false reality, like you have to fit into a box. By leaving Instagram it helped me build up my confidence again and help my mental health to appreciate myself more (Norah, 16, Samoan).

Sometimes I wish I could be like the Instagram body but at the same time I don't give a crap, I'm too lazy. I could if I would. But I don't have the means to at the moment. But at the same time, why do I want to look like that when I can just be myself? Just walk out with hairy legs? If no one can accept me for hairy legs then it's their problem. If I'm confident wearing hairy legs out, you know then, then cool. But like it's other people's problem, you know? (Rangi, 24, Māori-Samoan).

In these quotes we see the young wāhine critically analysing their own and others experiences with images on social media. The young wāhine are actively problematizing the lack of diversity on some social media platforms and expressing the desire to see more women that look like them. They also highlight the potential of such images to have a positive influence on young wāhine.

The young wāhine were also aware of the changing media landscape and influences of ideal body images through the images on social media platforms. Recognizing a growing diversity of images of women's bodies, they believed that society was starting to become more accepting of all body types:

In probably 2015, [the body shape you wanted to be like] was skinny, not bones but enough to feel around your whole waist or enough to fit into size small jeans and stuff, [that] is what you need to be. But now, people are accepting that not all body types are the same... But I think other people shouldn't have an opinion on women's body type, they shouldn't really have opinions on what we should look like, to be honest, because it's the body that we have (Tali, 19, Samoan).

Here we see a young wahine being agentic in choosing and portraying perspectives on body image that empowers all women by accepting and normalizing all body types. She grounds herself in these beliefs by taking the power from people who have opinions about women's bodies and nullifies them, stating that the young womens' bodies belong to themselves so they should have the freedom to interpret and present them however they choose. These statements illustrate body pride where the comments of others that could prompt feelings of shame are rejected and the voices and beliefs of the young wāhine are uplifted and valued (Leboeuf, 2019).

The young wāhine shared critical reflections on how their perspectives on body image played out in daily interactions and how these changed as they got older.

Looking around, I'd be like oh, this girl's got a boyfriend because she looks that type of way, or people like her because she's this type of body shape. That was my mentality of thinking of it when I was younger. But once I grew up, it was more about your personality. It's more important if you're nice, if you're kind, if you have all those attributes; it's not about your body type. I wish I thought about that when I was 15. But, when I was 18, I could see how that was negative thinking, because that's just bad. But to me, my ideal one would just be one that I'm comfortable in or one that I'm not shy to show off and stuff. If you're happy with that, then you do you (Tali, 19, Samoan).

In this example we see the development and learning of how te taha hinengaro began to increase in importance as Tali got older. She had a realisation that internal qualities, such as having a good personality and being kind, held more importance than body shape and that her previous views when she was younger were negative. Internalising her views on body image, Tali then draws on body pride in highlighting that not being shy but being confident

with how you feel about your body and that being happy, whatever that might look like, is more important.

Being happy was a common narrative that was shared among the young wāhine despite the negativity they sometimes face regarding having bigger bodies. Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) embodies the concept of being happy when sharing her response to a situation where she was told that she was getting “really fat.” She responds jovially, “What do you mean I’m fat, I’m not! I’m just chubby’ (laughing). Well, yeah, I’m happy. I’m happy the way I am.” Despite being targeted with negative comments about how her body looks ‘fat’, she embraces how her body looks and refuses to feel discouraged by these comments. Instead, she embraces the comment then nullifies it by resolutely stating that she’s happy with how she is. This also aligns with Teevale’s (Teevale, 2011) body image research with Pacific youth, where one of the participants [a Tongan mother] believed that her daughter ‘being happy’ was more important than her being overweight.

Through an intersectional lens, we see that young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research presented views on body image that differ from previous research conducted with and for young White women (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Where the positive body image characteristics in Wood-Barcalow et al. (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010), referred to how they felt about the way their body looked in reference to Western feminine ideals of being thin and fit, the young wāhine in this study were more concerned about a holistic view relating more to mental wellbeing and internal self-confidence such as being happy. These beliefs and views were influenced by cultural knowledge, and particularly te taha hinengaro.

Navigating Body Image Stereotypes

Many body image stereotypes that are attributed to Māori and Pasifika include having larger bodies and being physically dominant and ‘naturally’ athletic, particularly when compared to other ethnic groups in Aotearoa (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2003a, 2003b; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Indigenous scholars have argued against racialized ideologies relating to physical size and athleticism as they limit the potential of Māori and Pasifika in other areas of society (Hippolite & Bruce, 2010; Hokowhitu, 2003a). Having larger bodies also tends to frame Māori and Pasifika with higher health risks particularly with being overweight and/or obese, leading to higher rates of diabetes and cardiovascular health disease (McCabe et al., 2011; Stoner et al., 2013, 2016; Tupai-Firestone et al., 2016). While we do not contest the

health implications associated with obesity or being overweight, we argue that the socio-cultural stereotypes imposed on young Māori and Pasifika based on body size is unfair and often unwarranted. Amplifying the voices of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in our research, we illustrate how they are navigating these 'big body' stereotypes and enacting body pride to powerfully stake claim of their own bodies in public spaces and sport and fitness.

The young wāhine in our research were cognizant of the stereotypes relating to body size and were not hesitant in pointing these out. For example, Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) explained, "I think that's the way they look at us, Islanders are big people but to be honest, I just see them as human beings". . Similarly, Mary (19, Tongan) reflected critically on stereotypes of Pasifika bodies: "Like they have big arms, yeah big arms, big bones, people look at them like, you shouldn't be that size, or like your arms shouldn't be like that. Sorry then God! (all laughing). Here we see elements of body pride where Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) rejects the notion of the stereotypes of Islanders having big bodies by ignoring size and focusing on people as humans. Mary (19, Tongan) also demonstrates body pride and uses sarcasm and humour to contest the negative narratives placed on the larger bodies of Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Her sarcastic statement, "Sorry, then God," is mocking people who dictate how female bodies should look. By using 'God,' who is a revered being in both Māori and Pasifika cultures (Akbar et al., 2022b; Gordon et al., 2013), she is inadvertently stating that only 'God' has the power to dictate how things should be and anyone else, such as those commenting on how Māori and Pasifika wāhine bodies 'shouldn't be,' is overstepping their position in society. The idea and audacity for an individual to behave like 'God' is so preposterous that her comment incited laughter from the other young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in that particular wānanga. The laughter also demonstrated understanding and that they agreed with this comment.

Such body image pressures not only came from social media and wider society, but also within their own communities. Some of the young wāhine fielded negative body shaming comments from friends and family and navigated these situations in ways to protect themselves:

Earlier on this year, when I was back at the Islands, one of my cousins... called me fat. And I was like, that's not nice to say, but I actually take it into heart. And, yeah, and I

felt like, Oh, I want to be skinny, I'm gonna start exercising, and then actually started exercising when I was in Raro. And I never missed a day of exercising, but when I was exercising I went back to my eating, like you know just eating anything I want to...the fatty food and stuff like that. And I say to myself, am I happy? And then I said, I don't think so and then I was like, you know what, I'm not gonna care if anyone says, 'You're fat' and things like that, I'm just gonna say, 'yeah nah, you can call me whatever you want but I don't care' (Rita, 23, Cook Island Māori).

In Samoa culture they take it just as a joke, "Hey, you're getting a bit chubbier there" or "You look a bit chubby there." It just defeats the purpose of love or is this what you're supposed to be hearing from your aunties or your uncles and stuff? When I was a little kid I was, "ha ha, that's funny." But now I'm grown up, you can see how that messes with you sometimes. I just laugh it off and I'm like, nah, I like the way I look now (Tali, 19, Samoan).

I think I'm still the same really because I blocked it all out. Well, my dad used to always say I was skinny, [but] my Mum was like no, you're fine. Yeah, and I just happened to like put a guard up when anyone would say 'oh you're too small' or 'you're getting too big'. And yeah I would just like ignore it. Just because that's just how I am...I'll try and keep the negativity out because it's not good for your health (Nadine, 24, Samoan-Niuean).

Here we see critical reflections from the young wāhine where they recognised the negative views placed on them from family members (i.e., cousins, aunties and uncles, mothers and fathers) and chose to reject them by drawing on their inner self belief of what makes them happy. We see here that they are not immune to the negative comments and that these seem to be ongoing. Notably, the young wāhine understood the detrimental effects that harmful body image comments could have on their health, and consciously chose to 'block it all out', instead drawing on body pride to reject negative comments. Using phrases such as, "I don't care," "I like the way I look," and "I would just ignore it", they are confidently grounding themselves in their self-belief and self-confidence despite having to navigate these comments.

Frustration was felt from some of the young wāhine with the negativity that came from family members or other Māori and/or Pasifika people. The following response from Mary

(19, Tongan) expresses the frustration and concern about negative body image behaviour from people who are supposed to be supportive:

Sometimes I want to stand up for that person cos we all come from the same place, same background, like we're all trying to make our parents proud and stuff. And like, that person may be having some problems at home and they come to school and they think coming to school as like a place where they can get their mind off the things that's happening at home. And just coming to school and having those people pick on you on your worst flaws. It just makes it even worse. And that's what leads some people to take their own life. I don't know like some people, they have the same background but they still have the audacity to come and do that to a person, like I just don't understand why you can't you just can't be nice to everyone, like my Mum has told me and my sisters, if you don't have anything nice to say don't say it at all. And just seeing how other people get treated because of just the way they look, how they weigh and like their size, like we're all, we're all not perfect, and we're all not made the same.

This was a very emotive response that resulted in tears from everyone attending that particular wānanga. There was a shared and unspoken understanding of the pain and hurt caused by negativity from within ones own community, and the mention of suicide was a stark reminder of the damaging effects of such behaviour. Sadly, the ethnic groups with the highest rates of suicide in Aotearoa are Māori and Pacific people (*Statistics on Suicide in New Zealand*, n.d.), so Mary's comment and the ensuing emotion indicated lived experiences relating to this. These lived experiences of collective feelings of body shaming from many parts of society, including within their own families and communities, may also explain why the young wāhine choose the characteristics of te taha hinengaro to reframe their understanding of body image in ways to protect their own mental health and wellbeing.

Using intersectionality, our analysis also revealed interesting insights into how young Māori and Pasifika wāhine come to understand their own gendered and ethnic bodies in sport and fitness contexts. While young Māori and Pasifika tāne (men) are lauded for having big, strong muscular physiques that serve them well in sport and physical education spaces, young wāhine are often treated quite the opposite. Herein, the young wāhine share their

experiences of navigating sport and physical education spaces where their femininity is questioned, and their bodies become sites of critique under the gaze of a Westernized lens:

They say it's like known to be ugly to be musclier than boys. Yeah, it's not feminine being muscle toned and all that. I used to get so pissed off and be like, 'oh, I'm gonna get skinny arms and all that', but it's never gonna happen (all laugh). You try but it's just like, no, it's not gonna happen, it's genetics, it's what you were born with and what God gave you. Just continue being yourself. Just don't let anyone tell you any different. Just yeah from experience, listening to everyone's opinions, you know, I put my younger self down, so if I had a chance to tell [my younger self], I would say 'tell them to shut up and get outta my face'. (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan).

Because my male PE teacher knew I did CrossFit and, you know, CrossFit was like, just coming out and everyone's like "It's not a sport", "It's just for men", "women, aren't supposed to lift". And I think that's what got me the most then I think like a few times I'd be smart and be like, well you have chicken legs (all laughing). My thighs can squash you (more laughing). And like just growing up doing weightlifting and CrossFit and just training was like the people that I was with you could just realize, well, I'm an Islander, this is how I was built and this is what I'm made for. So like yeah, I just think of it as like it's raw strength, use it while you can, while you're young. I'm like you have this body, use it while you can (Nadine, 24, Samoan-Niuean).

These experiences illustrate the negative attitudes young Māori and Pasifika wāhine encounter and negotiate surrounding the shape, size and structure of their bodies. They described various instances of being discriminated against and treated unfairly because their bodies don't conform to Western standards of femininity and slim ideals. In the face of such stereotypes and treatment, however, these young wāhine powerfully claim and embrace their physical characteristics by standing up to those who are judging them. They also use their bodies as sites of celebration of what they can do, rather than what they look like according to others gendered and cultural expectations. The young wāhine argue against those who discriminate against them by drawing on their own strengths ("My thighs can squash you"). Notably Wenzie (19, Cook Island-Samoan), has recently accepted a contract to

play for a prestigious Australian Rugby League Club and Nadine (24, Samoan-Niuean) has represented Aotearoa internationally in weightlifting. It is important to point out that while these two young wāhine embrace their 'God given genetics' that have helped them succeed in sport and used such successes to push back on cultural and gendered stereotypes, other wāhine who do not participate in sport may have different experiences.

Another form of discrimination and stereotyping that the young wāhine had to navigate included experiences of being told they were too overweight to participate in sport:

When I played reserve league for netball, we had to be a certain weight. We had to be 65[kg] and under. You could never go above or else you'd get dropped. There are a lot of girls that deserved the spot more than other people, but just because of the weight restriction, they were cancelled out, which I reckon was pretty unfair. Some of the girls I've played with for years put in so much work and one girl just gets it because she's skinnier. It just changes the whole point of playing netball basically. Polynesians always had the weight restriction thing. We have bigger bodies, but big bodies can do a lot of things. [They] can do just as much as a little body can (Lene, 20, Cook Islander).

While Netball New Zealand policy guidelines identify exclusion based on weight as an unacceptable form of discrimination (Netball New Zealand, n.d.), our participants' experience suggest that such practices continue to occur with negative consequences for Māori and Pasifika wāhine experiences in the sport. In defending the larger bodies of Pasifika wāhine, Lene (20, Cook Islander) rightly points out that "big bodies can do a lot of things."

Other young wāhine experienced weight-based stereotypes in school sport and physical education that negatively impacted their feelings about their bodies:

Once she [teacher] saw me she was like, you need to lose weight and I actually did it because I was like 'okay, this is the sports coordinator, she's gonna make me the best athlete ever.' But then I got sick [from] doing that, so I stopped. But then just hearing all the opinions from everyone about me being you know too muscly, too big. At first it made me more angry than anything, the fact that they had the audacity to tell me that I'm overweight or too big for my age. But like, it's my genetics and I can't change that about myself, and I'm proud of that, of course! (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan).

Here we see Wenzie experiencing negative affects (anger, frustration) from such comments, but ultimately demonstrating refusal of others judgements, and embracing body pride.

A few young wāhine expressed disbelief and frustration at some of the stereotypes they had experienced regarding the types of sports that they were 'expected' to participate in:

At college (high school), most people wouldn't think Samoan girls would play netball. It's usually just, "I thought you played this kind of sport", like rugby and stuff because they think we're kind of like the Samoan boys. I reckon some of the girls that are Samoan have the ability to go just beyond playing at college. But I guess the other stereotype would just be that we'd do shotput and stuff, or big things that we can carry because we're of big stature and stuff. They've never seen people sprint, like in the 100m one. I was like, oh my gosh, you've never seen a girl Samoan sprint, oh wow! (Tali, 19, Samoan).

Sometimes Islander girls are the stereotypes, like Islander girls should be playing rugby or contact, like men's sports. Not doing gymnastics and ballerina stuff. I get that one. If you're an Islander, doing gymnastics is like, oh you must be half something else. It's sad (Mary, 19, Tongan).

In these experiences we see that young Māori and Pasifika wāhine are 'expected' to participate in particular types of sporting activities, based on their body types. Interestingly some of the stereotyping comes from their peers which could be seen as an indication of complicit beliefs. This peer stereotyping is problematic as it can unconsciously limit participation of sports and activities that are outside of their scope which in turn places limits on potential. Cooky and Rauscher (2016) resonate with this where they mention that participation for young women in sport is influenced by cultural factors including expectations from others.

Showing resilience and a deeply rooted belief in body pride, a few of the young wāhine drew strength from their sporting abilities to counter stereotypes they faced relating to having bigger bodies:

Being a rugby player it's, you know, you're muscley, you're, you're massive I was, one of the biggest girls on my team. I'm not that big. Hey I'm not that big, (girls laugh reassuringly) but I was the biggest. I did reinforce my own you know

attributes towards the game but then also, it's genetics like you know the muscliness, the strength. I'm gonna always have that from the stereotypes that all these people say about me. I'm not gonna, I can't hide it. I can't take my toughness away just for them, you know, so yeah I reinforce my stereotypes in a good way, like, kind of make bad into good, you know? I have my own individual strengths, like speed and stuff (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan).

A lot of white people, they just look at me and they're like 'oh, she's dumb, she doesn't know a lot'. Also, being a young woman, it also puts me under the bar as well because stereotypically we're weaker, meant to be weaker than males overall. Being both of those things is kind of hard because when people, mostly just white people, when they look at you it's kind of like they really underestimate you. They just look at you and think that you act a certain way. I don't like that. I guess in sport, sport really helps me to prove to people that I don't have to be a certain way. I can be really good at sport! For me, sport is the place where people can recognise you, see who you are as a person on the court or on the field (Norah, 16, Samoan).

As these comments suggest, for some Māori and Pasifika wāhine, sport is a place they can experience success and pride in what their bodies can achieve, and thus counter White, Western stereotypes based on gendered and racist ideologies. Despite the challenges and stereotypes faced by young wāhine, they are resolutely proclaiming their strengths and beliefs on body image and demonstrating body pride, focusing on what their bodies can do.

Some young wāhine shared their views and recommendations on how they believed body image views could be improved for young wāhine. Cherie (23, Māori) suggests, “I definitely think pushing more of the confidence aspect of it. Because there will be bigger young girls who will just never look like that, [slim or slim-fit] but they can look great in their own way. So having that visual representation, pushing the confidence aspect, and pushing the community and healthy women aspects.” Cherie leans into the concepts of body pride through promoting self-confidence while acknowledging that some young Māori and Pasifika wāhine may have bigger bodies that will never be able to fit Westernised body image standards. Her recommendation of having visual representations of how young wāhine can ‘look good in their own way’ and building a community of healthy women provides nuanced knowledge and advice for body image practitioners.

Summarising the voices of the young wāhine, Mary (19, Tongan) shares her final thoughts on how females should approach body image:

I think just getting everyone, especially females to understand that we're all given our own body type and we don't have to look like that person. It's not like a must, because I see it in social media there's a lot of girls that really want to hit a specific shape or type. I'm like, just be happy with your skin and your body, your body looks nice.

Pushing body pride concepts by having an individualised appreciation of how their bodies look, Mary recommends that wāhine reject notions where body comparisons are made and to stop setting goals that strive to have a particular body shape. To all young wāhine, who are having body image concerns or struggles, she reassuringly states, 'be happy.... your body looks nice.'

Conclusion

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature that demonstrates the importance of cultural identity for young people's understandings of health and wellbeing (Clark et al., 2013; Fleming et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2018). Working at the intersection of gender, cultural identity and youth, our particular focus was on young Māori and Pasifika wāhine understandings of body image. Drawing upon wānanga, individual interviews and digital diaries of 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine from two low socio-economic urban cities in Aotearoa, we reveal the ways young wāhine use cultural knowledge of taha hinengaro (which aligns with body pride) to challenge negative stereotypes and to frame their understandings of body image. Although the young wāhine experienced negative stereotypes and body shaming from various aspects of their lives (i.e., school, sport), they draw on taha hinengaro and culturally-specific forms of body pride to embrace and be happy with their bodies, because their bodies belong to them.

In sum, our findings provide knowledge contextualised with and for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa who demonstrate agency in rejecting negative stereotypes about their bodies, and powerfully embrace how their bodies look and function. However, this article also highlights the need for those working with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (i.e., teachers, coaches) to question some of their own assumptions and critically reflect on how these may be negatively impacting the experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in a

range of settings (i.e., school, sport). Some cultural stereotypes continue to abound and do harm. Furthermore, dominant framings of young Māori and Pasifika bodies are out of date, and do not reflect the nuanced culturally-informed strengths-based views young wāhine have of their own bodies.

