

# “EDUCATION’S NOT GOING TO GET YOU PREGNANT”

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## Narrating life’s low points, turning points and high points for Māori adolescent well-being

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### Abstract

This qualitative study highlighted commonly occurring themes from critical life event narratives for Māori adolescents and emerging adults aged between 12 and 20 years in Aotearoa New Zealand. Twelve participant critical life event narratives were examined and analysed using thematic analysis to capture a broad range of commonly occurring themes. Peer relationships, reflecting on the past for self-understanding, overcoming adversity through achievement and connecting with a wider whānau network were the most commonly occurring themes identified. In addition, themes from participants’ critical life event narratives reflected both interdependent and independent cultural orientation. Māori adolescent well-being and resilience was depicted in critical life event narratives about achievement and a connection to a wider whānau network. In particular, connection with a grandparent was found to be crucial for Māori youth well-being.

### Keywords

adolescence, Māori, narrative identity themes, well-being, qualitative

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## Introduction

Adolescence marks a significant period in development for deliberation and reflection about critical life events in an effort to create a cohesive narrative identity (Erikson, 1968; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Narrative identity is a life story constructed through an individual's experience of her social and cultural environment (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). In comparison to more general autobiographical memories, critical life events are especially vivid, self-defining, emotionally evocative and personally meaningful (Pillemer, 2001). While narrative identity is a life story in full, the research reported in this paper was focused on single critical life event narratives, such as low points, turning points and high points, as markers of narrative identity development.

Theoretically, narrative identity develops in adolescence and is considered the top layer of personality development in the multilayered theory of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Narrative identity represents the way in which individuals are least alike because cultures exert the most influence on narrative identity content. The bottom layer of personality, comprised of dispositional traits, represents the way in which individuals are most alike. For example, it has been argued that traits of extroversion, openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness are to some extent present in infancy in the form of temperament (John & Srivastava, 1999). Finally, the middle layer of personality, which develops in childhood, represents one's motivations, goals, values and hopes.

Importantly, cultural differences have been noted in the content of critical life event narratives and in the link between narrative themes and adolescent well-being. Cultures differ along dimensions of orientation between interdependence (e.g., collective, relatedness-focused) and independence (e.g., self-focused, agency-driven) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Christian European-American adults, for instance, are

thought to be more independent in their cultural orientation and may derive meaning from motivational themes such as agency (e.g., power, achievement, autonomy) and communion (e.g., love, intimacy, belongingness), or they may follow a specific narrative sequence. For example, a "redemption" sequence is a story in which something bad turns good, while a "contamination" sequence is a story in which something good turns bad (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). In contrast, Chinese adults, who are thought to be more interdependent, may highlight themes of morality and relational hierarchy (e.g., learning about the self in terms of relations with others) (Wang & Conway, 2004). Prevalent themes of European-American adolescents' critical life events are about relationships (parents and peers) and mortality (death and dying). Relationship themes in adolescent identity narratives tend to be more personally meaningful and offer greater insight into self-understanding (McLean & Pratt, 2006; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). Personal meaning and insight is linked to greater adolescent self-esteem (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). Furthermore, adolescents from European-American samples who tell redemptive stories, that is, reconstruct past negative events into more positive events, also experience greater self-esteem (McLean & Breen, 2009).

In Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter referred to as New Zealand), Edwards, McCreanor and Moewaka-Barnes (2007) found that some Māori adolescent and emerging adults' life narratives were dominated by relationship themes. Generally, mothers were described as more nurturing and fathers more "staunch". The nature of sibling relations was role-specific depending on age, and included responsibility themes. Positive relationships with grandparents, as well as aunts and uncles, were described as a safety net for most Māori youth. Finally, relationships with cousins were similar to those with peers. Overall, the centrality of relationships in the lives of Māori youth is clear. Potential positive

links between the content of identity narratives and well-being are important from an adolescent well-being perspective because of the prevalence of adolescent depression in New Zealand generally, and higher rates of suicide attempts for Māori specifically (Crengle et al., 2013).

