

Maori Flourishing in a Fast Changing World – An Inaugural Professorial Address

Tuesday 17 November at 6pm, Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Press release

“A strong sense of who one is and that one’s life matters is vital to health and wellbeing,” says Professor Linda Waimaire Nikora, who will deliver her Inaugural Professorial Lecture in November. “Without meaning and belonging, many people, families and communities lie open to the risk of mental illness, addiction, transience, criminality, suicide and so on,” she says. Surveying almost 30 years of research, Professor Nikora will examine some of these unwellness forces and the responses Māori make within the broader quest to remain indigenous and to flourish.



“In a rapidly changing social and technological environment, where being Māori is enacted in the face of a dominant Pakeha majority, and in an increasingly diverse Māori world, staying well is an important challenge that we cannot underestimate or take for granted,” says Professor Nikora. “There are many unwellness forces upon Māori in this fast changing world. Some are obvious and readily felt others not so easy to apprehend or explain,” she says. Of Tuhoe and Te Aitanga a Hauiti descent, Linda Waimarie Nikora is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Waikato. Her training is primarily in social, community, cross-cultural, ethno and indigenous psychology. In 1996, she established the Māori & Psychology Research Unit for research which focuses on the psychological needs, aspirations, and priorities of Māori people. From a research unit supported primarily by student work, the unit has grown to host multidisciplinary and cross-institutional research teams of excellence. Her research interests are in the area of Māori flourishing and how psychology can contribute to Māori survival, Māori uniqueness, and an improved legacy for future generations. Her recent research includes, Tangi: Māori ways of mourning; Moko: traditional body modification; ethnic status as a stressor; Māori identity development; cultural safety and competence; Māori mental health and recovery; social and economic determinants of health; homelessness; relational health; and social connectedness. She presently co-leads the multidisciplinary and inter-institutional Mauri Ora: Māori Flourishing research stream within Nga Pae o te Maramatanga, a National Centre for Research Excellence.

Professor Nikora’s lecture Māori flourishing in a fast changing world is on Tuesday 17 November at 6pm. Email for correspondence: psyc2046@waikato.ac.nz

Maori flourishing in a Fast Changing World

E rau rangatira ma, tena ra koutou. Tena ano koutou i runga i te kaupapa o te wa; ratou ki a ratou, tatou kia a tatou, tihei mauri ora. Kei te tautoko ahau nga mihi kua mihi, no reira, ha huri noa ki tenei kauhou, hei putanga whakaaro mo te iwi. Officers of the University, Vice Chancellor Quigley and Dean Hannah, tena korua. Kia koutou kua huihui mai nei i tenei po, ki Karipukau. Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Opening stories

Imagine you are at home with a child who is singing that ‘but why?’ song. You know, the child sings ‘but why?’ and you sing the next line until you end up frustrated and resort to the ‘it just is’ line. I’m sure many parents have sung this song with their children many times. I want to dwell briefly on three versions of this song. For some of you all three songs may resonate with messages you received while growing up, for others they may seem odd and unfamiliar. **The first** is really a story about socialisation and the role of schooling and education in our lives. As an institution, children are taught about pathways to achievement and success and ultimately what it means to lead a happy, well and fulfilling life.

Why do I need to go to school?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| • So you can learn | Curiosity |
| • To do well on your tests | Achievement |
| • To pass the class | Class mobility |
| • To go to university | Career and income |
| • To get a degree | Independence/Self-sufficiency/‘Me-ness’ |
| • To get a good job | Family life |
| • To make money | Happiness, purpose and meaning |
| • To make your own way in the world | |
| • To support your own family | |
| • To be happy and well off | |

Why do I need to go to the marae?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • To get to know your relatives | • Relatedness |
| • To learn how we do things | • Knowledge and competence |
| • To make our contribution | • Connectedness |
| • To take care of what is ours | • Care and protection |
| • To support the <u>kaupapa</u> | • Support |
| • To support the people | • Giving |
| • To be involved | • Engagement |
| • To take an interest | • Belonging |
| • To be a part of something | • ‘We-ness’ |
| • To know who you/we are | |

The second story is about the process of enculturation, of coming to know and embody culture and sit comfortably in its embrace. Enculturation is about being well, content and fulfilled within a context of relatedness and belonging.