Table 1. Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Social Situation
South Auckland			
Deena	18	Māori	High school student.
Anne-Marie	22	Māori	Full time work; University graduate.
Rayena	23	Māori	Full time work; Mother of one.
Evelyn Burns	25	Māori	Full time work; University graduate.
Tati	16	Māori - Samoan	High school student.
Hera	17	Māori - Samoan	Tertiary study.
Vaitala	21	Māori - Samoan	Part time work.
Lele	22	Māori - Samoan	Part time work; Solo mother of one.
Rangi	24	Māori - Samoan	Solo mother of two.
Rita	23	Cook Island Māori	Tertiary study.
Lene	20	Cook Island	Tertiary study.
Wenzie	19	Cook Island - Samoan	Tertiary study; Part time work.
Nora	18	Samoan - Niuean	High school student.
Nadine	24	Samoan – Niuean	Tertiary study; Part time work.
Tee	24	Samoan	Tertiary study; Part time work.
Mary	19	Tongan	Tertiary study; Part time work.
Porirua			
Tanya	19	Māori	Full time work.
Jean	22	Māori	Full time work. University graduate.
Cherie	23	Māori	Tertiary study.
Nina	18	Māori - Samoan	Tertiary study.
Mischa	25	Māori - Samoan	Part time work. Mother of one.

Wairemana	21	Māori – Scottish - Swedish	Tertiary study.
Charlotte	24	Māori – Pākehā	Full time work.
Norah	16	Samoan	High school student.
Sally	17	Samoan	High school student.
Tali	19	Samoan	Full time work.
Toni	20	Samoan	Full time work.
Larma	16	Samoan – Tongan	High school student.
Paige	19	Samoan – Tokelau	High school student.
Mia	20	Samoan – Tokelau	Full time work.
Rya	23	Samoan – Tokelau	Full time work.

Chapter 6: Manuscript 4 (Currently under review)

Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Preface

In this final empirical chapter, we (all authors) take a strengths-based approach to amplify the voices and physical activity experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi principles throughout our analysis, we also draw on intersectionality to examine the features that enhance participation in physical activity. By purposefully focussing on young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who *are* physically active, we provide cultural views and knowledge that can be used to encourage those who are less active. Importantly, the young wāhine share how hauora motivates them to be physically active and they also highlight features that enhance their participation in netball and ‘gymming’³⁸. Please note that there is repetition in sections of this chapter due to it being a stand-alone article that requires framing and context.

³⁸ ‘Gymming’ is a term that was frequently used by the young wāhine and is an informal word widely accepted among young people that means working out at a gym (Anwar & Ali, 2020; Contractor & Rasquinha, 2021; Maddox, 2020)

Abstract

Young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (women) in Aotearoa New Zealand are reported as being less active compared to other young women and men. Taking a strengths-based approach we amplify the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who are physically active to provide insights that can inform policy and practice to improve participation for those who are less active. Weaving Indigenous methodologies and qualitative methods, we engage 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (16-25 years) from urban cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our objective is to understand their 1) motivations to participate, 2) preferred activities and 3) perspectives on participation. Using thematic-analysis we discovered they were influenced by cultural knowledges including hauora (wellbeing) and whanaungatanga (relationships). Based on our findings we suggest physical activity for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine focuses on improving mental health and wellbeing, and to use group activities that include learning new skills and knowledge.

Keywords: Physical Activity, Māori, Pasifika, Indigenous, Wāhine.

Introduction

The health and social benefits of physical activity and sport are well known, yet participation levels for young Indigenous and culturally diverse women continue to be lower than young men and other young women (Eyler et al., 1998; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010; Stronach et al., 2016). Similar reports in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa) indicate that young Indigenous wāhine (women) in low socio-economic regions are even less active (Brocklesby & van Bergenhenegouwen, 2019; Sport New Zealand, 2021; O. W. A. Wilson et al., 2023). Recent international scholarship with and for Indigenous women and young people are taking strengths-based and/or culturally specific approaches to understand their motivations to be physically active. Much of this research is being conducted by scholars from these communities (Maxwell et al., 2021; McGuire-Adams, 2017). Some of the findings of this scholarship includes cultural meanings of wellbeing, the importance of family and community engagement, self-empowerment, and acknowledging stereotypes of being good at sport (McGuire-Adams, 2017; Stronach et al., 2016).

We contribute to this literature by focussing on a group of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in low socio-economic urban areas in Aotearoa who are physically active. Using their lived experiences, and operating at the intersections of gender and ethnicity, we examine

features of their participation to understand and provide culturally and gendered specific knowledge that could be used to engage wāhine who are less active. We also contribute to a growing body of international literature that uses culturally informed strengths-based approaches to understand the physical activity motivations of young Indigenous women.

Cultural Context and Researcher Positionings

Aotearoa is socially and politically influenced by Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi hereafter Te Tiriti) which is the founding document signed between the Crown (Queen Victoria) and the Indigenous Māori people in 1840 (Orange, 2015). Te Tiriti intended to establish a framework for coexistence between Māori and British settlers which included preserving, acknowledging, and upholding Māori in their own self-determination (M. L. Hudson & Russell, 2009; Orange, 2015; Terruhn, 2019). However, Māori continue to experience significant social disparities (poverty, poor health, lower levels of education) which indicates that the Crown still has work to do to meet Te Tiriti obligations (Came, 2021; Came et al., 2021, 2023; Gustafson et al., 2024; *Wai 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry*, 2016). Importantly for the context of this paper, breaches of Te Tiriti continue to influence and impact the lives of young wāhine in Aotearoa.

Pacific peoples in Aotearoa are a diverse group whose cultural heritage is from the Pacific Islands. In the 2018 Census, 66% of Pacific people were reported as being born in Aotearoa and many had mixed ethnicities (Stats NZ, 2023). To acknowledge this group of individuals, we use the term 'Pasifika' as it represents Pacific people who were born outside of their country of heritage. Doing this we respect their nuanced identities and their lived experiences in Aotearoa (Fa'avae, 2022). In this paper we refer to Pasifika as Indigenous because they are Indigenous to their respective islands of heritage.

In Aotearoa, Māori and Pasifika peoples share a variety of cultural and social interconnected relationships. Cultural connections include similar linguistics, similar lived experiences, and an innate understanding of being 'brown' (Enari & Haua, 2021; Matika et al., 2021; Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). Historically Māori and Pasifika were part of the great Polynesian migration and currently in Aotearoa they experience similar social disparities such as low employment rates, discrimination in education and society, and poor health outcomes (Gabel, 2022; Gray & Crichton, 2019; Kukutai et al., 2020; McAllister et al., 2022; McCullough, 2021). There is also a growing number of mixed-ethnic Māori and Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa

whose experiences may be different than those identifying with a singular ethnic group (Rocha & Webber, 2017; Si'ilata, 2017).

While investigating the lived experiences of Indigenous wāhine, we are transparent about our researcher positionality. The first author is a mixed Māori-Samoan woman and her lived experiences provided Indigenous insights and cultural rational for our research. She was supported culturally by the third and fourth authors (also Indigenous) who are academics with extensive research experience with, for, and by, Māori and Pacific peoples. The second, and fifth, authors supported through subject knowledge as experienced researchers in gender, physical activity, and sociology. Reflexivity was constantly practiced and while our positionalities were varied, we came together with a united view of understanding the physical activity motivations of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research. Our intention is to provide culturally specific knowledge to inform policy that will respectfully understand, engage, and enhance participation.

Methodology

This research weaves two Indigenous methodologies; Mana Wahine and Masi methodology. Mana Wahine is a theoretical framework that was designed by, with and for Māori Wāhine (Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2011). It centres the voices of wahine Māori as researchers and as participants. Masi methodology is a Pacific framework designed by, with, and for Pacific women (Naepi, 2019a, 2021). It operates similarly to Mana Wahine but for Pacific women as it purposefully centres their voices and experiences. Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi methodology has been done intentionally to respect, value, and centre the voices of the participants in this study who are Māori, Pasifika, or a combination of both. It also acknowledges the differences and similarities between cultural contexts. In so doing, we draw inspiration from Tutone et al (2023) who used Mana Wahine and Masi methodology to respect the ethnicities of their participants but also illustrate their shared lived experiences.

Methods

Two qualitative methods were used to gather data. These were (i) two one-hour wānanga (group discussions) and/or individual interviews held six months apart and (ii) self-selected digital diaries. Aligning with current research with and for Indigenous young people and women, a co-participatory approach was used where the young wāhine self-selected from a range of digital methods including videography, photography, digital activity log, and social

media pages (B. Carlson & Frazer, 2021b; Maxwell et al., 2021; Rice et al., 2016). Data from wānanga and interviews were transcribed, and raw data from digital diaries were analysed using culturally responsive and reflexive thematic-analysis (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Participants

This research included 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine between 16 to 25 years old from South Auckland (16) and Porirua in Wellington (15) ([Table 1](#)). These locations were selected due to having similar demographics such as high numbers of Māori and Pasifika peoples, and low socio-economic regions in large urban cities. The ethnicities of the young wāhine included, 18 Samoan, 17 Māori, and 16 mixed ethnicities with the most common being Māori-Samoan. Social situations for the participants varied with some in high school (7) and some university graduates (4). Seventeen of the young wāhine were working and four were mothers with young toddlers or babies.

Ethics

This research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards. Full ethical approval was provided by the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies at the University of Waikato. Prior to data collection, participants were provided detailed information about the study after which they gave their informed consent. Participants self-selected a pseudonym or had us select one for them. These names are used to represent them in this article.

Findings and Discussion

Our findings focus on how gender, culture and ethnicity intersect to impact the physical activity experiences of the young wāhine. We recognise that the findings may be a function of our sample who are physically active and participating by choice, so these recommendations may not be suitable for young wāhine who are completely inactive. We also acknowledge that while we have a smaller sample size (31), the depth of our findings provide cultural nuance that warrants consideration for practitioners working with, and for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

In this section we present and discuss our findings under the following themes; 1) motivations to participate, 2) physical activities of choice, and 3) participation perspectives.

Motivations to Participate

Scholarship on motivations for Indigenous young peoples participation in physical activity and sport revealed that these included connection with friends, family and community (Gordon et al., 2013; A. Nelson, 2009; Stronach et al., 2016), leaning into their 'natural' athlete stereotypes (Hokowhitu, 2003a; Stronach et al., 2016), and Indigenous knowledges of well-being (Calder-Dawe et al., 2023; T. Carlson et al., 2022; Lavallée, 2008). In this section, the themes we discuss include hauora, which is a cultural and holistic understanding of health and wellbeing, whanaungatanga which relates to relationships and connection, and lastly escapism.

Hauora – Holistic Well-being

When describing their understanding of well-being, most of the young wāhine referred to hauora and holistic views of well-being. Hauora is very often represented through a Māori health model named Te Whare Tapa Whā, which represents four walls of a Marae (Māori meeting house). Each wall relates to an area of health that needs to be maintained and balanced (Rochford, 2004). These are taha wairua (spirituality), taha whanau (family and close relationships), taha hinengaro (mind and mental well-being) and taha tinana (body).

Most of the young wāhine indicated that the main reason for being physically active related to hauora. Tati (16) explains how hauora affects her life.

The four elements of hauora are – spiritual, emotional, social and physical. I kind of live off those because if you don't have spiritual, you lack purpose. If you don't have socials, you're drained, if you don't have your emotions fixed, you're kind of crowded, and if you don't have physical, you're not free. So, if you have all these aspects, you're basically living the best life even if you're going through tough times.

Similarly, Nina (18) explains how she embodies hauora in her approach to physical activity:

Physical activity has always allowed me to keep my spiritual health, social health and mental health in check. If I didn't have that physical exercise component, I wouldn't be able to perform or give as much as I can. It's been a part of my life for so long that I have to keep active even if that means just going for a walk or doing something outdoors with my family.

The balance of all four components of Te Whare Tapa Wha and hauora are portrayed as Nina (18) embodies and describes them as part of who she is and how they are part of her life. This

cultural alignment with physical activity is also similar to the Medicine Wheel used by Indigenous Anishnaabe scholars in Canada where physical activity was used to identify the “interconnection to mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of urban Aboriginal adults” (Lavallée, 2007, p. 128).

Many of the young wāhine also indicated that being physically active improved their taha hinengaro (mental health) and self-care. Wairemana (21) shares her views.

The biggest motivator for me to exercise over the past few years has been my mental health and taking care of myself. Personally, working out or being involved in physical activity has never been about the physical side of it, but rather the positive impact that I know it will have on my internal environment. I haven't been as motivated to do physical activity since leaving college [high school], and I think it's because I struggle to prioritise it, and I also procrastinate a lot. But what helps me is being around people who are motivated and doing things. I also like to remind myself when I'm feeling beaten up about not doing anything, that starting is the most difficult part.

While Wairemana is motivated by the internal effects of being physically active, being in a group with similar motivations is also important. This aligns with research on young Indigenous people who have indicated that being with others in a supportive environment assists motivation for participation (Mason et al., 2019; A. Nelson, 2009).

Whanaungatanga – Relationships and Connections

Whanaungatanga is a Māori word that describes the relationships and connections between people who have shared experiences. It comes from the Māori word whanau which means family and is the act of creating family with people around you. Whanaungatanga also enhances feelings of belonging and acceptance in groups (Moorfield, 2024). Much of the motivation for participation was shaped around whanaungatanga. Some of the young wāhine pursued a career in sport and exercise with the intent of helping others in their communities. Cherie (23) explains why she shifted careers from being a chef to a personal trainer:

The main reason I started studying and why I wanted to be a personal trainer was because of my own mental health. Exercise helped me with my own mental health and so I wanted to know more to help myself and others too. It's not a cure, but it helps.

Important to note is that Cherie (23) openly shared her struggles with mental health and coming to terms with being a young gay wāhine Māori. She wanted to be in a position to help

other young wāhine who may be experiencing similar struggles. This motivation aligns with the work of McGuire-Adams (2017) and Stronach et al. (2016) where the Indigenous women were motivated to help their communities using physical activity because of the transformational changes they had experienced themselves.

Aligning with Indigenous scholarly research where physical activity and sport engagement is viewed as a family affair (Allen et al., 2021; Gordon et al., 2013; McGuire-Adams, 2017; A. Nelson, 2009; Stronach et al., 2016), Anne-Marie (22) explains, “I will say that physical activity and sport is a way to reconnect whether it be with friends or family.” Many young wāhine had active parents and family members so grew up with sport and physical activity as part of their lives. Jean (22), who is an age group world champion in a traditional sport, shares how being active has always been part of her life since she was a child:

I think being active is just normal in my family. Since I can remember, maybe from 5 years old, we have always participated in [this sport (name of sport removed for anonymity)] so it's always been normal to exercise but also be with my family doing it. My mum was my coach, and we used to always go to nationals, and now I'm coaching. It's about supporting whānau and helping anyone who wants to do [this sport] reach their best potential. That's where my family is at right now in terms of our club.

Many other young wāhine also explained that their participation and engagement in particular sports were a result of their usual family or church activities as they were growing up and so it became part of their identity. Rya (23) explains her reasons: “Everyone in our family played rugby since nappy days. We kind of got into it because we saw all our cousins and we were like, if our boy cousins can do it, so can we!” Here we see a gendered and whānau approach to participation and engagement in sport. Interestingly, Rya and her sisters were selected for provincial teams in rugby while her ‘boy’ cousins missed out.

The young wāhine who were mothers continued this positive generational narrative of being active by aligning their motivations to be active for their children. Rayena (23) shares the following in her diary:

My decision to get into physical fitness was because I wanted my son to see that his Mum cares about her health and physical wellbeing. Kids mirror their surroundings so if they are surrounded by love, kindness and even things like healthy eating habits and exercise, they will copy. I have always been a person who has been into sports, just

because I'm an adult, a young mum, I have no excuse to why I cannot be physically active.

Rayena further writes about how frustrated she is when seeing young Māori and Pasifika children who are obese and offers a solution that includes improving the surroundings for the children. She alludes to the increased cost of living and the affordability of takeaway foods which she believes is “killing our people.” These issues are not new to places such as South Auckland and Porirua where numerous takeaway food venues often take precedence over fresh fruit and vegetables because they provide cheaper and higher food volume options. While we do not focus on nutrition in our study, Rayena’s concerns raise important points about access to healthy kai (food), kai sovereignty (the right for Māori to manage their own food systems), and eating practices that should support physical activity and sport participation in low socio-economic communities. This is also a factor that scholars have identified as an issue in these communities (Elers et al., 2021; Starck et al., 2021; Teevale, 2009; Turrell, 1996).

For some of the young wāhine, sport and physical activity is a way to socialise and spend time with their friends. Tati (16) explains, “it really helped me be more confident with people. I don’t usually socialise a lot, but through sports I met new people, and through dance, I met new people. That’s how I started connecting with others.” Some of the young wāhine shared that they had formed social sport teams with their friends after they had finished high school and that they used the weekly social sport competitions as a chance to spend time together in a fun, stress free environment. Other young wāhine enjoyed ‘gymming’ with their friends as they helped motivate and keep each other accountable. This concept supports previous Indigenous scholarship where group and community participation helps maintain motivation (Lavallée, 2007; Mason et al., 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020a).

Escapism

While most of the young wāhine in our study enjoyed participating in physical activity and sport in groups, many also enjoyed exercising alone as it gave them a space to escape from their many responsibilities. Most of the young wāhine in our study had gendered and cultural responsibilities in their families such as babysitting, housework, and part-time work to help their parents financially (Thorpe, Ahmad, et al., 2023). They also field social pressures and discrimination in schools, applying for jobs and shopping (Cormack et al., 2020; Kapeli et al.,

2020; Tobler et al., 2013). Due to these external responsibilities and pressures, their participation in physical activity and sport became a stress reliever and an escape. Deena (18) explains, “For me it’s probably a way out. When you have had a long stressful day and I’m just trying to forget all about it, go to the gym. It’s just really therapeutic.” Similarly, Lene (20), who has additional family responsibilities as an older daughter and is also studying, explains:

It’s a good break from reality, I reckon. Well, for me it’s like when you’re stressed, there’s family stuff going on or school stuff going on, it’s like yes, training, I can do something I like. Even if fitness is not what I like, it’s a break from reality, and when training finishes I think ‘oh dammit, I’ve got an assessment due tonight’.

Mary (19) likes to exercise alone because it helps her de-stress and it gives her a space where nobody can interfere with her, and Nora (18) shares, “I find it as a reset. I like working out in the afternoon after all the stress with school and stuff. I like to unload by almost dying in a workout and that helps me sleep better at night-time.” These findings provide nuanced gendered and cultural differences that differs from research that suggests Indigenous peoples enjoy physical activity and sport in groups (Mason et al., 2019; A. Nelson, 2009; Stronach et al., 2016). Our findings support research where women participate for stress release (Thorpe, Brice, et al., 2023; Thorpe, O’Leary, et al., 2023), and extends this work by considering how gendered and cultural responsibilities on young wāhine shape their physical activity engagement.

Physical Activities of Choice

In this section we examine the highest participated activities the young wāhine engage in by analysing their views and experiences. Aotearoa scholars O’Brien et al. (2019) provide ethnic-specific physical activity suggestions for Māori and Pacific women (16-45 years) and share some insightful perspectives that resonate with the current study such as whanaungatanga and cultural meanings for being active. We contribute to this research by focusing specifically on younger Māori and Pasifika wāhine where we created culturally safe spaces for them to share their lived experiences.

All the young wāhine mentioned at least three activities with the more active wāhine participating in up to eleven different activities ([Table 1](#)). Although the young wāhine participated in a range of different activities, the activities with the highest participation rates were Netball (74%) and Gymming (48%). This differs from the types of participation in O’Brien

et al. (2019) which had music and dance for Pacific wāhine, and walking and floor exercises for wāhine Māori. The differences could be due to the younger age and lower number of overall participants in our study. In the following sub-sections, we evaluate the experiences and voices of the young wāhine and their participation in netball and gymming, aiming to deepen understanding of their engagement with these activities.