Māori adolescent identity development is influenced to some extent by the historical and socio-political context of New Zealand. It is believed that since the arrival of British settlers in the 18th century Māori have been assimilated into the dominant Pākehā culture, and many Māori have experienced cultural alienation through rapid urbanisation and institutional racism (Durie, 1994). These socio-political factors have contributed to young Māori being at heightened risk of developing anxiety and engaging in suicide-related behaviours (Beatrais & Fergusson, 2006; Crengle et al., 2013). Identity researchers believe that positive Māori identity development requires some degree of enculturation: the process of reconnecting Māori with *te reo Māori*, *te ao Māori* and *tikanga Māori* (Durie, 1994; Houkamau & Sibley, 2011).

Māori cultural processes related to narrative identity development include the importance of oral storytelling. Some Māori experience a rich narrative environment from a young age in which narratives about the past include emphasis on relational time (e.g., placing events on a timeline) and references to internal states (e.g., physical, mental states), which are linked to child memory development (Reese, Hayne, & MacDonald, 2008). Many Māori communicate their history through the use of *whakataukī*, *pūrākāu* and *kōrero*, *karakia*, *waiata* and *whaikorero*, which still have enduring power in shaping contemporary Māori identity (Kawharu, 2008; Rewi, 2013). MacDonald, Uesiliana and Hayne (2000) have demonstrated that young Māori adults have earlier memories than other ethnicities. In their study, university students from three cultural backgrounds (New Zealand European, New Zealand Māori and

New Zealand Asian) described and dated their earliest memories. Young Māori adults dated their earliest memories back to 2.5 years on average, with New Zealand Europeans dating them back to 3.5 years and New Zealand Asians to 4 years. The authors attributed these findings to the cultural relevance of reminiscing about the past for Māori. Although some memory processes for Māori narrative identity development have been studied, research on the content of adolescent identity narratives is limited.

As well as their cultural practices, Māori can be distinguished by their cultural orientation. Māori adolescents are thought to be more interdependent but are also able to adopt an independent orientation (Harrington & Liu, 2002; Jose & Schurer, 2010). Mainstream New Zealand European culture is more independent-oriented. Research has shown that some Māori adolescents who strongly endorse independent cultural tendencies experienced greater maladjustment in terms of coping, suggesting that cultural orientation impacts on individual well-being (Jose & Schurer, 2010). However, New Zealand is considered a multicultural society and Māori identity is better conceptualised on a spectrum of belonging, as outlined in the Pōwhiri Identity Negotiation Framework (Rata, Liu, & Hutchings, 2014). It is likely that contemporary Māori adolescents experience a complex "co-existence of orientations" (Killen & Wainryb, 2000).

Taking a more nuanced approach, the current study aimed firstly to describe common themes in the low points, turning points and high points of contemporary Māori adolescents and emerging adults and verify whether the themes had previously been linked to well-being in the literature. Secondly, this research aimed to explore whether these Māori adolescent critical life event themes reflected a specific cultural orientation such as independence or interdependence, or the co-existence of both. Lastly, there was a specific aim to highlight any positive themes or story sequences for Māori adolescent identity development.

## Method

The interviews selected for the qualitative study reported here were conducted as part of a larger cross-sectional study examining Māori adolescent narrative identity development. Ninety-one Māori adolescents and emerging adults were initially interviewed as part of the larger study using the Emerging Life Story Interview technique (Reese, Chen, Jack, & Hayne, 2010). At this point it has to be acknowledged that when beginning qualitative analysis for the current study, the researcher came with previous knowledge and ideas about the data due to having conducted many of the larger study interviews, completing reliability coding, performing statistical analysis of the data, and writing up the findings. For the current qualitative study, 12 participant interviews were selected for analysis. Selection was made based on age group and gender, and was therefore not random. Because the study is focused on critical life event themes from adolescent critical life events as a function of age, 4 interviews (2 male; 2 female) were selected from 3 different age groups (4 early adolescents aged 12 to 14 years; 4 mid-adolescents aged 15 to 17 years; and 4 older adolescents aged 18 to 20 years). Participants, place names and schools have been given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes

## Data analysis

Data was analysed using thematic analysis as outlined in Braun and Clark (2006, 2013). Interviews had been transcribed in full for the larger study (Reese et al., 2014). The approach to data analysis was mainly inductive and data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher was primarily interested in coding directly from the data in order to describe the themes from the experiences of the participants themselves on a semantic but not latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis and interpretation

were informed by an overall “contextualist” framework of knowledge as opposed to a purely “essentialist” or “constructionist” framework. Beyond this broad framework, the researcher did not set out to look for instances of any specific construct, meaning or reality in the data. However, recurring themes were discussed in the context of current psychological research.

Data analysis commenced with the first of Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) six phases: familiarising oneself with the data. Because the researcher had previous knowledge of the ideas and themes from the larger study, phase two, generating initial codes, swiftly followed. In this phase obvious codes that emerged in phase one were noted and excerpts to support the codes were gathered (see Table 1). Transcripts were reread until no new or different codes were evident in the 12 interviews. Although only 12 interviews were selected for analysis, the researcher felt that this data set was representative of important themes based on her knowledge of the entire corpus of 91 interviews. At the end of this phase, 16 codes in total were generated.

Phase three, searching for themes, involved reading through the codes and the supporting excerpts and bundling the codes into separate prominent themes that occurred across the data set for more than one participant. Four themes were produced, complete with codes and extracts from participant interviews (see Table 2). Once the data set was represented with appropriate themes, phase four, reviewing potential themes, began. At the end of this phase, five final themes had been generated.

## Results and discussion

The five most commonly occurring themes from Māori adolescents’ critical life event narratives are shown in Table 3. Descriptive explanations of the five themes are provided below using representative extracts from selected interviews. Further examination with regard to the relevant

TABLE 1 Example of a code with supporting interview excerpts from different critical life events

Code	Event type	Interview excerpt
Insight into past mistakes comes with reflection and age	Low point	“... yeah cos then I started to realise that, no, that’s dumb, that’s not even cool, yeah I think I done it to be cool as well, to fit in with the friends.”
	Turning point	“... ah I think it (making friends) just made me be happier with my life cos um I suppose if I just didn’t like school back in Year 9 and just didn’t come. So it’s way better coming to school and getting grades and everything.”
	Low point	“I didn’t have perspective ... my very immature low point of my life (relationship break-up) ... and because it’s quite scary, like you can put your whole self into your education because education’s not going to get you pregnant. So I learnt after that if I’m not going to get anything back from it then don’t put so much energy into it.”

TABLE 2 Example of a theme in progress with relevant supporting codes

Theme 1	Codes
Becoming an adult—the transition to adulthood is a windy road, that is, it’s both negative and positive (adolescent-specific). Growing up, becoming independent, detaching from parents, being an adult, being self-reliant, showing that one can stand on own feet, establishing relationships with peers and of the romantic kind are the key.	Early relations key to adolescent life no matter the consequences
	Getting a life is being self-reliant
	Learning to adjust to new schooling situations
	Detachment from parents is the key to growing up
	Periods of change/transition can be unsettling and distressing for young people

TABLE 3 The five most common themes from Māori adolescents’ critical life event narratives

No.	Theme
1	Māori adolescence marks a period of peer relations
2	Constant change is common
3	Getting a life is reconciling the past and becoming the “adult” me
4	Overcoming adversity through achievement
5	Whānau: The foundation for Māori adolescent well-being

literature will be outlined in the discussion section.

***Māori adolescence marks a period of peer relations***

For many of the adolescents, creating new peer and romantic relations outside of the family and

parent context was one of the most significant events. Adolescent peer and romantic relations were contentious in nature. There was a clear mixture of both negative and positive same-age experiences. In the following positive narrative example, an 18-year-old female describes her high-point event, which involved her closest female friend:

The best thing that happened was, um me and my best friend, when we learned how to drive together . . . We were proud that we'd done it together, and that like, we were there for each other. (Miriam)

Adolescents were keen to fit into age-related groups even if they were a negative influence. In the narrative example below, the pressure to relate to peers at any cost is clearly highlighted in the low-point event of a mid-adolescent female:

I think that [her low-point event] was back in my intermediate years when I was rebelling, I didn't like my mum telling me what to do and stuff, and I would just go against whatever she said. I don't know why, I think I was just um, like the friends I was with they were bad and so I was like I'm going to be like them kind of a thing, so I never used to listen to her or my dad. (Aroha)

Yet for other adolescents, peers had a positive influence on behaviour. Prior to making these new friends, Aroha was not attending school at all, which clearly shows the positive impact adolescent peer relations can have on belonging, behaviour and therefore school attendance.