After school, come straight home...

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| • So I know where you are... | • Responsibility |
| • So you’re not hanging about down the road... | • Duty of care |
| • So the school doesn’t ring me up | • Negative perceptions |
| • So the police don’t pick you up | • Avoidance |
| • So you don’t get into trouble | • Discrimination |
| • So I know you are safe in your own backyard | • Self-preservation |
| | • ‘They-ness’ |

The third story is about discrimination and marginalisation as a minority people required to live life as Maori in the face of a dominant and often discriminating Pakeha majority. By the time a child is 7 or 8 years of age,

and indeed, sometimes earlier, they are way ahead in the task of understanding these messages and integrating all three of them into their lives. Identity development is not a discrete exercise that begins at age X and is complete by age Z, it is one that continues across the whole of life, even to the very day we depart this earth.

To this end, I have to acknowledge two special and influential people in my life. My mother Makere Rangiua, and Tamaro Nikora, as parents they instilled scholarly and rigorous values. And a persistent curiosity. Both always moved forward, taking people with them, fearless, gracious, humble, wise. E ko, moe mai. E pa, tena koe.

This evening, I want to review 5 research endeavours that I have been privileged to engage. Across these 5 endeavours and the many others I have been involved with, I have been honoured to work with luminaries in their fields, like Professors James and Jane Ritchie, Professor David Thomas, Professor Darrin Hodgetts and Professor Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Doctors Hilary Lapsley, Bernard Guerin and Neville Robertson. These are some of the people who 'grew me'. While I am thankful of their patience and enduring support, sometimes I wonder about the nature of what they have grown! I am also grateful of those colleagues and associates of the Maori & Psychology Research Unit here at the University of Waikato such as Drs Michelle Levy, Mohi Rua, Bridgette Masters and Waikaremoana Waitoki. With them and the enthusiastically brilliant graduates who work with us, and those communities around the country who have partnered with us in research endeavours, I have found great pleasure, delight and satisfaction in the research pathways and knowledge we have pursued together. The work I present tonight is our work, the product of enduring relationships. No reira, kei te mihi, kei te mihi, kei te mihi.

While I'd love to tell you about the totality of what occupies our research lives, tonight I only have enough time to open a small window on a continuous stream of research interest that explores the nature of Maori identities as a good thing to have and as a foundation for wellness, meaning and flourishing.

Maori, Pakeha and New Zealander

I begin in the early 1990's. Professor David Thomas and I pursued a mutual research interest in ethnic identity. We were both interested in social policy positions that acknowledged diversity and pluralism and that sought to evolve an inclusive society, one free from prejudice and racism and that built upon our nations bicultural foundations. To this end, we were interested in better understanding how Maori and Pakeha conceived of their ethnic identities and of each other.

We developed a questionnaire which contained a number of open-ended questions about ethnic identity which were answered by 268 school aged respondents (13-17). 145 identified as Pakeha and 91 as Maori. Yes there were other participants, and ethnicity is a messy construct to capture, but for this evening, I am mainly interested in what the Maori students told us. And so we asked them: "What things about yourself and the way you live do you feel identify you as a Maori?" (asked of Maori respondents only). "When you think of people who you feel are very Maori, what is it that makes them seem Maori?"

Attributes Associated with Being Maori	
	Maori students (N=91)
Culture, customs, lifestyle	71%
Language	62%
Colour	42%
Accent	29%
Descent	25%
Tribal and kin affiliations	21%
Appearance	10%

Thomas, D. R., & Nikora, L. W. (1996). Maori, Pakeha and New Zealander: Ethnic and national identity among New Zealand students. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 17(1/2), 29-40

While physical attributes were a feature of their ethnic conceptions, they tended to emphasize cultural attributes, that is, what it meant to ‘do’ being Maori, such as engaging in cultural ways of relating, of languaging, of affiliating and being connected. While descent, colour and appearance featured, it tended to be secondary to what Maori did together in their everyday lives. It was the outcome of this study that lead me to further explore how Maori put together their lives, their sense of relatedness and identities, in order to better understand the contribution that social identities can make to wellness. This lead me to Hawaii and the second exemplar I wish to present tonight.