Netball

Our findings for the high participation numbers in this particular cohort provide some interesting insights. Most of the young wāhine started playing netball from primary school and some had been socialised into netball because of mothers or aunties who played. Deena (18) explains,

I never had a choice because my Mum was competitive in netball, so she used my height and made me play. I was twice the size of every other girl in primary school, so it was easy. One year I didn't even have to trial because they just put me straight into the top team which was kind of sad to lots of other girls.

Interestingly, not all the young wāhine wanted to play netball as some thought it was too 'girly.' This comment aligns with Marfell's (2019) research on netball which argues against the heteronormative feminine culture that is reproduced in Aotearoa and suggests that this culture be shifted to be more inclusive of alternative understandings of femininities and bodies. However, because it was a sport that most girls played, many ended up participating because they did not want to be left out and because their friends were playing.

With some young wāhine, netball became the sport that helped maintain connections with friends and family to the point where it became a normalised activity in their lives. Their reasons for continued participation included whanaungatanga which included spending time together and enjoying each other's company rather than competing. Anne-Marie (22) explains, "With netball, I do it with a lot of my family members because we've got a whanau team and a club that's been together for the last four years." Tali (19) and her friends used it as their way to keep in touch on a weekly basis. She shares, "When I was in primary school I made new friends who played netball so we all played together. I guess it's just gone from that to high school, to where we are playing now." In these examples we see that a community had been created among family and friends, where

netball became an important connecting part of their lives. This resonates with the work of Stronach et al. (2016) where sport is used as a social space for Indigenous women.

Unfortunately, not all the young wāhine had positive experiences with netball. Lene (20) shares her experiences:

I used to play serious netball for reserves team in the top grade and when I didn't get selected I was depressed. It was also really unfair for some of my friends and teammates who were trialling for netball too. They were Pasifika and had bigger bodies but they had to meet a certain weight to be considered to be selected. I was ok because I fit the weight category, but it was pretty sad for my friends because they'd do all they could. Like, they would stop eating, they would fast, do all these diet plans for nothing as they couldn't meet the weight criteria. It was really disappointing. I only play netball socially now not just because of this, but because of the culture of netball.

Lene's comments align with previous research that describes how young Pasifika wāhine are discriminated against for having larger bodies in sports such as netball (Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). Here we see a factor that has had a negative affect on participation in netball.

Gymming

Gymming was the second highest activity that the young wāhine engaged in and their reasons for this varied. Cherie (23) who is studying to be a personal trainer shares her views:

I found that free weights in the gym is quite a confidence builder. Once I got over the fear of getting used to that sort of thing and people watching, I started really enjoying it. So learning to take that a bit further is something I'm really enjoying.

Mary (19) who is studying her degree in sport also likes learning new things in the gym, explains:

I do gymming a lot by myself and with friends. I go to the one at the town centre where the pools are and to Nesian Fitness. The big thing for me is that the machines they have at the gym at the town centre, are quite basic. It's like yeah you want to do that but there's other things you want to try as well. Nesian Fitness has a whole list of neat equipment that I haven't tried before, so I like to go there to try those out too.

Here we see that the young wāhine enjoyed learning different things particularly related to lifting weights or using different machines. We acknowledge that these young wāhine possibly embraced new experiences in the gym because they were studying in the fitness

industry. Despite this, practitioners could take into consideration that learning new things in the gym can help build confidence and help maintain interest in participation for young wāhine.

Some young wāhine enjoyed doing workouts that had a variety of different exercises including HIIT (high intensity interval training) and group exercise training. Rayena (23) shares what she enjoys about training with other people:

I like the atmosphere of gym classes. I like how everyone is doing the same thing and we all push each other. I prefer pairing up for the sets because I do find myself slacking off and not pushing myself as hard as I would if I were with a buddy. I think my self-motivation has always been an issue. I doubt myself way too much and I think that just comes down to past experiences or even my own personality.

In this example, we see that working out with others helped with motivation and confidence. Many of the young wāhine joined a gym with their friends and, much like netball, used it as a social space where they would meet, enjoy each other's company and work together on improving their health and wellbeing. Once again, we see that whanaungatanga plays an important role in the choice of activity.

For practitioners, this information provides helpful insights into features that could enhance the participation levels for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. We suggest that it is not necessarily the 'type' of activity that encourages participation, but rather it includes the ability to learn something new to build confidence and to participate with friends and/or family. It is also important to take into consideration escapism (as previously mentioned) where individual choice and freedom in a gym environment is also an important feature.

Participation Perspectives

In this final section the voices of the young wāhine are amplified as they share their views on physical activity participation. It was very interesting to note that the young wāhine in this study were adamant that all Māori and Pasifika girls around their age were physically active. Norah (16) states, "I'm serious, I've never met a brown girl my age, that doesn't do something. We all play sports." Cherie (23) supports this by saying, "I can't think of anyone that does nothing. I think everyone I know does something." Tali (19) contributes thoughtfully when saying "I'm trying to think of someone who doesn't do any kind of activity, but nobody comes to mind. I feel like there should be someone but there literally is no one." Many of them

questioned the research that indicated they were a less active group and asked where this information came from. Rita (23) states,

Maybe the people who did the research think we don't do a lot of exercise but to be honest, we do a lot of stuff. All these rugby teams, most of them are Māori and Pacific Islanders. Where did they get all the information? I'm just saying, but I feel like they put us down.

We recognize that this cohort was a small number (31) and that the young wāhine most likely gravitate to other young wāhine who are also physically active, but their concerns warrant further attention. While our study does not focus on the mechanisms of large-scale data gathering, we see an opportunity for this to be explored. Similar to research conducted with young Indigenous people in other countries (Njeze et al., 2020), we suggest an intersectional strengths-based approach to conducting research with, and for them. Examining the individual, cultural and social ways young wāhine are physically active has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of the nuanced ways they can be supported.

Although the young wāhine could not think of young wāhine who were less active, they provided advice on how to improve participation. Nina (18) suggests:

I feel like the first step would definitely be a group fitness session knowing that their friends are going to be there as well. So like a friend thing, you know, encouraging them and giving them the option to come if they want. Letting them know it's going to be cool and fun and also making it free as well. Also use it as an opportunity to catch up after for lunch, or breakfast is usually a good hook.

A nuanced suggestion we see here was the use of food to encourage participation. Nina's suggestion shows that she resonated with the cultural value that food has in bringing people together, particularly for Māori and Pasifika (Akbar et al., 2022a; Nemani et al., 2023). Norah (16) adds to this and explains, "I feel like we are people-people. We were brought up to do things together with other people and that's our way of learning and meeting new people." All of the young wāhine took it upon themselves to invite anyone who was less active which supports previous research with Indigenous women where group mentorship is an important role in helping to empower each other to participate in physical activity (McGuire-Adams, 2017).

While group participation is an important factor, the costs involved in participation were identified as a barrier. The young wāhine recognised that there were many different

opportunities for participating, but that cost may be an issue: “There are so many opportunities in South Auckland. We’ve got swimming pools, and gyms everywhere. I think it’s just hard for people to find, and people just can’t afford it. It’s good that the pools are free though” (Lele, 22). To address cost, the young wāhine suggested providing free programmes for people who could not afford to participate. They mentioned that with the increased costs of living, it was likely that people would be more inclined to pay their bills and put food on the table rather than pay to go to a gym or group fitness class.

Some young wāhine provided a different perspective that related to changing their mindset around being physically active. For example, Rayena (23) explained: “Nothing can stop you from being physically active other than yourself. You don’t need to sign up to a gym, you don’t have to be good at sport. Just going for a walk around your neighbourhood it’s good for you!” Taking ownership of being physical active was something that many of the young wāhine agreed with, but they also acknowledged the difficulties of maintaining motivation. This is where being a member of a group or community assisted in participation as it provided external social motivation by encouraging a sense of belonging. Although some of these young wāhine highlight individual responsibility, it is imperative to acknowledge the underlying impacts of the social determinants of health (lack of employment, low wages, poor housing, low levels of education) that influence and affect many young wāhine living in low socio-economic regions. Some of these factors along with cultural and gendered expectations has the potential to limit opportunities to be physically active despite their best intentions.

Conclusion

Our findings align with Stronach et al. (2016) when stating that Indigenous “women are influenced by the complex amalgamation of personal, family, community, and broader societal influences” (2016, p. 22). These intersecting factors impacted the motivations, experiences, and perspectives of the young wāhine in this study. Importantly, the young wāhine included the use of cultural knowledge hauora and whanaungatanga throughout this study. This knowledge affected the ways that they engage in activity on a personal level as their motivations related to hauora which then affected their activity choices. While the young wāhine indicated that whanaungatanga and participating in groups with their friends was important, they also enjoyed the individualism and escape from responsibilities afforded by exercising. We note that although netball and gymming had the highest participation in

this study, we suggest that the underlying reasons related to whanaungatanga and learning something new to build confidence. The young wāhine also provided suggestions for practitioners which included the use of food as a tool to encourage participation, as well as providing free activities to increase affordability. An interesting finding that goes beyond the scope of this study, was how adamant they were that all young Māori and Pasifika wāhine that they knew in their demographic were indeed active. Herein we recommend that strengths-based approaches be used for physical activity and sport research with, for and by young Māori and Pasifika wāhine so their knowledge can inform policy that directly impacts them.

Table 1: Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Location/Social Situation	Physical Activity Choices
Larma	16	Samoaan – Tongan	Porirua/ High school student.	Hockey, tag rugby, touch rugby, volleyball.
Norah	16	Samoaan	Porirua/ High school student.	Basketball, netball, softball, swimming, touch rugby.
Tati	16	Māori - Samoaan	South Auckland/ High school student.	Cliff jumping, hip hop and contemporary dancing, gymming ³⁹ , netball, skateboarding,
Hera	17	Māori - Samoaan	South Auckland/Higher education.	Basketball, netball, soccer, swimming, volleyball.
Sally	17	Samoaan	Porirua/ High school student.	Netball, rugby union, volleyball.
Deena	18	Māori	South Auckland/ High school student.	Badminton, basketball, CrossFit, gymming, netball, powerlifting, sailing, sevens rugby, waka ama.
Nina	18	Māori - Samoaan	Porirua/ Higher education.	Gymming, rugby union, running, walking.
Nora	18	Samoaan - Niuean	South Auckland/ High school student.	CrossFit, netball, Olympic weightlifting, swimming, volleyball.
Mary	19	Tongan	South Auckland/ Higher education; Part time work.	Gymming, netball, sevens rugby, soccer.
Paige	19	Samoaan – Tokelau	Porirua/ High school student.	Handball, netball, rugby league, rugby union, sevens rugby, soccer, tag rugby, volleyball.
Tanya	19	Māori	Porirua/ Full time work.	Basketball, gymming, netball, running.
Tali	19	Samoaan	Porirua/ Full time work.	Basketball, hiking, netball, tag rugby, volleyball, walking.
Wenzie	19	Cook Island - Samoaan	South Auckland/ Higher education; Part time work.	CrossFit, gymming, netball, rugby league, swimming.
Lene	20	Cook Island	South Auckland/ Higher education.	Gymming, indoor netball, netball, tag rugby.
Mia	20	Samoaan – Tokelau	Porirua/ Full time work.	Netball, rugby league, rugby union, sevens rugby, tag rugby.
Toni	20	Samoaan	Porirua/ Full time work.	F45, indoor netball, netball, volleyball,
Vaitala	21	Māori - Samoaan	South Auckland/ Part time work.	Basketball, gymming, netball, skateboarding, softball, swimming, volleyball, walk the dog, walk the nephews.

Wairemana	21	Māori – Scottish - Swedish	Porirua/ Higher education.	CrossFit, Iron Māori, netball, waka ama.
Anne-Marie	22	Māori	South Auckland/ Full time work; University graduate.	Gymming, hiking, kayaking, netball, surfing.
Jean	22	Māori	Porirua/ Full time work. University graduate.	Badminton, basketball, gymming, rugby union, running, swimming, waka ama.
Lele	22	Māori - Samoan	South Auckland/ Part time work; Solo mother of one (newborn).	Basketball, gymming, netball, volleyball, walking the dog.
Cherie	23	Māori	Porirua/ Higher education.	Gymming, netball, powerlifting, running, soccer, swimming, waka ama.
Rayena	23	Māori	South Auckland/ Full time work; Mother of one (toddler).	Group fitness, gymming, playing with son, waka ama.
Rita	23	Cook Island Māori	South Auckland/ Higher education.	Cricket, gymming, running, softball, walking.
Rya	23	Samoan – Tokelau	Porirua/ Full time work.	F45, netball, rugby league, rugby union, sevens rugby, tag rugby.
Charlotte	24	Māori – Pākehā	Porirua/ Full time work.	Biking, CrossFit, hockey, Iron Māori, running, swimming.
Nadine	24	Samoan – Niuean	South Auckland/ Higher education; Part time work.	CrossFit, netball, Olympic weightlifting, rugby league, rugby union.
Rangi	24	Māori - Samoan	South Auckland/ Solo mother of two (under 5 years old)	Bodyboarding, dancing, group fitness, playing/walking kids.
Tee	24	Samoan	South Auckland/ Higher education; Part time work.	Gymming, rugby league, rugby union, soccer, tennis.
Mischa	25	Māori - Samoan	Porirua/ Part time work. Mother of one (baby). University graduate.	Netball, rugby league, umpiring rugby league.
Evelyn	25	Māori	South Auckland/ Full time work; University graduate.	Athletics, basketball, cricket, hockey, netball, softball, swimming, tee ball, volleyball, walking, yoga.

Chapter 7: Conclusion - Reflections and Future Implications

In this chapter I share the importance of this research by describing how the different strands of knowledge in each chapter are woven together, creating a tapestry of Indigenous research that can be used to better understand the lives of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in urban cities in Aotearoa. Each of the empirical chapters has amplified the voices of the young wāhine in different but important contexts and in so doing, provides new knowledge into how they view themselves in relation to their cultural identity, body image and physical activity. I begin this chapter with an explanation of the weaving process and describe how it provided the central guiding metaphor for this research. Next, I provide a brief review of the chapters by focusing on the important points followed by a summary of the key findings. This chapter and thesis will conclude with the challenges, reflections and future imaginings for research conducted with, for and by young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

The Weaving Process

Weaving holds significant cultural importance with Māori and Pacific cultures as it is a form of cultural expression that encompasses and represents, cultural identity, connection, and heritage. Weaving also creates items for everyday living within Māori and Pacific cultures such as baskets, items of clothing, mats, or hats. Some woven items carry symbolic meaning and are used as gifts or representations of significant events or ceremonies (Griffen, 2006). Each culture uses their own unique techniques and as such, no two woven pieces are the same.

There are intricate details involved in weaving that create nuances that add a distinct flavour to the final product. Sometimes, the weavers add to the nuance where their experiences, knowledge and choices shape the item being woven. Other times, the nuance comes from the natural beauty and distinctness of the materials being used. Regardless of what nuance influences the final product, the combination of the weavers and the material is what brings out the uniqueness and rarity of a woven item. In this thesis, I used weaving as an analogy and along with my supervisors, we represent the weavers. The lived experiences, stories, and voices of the young wāhine represent the materials that were used in this woven piece of knowledge.

Reflecting on this process as the main ‘weaver’, my past experiences framed the overarching focus and purpose of my research. In particular, being a mixed-ethnic Indigenous Feminist researcher was a complex and evolving journey. Although my mixed Samoan Māori

ethnicity provided multiple views and understandings, this positionality also prompted me to critically reflect on how these shaped my perspectives and how these influenced this research project. Sometimes I felt uncertain about decisions, and other times filled with confidence. This constant grappling is indicative of feminist ethics of care and the pressure further intensified when wrapped in the cultural responsibility I felt towards the young wāhine. Embracing this challenge, the art of weaving became a dynamic and spiritual process that required a never-ending respectful, sincere, and thoughtful approach.

One of the main drivers for this project was my post-graduate research where I discovered that my extensive lived experiences with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine did not resonate with research that had been conducted on them. The young wāhine who participated in this research are strong willed, confident, and physically active, yet in previous research these socio-demographic groups were portrayed as vulnerable and at risk with poor health outcomes (Firestone et al., 2021; Gray & Crichton, 2019; Mack et al., 2022; Mullane, Harwood, Warbrick, et al., 2022; Utter et al., 2010). Drawing from and aligning with research conducted with and for Indigenous young people (Cooper et al., 2019; Tang & Jardine, 2016), this research adopted a strengths-based approach by recruiting young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who were physically active. The objective was to use the cultural knowledge and lived experiences of the active wāhine to inform policy and practitioners to encourage those who are less active.

The lived experiences and voices of the 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this study represent the material used in the weaving metaphor of this thesis. Each young wāhine represents one of the threads that is woven in this thesis. While they all come from low-socioeconomic urbanised cities in Aotearoa - South Auckland and Porirua - each young wāhine was unique, and the intersections of different parts of their identities created nuances that added to the originality of this research. In particular, I focused on the intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity and culture. The intersections of their differing ethnicities, social situations, and activity choices provided a range of perspectives and experiences, but an important theme that came through included a strong connection to their cultural identities.

Aligning with international Indigenous Feminist scholars of sport and physical activity (Lavallée, 2007; McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018) who inspired the need for Indigenous Feminist scholarship in Aotearoa, I embarked on this project to provide knowledge that would potentially support young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in their own self-determination. By

weaving the voices and lived experiences of 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa, this thesis provides an original piece of scholarship, where the intersections of identity, culture, and gender are used to create knowledge that will inform policy and practice that directly impacts them.

Chapter Review

In the introduction chapter the scene was set by providing the context and objectives for this project. As the lead weaver of this thesis, a pepehā was shared followed by positioning as a mixed Māori-Samoan wahine (woman) Indigenous feminist researcher. The intersections of identity and positionality combined with lived experiences added an Indigenous lens to this research while also providing context and depth. Importantly, the weight of responsibility to ensure authenticity when conducting research with Māori and Pasifika communities was always at the forefront of decisions and actions showing reflexivity from the start. This constant reflexivity was a necessary part of the weaving process that helped ease the fluctuation of confidence levels when presenting and making decisions on findings. Most importantly, the aim was to ensure that the voices of the young wāhine were indeed amplified.

The second chapter served as the whakapapa of this project. By tracing the ancestry of this project using relevant literature, an explanation of how each strand of literature was linked and how it supports the overall purpose and structure of this project. Starting with an exploration of socio-cultural research in physical activity and sport for women, the focus then shifted to international research with, for and by Indigenous women. The whakapapa then zoomed in on Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa where the gaps in literature highlighted a need for research to be conducted with and for young wāhine to truly understand their lived experiences with physical activity. It was clear that strengths-focussed research on physical activity and sport with, and for both Māori and Pasifika wāhine was lacking. This led to the formation of the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary Research Question:

What are the embodied experiences of physically active young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. How does culture and ethnicity shape young Māori and Pasifika wāhine identity, everyday experiences, and sport and physical activity?
2. What perspectives do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine have about body image in their everyday lives, physical activity, and sport?
3. How and why do young Māori and Pasifika wāhine prioritise physical activity in their lives?

The publications and manuscripts (Chapters Four, Five and Six) aimed to answer these questions.

The Methodology chapter that is Chapter Three, introduces the first published article titled “‘You made us feel at home’: towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise.” (Nemani et al., 2023). This chapter represents the first contribution of new knowledge from this body of work. Firstly, there was an emphasis on the importance of acknowledging Māori, Pasifika, and mixed Māori-Pasifika wāhine in their own self-determination. This was achieved by weaving together two Indigenous Feminist methodologies, Mana Wahine and Masi methodology. Mana Wahine and Masi methodology values and principles such as respect, reciprocity and building genuine relationships, were woven throughout all interactions with the young wāhine. The intent was to centre their voices and ensure that they felt valued by using culturally responsive methods and practices. This article also provided examples of these methods and practices for researchers wishing to work with and for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in the future. Contributing to Indigenous Feminist researchers who conduct research with and for young women in their communities, we highlight and demonstrate the importance of using methodologies and practices that have localised cultural meanings.