Um well at the start I was just didn't want to go [to school] I just felt like it, I was scared of um being by myself, cos I didn't really have much friends but started really liking it think it's cos I had more friends. (Aroha)

For some of the participants, it was adolescent romantic relationships that had more of an impact on their developing sense of self. As with peer relations, early romantic relations were no less intense in their involvement, and their meaning for self-definition was long-lasting. The extract below is from the low-point event narrative of a 19-year-old female:

I went out with this boy, he was a year younger than me but we went out for a long time and

it just got, it got to a stage where it was pretty dangerous, like it was, if I couldn't see him, you know, I'd, I'd be thinking like suicidal thoughts . . . I was so engulfed in everything that was around that that um it made me think yeah it's my time to start having babies you know and, you know. But it wasn't, not at all, I'm so far off that. (Anahera)

Given the huge emphasis on peer relations during the adolescent period of development noted in other cultures (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985) and the reliance on peers to explore new roles and responsibilities as adolescents seek to establish an adult identity (Bukowski, Motzoi, & Meyer, 2009), it is not surprising that creating new peer bonds was a major theme in Māori adolescent narratives. As we have seen, adolescent romantic relations were also common in Māori adolescents' critical event narratives. In some cultures, adolescent romantic relations are not encouraged—Chinese adolescents, for example, have reported far less romantic involvement compared to their Canadian counterparts because of the familial priority in Asian families (Li, Connolly, Jiang, Pepler, & Craig, 2010). Although Māori in New Zealand also have strong affiliations with whānau (family), Māori parents in our study were very accepting of adolescent romantic relations, similarly to cultures that are independently oriented such as New Zealand European culture, possibly reflecting bicultural tendencies for Māori youth (Harrington & Liu, 2002). In addition, whānau is considered to be the defining socialisation system and is highly valued among Māori. It could also be that early romantic relations are encouraged in order to make family networks bigger. What was clear, however, was that peer and romantic adolescent relationships were a major theme for young Māori in this study.

### ***Constant change is common***

As well as defining themselves by talking about their new relationships, Māori adolescents'

critical life events were described in terms of transition and change. For the most part, these changes were a struggle and real tension was apparent. Despite this tension, more often than not further insight into their sense of self was gained as a result of these transitions. In the following extract, Miriama explicitly refers to the physical changes of growing up as contributing to her low-point event.

I think I was just like getting to that emotional hormones changing and everything and I think, it was just real hard. Like, I guess I just felt real low like, there was just something dragging me down and, yeah.

In the school context, the transition from one school to another, for example, primary school to secondary school, often prompted reflection on the changing self. For Miriama, changing schools was particularly difficult because at the end of the school year she realised that she had “grown up with” the people at the Māori school she had previously attended. In her turning point event, she described the transition to a larger state school as like leaving her family behind, and thus a crucial part of herself:

When I left kura (school), when I left . . . I also left a lot of that behind when I went to Houghton. Like, it was, it became like two separate things. Um, it was real rough like, I didn’t like seeing people come and go cos like I got so used to seeing them around and then they were gone.