Maori Social Identities in New Zealand and Hawaii

Between 1994 and 1996 I set out to explore how Maori put together their cultural identities, as they related to whanau, hapu and iwi in New Zealand and Hawaii. I wanted to discover whether being Maori was the same or different in these two contexts. Of course I could have explored this same question with Maori in Australia, or the UK, or even in mainland USA, but Hawaii seemed just far enough away, yet close enough even though separated by 8 hours of air travel time at just under \$1000 return. More especially, Hawaii is one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world and at least three generations of Maori had taken up residence there.

New Zealand and Hawaii have many commonalities and of course differences. In both settings Maori are required to make decisions about the continuity of their ethnic Maori identities and hereditary cultural identities of iwi, hapu and whanau, and the part that they wish these identities to play in their lives. What I found in this study, was that **1)** the participants in New Zealand continued to value and gain meaning and satisfaction from their cultural collectivities and the social identities derived from them. However, there tended to be a movement in how they conceptualise these identities and concomitantly, how they saw themselves. **2)** Conceptions of hapu and iwi appeared to be converging, becoming one in the same, with an increasing focus on the physicality of marae, its environment and symbolism, and the social events and relationships negotiated in that space. **3)** They viewed some hapu and iwi maintenance activities as more legitimate than others. For example, more value was placed on returning to hapu and iwi homelands however irregular. Unsurprisingly, these returns were particularly for tangi, or celebrations or to visit whanau living ‘at home’.

In contrast, conceptions of hapu and iwi held by Maori in Hawaii seemed less intense. **1)** There were few opportunities to engage with other hapu or iwi members

and navigating the distance between Hawaii and New Zealand was seen as expensive and distant. Being Maori had greater meaning, rather than belonging to an iwi or hapu, and was understood, probed and valued by others in the culturally plural context of Hawaii. In short, it was easy and safe to be Maori in Hawaii. People expected you to have an ethnic identity, and to proudly share it with others.

For those in New Zealand, being Maori was enacted in the context of being a discriminated, negatively constructed minority. All were aware of the defining effect that the presence of a dominant white majority could have and countered these effects by engaging in social justice, resistance and in-group solidarity activities.

What I concluded from this research was that the changing identity conceptions held by members of Maori social groups will have implications for a sense of community, for social cohesion, for tribal asset management, service delivery and crown settlement processes. If Maori are redefining and renegotiating their social identities to achieve greater meaning and satisfaction then these changes are important to respond to and recognise.

At this point I had the opportunity to turn my attention to Mental Health and Recovery.

Kia Mauri Tau

In 1999, Hilary Lapsley, myself and Rose Black (along with a team of research interviewers) set out from the University of Waikato, to gather stories of recovery from 40 Maori and non-Maori women and men who had experienced disabling mental health problems sometime in their past. *Kia Mauri Tau!* is the report of our research project published by the Mental Health Commission. It tells of how people we spoke with: **1)** journeyed into the life-shattering experience of mental ill health; **2)** how they made their way through the recovery process; **3)** and onwards through to a place where mental health problems no longer dominated their lives.

A mental health illness can be a life shattering experience. Many of the narratives suggested a loss of personal identity to the point of unknowingness, using terms such as “gone”, “lost it”, “scattered”, “dislocation”, “out of it”, “real deep daze”, “blurb time”, “blank in my mind”, “consumes you”, “oblivion”; or a strange and alienated state of mind, such as “spaced out”, “a zombie”, “tripping out”. One phrase used by several, which suggested the chasm between normal life and becoming mentally unwell, was “lost the plot”.

Without exception, most narratives described the consequence of mental health illness as highly disruptive. There was loss of employment, partners, children, friends, whanau and other significant others. Loss of roles as fathers or mothers, or as employees or employers, or as learners engaged in tertiary education. There was also the loss of homes and freedoms especially if hospitalised, or in the case of those who were engaged in a subsequent research project, made homeless. Most significant in participants narratives was the lingering sense that one’s self and life had in some way been shattered and lost.

But this study was about recovery and a typical recover narrative went something like this: 1) I glimpsed the possibility of recovery; 2) I reached a turning point; 3) I travelled on the long road towards recovery.