Chapter Four is the first empirical chapter, which is comprised of a manuscript (currently under review) titled, “‘I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me’: Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa” (Nemani, Thorpe, Hemi, et al., 2024). This manuscript amplified the voices of the young wāhine as they shared their cultural identities in terms of who they are and how they navigate their way in society. Using intersectionality, insight is provided into the ways that gender, ethnicity, and culture impact their lives. The young wāhine shared experiences and conflicts they encountered from their interactions with other people (family members, coaches, teachers), as well as how they

have been treated in social spaces including shopping, school, and employment. In this manuscript the strength and resilience of the young wāhine is portrayed as they enact cultural pride by proudly and unashamedly grounding themselves in their cultural identities. By recognising and understanding their unique nuanced cultural identities we respected and centred their experiences and perspectives. A key finding in this manuscript are the experiences of young wāhine with mixed ethnicities who sometimes feel less authentic in their cultural identities. This knowledge and understanding of the diverse cultural identities of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine can also assist scholars wishing to conduct research with and for young wāhine, or by those who write policies that impact the lives of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

The next empirical chapter presents the views, cultural beliefs and lived experiences of the young wāhine in relation to body image. The title of the published article presenting this knowledge is; “My Thighs Can Squash You”: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies (Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). In this article we draw from Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies and centre the voices of the young wāhine on how they enacted body pride and their cultural identities regarding wellbeing and body image. One of the key findings in this article was that cultural knowledge, namely hauora, was the foundation of their understanding of wellbeing and this knowledge shaped their views on body image. Whilst acknowledging the dominant framings of Westernised beliefs related to idealised body shapes portrayed through social media, they believed in hauora, and as such, were more concerned with improving mental and spiritual aspects of their bodies while embracing their physical capabilities. This article contributes to international scholarship on body pride where cultural knowledge is used to understand Indigenous and culturally diverse understandings of body image.

The manuscript for the final empirical chapter, Chapter Six (currently under review) is titled, “Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand” (Nemani, Thorpe, Hemi, Rolleston, & Richards, 2024). In this manuscript the young wāhine share how their understanding of hauora relates to physical activity in terms of their motivations to participate, the types of activities they participate in, and their perspectives on participation. One of the key findings in this manuscript showed that for many of the young wāhine, physical activity was an escape from the responsibilities and pressures from family, work and education. While our findings also support

whanaungatanga through group activities, escapism, where the young wāhine preferred to be alone, provided a different perspective from previous research on Māori and Pacific wāhine participation in sport and physical activity (Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018; F. Palmer, 2007b). Another interesting finding was that many of the young wāhine questioned the statistics and measurement methods that indicated they were a less active group as they could not think of any 'brown' girls that were not active. This manuscript contributes to a growing body of physical activity literature conducted with, for and by Indigenous women where localised culturally specific knowledge underpins participation.

Key Findings

Important to note is that the key findings presented in this section aim to answer the research questions posed in Chapter Two and to also provide key learnings and findings as an Indigenous Feminist researcher. As such, this research provides key findings from two different perspectives; the material being woven and the weaver. The first perspective is from the voices of the young Indigenous Māori and Pasifika wāhine who provide knowledge for practitioners and people who impact their lives. The second provides key findings as an Indigenous feminist academic through contributing to knowledge on Indigenous Feminist scholarship and conducting research with and for their respective communities. To clearly distinguish between the two, findings are presented under two separate headings; The Material, and The Weaver.

The Material: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Lived Experiences

Herein I present four key findings from the voices and experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine include the following. Firstly, the young wāhine enact cultural pride in their self-determination and stand proud and strong in their cultural and sporting identities. This finding takes an intersectional approach by focusing on the cultural and gendered experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine and provides knowledge within the context of Aotearoa. Contributing to international literature that recommends fostering cultural pride with young Indigenous people who live in Westernised societies (Coppola et al., 2017; Dubnewick et al., 2018), we provide evidence that promoting cultural pride grounds young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in their respective identities and is a source of strength against the discrimination they face on a daily basis.

Secondly, mixed-ethnic wāhine shared unique perspectives and experiences as they navigated their cultural identities. While cultural pride grounded the young wāhine, we noted

that mixed-ethnic wāhine had different experiences navigating the multiplicities of their cultural values and practices. Some felt like outsiders to their culture and experienced internal conflict with their identity, whereas others embraced and felt connected to both. This knowledge contributes to mixed-ethnic identity literature (Ali, 2020; T. Carlson et al., 2022; Rocha & Webber, 2017; Vaka'uta, 2021) and provides an intersectional lens where gender and ethnicity are considered as plural and multiple, impacting young women's lives in a range of ways.

Thirdly, cultural knowledge of hauora underpins their understanding of wellbeing in relation to body image where their mental health and self-confidence in their bodies and how they function are more important than how their bodies look. This key finding contributes to international literature on body pride (Coppola et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2014; McHugh & Coppola, 2013) and provides new knowledge contextualised to young Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in Aotearoa. Drawing on body pride, the young wāhine encouraged other young wāhine to be happy with their bodies.

Finally, Hauora and whanaungatanga underpin the physical activity motivations of the young wāhine. This finding resonates with international literature with young Indigenous populations in Canada where cultural knowledge and cultural pride encourage and enhance participation (Coppola et al., 2017; Dubnewick et al., 2018; McHugh & Coppola, 2013). Culturally gendered reasons of escapism were also used as a motivator to do physical activity and the two highest participated activities were netball and gymming. This knowledge contributes to Indigenous feminist research on physical activity (Lavallée, 2007; McGuire-Adams, 2017; Stronach et al., 2016; Tang & Jardine, 2016) in the context of Aotearoa with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

These findings provide knowledge for practitioners and policy makers on how they might better understand and engage young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in areas of society that impact them.

The Weaver: Indigenous Feminist Researcher Key Findings

Herein I document the three key findings from the perspective and learning as the 'weaver'. Firstly, I came to understand, and advocate for, the importance of respecting Indigenous women in their own self-determination by sourcing and implementing methodologies and methods that are culturally and locally specific. This finding supports and contributes to

international Indigenous feminist literature (Azzarito, 2018; Lavallée, 2007; McGuire-Adams, 2020a) where it is imperative to draw from Indigenous knowledges and methodologies when conducting research with, for, and by one's own community.

Secondly, when conducting research with young Indigenous women, I learned how important it is to ensure they know and understand that they are a valued and integral part of your research and always treat them with respect. Also, it is highly important for the researcher to be adaptable as well as mentally and logistically prepared for anything. This research contributes to literature where young Indigenous and culturally diverse young women are participants and provides insights and considerations for future research conducted with and for them (Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018; Leonard et al., 2014; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010).

Lastly, as I have gained confidence in my identity as an Indigenous feminist researcher, I have come to recognize the value in my own lived experiences. My cultural and ethnic heritage is unique and is what brings nuance and novelty to this research. I also leaned upon, and learned so much from, the experiences of Indigenous Feminist academics who have gone before me to inspire and guide my work. Through my own learnings, I hope this research contributes to supporting others, particularly for mixed-ethnic Indigenous researchers (Lavallée, 2007; McGuire-Adams, 2017; Naepi, 2019a; Pihama, 2020; L. T. Smith et al., 2016).

Past and Future Dissemination

As an early career researcher my aim is to have key research findings translated into real world practice that will hopefully improve and positively impact the lives of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Acknowledging that these aspirations may take time, there are a few of factors to consider and actions that I have already taken, which could expedite this process. Firstly, I am the first and only female of three Sport New Zealand PhD Scholarship recipients. As a scholarship recipient one of my PhD supervisors was required to come from Sport New Zealand. As such, I have been very fortunate to have had constant connection and guidance from Sport New Zealand throughout all stages of my research. Consequently, I have presented different stages of my research to the Sport New Zealand research team and am also scheduled to present my findings to them in August 2024. As such, Sport New Zealand is a key connection where I will be able to discuss and share my findings with individuals who have the power to inform policy and impact change. I also had the opportunity to speak directly to Raelene Castle who is the Chief Executive Officer of Sport New Zealand. In a hui with all three

of the PhD Scholarship recipients, Ms Castle encouraged us to use the knowledge we would gain from our PhD studies to challenge Sport New Zealand. This is something I will aspire to do during my presentation of key findings in August 2024.

A dissemination that has been actioned includes the addition of one of my publications as a resource to the Child and Youth Wellbeing website that is led by The Minister for Child Poverty Reduction (*About Us / Child and Youth Wellbeing*, n.d.). The published article titled “My Thighs can Squash You”: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies (Nemani & Thorpe, 2023), was included in the Child and youth voice research findings resources. Although the impact of this article is unknown, it is promising that it has been included as a resource on this platform.

Further dissemination of my research over the past couple of years included presenting at ten different conferences and delivering content in lectures at the University of Waikato and Manukau Institute of Technology. In the first seven conferences (four international, one national, two local,) I shared the overall topic and purpose of my research which was titled, ““Weaving Culture and Fitness Practices in Aotearoa”: The role of Physical Activity in the Lives of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine” (Nemani, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e, 2022f, 2023a). The objective of these presentations was to share the importance of my research topic. I also highlighted the use of Indigenous Feminist methodologies and strengths-based research to amplify the voices of the young wāhine who are often marginalised and/or mis-represented in research that impacts them. In the following two conferences (one international, one local), I presented the key findings on body image of my first published article titled, “My thighs can squash you”: Young Māori and Pasifika wāhine celebration of strong brown bodies” (Nemani, 2023b, 2023c; Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). The last conference that I presented at was a national conference and I presented findings from my second published article. The article and presentation are titled, “You made us feel at home”: Towards Indigenous Feminist Methodologies with Young Wāhine in Sport and Exercise” (Nemani, 2023d; Nemani et al., 2023). The intent for the final three conference presentations were to share the new knowledge and concepts from my key findings on body image for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine and the importance of using Indigenous feminist methodologies.

Future dissemination of a more practical nature will take place through engagement within the South Auckland community. I am currently involved with and advise a range of

practitioners who provide different programmes for Māori and Pasifika peoples. This includes a development rugby league squad consisting of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine, a local gym in Otara, and an organisation that provides programmes to help improve the confidence and wellbeing of Pasifika people. I aim to use my findings to inform practice with the intent of improving or enhancing engagement in physical activity and sport for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. As a lecturer I will also continue to share and teach key findings with sport and health students who will be working with, and for, young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

Reflections on Challenges

Despite the valuable insights and findings presented in this research, it is important to also acknowledge and reflect on the challenges that are inevitable and inherent when conducting research. Acknowledging and discussing these is not only a necessary process to identify gaps openly and honestly in one's research, but to also provide a pathway for future research. In this section I present the challenges from my position as an Indigenous researcher and also provide perspectives that may help future Indigenous researchers.

A couple of challenges I experienced as an Indigenous researcher is that I am mixed Samoan and Māori, and I am not fluent in speaking Samoan or Māori. Not being able to speak these languages is part of my own colonisation story that I am realising now is a result of generational oppression. However, through this research process I am on the path to reclaiming and embracing my unique positionings. My inability to speak Samoan or Māori could potentially be viewed by Indigenous researchers who are Samoan and/or Māori as less authentic and therefore lacking in overall Indigenous quality. Indigenous researchers views and opinions are out of my control, however, the challenges of having mixed ethnicities and not speaking the languages of my heritage, are topics that I can provide perspective on for mixed Indigenous researchers.

Not being able to speak the language of my heritage was an internal challenge that I often battled with and is likely a challenge that other Indigenous researchers will face if they have been born and raised in a Westernised colonised society. I realise now that it is not the fault of my parents who did their best to provide my siblings and I a bright future by embracing colonised ways and inadvertently pushing parts of our ethnic culture aside. Although I feel my own personal responsibility to have learned the languages of my heritage, I also acknowledge and realise that the societal structures, values, and beliefs that formed mine and my parents' way of thinking as I was growing up played a significant role in my lack of desire to learn them.

Learning the Māori and Samoan languages have not been a priority or been important in my life until now. Now because I realise that there are elements of Māori and Samoan cultures that can only be accessed through knowing and speaking the language. Going forward, learning these languages and embracing these aspects of my culture are going to be part of my next reclamation journey.

Fortunately, my inability to speak Māori or Samoan did not hinder my ability to communicate with the young wāhine. In fact, the majority of the young wāhine also did not speak their language of heritage and those who could, did not want to speak it even when given the opportunity to do so. I had not considered that giving the young wāhine the chance to speak their language of heritage in a predominantly English-speaking interview would create feelings of anxiety. Upon reflection, I would not have asked them to share and speak their language of heritage. My learning for this is that with group interviews or discussions I will use one language that everyone can speak. Using a language that only a few can understand and speak inadvertently ‘others’ those who can *or* can’t speak it.

It is imperative to understand that being mixed Māori and Samoan creates an entirely different positionality. Not having a space in academia that reflected my ‘mixedness’ was confronting and challenging. However, while listening to the young wāhine and their lived experiences, I began to feel comfortable and was grateful to be mixed Māori and Samoan. Hearing the young wāhine sharing their stories, I was able to understand and resonate culturally with those who were Māori, Pasifika, and mixed. Often there were times when the young wāhine would look at me and say, “you know what I mean,” and indeed, I knew what they were talking about. The similarities and differences between the cultures were clear for me to see as I had a lifetime of experience with both. My mixed Indigenous insider positionality ended up being a blessing and strength because I was able to connect authentically and culturally with each of the 31 young wāhine.

Conclusion and Future Implications

The overarching aim of this research was to empower young Māori and Pasifika wāhine by amplifying their voices as they share how their cultural identities impact their views and experiences with body image and physical activity. Purposefully weaving Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies throughout the research design, I created a culturally safe space where they were able to openly and honestly share their stories and experiences (Nemani et al., 2023). Research on Indigenous women has often been conducted from deficit perspectives

that portray them as vulnerable and weak (Drawson et al., 2017). However, I have shown that the young wāhine in this project are strong, confident, and decisive. They are grounded in their cultural identities and they draw strength from cultural knowledge as they enact cultural and body pride in their understandings of well-being and body image (Coppola et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2014; Nemani & Thorpe, 2023). They use their cultural knowledge of hauora and whanaungatanga in their motivations to participate in physical activity and are adamant that young 'brown' wāhine are physically active and not at risk.

A growing body of strengths-based Indigenous feminist led research is providing authentic cultural knowledge with and for Indigenous women across the globe (McGuire-Adams, 2017, 2020b; Stronach et al., 2016). This research contributes to this growing body of literature by sharing the cultural identities, knowledge and experiences of Māori and Pasifika wāhine who live in large urban cities in Aotearoa. Contributions of cultural knowledge are provided through the experiences of the young wāhine, as well as myself as the Indigenous feminist researcher. Importantly, at the intersections of gender and ethnicity, there are nuances to cultural identity for these young Māori and Pasifika wāhine, and also opportunities for future research.

Future research endeavours could focus on expanding and exploring the cultural identities of mixed-ethnic young wāhine and how these might affect their engagement and participation in physical activity. While this project eludes to there being different experiences for mixed-ethnic young wāhine, this is a topic that warrants further investigation given the complexities they face engaging in society. Additionally, intergenerational and cultural approaches including family and community in physical activity and well-being could be explored with Māori and Pacific wāhine. Advancing these research avenues will aim to extend the work and knowledge in this research project and also provide and guide practical applications and policy initiatives that could improve the wellbeing of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

As I stand at the end of this academic journey and look to the future, I hope that the threads of knowledge presented in this thesis help to enrich the fabric of understanding for those working with and for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Every thread that has been woven represents an insight and a contribution that has created this knowledge. It is my hope that it may also inspire others to continue to extend this knowledge so that authentic,

meaningful, and impactful research can be conducted with and for young Māori and Pasifika wāhine.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Published Manuscripts in Printed Form

'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise.



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'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise

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ABSTRACT

Decades of research on Indigenous and culturally diverse young women in sport and exercise has been underpinned by deficit models where these groups are portrayed as 'lacking', 'at risk', and/or 'vulnerable'. Such approaches have been heavily critiqued for ignoring broader structural and systemic inequities that have produced such health disparities. These approaches also reproduce racialised ideologies of Indigenous and culturally diverse women where they are seen as a 'problem group' in sport, exercise and health research. Over recent years, a growing body of research is advancing culturally appropriate methodologies and methods that aim to prioritise the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous and culturally diverse women. This paper contributes to this literature by providing an example of research that used Indigenous methodologies (Mana Wahine and Māori Methodology) to engage young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa New Zealand. We start by positioning this paper in relevant literature, then detail the cultural underpinnings of the methodological approach we used. We then outline the research and offer some practical considerations in: i) recruiting young women within one's community, ii) using methods such as wānanga (meetings), digital diaries and kai (food), and iii) weaving care and reciprocity. In so doing, we highlight the importance of using locally specific feminist methodologies throughout research with, by and for young Indigenous and culturally diverse young women.

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Introduction

Indigenous and culturally diverse young women are often viewed as problematic and their multiple 'vulnerabilities' are negatively highlighted in media and policy (Clark et al. 2021; Deckert 2020). This deficit view is often reproduced in the methodologies used by researchers (often those outside of these communities) investigating their sport and exercise participation. In response to such problematic approaches, a growing body of Indigenous feminist scholarship is providing alternatives including strengths-based approaches with, by and for Indigenous and culturally diverse women (Aarti et al. 2017; McGuire-Adams 2020b). Much of this research is being led by women from these communities who use culturally-specific methods and methodologies that resonate with the women in their communities. While methodologies and methods are contextualised to place and location, underpinning this work are efforts to develop 'decolonised methodologies' with and for their communities (Smith 2012). By using culturally-specific methodologies for Indigenous and culturally diverse women, researchers work to create spaces where participants feel comfortable sharing their lived experiences.

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We contribute to this growing body of literature by using the current PhD research of the first author which focuses on the sport and exercise experiences of young Māori¹ and Pasifika² wāhine.³ In this article we use the first author's research as an example of how culturally-specific methodologies and methods were used to recruit and engage young wāhine in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa). In respecting the culturally diverse lives of these young wāhine, we wove together two feminist Indigenous methodological approaches: Mana Wahine (Pihama 2020) and Masi Methodology (Naepi 2019). We start by providing context for this project and the researchers' positionings. Next, we examine Indigenous feminist literature followed by our rationale for weaving Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology. We then explain the project and provide practical examples in i) recruiting young women within one's community, ii) using wānanga,⁴ digital diaries and kai,⁵ and iii) weaving care and reciprocity. In so doing, we highlight the importance of using culturally-specific methods and methodologies when conducting research with and for Indigenous and culturally diverse young women.

Cultural context and Positionality: Māori and Pasifika cultural connections in Aotearoa

Māori have a rich culture⁶ that shapes their worldview and how they engage in society. As the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, Māori ways of life continue to flourish despite the physical, economic and symbolic violence of colonialism (Ka'ai-Mahuta 2011; Taonui 2010). Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), a treaty of cession signed between Māori and British Crown representatives in 1840, is a significant and contested document that continues to shape relations between Māori, Pākehā (NZ Europeans) and all other peoples in Aotearoa (Byrnes 1999; Hill 2010; Thomas and Waimarie Nikora 1996). Te Tiriti principles of reciprocity, active protection, partnership, equity, and equal treatment shape policy and practice in health, education, research (Smith 2012; Wilkie and Whakatauki 2005), and sport and exercise (Hapeta et al. 2019; Hapeta, Stewart-Withers, and Palmer 2019).

Pacific peoples are a collective group living in Aotearoa. They are Indigenous⁷ to their respective Islands (Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Niue, etc) and have distinct cultures. In Aotearoa they are identified using terms such as Pacific and/or Pasifika. Although Pacific and Pasifika are used interchangeably, we align with Fa'avae (2022) who explains that Pacific refers to anyone with Pacific heritage and Pasifika refers to Pacific people who were born and raised in Aotearoa. Most Pacific people living in Aotearoa are Pasifika so their lived experiences with their Indigenous cultures differ from those born and raised in the Islands (Mila-Schaaf 2011).

Māori and Pacific cultural connections

Māori and Pacific peoples are connected through ancestral links as all Polynesians (Māori included) migrated from the same shores and are part of Oceania (Hill 2010; Somerville 2012). Cultural connections also exist such as shared social experiences, intermarriage and a camaraderie with being brown (Matika et al. 2021; Mila-Schaaf 2011). Māori and Pacific peoples are often framed negatively in wider social contexts including health, education, crime and poverty (Enari and Haua 2021). As various critical sport and physical education scholars have highlighted, they are often unfairly stereotyped as 'gifted' in sport and exercise and inept in education (Fitzpatrick 2013; Hokowhitu 2003a, 2003b). Conversely, while disproportionately honoured and recognised for their achievements and athleticism in sports (Palmer 2016; Schaaf 2005), various studies show lower levels of sport and physical activity participation (Stoner et al. 2016). For example, Sport New Zealand identified young Māori and Pasifika wāhine as having a heightened 'risk' of low participation in sport and exercise ('Spotlight on Deprivation: Key Findings 2019'). Such reports often fail to include the knowledge and experiences of young wāhine that would help understand 'why' they are identified

as being 'at risk'. This is where Indigenous feminist methodologies and methods could assist with engaging these young wāhine in research.

Another connection includes individuals with mixed Māori and Pacific ancestry. A YouTube series named Duality (Tahi 2023) unpacks the lived experiences of mixed Māori and Pasifika rangatahi⁸ who are described by Sir Aupito William Sio (Minister for Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa) as being, 'the Generation [of young] ... people who are brown, ... brainy, ... beautiful and bicultural' (Vaka'ut a 2021, 1). Despite this growing group of mixed ethnic rangatahi, such hybridity is rarely acknowledged in research and policy (Moeke-Maxwell 2005). To date most research in Aotearoa has kept Māori and Pasifika separate and very few combine methods and/or methodologies (Mayeda et al. 2014; Wikaire et al. 2017). We aim to address this gap by 1) conducting research with and for Māori and Pasifika wāhine (including those of mixed ethnicities), and 2) intentionally weaving culturally-specific methodologies and methods to recruit and engage them.

Researcher positionality and cultural reflexivity

As an Indigenous feminist researcher of Māori-Samoan (Pasifika) descent, the first author has unique insider positioning for this research. She has a similar ethnic and socio-economic background as the young wāhine and has worked with hundreds of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine for over thirty years as an educator, trainer, coach and church group leader. This extensive lived experience provided cultural knowledge and authenticity to this research. However, she is a different generation to the participants and as feminist youth scholars have revealed, there are generational complexities when doing research by, with and for youth from the same cultural backgrounds (Miled 2019). Given the diversity in Pasifika ethnic groups, there are also nuanced cultural differences between the young wāhine and the first author. We acknowledged and addressed these generational and cultural differences through constant thorough reflexivity.

The broader research team included Pākehā,¹⁰ Pacific, and Māori scholars that contributed different strengths, experience and knowledge. Throughout this project we regularly reflected on our individual and collective positionings and were particularly mindful of how our cultural and disciplinary positionalities were shaping this project. We came together with a shared interest in understanding how Māori and Pasifika methodologies could amplify the voices of young wāhine in research.

Literature Review: sport and exercise research on/with and by Indigenous and culturally diverse women

Decades of research on Indigenous and culturally diverse women's participation in sport and exercise has been underpinned by deficit-models where they are often seen as 'lacking', 'at risk' or 'vulnerable'. In such research, young women are portrayed as requiring interventions to improve individual sport and exercise levels, and thus overall health (Meharg et al. 2020; Roberts et al. 2017). These approaches have been heavily critiqued for ignoring broader structural and systemic inequities that have produced such health disparities. Furthermore, these approaches often reproduce racialised ideologies of Indigenous and culturally diverse women where they are portrayed as a 'problem' in sport, exercise and health research (Hyett et al. 2019; Krieg 2016). Indigenous scholars have argued that for better representation of Indigenous and culturally diverse women, the methodologies and methods used need to be culturally-specific (Courtney et al. 2020; Smith et al. 2016). In this paper we build upon and extend these arguments by focusing on methodologies and methods used with sport and exercise research by Indigenous and culturally diverse women.

Over recent years various research approaches have been developed to advance culturally-specific methods and methodologies that prioritise the lived experiences of Indigenous and culturally diverse women. These include community-based participatory research (CBPR) (Coppola et al. 2017; Sanz-Remacha et al. 2022), Postcolonial Feminist Participatory Action Research (PFPAR)

(Hayhurst, Giles, and Radforth 2015), and Narrative Inquiry (Hamzavi and Brown 2023). While there are undoubtedly strengths in such approaches, our research specifically contributes to the small but significant body of literature led by feminist Indigenous and culturally diverse women who are creating methodologies and conducting research *with and for* women in their communities (Aarti et al. 2017; Ahmad et al. 2020; McGuire-Adams 2020b). Aarti et al. (2017) explain that Indigenous or ethnic 'Other' feminists 'privilege theoretical frameworks that "speak to them", and which inform their methodological choices and methods, to provide new and original approaches to analysing sport, physical culture and the lives of ethnic "Other" girls and women' (3). Such research is guided by culturally-specific intersectional feminist and cultural practices that may not always be fully understood or acknowledged by Westernised research approaches. However, we draw strength from Lorde (2003) when stating that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (p. 27) and resonate with Stewart-Withers et al. (2017) when explaining that while research approaches such as PAR 'can work with indigenous people it is not informed by an indigenous worldview' (p. 56).

Importantly, and most relevant to this article, are culturally-specific methods and practices used by sport and exercise researchers to engage participants from Indigenous and culturally diverse communities. In Canada, methods including sharing circles and storytelling as well as cultural practices like offering tobacco have been implemented with Indigenous communities (Hudson, Spence, and McHugh 2020; Mason et al. 2019; McGuire-Adams 2020a; McHugh, Coppola, and Sinclair 2013). In Australia, an Indigenous method named 'yarning'¹¹ is used by Indigenous scholars to conduct research with their communities (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010; Walker et al. 2014). Indigenous research approaches using digital technologies and social media has also been gaining traction due to it being used by many young Indigenous peoples (Carlson and Frazer 2021; Rice et al. 2016). Importantly, culturally-specific methods and practices help provide respectful and familiar spaces for Indigenous peoples engagement in research.

An example of research that uses a culturally-specific Indigenous feminist methodology and method is the work of McGuire-Adams (2017, 2020b). In her position as an Anishinaabe woman and scholar, she developed an Anishinaabeg research paradigm for sport sociology and used it to recruit and engage women in her community. Her methods included sharing circles and story-telling and she used Anishinaabeg cultural protocols, such as offering tobacco and drawing upon spirits (McGuire-Adams 2017). Using culturally-specific practices the Anishinaabeg women authentically engaged with research in environments that they were accustomed to. Further Indigenous feminist ethics of care included encouraging the women to share their stories in their own ways and having full editing rights in their transcripts (McGuire-Adams 2020b). Here we see the implementation and practice of a culturally specific research methodology and methods by an Indigenous feminist with and for women in her community.

In Aotearoa, several research projects provide insight into the methods and methodologies that have been used to investigate the physical education and sport experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Indigenous feminist researcher Palmer (2007, 2000), conducted research with young Māori wāhine and their experiences in physical education using Kaupapa Māori¹² methodologies and methods. More recently, Pacific scholar Sotutu (2022) employed a Pasifika research paradigm and used Talanoa¹³ as the method to investigate the experiences of young Pasifika girls in junior rugby. Building on this Indigenous feminist scholarship (Palmer 2007; Sotutu 2022), we aim to contribute to literature on research with and for young Māori and/or Pasifika wāhine using culturally-specific methodologies and methods.

Māori and Pasifika feminist methodologies

I think that when research is being done on a certain population, that the research methods and approach align with the population's values and culture. People are more likely to open up and feel comfortable with people who they can relate to, and with you I felt this wholeheartedly. I was able to be vulnerable and open up about things that I've never expressed before, I was given a safe space to be vulnerable and kōrero.¹⁴ Wairemana¹⁵ (21, Māori-Pākehā)

This is the voice of a young Māori-Pākehā wahine in our research project.¹⁶ Her response reinforced the importance of using culturally-specific practices throughout the data gathering stages of this project and it confirmed our resolve to weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology. In this section we present the tenets of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology and explain how and why we wove these together for our research.

Mana Wahine

Mana Wahine is a research approach designed by, with and for Māori wahine. As a theoretical framework, Mana Wahine centres the lives, knowledge and experiences of Māori wahine (Pihama 2020; Toi 2019). It is sometimes attributed to intersectionality which explores how ethnicity and gender intersect to impact women's lives in varied ways (Simmonds 2011; Toyibah and Riyani 2022). Simmonds (2009) explains that, 'Mana wahine is about making visible Māori women's knowledges and making heard our voices and herstories. It has emerged to describe and analyse Māori women's lived realities' (4). Mana Wahine is fluid, relational and diverse as it acknowledges and respects the varied ways in which Māori wahine live their lives. It embraces self-determination and cannot be defined to a single version or truth as it encompasses and embraces the diverse ways of 'being' a Māori wahine (Pihama 2020). In research, Mana Wahine embraces methods that centre the lives and experiences of Māori wahine and it supports the choices of Māori wahine in academia who conduct research with, by and for other Māori wahine.

Masi methodology

Masi Methodology is a Pan-Pacific methodology used to centre the lives and experiences of Pacific women (Naepi 2016, 2019, 2021). In practice, Masi Methodology is the implementation of Pacific values and principles when conducting research with Pacific women. The objective is to centre 'Pacific women's voices as authoritative and having something to offer beyond the limits of the academy's understanding' (Naepi 2019, 238). Pacific principles include showing respect, acknowledging and valuing relationships, demonstrating and being aware of different cultural practices, reciprocity, and encouraging genuine participation through autonomy and decision making (Naepi 2019). Masi Methodology is currently a framework that is intended to guide a researcher conducting research with Pacific women. Although in its infancy, 'its potential to be a powerful tool for recording Pacific women's experiences of this world is unlimited' (Naepi 2019, 240).

Weaving Mana Wahine and Masi methodology

Weaving is a practice and custom used by most Pacific nations including Māori, Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji (Griffen 2006). This custom is predominantly performed by women and although each country has their own unique cultural techniques, it is understood that when weaving, women 'share stories and ideas of family and community and the world and of a woman's place in it' (Griffen 2006, 17). The act and art of weaving comprises values and cultural representations that embrace Māori and Pasifika wahine and as such, is an apt metaphor for the methodological practices we employed in this project.

Our decision to weave two Indigenous feminist methodologies into the research design was based on the first author's lived experiences as a Māori-Pasifika wahine. Understanding the tensions of having to choose either a Māori or Samoan identity and knowing the nuances between each culture, she was resolved to find a methodology that would respect the mixed cultural and ethnic identities of young wahine. In our search for a suitable methodology, we found Tangata Hourua which is a mixed Māori and Pasifika research methodology (Mullane, Harwood, and Warbrick 2022). Although some of the tenets of this suited our research, it failed to acknowledge the intersections of gender and ethnicity. Aspiring surgeons Tutone et al. (2023)

were the first Māori and Pasifika academics to weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology into their research design. Like us, their goal was to centre the voices and experiences of Māori and Pasifika wāhine while also honouring them ‘in their own self-determination’ (Tutone et al. 2023, 108). Mirroring their intentions, we also weave Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology throughout our research design.

Various scholars have expressed concern over the watering down and loss of integrity of Māori and Pasifika knowledge when methodologies are blended (Naepi 2019; Sanga and Reynolds 2017). Acknowledging such concerns, we worked reflexively with Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology throughout all stages of our research (Naepi 2015). The metaphorical process of weaving required respect for the different strands of Mana Wahine and Masi principles. At times, depending on the context, the Mana Wahine strands took precedence, and other times Masi strands were used. Sometimes both strands were used concurrently. Importantly, each strand was equally valued in the weaving process. This is where a great deal of reflexivity, cultural care, deeply embodied cultural knowledge and intuition became important. We showed respect to all the young wāhine by centring their gendered cultural multiplicities throughout our research.

Discussion: centring young wāhine using Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology

In this section, we introduce the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research project to provide context and understanding of how and why we wove Mana Wahine and Masi methodology. We then provide examples of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology in practice.

Young Māori and Pasifika wāhine

In this research there are 31 young Māori and/or Pasifika Wāhine aged 16 to 25 years old living in South Auckland (16) or Porirua¹⁷ (15). We use these locations as they are both low socio-economic communities with similar demographics situated in large, urbanised cities (Statistics New Zealand 2018; Yong et al. 2017). Of the 31 participants, sixteen wāhine have mixed-ethnicities comprising of Māori-Samoan (7), Samoan-Tokelauan (3), Samoan-Niuean (2), Cook Island-Samoan (1), Samoan-Tongan (1), and Māori-Pākehā (2). Among the remainder of the sample, seven identify as Māori and eight as Pasifika. The Pasifika wāhine come from a range of different ethnic groups (i.e. Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island) but the majority are Samoan (5). Seven were in high school, 10 in higher education, three had graduated with a qualification, 16 were employed, and four had children.

The lived realities of the young wāhine illustrate the expectations, responsibilities, and stereotypes they experience. Some come from families where they are expected to work to help pay family expenses because both parents are working – sometimes two jobs. Many have gendered domestic responsibilities (i.e. laundry, cleaning, babysitting) unlike their brothers who are encouraged to participate in sport. Some are from overcrowded intergenerational homes (two wāhine had 10 people living in a 3 bedroom home) with family members who have serious health conditions. The majority of these young wāhine described racial discrimination they face in social spaces including school, university and shopping. Mirroring other research on the everyday experiences of Māori and Pasifika wāhine (Gray Claire 2019), the young wāhine in our study believed they were regularly targeted because they were ‘brown’.

As one young wāhine expressed:

We are the main ethnicity that gets crapped on here [in Aotearoa] but I am proud to be Māori-Pasifika. I'll never want to change, you know, my ethnicity, ever! (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan-Māori)

These expectations, responsibilities and stereotypes frame their lives and reinforce the importance of using Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology to centre and respect their voices.

Mana wahine and masi methodology in practice

Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology centre and respect the voices and lives of Māori and Pacific wahine. In practice this meant ensuring each young wahine felt important, valued and integral to the research. Once a young wahine committed to participating, the first author built on that relationship and created a meaningful connection. Meaningful relationships and connections are both integral strands of Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology (Naepi 2019; Pihama 2020). The remainder of this paper outlines some cultural practices we used, focusing specifically on the considerations with i) recruiting from within one's community, ii) Wānanga, digital diaries, and kai, and iii) care and reciprocity.

Recruiting young women within your community

Our recruitment strategies were informed by research on recruiting young Indigenous women mixed with Mana Wahine and Masi principles. Mirroring current trends in recruiting young women for research, we used social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram (Thornton et al. 2016; Whitaker, Stevelink, and Fear 2017). Our recruitment was similar to research conducted with young Black and Latina women that were recruited using adults they knew and trusted (González and Grov 2022). This form of recruitment also aligns with Mana Wahine and Masi Principles through Whanaungatanga¹⁸ within one's community.

Positionality and location were key factors shaping our recruitment strategies. In South Auckland recruitment started with the first author sending personalised private messages to young wahine who she was friends with on Facebook and Instagram. Our choice to use this approach related to culturally-specific knowledge of Māori and Pasifika young wahine. In Māori and Pacific cultures, respect is given to those who are older than oneself which can lead to feelings of obligation. Sending private messages aimed to minimise this possible imbalance of power. Instead, young wahine were given time to read the invitation before deciding to participate. If they were asked face-to-face, young wahine were potentially put in a vulnerable position. Whanaungatanga was facilitated using personal contacts through home visits with friends and family, phone calls and informal conversations with past students.¹⁹ Some Western research approaches may define such recruitment strategies as strategic, purposive sampling among existing networks. However, when doing research with Māori and Pasifika, these relationships have deeper cultural meanings and are underpinned by respect, care and reciprocity (Naepi 2019).

Recruiting in Porirua was challenging because the first author had very few close contacts. The approaches used in this region differed from those in South Auckland but whanaungatanga was still a strong focal point. Drawing on research that encouraged Facebook as a recruitment tool (Thornton et al. 2016; Whitaker, Stevelink, and Fear 2017), the first author joined and shared a poster featuring a young Māori-Pasifika wahine on a number of Porirua community Facebook pages. She joined community fitness groups, sent emails and messages to different sporting communities (i.e. Porirua Basketball Association) and participated in CrossFit, F45 and community classes. Recruitment also included sending personal messages and emails with the poster to friends and family asking them to distribute it among their communities.

Interestingly, the recruitment method that yielded the most interest and engagement resonated with research by González and Grov (2022) where a trusted adult encouraged the young wahine to participate. Many of the adults who encouraged the young wahine in Porirua were their mothers or aunts who resonated with the research topic and the first author. As Māori and/or Pasifika wahine, they wanted to support the first author and in so doing reflected Mana Wahine (kotahitanga²⁰) and Masi (respect and support) principles. This demonstrates intergenerational support which highlights the importance of engaging whānau²¹ and community in recruitment.

Māori and Pasifika peoples enjoy helping their communities progress. Sharing the purpose and importance of the research project gave the young wahine a chance to feel they were being helpful

and important. Replies from some young wāhine included that they were excited and happy to support this research. However, not all wāhine wanted to be part of this research⁽⁵⁾. Using Mana Wahine and Masi principles, extra care was taken to ensure these young wāhine were not pressured by thanking them for their consideration by reassuring them that declining was not a problem. Given her prior relationships with many of the young wāhine (particularly those in South Auckland), the first author constantly reiterated that participation was free from obligation and that they had full control over decisions to leave without any repercussions.

Wānanga, digital diaries, and kai

The methods used in this research included hosting two wānanga held six to seven months apart. Young wāhine who were unable to make the group wānanga had a *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui*²² at a local restaurant of their choosing. The young wāhine were asked to document their sport and exercise experiences between the first and second wānanga. To do this we used co-participatory methods by providing a variety of options. The options included a written journal (notebooks with empowering quotes on the cover and pens were gifted to each participant regardless of their preferred method), participant-created videography or photography (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook), or a google form specifically created to document their stories. Social media options were offered because we recognised the importance of digital technologies in young women's lives (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019) as well as the use of social media for Indigenous storytelling (Carlson and Frazer 2021; Iseke 2011). These practices resonated with Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies as it involved collaboration and key decision making by placing the control of knowledge with the young wāhine (Naepi 2019; Simmonds 2009). At the first wānanga, one young wāhine asked if she could choose more than one option. We hadn't considered this, but holding fast to the Mana Wahine and Masi principles, the response was, 'Of course you can!'

The digital method options recognise that many young people use social media regularly and view it as an integral part of their everyday lives (Hsu et al. 2015; Seo et al. 2014). For Indigenous and culturally diverse communities, social media can provide opportunities for young people to reinforce their identities and build acceptance within their communities (Carlson and Frazer 2021). Some of the wāhine embraced the variety of digital methods available to record and capture their stories. One young wāhine had an Instagram page which she allowed the first author to join and follow, and another created a beautiful word document with photos and reflective comments about her experiences. Others took photos which showed them in different outdoor environments including beaches, waterfalls and walking tracks. Importantly, the young wāhine embraced these digital options as they enabled them to 'show and tell' their movement stories in a range of creative ways. Their activities included skateboarding, dancing, 'gyming',²³ waka-ama, walking and netball. When given the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own ways, these young wāhine were far from the inactive, 'at risk' group described in policy documents. Instead, they enjoyed participating in a range of physical activities in their own ways and on their own terms.