For many participants, that road to recover included what we refer to as identity transitions. Most of us, I would suggest, fit comfortably into our lives as adults, and have no need to question our many identities. They just are. However, the experience of mental ill health unsettles much about life that had previously been taken for granted. Identity in adults is built on investigating “Who am I?” “Where do I

belong?” “What makes me unique?” and “How am I connected with others?” Within psychology, the notion of identity is a complex construct involving a number of dimensions, personal, social and cultural. Among people in this study, identity transitions, although they could begin suddenly, seldom meant the dramatic adoption of entirely new identities. Rather, they involved the reorganisation and revaluing of problematic, discounted or suppressed identities and shifts of group allegiance. Sometimes it was a matter of resisting family/whanau or social expectations that had been experienced as damaging, or taking on new roles and responsibilities that they were ready to step up and into. Throughout recovery, participants came to understand themselves better and to accept their individuality, at the same time exploring shifts in relationships to maximise the experience of wellness within them.

All the participants in the Kia Mauri Tau study recognized that their experience of mental ill health had changed them. Life was now different in relation to work, family and friends. They had a greater consciousness of their strengths and limitations. Many felt “sadder and wiser”, had greater understanding and tolerance and were more willing to use their story to help others. Most significant, is that they, respectively, now knew who they were and what really matter to them in life.

Kia Mauri Tau! is a phrase which asks for contentment of the spirit. It has an aura of confidence about it. A loose translation is “be happy with who you are!” Focusing on the darker side could lead us into despair. However, what participants in this study told us gives us hope and faith in people’s ability to come back from devastating experiences with new wisdom, strength and a sense of who they are and their place in the world.

Many Maori participants in the Kia Mauri Tau study spoke of how wellness was found in relationship with people and places, cultural institutions and tribal landscapes, to people passed and futures yet to be lived. In the Mau Moko study, I had the opportunity to explore with Professor Ngahaia Te Awekotuku and with colleagues Mohi Rua, Rolinda Karapu and Ariana Simpson how people and heritage are inseparable.

Mau Moko – Affirmation of Identity

Contrary to the widely held belief that the art and custom of moko—Maori skin adornment—had vanished from New Zealand communities, over the last two decades an increasingly visible number of Maori have revived and renewed the practice - taking colour into their skin. When we started the Mau Moko project in 2001, as a research team we pretty much knew every person who had a facial moko. By the end of the project, the number with adorned faces had increased beyond all expectations. Many Maori now, have ink somewhere, as do other New Zealanders, and visitors to our country who wish for a memento of their time spent here. While at one time in the care of gang members, criminals and the marginalised who sustained the practice, moko now adorns members of the NZ Police force, judges, lawyers, sporting heroes, teachers, nurses and doctors, and even officers of the Vice Chancellor! And, indeed, through the course of the study, such people were more than happy to share their adornments and journeys with moko with us.

As an indigenous people, taking moko confronts and refutes the myth of a ‘dying race’. It calls on Maori to recommit to strong Maori identities, customs and traditions and challenges the viewer to re-examine how they think of moko and behave towards moko wearers. Of those that we spoke with, the vast majority had taken moko as a conscious and considered act. All were aware that moko was often negatively perceived particularly by the Pakeha dominant majority, and sometimes by

other Maori and that they needed strategies to navigate this prickly terrain. They did this in 4 different ways.

They choose to educate others in response to engagements by curious others.

1) They also reconstructed the ways in which they presented themselves recognizing that they walked life with moko, a taonga they had to respect and care for. 2) Negative attention they mostly lifted themselves above recognizing the ignorance of racism. But some acts of discrimination they felt a responsibility to respond to and in some cases they did just that by laying complaints with the Office of the Race-Relations Conciliator; 3) They built healthy and well relationships with people who could be critical friends in spaces of familiarity and safety. Here they could retreat into conversations to rejuvenate, reassess, and reaffirm their walk with moko. 4) Lastly, they developed a keen insight and sense of themselves, the world they were in relationship with, what moko meant in their lives, and in particular, how they themselves wanted to live life. Their stories reflect the celebration of cultural resilience, resistance and continuity.