Prayer, religion and food play an important role in Māori and Pasifika peoples lives. Many family, church and community gatherings involve prayer and sharing kai. Māori and Pasifika peoples have deep cultural connections with kai and it is often used to demonstrate care and respect (Heena et al. 2022). Understanding this culturally-specific knowledge and demonstrating Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology principles, we provided kai for all wānanga and hui. The menu consisted of multiple main and side dishes, dessert, non-alcoholic beverages and snacks. This may seem excessive in Western research frameworks, however, this resonates with Māori and Pasifika values and is an important way of showing appreciation. Our provision of kai was an overt action to show the young wāhine that they are important, and that we respected them to a level where they could see we took great efforts for them. Another Māori and Pasifika cultural practice that we used included providing more food than was necessary. We also provided extra plates and cling wrap for participants to 'make a plate'²⁴ they could take home and share with their families. These cultural practices align with Mana Wahine and Masi methodology by showing respect, reciprocity and appreciation for the young wāhine and their whānau.

Care and reciprocity

When communicating with the young wāhine, Mana Wahine and Masi Methodology principles were used. This included a reassuring and gentle approach where the importance of 'having your say' and 'sharing your story' was reinforced. Mana Wahine and Masi principles were also portrayed through the flexibility, patience and problem-solving applied when working with the young wāhine. For example, transportation was often an issue. Many young wāhine needed transportation to and/or from the wānanga. This was resolved with offers to pick them up and/or drop them off wherever they needed to go (Figure 1). This occurred many times in South Auckland and Porirua illustrating that accessibility was an issue for the young wāhine. Mana Wahine and Masi principles of care were evident in the actions of taking the young wāhine to and from their destinations without hesitation. The first author was cognisant of the additional roles required of her to support the young wāhine with their participation in the research.

Being flexible also included being mentally and logistically prepared for anything. For example, some young wāhine were late, or they had to leave early, or they wanted to change times and days at short notice (Figure 2). At the very first wānanga the first author had prepared the room with extra care. She had borrowed her mother's tablecloths and bought food for more than 12 participants, yet only three turned up. Despite the initial disappointment at the low turnout the discussion was authentic, deep and meaningful. Painful experiences were shared, tears were shed, and hugs were given. Empathy and understanding of the lived realities of the young women became paramount and it reinforced the importance of being calm and kind, and always showing the young wāhine that they were indeed important.

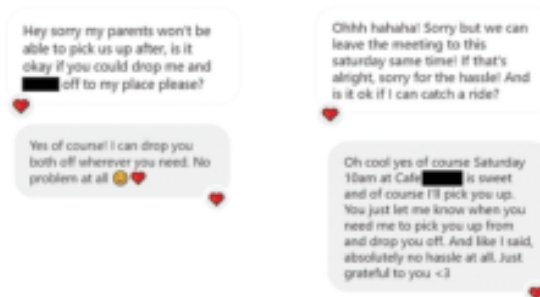


Figure 1. Examples of texts from young wāhine to the first author or demonstrating the need for support with transportation.

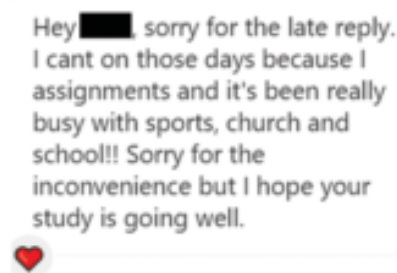


Figure 2. Example of text from a participant to the first author showing the range of commitments that needed to be navigated and why flexibility and understanding is important.

At times it can be hard to know whether young women are interpreting such gestures as they were intended. However, when asked to participate in a voluntary online post-wānanga survey, it was evident that they felt safe, valued and comfortable throughout the research process:

I did. It felt as if I could open up without getting judged with what I had to say. (Tali, 16, Māori-Samoan)

OMG YES! Very much never experienced this kind of research to recognise Pacific and Māori women in sports. Very comfortable. (Paige, 20, Samoan-Tokelauan)

Yes definitely made me feel safe and it made me open up a bit more because you are so kind and welcoming. As Māori/Pasifika people we have this nature where we naturally draw to our people whether we know them or not. But you made us feel at home and like we were just having a conversation. (Rya, 23, Samoan-Tokelauan)

With these thoughts in mind, it was important to make known to them that the choices and stories they shared throughout the research would be valued and not taken for granted. As a final gesture of gratitude, at the end of the project the young wāhine were given a koha.²⁵ This was a t-shirt that had a print of an original design created by the first author specifically for the young wāhine (Figure 3). The uniquely designed t-shirt combined Māori and Pasifika themes and was appreciated by the young wāhine who expressed their excitement and pride in wearing it. Upon receiving the t-shirt that had the words, 'Mana Wāhine – Weaving our stories of health and physical activity' printed on it, Nina (19, Samoan-Māori) responded via text message: 'Thank you so much for the t-shirt. It fits perfectly! I love it so much'.

The importance of Mana Wāhine and Masi methodological practices implemented throughout this project acknowledge the intersecting cultural and gendered identities of young Indigenous and culturally diverse women. Furthermore, Mana Wāhine and Masi methodological practices were adapted to the lives of young wāhine (i.e. use of social media methods; driving to pick up and drop off; t-shirts as koha). Through creating environments where they felt comfortable and respected, they were able to share their knowledge freely and authentically in ways that resonated with them. Existing within spaces where their voices are often not sought after or listened to (i.e. school, public spaces, policy, research), it was important to ensure that they were always welcomed, acknowledged, supported, appreciated and valued. We contend that the Mana Wāhine and Masi methodology principles and values implemented in our research empowered the young wāhine by creating environments that felt familiar to them and they were able to engage authentically in their own ways.

Final reflections

Weaving Mana Wāhine and Masi Methodology was no easy feat and it required listening and responding to the multiplicities of the cultural and gendered identities of the young wāhine. In so doing, the



Figure 3. Nora (19, Samoan-Māori) - modelling the Mana Wāhine t-shirt designed by the first author and given as koha for participation (photo used with full permission).

metaphorical process of 'weaving' required the researcher/s to 'feel' the embodied, ethical and culturally appropriate responses to and with the young wāhine. There is a weight of responsibility that comes with this work, and such approaches cannot be directly replicated. While always guided by the dual stands of Mana Wahine and Māori methodologies, there were times when one strand took greater significance, but always as part of the whole. The metaphor of weaving is powerful and useful here and we acknowledge that the researcher/s is/are integral to the process. The final product will be shaped by the aroha,²⁶ care and culturally-specific approaches used with and for their community. Using the words of Pihama (2020), we agree that 'we must not allow the colonial preoccupation with finding the singular "truth" deter us from seeking forms of analysis that can support the affirmation of our roles, status and positioning' (353). While the processes detailed in this paper are specific to the communities of young Māori and Pacific wāhine, we hope that others can take our learnings into consideration as they weave their own research in ways that are responsive to the multiplicities within and for their own communities.

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature focused on developing culturally-specific feminist methodologies with and for Indigenous and culturally diverse young women in sport and exercise (Aarti et al. 2017; McGuire-Adams 2020a). Applying Indigenous feminist methodologies are necessary to create environments and spaces that feel comfortable, respectful and familiar for young Indigenous and culturally diverse women. This allows their authentic lived experiences to be valued and acknowledged. Contextualising the experiences and finding culturally-specific methodologies for amplifying the voices of young Indigenous women is not only necessary for producing richer qualitative data, but also for providing accurate representations of who these young women are and what their needs and hopes might be.

Notes

1. Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa.
2. Pasifika is a word often used by Pacific People who live in Aotearoa to describe themselves and their communities.
3. Wāhine is woman; Wāhine is women.
4. A meeting to discuss, share, and deliberate.
5. Food.
6. We use the term culture to refer to the behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and practices of a group.
7. For clarity and consistency we will use Indigenous to represent Māori and Pasifika peoples.
8. The Māori word for young people or the younger generation. This usually refers to teenagers and young adults.
9. In this example the term bicultural means having mixed Māori and Pasifika ancestry.
10. Māori word for New Zealand European.
11. Relates to conversation that has Indigenous cultural meaning for Indigenous Australians.
12. Kaupapa Māori is research conducted with, for and by Māori.
13. Talanoa is a Pacific research methodology and method used by many Pacific scholars as it is flexibly used across Pacific ethnic groups and embraces cultural values, attitudes, and practices. As a method it is used to generate and share conversations and knowledge while creating relationships (Vaiote 2013).
14. The Māori word for talk or discuss.
15. Pseudonyms are used in this article.
16. Full ethics approval was obtained and all participants provided consent.
17. A suburb in Wellington, Aotearoa.
18. Relationships and connection.
19. Students we refer to attend the educational institution where the first author works. We did not recruit current students.
20. The concept of lifting each other up.
21. Immediate and extended family and/or groups of people who view and treat each other as though they were family.
22. Face-to-face meeting.
23. A term used by the young wāhine to describe their actions of going to train at a gym or fitness centre.
24. A phrase used to describe the action of packing food away after a meal for guests to take home and consume later.
25. Gift or donation.
26. Māori word for Love.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Article

“My Thighs Can Squash You”: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies

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Abstract: Media representations and dominant social constructions of the ‘ideal’ physique for young women are often framed through a Westernised lens that focuses on heteronormative, White able-bodied aesthetics of beauty and femininity. Until very recently, the imagery available for young women to connect with and aspire to has been highly limited, failing to represent the embodied cultural beliefs that Indigenous and culturally-minoritised young women may have towards the gendered body. In this paper, we draw upon focus groups (wānanga) and digital diaries with young, physically active Māori and Pasifika wāhine (women) in Aotearoa New Zealand, to reveal how they are making meaning out of dominant framings of beauty, and drawing upon cultural knowledge to refuse such portrayals, instead reclaiming power in their own bodies. Working at the intersection of Mana Wāhine and Māori methodologies, this article amplifies the voices of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who actively participate in sport and/or physical activity, embrace and appreciate their strong brown bodies, and are critically reading and rejecting dominant Western framings of beauty and femininity. In so doing, this paper contributes to a growing international dialogue about the need for new culturally-informed understandings of body image by young women from Indigenous and culturally marginalised communities.

Keywords: young women; body image; feminist Indigenous methodologies; Mana Wāhine; Māori methodology; Aotearoa New Zealand



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1. Introduction

Over recent decades, scholars around the world have examined the powerful role of the media in reproducing unrealistic feminine aesthetic ideals [1–5]. While the ideal body shapes and types have changed over time, Westernised views of women’s bodies continue to influence socially accepted norms that often disregard, or are contrary to, the views and perspectives of ethnic minority or ‘othered’ bodies [6–9]. With the significantly increased use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), a greater diversity of visual representations of ethnic minority and traditionally othered women’s bodies (i.e., fat, disabled) are available [10,11]. Yet, across many media outlets, the dominant narrative continues to focus on an ideal physique (i.e., thin, toned, young) related to White heteronormative standards. Numerous scholars have conducted research on young women and body image [12–16], powerfully providing evidence of the impact of such media portrayals on young women’s bodily dissatisfaction, with a heightened risk of disordered eating practices and mental health issues. To date, only a handful of scholars have focused on the ways in which young women from Indigenous and ethnic minority communities make meaning of such imagery [17,18].

In this paper, we draw upon wānanga (focus groups) and digital diaries to examine how young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (wāhine is the Māori word for woman, and wāhine (hyphenated) is the Māori word for women) (16 to 25 years) who live in Aotearoa (New Zealand) understand body image. Drawing on Indigenous feminist methodologies Mana

Wahine and Masi methodology, and an intersectional approach, we report the findings for this paper under two main themes: (1) influences on body image, and (2) navigating body-image stereotypes. As we amplify the voices of the young wahine, this article illustrates how they navigate Westernised views, and use their cultural knowledge of healthy bodies to powerfully reclaim what their bodies represent, and how they believe their bodies should be viewed.

2. Literature: Context, Positioning, and Theoretical Framing

Many academics have contributed to researching the complexities related to body image, and have provided insights, perspectives, and knowledge on the nuances of this topic [19–22]. This paper takes a socio-cultural approach, drawing upon the intersections of gender and ethnicity in relation to body image, with a particular focus on body positivity. In this section, we focus on the literature that examines body image in relation to the experiences of women from Indigenous, ethnic-minority, or ‘othered’ communities. We begin with an examination of the literature on intersectionality [23,24], to understand the nuanced experiences of women at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, then present the literature on body image, based on work conducted with Black women in America, Aboriginal women in Canada and, finally, young Māori and Pasifika women in Aotearoa.

Intersectionality is a theory created and developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw [24,25], a Black African-American civil rights advocate and Professor of Law, who saw the need for a theory that acknowledged Black women and their nuanced lived experiences. Using the intersection of gender and race, Crenshaw [23,24] centred the voices of Black women and, through their lived experiences, began to unveil the systems and structures that discriminated against them in policy and practice. Intersectionality has been used by many scholars who understand the complexities of identity for Indigenous, ethnic minority, and othered women, by revealing the structures of power and privilege that create their multiple minoritised positions in Westernised societies [26–28]. We echo the use of intersectionality by Watson, Lewis, and Moody [29], who explain that it “provides a more nuanced understanding of the ways that the history of Black women’s gender and racial oppression influence their specific body image concerns” [29] (p. 2). This paper contributes to scholarship on intersectionality by providing knowledge from young Māori and Pasifika wahine about their body-image experiences in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Recent literature on body image is showing a shift away from slim ideals, and towards more voluptuous bodies, or the ‘slim-thick’ ideal that includes having a slim waist, large breasts, and large buttocks [30,31]. Some literature identifies the turn towards more curvaceous ideals as heavily influenced by Black and Hispanic cultures, and particularly celebrities such as the Kardashian women, Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé, and Serena Williams, among others [30,32]. While these ideals have resonated with Black, Brown, and White women around the world, the new ideal to be both fat-free, toned, and curvaceous presents another largely unrealistic ideal [33]. Other literature is also showing a shift from slim to strong, wherein the slim, muscular, fit body is also being signalled as an ideal body [31,34,35]. Although the ideals may have changed from slim to slim-thick, or slim to slim-strong, they are still unrealistic and unattainable for many women.

A handful of scholars have conducted body-image research on women from Indigenous, ethnic-minoritised, and othered communities, and have identified nuanced cultural understandings that differ from White Westernised views [8,17,29,36–40]. For example, body-image research on Black women in America has highlighted a need for culturally informed methods and measures that consider their unique body-image concerns [40]. Lowy et al. [40] explain that, in addition to the influences of White standards of ideal body image, they also face cultural pressures that relate to Black women’s standards of body image relating to hair style, skin colour, and curviness. Similarly, Viladrich and colleagues [41] found Hispanic women living in the US experiencing a paradoxical body image, between the thin-fit White ideal and the “Latina curvy shape as its counter-image” [41] (p. 20). Importantly, scholars recommend that research which enables culturally-specific ideas and

knowledge of body image is necessary, as it has the potential to show the agency of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women and their lived experiences, despite the pervasiveness of White, Western ideals and the social pressures that they navigate [40,42]. While some scholars have focused on the ways in which women navigate conflicting body-image ideals between their own cultures and the dominance of White, Westernised versions of femininity and beauty, others recommend taking strengths-focused approaches, wherein body positivity can emphasise the ways that Black, Brown, and Indigenous women appreciate and embrace the uniqueness of their bodies [29].

Historically the research on body image has focused on body-image dissatisfaction [43–46]. However, recently, there has been a growing body of scholarship focused on body positivity, or having a holistic positive evaluation of your body [47]. Scholars have documented how the ‘body positive’ movement that proliferated via social media has been shaped by postfeminist discourses, and is connected to neoliberal capitalist values (i.e., consumerism, empowerment, ‘love thy self’) [48,49]. As Sastre [48] found, online body positivity discourse “more closely mirrors than challenges a neoliberal paradigm of bodily compliance” (p. 929). Despite this, a number of scholars argue that conducting research on participants with body-positive perspectives, and understanding the diverse sources of such positivity (i.e., social media, families, peers, cultural knowledge, religion), can provide a set of unique insights relating to body image that have the potential to provide tools for practitioners working in body-image-related fields [47,50–53]. Some of these characteristics include having a higher self-esteem, having a broader view on beauty ideals that go beyond physical appearance, rejecting and criticising media representations of an unrealistic body image, and having an appreciation of the functionality of their body, and a desire to practise self-care and compassion [50,51,54].

Leboeuf [55] extends the concept of body positivity, and explains that, while it is an important factor to help women embrace the unique features of their bodies, “body pride marks a step toward overcoming unwarranted shame about one’s own body and valuing all body types, especially stigmatized ones” (p. 122). Body pride is a concept that has been used across an array of contexts, including among the disability, queer, and Fat communities. As Leboeuf [55] writes, “body positivity should be understood as a response to limiting body shame that can be achieved through the cultivation of proper body pride” (p. 124). Body pride has also been used to understand the body-image ideals of Indigenous, ethnic-minority, and culturally diverse groups who are influenced by Westernised body-image ideals [54]. Such work starts from culturally-informed ways of knowing the body that lead to distinctive forms of body pride and positivity, shaped less by popular social media discourse, and more by local communities and ways of understanding health and wellbeing. Thus, coupled with intersectionality, body pride has the potential to provide a framework which can be used to empower and amplify the voices of young Indigenous, ethnic-minority, and culturally diverse women.

The work of Coppola and colleagues offers a powerful example of scholars using a body-pride approach to amplify the voices of young Indigenous people [36,56,57]. One of the studies focused solely on young Aboriginal women in Canada, where the participants explained how body pride created a space for their cultural understandings of body image [36]. The young Aboriginal women in this study linked their cultural identity to body pride, and how they embraced all aspects of their bodies, which included embodied cultural practices, such as song and dance. While they acknowledged the negative body-image stereotypes associated with Aboriginal youth, they argued that body pride was more important, as it was a direct influence of their cultural identity. For them, body pride meant having resolve in their identity, which included “Being proud of who you are, [and] not being ashamed of your background” [36] (p. 324). Interestingly, the young Aboriginal women also placed the responsibility on their elders to do something to change the way in which Aboriginal people are viewed in society, and suggested that this would also help increase body pride for other young Aboriginal women [36]. Here, we see young Indigenous women using their knowledge of body image in ways that are culturally specific

for them, while placing the responsibility for facilitating positive narratives for their culture in broader society on their elders.

In Aotearoa, a few scholars have conducted research on body image specifically for Māori wāhine [58,59] and Pasifika wāhine [60,61]. Some of the themes from this work include recognising that Māori and Pasifika people generally have bigger bodies, but lower levels of 'body dissatisfaction', compared to other ethnic groups, and that they have an appreciation for how their bodies function [59–63]. While this research has provided some important cultural understandings on body image for young wāhine, over the past decade or so since these studies were conducted, there has been a significant increase in societal influences, specifically with social media, which indicates a need for more current research. There is also potential for fresh perspectives on the body-image experiences of young wāhine in Aotearoa from a mixed ethnic background. These are both areas that this research aims to address through an intersectional lens, using culturally-responsive body positivity and body pride.

A handful of scholars have conducted body positivity research on young women in Aotearoa, with the majority of the samples consisting of NZ European University students. To date, none of this research has focused specifically on the experiences of young Māori, Pasifika, or culturally-othered (we use 'culturally othered' to acknowledge young wāhine who are part of groups that share similar beliefs and experiences, such as religion or disability) wāhine [47,64,65]. Acknowledging the gap in their research, and echoing the findings of other international academics [17,38,66], Poulter and Treharne [47] highlight the need for further research to be conducted that will help with cultural and religious understandings of body image for Indigenous, ethnic minority, and othered young women.

Herein, this paper aims to contribute to the work conducted by academics, internationally and in Aotearoa, who have identified the need to understand and draw upon knowledge of body image for young women from Indigenous, ethnic minority, and othered communities. We do this by focusing on both young Māori and Pasifika wāhine, and use intersectionality, with culturally learned body positivity and body pride, to unveil the ethnic and gendered experiences that frame their lived realities.

2.1. Context: Māori and Pasifika Connections in Aotearoa

Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa who were part of the Polynesian migration, around AD 1280 [67]. Over 500 years after Māori first landed on and claimed Aotearoa as their homeland, the first White man arrived, marking the beginning of colonisation by the British Crown (hereafter, the Crown) [68]. In an attempt to maintain peace between Māori and the Crown, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) was signed, and is a living agreement between both parties. As part of this responsibility, the Crown agreed to enhance, preserve, and protect all things Māori, including the people, language, land, and culture [68]. This also means that all government agencies in Aotearoa are required to include and embed Te Ao Māori (Māori worldviews) in policy and practice.

The history of Pacific People migrating to Aotearoa is rich and diverse, as it involves the stories of people from many different countries, including Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, and Niue [69]. Currently, the majority of Pacific People living in Aotearoa were born in Aotearoa, and have lived here all their lives. They are also second or third generation to their parents or grandparents who initially migrated here, so their lived experiences are very different to those individuals who were born and raised in the Islands they are Indigenous to. Navigating their cultural identities can often be challenging, particularly if they are raised in a more Westernised or mixed-ethnic family environment [70,71]. It is important to acknowledge that the term 'Pasifika' is heavily contested with many Pacific scholars, due to it not addressing the nuances and richness from each ethnic group. It also tends to exclude some Pacific Island peoples, such as those from the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Vanuatu [71–73]. Fa'avae [74], unpacks the use of the words Pasifika and Pacific, by grounding them in the identity that they represent, as well as their respective whakapapa (genealogy and ancestral lineage). He explains that the word 'Pasifika' relates

to Pacific Island people who whakapapa from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands, as well as Pacific Island people who were born/or who have lived most of their life in Aotearoa [74]. Resonating with Fa'avae [74], we use Pasifika throughout this article as it represents the identity of the young Pasifika wāhine in our research.

There are important connections between Māori and Pasifika people, including historical ones, through Polynesian migration [75–77], and cultural ones, through language and identity [78]. They have also experienced similar social experiences relating to health, education, lower socio-economic living conditions, inter-cultural partnerships, and negative media representations [79–86]. Māori and Pasifika people have also often been grouped together in research, policy, and media, due to cultural similarities, and the disparities they experience in society compared to other ethnic groups [87–90]. Lastly, connections also exist among Māori and Pasifika who have a mixed-ethnic heritage, which in turn provides nuanced lived experiences that are gaining recognition in academia [91,92].

2.2. Cultural Context: Body Image and Hauora in Aotearoa

Indigenous scholars of Aotearoa focusing on young people's (rangatahi) health and wellbeing show that having a strong connection to their culture is highly important for better mental health [93,94]. These researchers have found that cultural identity and Indigenous ways of knowing health and wellbeing are important for supporting youth in a context where racial discrimination, inequities, and injustice continue to impact their everyday lives. In particular, Whare Tapa Wha (an Aotearoa health model) has been shown to impact and influence their engagement with health and wellbeing [95]. Whare tapa wha uses the analogy of a wharenui (a Māori meeting house that forms part of a Marae, which are meeting grounds that have a spiritual and cultural significance for Māori people; each Marae belongs to a specific Māori tribe or sub-tribe (Moeke-Pickering 1996)) which is upheld by four strong pillars. These four pillars include, "te taha tinana (physical wellbeing) ... te taha hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing) ... te taha whānau (extended family and social wellbeing) ... [and] te taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing)" [96] (p. 61). For total wellbeing, all four pillars need to be attended to, strengthened, and balanced, much like the pillars of a wharenui [95–97].

The Whare Tapa Wha model is taught in schools as a critical part of the health curriculum [95], and it also shapes the everyday experiences of rangatahi (young people) with whānau (immediate and extended family) and their wider communities. A recent qualitative report on rangatahi views of wellbeing in Aotearoa demonstrates the use of Te Whare Tapa Wha, wherein the Māori and Pasifika rangatahi referred to and used the framework to help understand their own wellbeing [98]. Research focusing on body image in Aotearoa has further illustrated that Māori and Pasifika draw upon their cultural ways of knowing to make meaning of their own and others' bodies, health, and wellbeing. For example, Houkamau and colleagues [99] conducted a large-scale study that documents how participation in traditional cultural practices that affirm cultural identity is strongly associated with higher levels of body satisfaction and self-esteem among members of the Māori population.

3. Methods

Mana Wahine and Masi methodology are the Indigenous feminist methodologies that we have used to frame this research. Mana Wahine magnifies the lived experiences and knowledge of Māori Wāhine, and it respects, protects, and centres their voices [100–102]. Similarly, Masi methodology centres and protects the voices and lived experiences of Pasifika wāhine [103–105]. We chose to weave Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, as it is important that we acknowledge the cultural heritage of both Māori and Pasifika wāhine as well as those with mixed ethnicities. We resonate with recent scholarship that has used both Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, in that we also "seek to honour both wāhine Māori and Pasifika in their own self-determination" [106] (p. 108).

This study draws upon the doctoral research of the first author, who conducted all of the data collection and led the analysis. Participants for this study were selected based on self-identifying as a wāhine, being aged between 16 and 25 years old, having Māori and/or Pasifika ancestry, and reporting past or current participation in sport or physical activity. The young wāhine either currently lived, or had previously lived, in South Auckland (a group of suburbs in Auckland) and/or Porirua (a suburb in Wellington). South Auckland and Porirua were selected as locations for this study as they have similar demographics, including having a high Māori and Pasifika population, having a lower socio-economic status, and being highly urbanised regions within large cities.

In total, there were 31 young wāhine that were recruited using the current connections of the first author, through family, friends, social media contacts, and attendance at different group fitness venues. There were 16 young wāhine from South Auckland, and 15 from Porirua, and of these young wāhine, 17 identified as Māori, and 22 identified as Pasifika (Table 1). The majority of Pasifika wāhine were of Samoan descent, and 16 young wāhine had a mixed-ethnic background, with the most common being Māori-Samoan. Participants were given an information sheet, and they all voluntarily signed a consent form agreeing to be part of this study. The young wāhine were also given the opportunity to select a pseudonym, or have one assigned for them. Their self-selected or assigned pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

We purposefully selected young wāhine who were participating in sport or physical activity, as we wanted to take a strengths-based rather than deficit-based approach to our research. Too often, young Māori and Pacific wāhine are framed by media and policies that focus on their physical and social ‘risks’ and vulnerabilities, and we intentionally sought out alternative perspectives. In so doing, there is an Indigenous feminist politic underpinning this project. We acknowledge that the young women came to this project with varied past and present experiences of participating in sport and physical activity. Some were currently participating in competitive sports (i.e., netball, weightlifting, rugby); others had stopped participating in competitive sports, but valued physical activity in their everyday lives (i.e., walking, gyming). In this paper, we acknowledge the various ways in which their past and present sport and physical activity experiences may be shaping their experiences of body image, navigating various forms of body shame, and embracing body pride.

The varied characteristics among this cohort were typical for young women aged between 16 and 25 years in Aotearoa, whose lives are transitioning in many ways that can often be challenging. For example, this cohort of young wāhine ranged from being in high school to moving out of home, being full time mothers, or pursuing tertiary studies [107]. The range of participants for this research spans a range of mixed Māori and/or Pasifika ethnicities, and covers a varied range of ages and stages of life, and as such, provides a rich depth representative of the young wāhine whose voices we amplify in this research.

Two data collection methods were used in the broader study: (i) wānanga and individual interviews, and (ii) digital diaries. Two wānanga and individual interviews were conducted six to seven months apart. In the first wānanga, the young wāhine participated in semi-structured kōrerorero (discussions), after which they were given the opportunity to choose their preferred method to diarise their sport and fitness experiences. These experiences were discussed at the second wānanga. For young wāhine who were unable to make the scheduled wānanga, an individual interview was conducted at a time and place that best suited them. At each wānanga or interview, kai (food) was provided for participants and, where appropriate, karakia (prayer) was offered to begin the proceedings.

Recognising the importance of social media and digital technologies in the everyday lives of young wāhine, we drew inspiration from research wherein young wāhine were given the option to use digital methods to document their stories [12]. The digital method options recognise that many young people, including those in low socio-economic communities, use social media regularly, and view it as an integral part of their everyday lives [108,109]. Building upon and extending this work, we offered participants a range

of options to diarise their experiences. This practice aligned with the principles of Mana Wahine and Masi methodology, wherein participants are given full control of creating and recording their own stories [106]. The options suggested, and provided, included keeping a written journal (which was provided for them), participant-created videography and/or photography, shared social media posts (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook), and also the option to use a Google Form to record and document their stories. When the young wāhine asked whether they could use a mix of the options available, aligning with Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies, the first author wholeheartedly agreed. While the digital diaries were an important aspect of the overall research project, and key themes were identified across both methods, in this paper, we draw specifically from the wānanga and interviews.

Table 1. Participant Information.

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Social Situation
South Auckland			
Deena	18	Māori	High school student.
Anne-Marie	22	Māori	Full time work; university graduate
Rayena	23	Māori	Full time work; mother of one
Evelyn Burns	25	Māori	Full time work; university graduate
Tati	16	Māori-Samoan	High school student
Hera	17	Māori-Samoan	Tertiary study
Vaitala	21	Māori-Samoan	Part time work
Lele	22	Māori-Samoan	Part time work; solo mother of one
Rangi	24	Māori-Samoan	Solo mother of two
Rita	23	Cook Island-Māori	Tertiary study
Lene	20	Cook Island	Tertiary study
Wenzie	19	Cook Island-Samoan	Tertiary study; part time work
Nora	18	Samoa-Niuean	High school student
Nadine	24	Samoa-Niuean	Tertiary study; part time work
Tee	24	Samoa	Tertiary study; part time work
Mary	19	Tongan	Tertiary study; part time work
Porirua			
Tanya	19	Māori	Full time work
Jean	22	Māori	Full time work; university graduate
Cherie	23	Māori	Tertiary study
Nina	18	Māori-Samoan	Tertiary study
Mischa	25	Māori-Samoan	Part time work; mother of one
Wairemana	21	Māori-Scottish-Swedish	Tertiary study
Charlotte	24	Māori-Pākehā	Full time work
Norah	16	Samoa	High school student
Sally	17	Samoa	High school student
Tali	19	Samoa	Full time work
Toni	20	Samoa	Full time work
Lama	16	Samoa-Tongan	High school student
Paige	19	Samoa-Tokelau	High school student
Mia	20	Samoa-Tokelau	Full time work
Rya	23	Samoa-Tokelau	Full time work

We made extensive efforts to ensure that the young wāhine felt valued and appreciated for their time, and this was demonstrated from recruitment to the final wānanga. Some of the ways in which Mana Wahine and Masi methodologies were woven throughout the data gathering included nuanced cultural practices, such as opening wānanga with a karakia; providing more kai than needed, so that the young wāhine could make a plate of food to take home to their whanau (family); and a koha (gift or a donation), in the form of a t-shirt specially designed and printed by the first author. The Mana Wahine and Masi methodology values that were practiced and implemented throughout all engagements with the young wāhine included respect, reciprocity, and authentic connections [104,110]. Practices that were adapted to the young wāhine based on their stage of life and age, included being flexible with timeframes for the interviews and/or wānanga, and picking them up from, or dropping them off at, their homes.

It is important to note the positioning of the first author in relation to this research project, as she is Māori-Samoan, and has lived and worked in the South Auckland community for most of her life. Her diverse roles in South Auckland over the past few decades have included lecturer, gym owner, trainer, group fitness instructor, and world champion athlete. These roles have provided insights into the lived experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research and many of them have been an important part of her life. While it would be remiss to assume she understands all cultural aspects of Māori and Pasifika, or that she shares the same experiences as the young wāhine in this research project, her embodied practices and lived experiences as a Māori-Samoan wāhine in and from the South Auckland community provides nuanced insider perspectives.

4. Analysis: Amplifying the Voices of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine on Body-Image Ideals

“How do you find beauty, when what is deemed beautiful, is never the reflection you see in front of you? How do you change the narrative when the stories that have been told are never the ones of your own people? Maybe it’s time for a new voice. The dawning of a new day”. [111]

This is a quote from a young Cook Island–Ghanian wāhine who is part of an Aotearoa-based online YouTube series through which young rangatahi with mixed ethnic identities share their lived experiences. We include it here, as it powerfully speaks to some of the themes in our research, and it highlights what we are aiming to achieve in this article, which is to share informed cultural knowledge of body image. In this section, we show how the young wāhine in our research are responding to dominant narratives of beauty and body image, and navigating alternative, culturally-informed ways of knowing their own bodies. In presenting our findings, we draw upon Mana Wahine and Masi methodology, which centres the voices of the young wāhine and their lived experiences, and we acknowledge them as knowledge creators, knowledge holders, and knowledge bearers [112,113]. Using a selection of quotes from wānanga, interviews and diaries, we amplify their voices across two different themes: (1) influences on body image, and (2) navigating body-image stereotypes.

4.1. Influences on Body Image

Interestingly, for the young wāhine, one of the biggest influences on their understanding of body image was connected to taha hinengaro, which is one of the pillars in the Te Whare Tapa Wha model [96]. Taha hinengaro is explained as being “your mind, heart, conscience, thoughts and feelings. It’s about how you feel, as well as how you communicate and think” [114]. Rather than focusing on the aesthetics of looking a certain way, or having a particular body type or shape, the young wāhine felt that working on and strengthening the mental and spiritual aspects of their bodies was more important. This was an overwhelmingly shared belief among all of the young wāhine.

People chase that image of looking good and having a six pack. I guess it’s different for different people, but my approach to my health is looking after my mental state and it’s spiritual things too. Like if I’m going to work out I’m working towards a goal, whether

it is rugby-related, it doesn't really have to be sports related to be honest. It's more working towards a better version of myself. I know that if I'm fit and well it just opens up so many opportunities because I'm ready, I'm prepared I know my body's prepared for opportunities. (Nina, 18, Māori-Samoan)

I think it's all about being mindset healthy and knowing when to put yourself first. Because for myself, I go out of my way a lot for other people, so knowing when to put my foot down and knowing when you deserve better. So, mindset-healthy kind of thing. (Charlotte, 24, Māori-Pakeha)

I think healthy looks when you're feeling more energised or looking better, glowing and feeling happy, and just looking after yourself more and having those positive thoughts about yourself, your body. You're not worrying about anyone else's opinion about your own body. I think healthy, like you want to change in your own way, not to fit someone else's type of body shape or what you need to look like as a woman or a girl. I think that's the best. (Tali, 19, Samoan)

The young wāhine acknowledge the benefits and necessity of being physically active (i.e., going to the gym, doing sports) and good nutrition (i.e., eating vegetables). For example, Charlotte (24, Māori-Pakeha) identified health as "Eating the right vegetables and all that kind of stuff. Maybe going to the gym once a week" (Charlotte). Importantly, the reasons behind this behaviour are not related to body image in the Westernised sense (physical aesthetics), but rather to improving self-confidence and taha hinengaro. The young wāhine are embracing their cultural knowledge by sharing their views and beliefs of body image, and these align with body pride when they encourage confidence among the young women in embracing their bodies in a way that feels good to them [55]. Here, at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, we see a view of body image through the perspectives and experiences of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research.

Although the young wāhine expressed their beliefs about how body image and well-being relate to having good mental health, and taking care of their bodies through physical activity, they were also conscious of the influences of social media in their lives and those of the people around them.

I think it's hard not to get influenced by social media, because hell, it's everywhere. Especially in this generation, social media is the number one thing...it influences the people that are growing up and that's what makes them kind of lose themselves in the process of their health, wellbeing and stuff like that. (Mary, 19, Tongan)

Some of the young wāhine were affected by some of the images on social media, and commented on how they navigated these spaces:

I used to buy into having a certain body type when I was Year 9 [roughly aged 13] on the insta-explore page. I really under-appreciated my body, but then as I got older it's really not realistic. I also noticed that a lot of models for some reason they were all white. I don't know why. I wish I had some black or some brown models on my explore page. That would have been nice. That would have influenced me. Mental health is just basically for me, it's not trying to get your mind sucked into all the social media stuff. It's all false reality, like you have to fit into a box. By leaving Instagram it helped me build up my confidence again and help my mental health to appreciate myself more. (Norah, 16, Samoan)

Sometimes I wish I could be like the Instagram body but at the same time I don't give a crap, I'm too lazy. I could if I would. But I don't have the means to at the moment. But at the same time, why do I want to look like that when I can just be myself? Just walk out with hairy legs? If no one can accept me for hairy legs then it's their problem. If I'm confident wearing hairy legs out, you know then, then cool. But like it's other people's problem, you know? (Rangi, 24, Māori-Samoan)

In these quotes, we see the young wāhine critically analysing their own and others' experiences with images on social media. The young wāhine are actively problematising the lack of diversity on some social media platforms, and expressing a desire to see more

women that look like them. They also highlight the potential of such images to have a positive influence on young wāhine.

The young wāhine are also aware of the changing media landscape, and the influences of an ideal body image through the images on social media platforms. Recognising the growing diversity in images of women's bodies, they believe that society is starting to become more accepting of all body types:

In probably 2015, [the body shape you wanted to be like] was skinny, not bones but enough to feel around your whole waist or enough to fit into size small jeans and stuff, [that] is what you need to be. But now, people are accepting that not all body types are the same... But I think other people shouldn't have an opinion on women's body type, they shouldn't really have opinions on what we should look like, to be honest, because it's the body that we have. (Tali, 19, Samoan)

Here, we see a young wāhine actively critiquing dominant body-image discourses, and instead celebrating the multiplicity of bodies. She grounds herself in these beliefs by taking the power from people who have opinions about women's bodies and nullifying them, stating that young women's bodies belong to themselves, so they should have the freedom to interpret and present them however they choose. These statements illustrate body pride, as the comments of others that could prompt feelings of shame are rejected, and the voices and beliefs of the young wāhine are uplifted and valued [55].

The young wāhine shared critical reflections on how their perspectives on body image played out in daily interactions, and how these changed as they got older:

Looking around, I'd be like oh, this girl's got a boyfriend because she looks that type of way, or people like her because she's this type of body shape. That was my mentality of thinking of it when I was younger. But once I grew up, it was more about your personality. It's more important if you're nice, if you're kind, if you have all those attributes; it's not about your body type. I wish I thought about that when I was 15. But, when I was 18, I could see how that was negative thinking, because that's just bad. But to me, my ideal one would just be one that I'm comfortable in or one that I'm not shy to show off and stuff. If you're happy with that, then you do you. (Tali, 19, Samoan)

In this example, we see development and learning in how te taha hinengaro began to increase in importance as Tali got older. She had a realisation that internal qualities, such as having a good personality and being kind, held more importance than body shape, and that her previous views when she was younger were negative. Internalising her views on body image, Tali then draws on body pride, in highlighting that not being shy, but being confident with how you feel about your body, and that being happy, whatever that might look like, is more important.

Being happy was a common narrative that was shared among the young wāhine, despite the negativity they sometimes face regarding having bigger bodies. Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) embodies the concept of being happy when sharing her response to a situation where she was told that she was getting "really fat." She responds jovially, "What do you mean I'm fat, I'm not! I'm just chubby" (laughing). Well, yeah, I'm happy. I'm happy the way I am." Despite being targeted with negative comments about how her body looks 'fat', she embraces how her body looks, and refuses to feel discouraged by these comments. Instead, she embraces the comment, then nullifies it by resolutely stating that she is happy with how she is. This also aligns with Teevale's [61] body-image research with Pacific youth, wherein one of the participants [a Tongan mother] believed that her daughter 'being happy' was more important than her being overweight.