There is one more aspect of this study I want to talk about. Moko can be seen as a memento, a reminder of a different time and place, of people passed, of lives lived. In 2006, the paramount chief and leader of the Kingitanga movement, Te Arikinui Te Ataairangi Kaahu passed over. This was a collectively sad moment for the Maori world who came to Turangawaewae to mourn her passing and to mark the ascension of her son Kingi Tuheitia. Once the initial wave of grief had passed, people began turning their attention to ways in which they could remember and memorialize her life. Some spoke of establishing education scholarships, of naming buildings in her honour, and even building new buildings and monuments. There were many ideas. One small group of women, mostly from Turangawaewae choose to remember The Lady by taking moko kauae. So, over the course of one long weekend the face of Turangawaewae marae was permanently changed as 16 women engaged the process and emerged into new lives with moko kauae and stronger for it. No longer were children and mokopuna reaching out to photographs of people with moko who had passed. The reality was now right there with them, in this world.

Tangi (on-going)

It should therefore come as no surprise to you that my research interests turned to the institution of tangi. And that will have to be a conversation for another time. Let me just say that:-

The Tangi programme is multidisciplinary programme with researchers, academics and post-graduate students from a broad range of disciplines. It's a research topic that is not for the faint hearted and neither is it one to be entered into flippantly, or just for the duration of the funding. Here I wish to acknowledge the significant contributions by Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga, New Zealand's Māori Centre of Research Excellence, The Royal Society of New Zealand's Marsden Fund, and the Health Research Council. This programme of research is ongoing because there is much to learn from our end-of-life journeys, rituals and expressions. In many ways, tangi is the ultimate form of Māori cultural expression. It has prevailed as a cultural priority since earliest European contact, despite missionary and colonial impact and interference, and macabre Victorian fascination. Contemporary Aotearoa/NZ is constantly touched by tangi practice, through the popular media and through personal involvement; elements of tangi engage people every day.

While tangi has changed, evolved and responded to our contemporary contexts, the essential pattern remains. It is a general pattern that brings predictability

and acceptability during a time of critical emotional upheaval, grieving and healing. Someone there will know what to do, what comes next and what counts as doing the right thing.

Conclusions: What do these studies tell us about Maori Flourishing?

It tells us that being Maori and maintaining well identities continues as a persistent desire, important to peoples daily lives. Becoming Maori is an evolution that has taken place over hundreds of years. As it was important for previous generations, it remains so for the present. Of future generations, I know with confidence that being Maori will most certainly be different. It has to be. A culture that does not change, dies. Being Maori must remain responsive to the needs, contexts, innovations and aspirations of each generation. We must come to appreciate what we have. As a psychologist, I am always on the look out for therapeutic aspects of culture that can assist in wellness. As mentioned previously, many of our institutions have evolved over many centuries, if not thousands of years. They were not just made up yesterday. Tangi is such an institution. As a grief intervention it is highly sophisticated and efficient in mediating the potential negative impacts of grief. But we have to participate and engage with it for it to be therapeutic in our lives. Sometimes, work, education and family life prevent us from doing so. Sometimes we prevent ourselves. Appreciating what we have also means finding ways to value, to hold close and to pass on. An identity is good thing to have. But it has to be worked at. It is a life long journey of finding meaning, purpose and fulfillment. Some of us through life's challenges become more conscious of this journey than others and some more critically self reflective than others. But we don't need calamities to be visited upon us for us to develop these capacities. Healthy and well futures are made, and with a little bit of help from supportive friends and whanau, we can be future makers.

To summarise, there are five critical messages in the studies I have presented this evening. The first two studies about Maori ethnic identity, tell us that we have to be aware of our social, cultural and historical contexts and what meanings they bring into our lives whether we are here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, or abroad. The Kia Mauri Tau study and journeys through mental unwellness also demonstrate how we need to confront the traumas in our lives, find and live well in those relationships that count as meaningful, and that there is life beyond mental illness. It also tells us that we have to invest energy and care into wellness and that we have to be active in this process. All the studies illustrate resilience, a capacity to bounce back, but they also demonstrate resistance. The moko project illustrates this. Somethings are worth keeping for us now in this generation and for those to come, such as the institution of tangi. In this regard, we must recognise the brilliance and sophistication of institutions left to us by our tipuna, choose to engage in them for our own wellness, lives of meaning and flourishing futures.

No reira, kua mutu te korero. Thank you for being here with me tonight. Tena kōwhiri, tena kōwhiri, tena kōwhiri katoa.

Further reading

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