Through an intersectional lens, we see that young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in this research presented views on body image that differ from research conducted on young White women [50]. Where the positive body-image characteristics in Wood-Barcalow et al. [50] referred to how they felt about the way their body looked in reference to the Western feminine ideals of being thin and fit, the young wāhine in this study shared views that were influenced by cultural knowledge shaped by te taha hinengaro.

4.2. Navigating Body Image Stereotypes

Many body-image stereotypes that are attributed to Māori and Pasifika include having larger bodies, and being physically dominant and ‘naturally’ athletic, particularly when compared to other ethnic groups in Aotearoa [50,115–117]. Indigenous scholars have argued against racialised ideologies relating to physical size and athleticism, as they limit the potential of Māori and Pasifika in other areas of society [116,118]. Having larger bodies also tends to frame Māori and Pasifika with having higher health risks, particularly with being overweight and/or obese, leading to higher rates of diabetes and cardiovascular health disease [119–122]. While we do not contest the health implications associated with obesity or being overweight, we argue that the socio-cultural stereotypes imposed on young Māori and Pasifika based on body size are unfair, and often unwarranted. Amplifying the voices of the young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in our research, we illustrate how they are navigating these ‘big body’ stereotypes, and enacting body pride, to powerfully claim their own bodies in public spaces and sport and fitness.

The young wāhine in our research were cognisant of the stereotypes relating to body size and were not hesitant in pointing these out. For example, Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) explained, “I think that’s the way they look at us, Islanders are big people but to be honest, I just see them as human beings”. Similarly, Mary (19, Tongan) reflected critically on stereotypes of Pasifika bodies: “Like they have big arms, yeah big arms, big bones, people look at them like, you shouldn’t be that size, or like your arms shouldn’t be like that. Sorry then God! (all laughing)”. Here we see elements of body pride, as Rita (23, Cook Island Māori) rejects the notion of the stereotypes of Islanders having big bodies by ignoring size and focusing on people as humans. Mary (19, Tongan) also demonstrates body pride, and uses sarcasm and humour to contest the negative narratives placed on the larger bodies of Māori and Pasifika wāhine. Her sarcastic statement, “Sorry then God”, is mocking people who dictate how female bodies should look. By using ‘God’, who is revered in many Pasifika cultures, and among some Māori [123,124], she is inadvertently stating that only ‘God’ has the power to dictate how things should be, and anyone else, such as those commenting on how Māori and Pasifika wāhine bodies ‘shouldn’t be’, is overstepping their position in society. The idea and audacity of an individual behaving like ‘God’ is so preposterous that her comment incited laughter from the other young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in that particular wānanga. The laughter also demonstrated understanding, and that they agreed with this comment.

Such body-image pressures not only came from social media and wider society, but also within their own communities. Some of the young wāhine fielded negative body-shaming comments from friends and family, and navigated these situations in ways that protected themselves:

Earlier on this year, when I was back at the Islands, one of my cousins... called me fat. And I was like, that’s not nice to say, but I actually take it into heart. And, yeah, and I felt like, Oh, I want to be skinny, I’m gonna start exercising, and then actually started exercising when I was in Rarua. And I never missed a day of exercising, but when I was exercising I went back to my eating, like you know just eating anything I want to... the fatty food and stuff like that. And I say to myself, am I happy? And then I said, I don’t think so and then I was like, you know what, I’m not gonna care if anyone says, ‘You’re fat’ and things like that, I’m just gonna say, ‘yeah nah, you can call me whatever you want but I don’t care’. (Rita, 23, Cook Island Māori)

In Samoa culture they take it just as a joke, “Hey, you’re getting a bit chubbier there” or “You look a bit chubby there.” It just defeats the purpose of love or is this what you’re supposed to be hearing from your aunties or your uncles and stuff? When I was a little kid I was, “ha ha, that’s funny.” But now I’m grown up, you can see how that messes with you sometimes. I just laugh it off and I’m like, nah, I like the way I look now. (Tali, 19, Samoan)

I think I'm still the same really because I blocked it all out. Well, my dad used to always say I was skinny, [but] my Mum was like no, you're fine. Yeah, and I just happened to like put a guard up when anyone would say 'oh you're too small' or 'you're getting too big'. And yeah I would just like ignore it. Just because that's just how I am. . . I'll try and keep the negativity out because it's not good for your health. (Nadine, 24, Samoan–Niuean)

Here, we see critical reflections from the young wāhine, wherein they recognised the negative views placed on them by family members (i.e., cousins, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers), and chose to reject them, by drawing on their inner self-belief of what makes them happy. We see here that they are not immune to the negative comments, and that these seem to be ongoing. Notably, the young wāhine understood the detrimental effects that harmful body-image comments could have on their health, and consciously chose to 'block it all out', instead drawing on body pride to reject negative comments. Using phrases such as, "I don't care", "I like the way I look", and "I would just ignore it", they are confidently grounding themselves in their self-belief and self-confidence, despite having to navigate these comments.

Frustration was felt by some of the young wāhine with the negativity that came from family members or other Māori and/or Pasifika people. The following response from Mary (19, Tongan) expresses frustration and concern about negative body-image behaviour from people who are supposed to be supportive:

Sometimes I want to stand up for that person cos we all come from the same place, same background, like we're all trying to make our parents proud and stuff. And like, that person may be having some problems at home and they come to school and they think coming to school as like a place where they can get their mind off the things that's happening at home. And just coming to school and having those people pick on you on your worst flaws. It just makes it even worse. And that's what leads some people to take their own life. I don't know like some people, they have the same background but they still have the audacity to come and do that to a person, like I just don't understand why you can't you just can't be nice to everyone, like my Mum has told me and my sisters, if you don't have anything nice to say don't say it at all. And just seeing how other people get treated because of just the way they look, how they weigh and like their size, like we're all, we're all not perfect, and we're all not made the same.

This was a very emotive response that resulted in tears from everyone attending that particular wānanga. There was a shared and unspoken understanding of the pain and hurt caused by negativity from within one's own community, and the mention of suicide was a stark reminder of the damaging effects of such behaviour. Sadly, the ethnic groups with the highest rates of suicide in Aotearoa are Māori and Pacific people [125], so Mary's comment and the ensuing emotion indicated lived experiences relating to this. These lived experiences of collective feelings of body shaming from many parts of society, including within their own families and communities, may also explain why the young wāhine choose the characteristics of te taha hinengaro to reframe their understanding of body image in ways that protect their own mental health and wellbeing.

Using intersectionality, our analysis also revealed interesting insights into how young Māori and Pasifika wāhine come to understand their own gendered and ethnic bodies in sport and fitness contexts. While young Māori and Pasifika tāne (men) are lauded for having big, strong, muscular physiques that serve them well in sport and physical education spaces, young wāhine are often treated in a way that is quite the opposite. Herein, the young wāhine share their experiences of navigating sport and physical education spaces where their femininity is questioned, and their bodies become sites of critique under the gaze of a Westernised lens:

They say it's like known to be ugly to be musclier than boys. Yeah, it's not feminine being muscle toned and all that. I used to get so pissed off and be like, 'oh, I'm gonna get skinny arms and all that', but it's never gonna happen (all laugh). You try but it's just like, no, it's not gonna happen, it's genetics, it's what you were born with and what God gave you.

Just continue being yourself. Just don't let anyone tell you any different. Just yeah from experience, listening to everyone's opinions, you know, I put my younger self down, so if I had a chance to tell [my younger self], I would say 'tell them to shut up and get outta my face'. (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan)

Because my male PE teacher knew I did CrossFit and, you know, CrossFit was like, just coming out and everyone's like "It's not a sport", "It's just for men", "women, aren't supposed to lift". And I think that's what got me the most then I think like a few times I'd be smart and be like, well you have chicken legs (all laughing). My thighs can squash you (more laughing). And like just growing up doing weightlifting and CrossFit and just training was like the people that I was with you could just realize, well, I'm an Islander, this is how I was built and this is what I'm made for. So like yeah, I just think of it as like it's raw strength, use it while you can, while you're young. I'm like you have this body, use it while you can. (Nadine, 24, Samoan-Niuean)

These experiences illustrate the negative attitudes young Māori and Pasifika wāhine encounter and negotiate surrounding the shape, size, and structure of their bodies. They described various instances of being discriminated against and treated unfairly because their bodies don't conform to Western standards of femininity and slim ideals. In the face of such stereotypes and treatment, however, these young wāhine powerfully claim and embrace their physical characteristics, by standing up to those who are judging them. They also use their bodies as sites of celebration of what they can do, rather than what they look like according to others' gendered and cultural expectations. The young wāhine argue against those who discriminate against them, by drawing on their own strengths ("My thighs can squash you"). Notably, Wenzie (19, Cook Island-Samoan) has recently accepted a contract to play for a prestigious Australian rugby league club, and Nadine (24, Samoan-Niuean) has represented Aotearoa internationally in weightlifting. It is important to point out that while these two young wāhine embrace their 'God given genetics' that have helped them to succeed in sport, and have used these successes to push back against cultural and gendered stereotypes, other wāhine who do not participate in sport and exercise may have different experiences and relationships with their bodies.

Another form of discrimination and stereotyping that the young wāhine had to navigate included experiences of being told they were too overweight to participate in sport:

When I played reserve league for netball, we had to be a certain weight. We had to be 65 [kg] and under. You could never go above or else you'd get dropped. There are a lot of girls that deserved the spot more than other people, but just because of the weight restriction, they were cancelled out, which I reckon was pretty unfair. Some of the girls I've played with for years put in so much work and one girl just gets it because she's skinnier. It just changes the whole point of playing netball basically. Polynesians always had the weight restriction thing. We have bigger bodies, but big bodies can do a lot of things. [They] can do just as much as a little body can. (Lene, 20, Cook Islander)

While Netball New Zealand policy guidelines identify exclusion based on weight as an unacceptable form of discrimination [126], our participants' experience suggest that such practices continue to occur, with negative consequences for Māori and Pasifika wāhine experiences in the sport. In defending the larger bodies of Pasifika wāhine, Lene (20, Cook Islander) rightly points out that "big bodies can do a lot of things".

Other young wāhine experienced weight-based stereotypes in school sports and physical education that negatively impacted their feelings about their bodies:

Once she [teacher] saw me she was like, you need to lose weight and I actually did it because I was like 'okay, this is the sports coordinator, she's gonna make me the best athlete ever.' But then I got sick [from] doing that, so I stopped. But then just hearing all the opinions from everyone about me being you know too muscly, too big. At first it made me more angry than anything, the fact that they had the audacity to tell me that I'm overweight or too big for my age. But like, it's my genetics and I can't change that about myself, and I'm proud of that, of course! (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan)

Here, we see Wenzie experiencing the negative effects (anger, frustration) of such comments, but ultimately demonstrating refusal of others' judgements, and embracing body pride.

A few young wāhine expressed disbelief and frustration at some of the stereotypes they had experienced regarding the types of sport that they were 'expected' to participate in:

At college (high school), most people wouldn't think Samoan girls would play netball. It's usually just, "I thought you played this kind of sport", like rugby and stuff because they think we're kind of like the Samoan boys. I reckon some of the girls that are Samoan have the ability to go just beyond playing at college. But I guess the other stereotype would just be that we'd do shotput and stuff, or big things that we can carry because we're of big stature and stuff. They've never seen people sprint, like in the 100 m one. I was like, oh my gosh, you've never seen a girl Samoan sprint, oh wow! (Tali, 19, Samoan)

Sometimes Islander girls are the stereotypes, like Islander girls should be playing rugby or contact, like men's sports. Not doing gymnastics and ballerina stuff. I get that one. If you're an Islander, doing gymnastics is like, oh you must be half something else. It's sad. (Mary, 19, Tongan)

In these experiences, we see that young Māori and Pasifika wāhine are 'expected' to participate in particular types of sporting activities, based on their body types. Interestingly, some of the stereotyping comes from their peers, which could be seen as an indication of complicit beliefs. This peer stereotyping is problematic, as it can unconsciously limit participation in sports and activities that are outside of their scope, which, in turn places limits on their potential. Such findings resonate with the work of Cooky and Rauscher [127], who acknowledge that the participation of young women in sport is influenced by cultural factors, including expectations from others.

Showing resilience, and a deeply rooted belief in body pride, a few of the young wāhine drew strength from their sporting abilities to counter the stereotypes they faced relating to having bigger bodies:

Being a rugby player it's, you know, you're muscley, you're, you're massive. I was, one of the biggest girls on my team. I'm not that big. Hey I'm not that big, (girls laugh reassuringly) but I was the biggest. I did reinforce my own you know attributes towards the game but then also, it's genetics like you know the muscliness, the strength. I'm gonna always have that from the stereotypes that all these people say about me. I'm not gonna, I can't hide it. I can't take my toughness away just for them, you know, so yeah I reinforce my stereotypes in a good way, like, kind of make bad into good, you know? I have my own individual strengths, like speed and stuff. (Wenzie, 19, Cook Island-Samoan)

A lot of white people, they just look at me and they're like 'oh, she's dumb, she doesn't know a lot'. Also, being a young woman, it also puts me under the bar as well because stereotypically we're weaker, meant to be weaker than males overall. Being both of those things is kind of hard because when people, mostly just white people, when they look at you it's kind of like they really underestimate you. They just look at you and think that you act a certain way. I don't like that. I guess in sport, sport really helps me to prove to people that I don't have to be a certain way. I can be really good at sport! For me, sport is the place where people can recognise you, see who you are as a person on the court or on the field. (Norah, 16, Samoan)

As these comments suggest, for some Māori and Pasifika wāhine, sport is a place they can experience success and pride in what their bodies can achieve, and thus counter White, Western stereotypes based on gendered and racist ideologies. Despite the challenges and stereotypes faced by young wāhine, they are resolutely proclaiming their strengths and beliefs on body image, and demonstrating body pride, focusing on what their bodies can do.

Some young wāhine shared their views and recommendations on how they believed body-image views could be improved for young wāhine. Cherie (23, Māori) suggests, "I

definitely think pushing more of the confidence aspect of it. Because there will be bigger young girls who will just never look like that, [slim or slim-fit] but they can look great in their own way. So having that visual representation, pushing the confidence aspect, and pushing the community and healthy women aspects". Cherie leans into the concept of body pride through promoting self-confidence, while acknowledging that some young Māori and Pasifika wāhine may have bigger bodies that will never be able to fit Westernised body-image standards. Her recommendation of having visual representations of how young wāhine can 'look good in their own way' is important for building a community of healthy women, and working towards more nuanced knowledge and advice for body-image practitioners.

Summarising the voices of the young wāhine, Mary (19, Tongan) shares her final thoughts on how females should approach body image:

I think just getting everyone, especially females to understand that we're all given our own body type and we don't have to look like that person. It's not like a must, because I see it in social media there's a lot of girls that really want to hit a specific shape or type. I'm like, just be happy with your skin and your body, your body looks nice.

Advocating body pride concepts by having an individualised appreciation of how their bodies look, Mary recommends that wāhine reject notions wherein body comparisons are made, and stop setting goals that involve striving to have a particular body shape. To all young wāhine who are having body-image concerns or struggles, she reassuringly states, 'be happy... your body looks nice'.

5. Conclusions

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature that demonstrates the importance of cultural identity in young people's understanding of health and wellbeing [94,128,129]. Working at the intersection of gender, cultural identity, and youth, our particular focus was on young Māori and Pasifika wāhine who are physically active in their everyday lives, and their understanding of body image. Drawing upon wānanga, individual interviews, and digital diaries involving 31 young Māori and Pasifika wāhine from two low socio-economic urban cities in Aotearoa, we reveal the ways in which young wāhine use cultural knowledge of taha hinengaro (which aligns with body pride) to challenge negative stereotypes, and to frame their understandings of body image. Although the young wāhine experienced negative stereotypes and body shaming in various aspects of their lives (i.e., school, sport), they draw on taha hinengaro and culturally-specific forms of body pride to embrace, and be happy with, their bodies, because their bodies belong to them.

In summary, our findings provide knowledge contextualised with, and for, young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in Aotearoa who are rejecting negative stereotypes about their bodies, and powerfully embracing how their bodies look and function. However, this article also highlights the need for those working with young Māori and Pasifika wāhine (i.e., teachers, coaches) to question some of their own assumptions, and critically reflect on how these may be negatively impacting the experiences of young Māori and Pasifika wāhine in a range of settings (i.e., school, sport). Some cultural stereotypes continue to abound and do harm. Furthermore, the dominant framings of young Māori and Pasifika bodies are out of date, and do not reflect the nuanced, culturally-informed strengths-based views that young wāhine have of their own bodies.

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Appendix 2: Co-Authorship Forms

Chapter 3: Manuscript 1 'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise



Co-Authorship Form

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Chapter 3: Methodology – 'You made us feel at home': towards Indigenous feminist methodologies with young wāhine in sport and exercise

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate

All data collection; Analysis; Full first draft; Editing (three drafts); Submission to Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health Journal; Editing reviewer comments (3 x submissions).

Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)

90

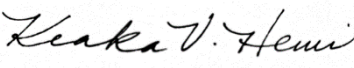
CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Holly Thorpe	Analysis; Editing; Advising; Assistance with reviewer comments.
Keaka Hemi	Analysis; Editing; Advising.
Anna Rolleston	Analysis; Editing; Advising.

Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and

Name	Signature	Date
Holly Thorpe		17/5/2024
Keaka Hemi		27/5/2024
Anna Rolleston		21/5/2024

Chapter 4: Manuscript 2 – ‘I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me’:
Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa



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**Chapter 4: ‘I take pride in my heritage and family. I carry them with me’:
Intersectional Identities of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine in Aotearoa**

Nature of contribution
by PhD candidate

All data collection; Analysis; Full first draft; Editing.

Extent of contribution
by PhD candidate (%)

90

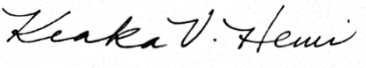
CO-AUTHORS

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Keaka Hemi	Analysis; Editing; Advising.
Anna Rolleston	Analysis; Editing; Advising.

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Chapter 5: Manuscript 3 – ‘My Thighs Can Squash You’: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies



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Chapter 5: ‘My Thighs Can Squash You’: Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine Celebration of Strong Brown Bodies

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate

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Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)

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Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and

Name	Signature	Date
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Chapter 6: Manuscript 4 – Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Chapter 6: Physical Activity of Young Māori and Pasifika Wāhine: A strengths-based qualitative study in Aotearoa New Zealand

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate

All data collection; Analysis; Full first draft; Editing.

Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)

90

CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Holly Thorpe	Analysis; Editing; Advising; Assistance with reviewer comments.
Justin Richards	Analysis; Editing; Advising.
Keaka Hemi	Analysis; Editing; Advising.
Anna Rolleston	Analysis; Editing; Advising.

Certification by Co-Authors

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Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

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Te Manu Taiko: Human Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Māori & Indigenous Studies
Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao

09/08/20

Ethics Approval

Tēnā koe e te manu hakahaka e whai atu ana i te whānuitanga me te rētōtanga o ngā kaupapa rangahau o te wā.

This letter is to confirm that Mihi Nemani has received ethical approval for the study '**The role of physical activity and fitness in the lives of Māori and Pasifika young women who live in high deprivation regions in New Zealand**'. The ethics application was reviewed by members of Te Manu Taiko and was signed off by the chair of the committee on 09/08/20. Good luck as you embark on your research.

Kimihia, rangahaua!

Associate Professor Maui Hudson
Convener, Te Manu Taiko
Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao
Faculty of Māori & Indigenous Studies