The theme of constant change as a common experience for Māori was important for creating meaning out of adolescent life events. Change took many forms (e.g., bodily, personality, mood, school) and was more often accompanied with a sense of tension as opposed to coherence. Research indicates that all adolescents experience a host of biological, emotional and cognitive changes in their transition to adulthood (Steinberg & Morris,

2001) so Māori adolescents are not alone in this regard. Furthermore, due to the onset of many coinciding changes, adolescents can experience declines in self-worth and self-esteem (Ryan, Shim, & Makara, 2013). One context in particular in which the participants explicitly mentioned a change associated with tension was during a school transition. One factor for consideration with the younger adolescents in our study was the transition from smaller, rural and predominantly Māori primary schools to larger public secondary schools with mixed ethnicities. Although they were not explicitly mentioned by the participants, it is possible that experiences like awareness of ethnic difference and awareness of difference in social class may have occurred as a result of school transition (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000). On top of common adolescent changes experienced, it could be that younger Māori from rural areas experienced the added pressure of reconciling their ethnic identity on arrival at their new schools, which could temporarily have contributed to lower well-being.

***Getting a life is reconciling the past and becoming the “adult” me***

This theme continued the self-development aspect of the previous theme, but moved beyond the tension related to adolescent transition. This theme was characterised by positive experiences of self-exploration. For example, the following narrative extracts demonstrate the insight gained from adolescent low-point events through a process of reflection on lessons learned from the past, indicative of self-maturation:

Oh yeah, it made me, like at one stage I was going to give up education and we had, my dad had instilled in us the values of you know, education gets you everywhere, you know. (Anahera)

Yeah cos then I started to realise that, no, that’s dumb, that’s not even cool, yeah I think

I done it to be cool as well, to fit in with the friends . . . so I could yeah be like them, and I just realised it's not even cool . . . like don't do that and snapped out of it and just focused on school after that. (Aroha)

Many of the adolescents were generally preoccupied with the idea of growing into the "adult me". This theme captured a sense of gaining control of the self through accomplishing life tasks recognised by New Zealand society, for example, getting your driver's licence. Getting a licence was a common step discussed by many of the participants. Other paths to assuming more responsibility for oneself included moving out of home, doing things earlier than previous generations, and getting a job. In the extract below, 17-year-old Kaleb talks about his high-point event, the time he got his driver's licence. This event was particularly noteworthy for Kaleb because he'd achieved the milestone earlier than members of his whānau had.

After I got my restricted [driver's license], which I was pretty stoked about. A lot of the aunts and uncles, um, reckon, um I've grown up too fast. They always talk about how they didn't get their car until they were like, I don't know they had to wait until they were twenty, and had to save for their own car and all that stuff. So I guess, um more mature. In a way that like, I'm more independent.

The theme of moving through appropriate life stages or culturally defined tasks (e.g., moving out of home or getting a driver's licence) was very relevant for creating meaning for Māori adolescents. The process of moving through appropriate society-defined life events has been called following a cultural life script (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004). Research has shown agreement of such events across different cultures including European (Danish, German), American, Turkish and Malaysian (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Although normative life scripts were not directly measured for Māori

adolescents, this study revealed that the order of certain life events was important for adolescent identity development. Furthermore, life stages which Māori adolescents talked about were similar to those of independently oriented cultures, possibly reflecting that young Māori function within both major cultural orientations in New Zealand (i.e., mainstream independently orientated New Zealand European culture and interdependently oriented Māori culture).

There were also instances of deeper self-exploration in the narratives, as seen in Anahera's turning-point event below. She talked about coming to terms with her ethnic identity and resolving issues around her understanding of what it means to be Māori. She did this through persistent engagement with Māori culture, despite being discriminated against for "not being brown". There was a sense of maintaining perseverance and coping while establishing her ethnic identity. But she also experienced disillusionment with other Māori because on some level she felt she was being a "good Māori" but that was still not enough; she experienced racism from other Māori for not having the right skin colour.

Like I want to show people that yeah I am [Māori] and don't underestimate me just because I've got white skin. I can speak Māori, I can do kapa haka doesn't mean that people will see that face value and if I want to be classified as Māori I would have to do a lot more, even though I don't . . . yeah so it changed my life by making me do more things um Māori . . . made me quite determined.

### ***Overcoming adversity through achievement***

This theme built on the previous themes of becoming more self-aware, because through achievement there was a sense of learning about the self by doing things out of one's comfort zone and by realising talents and potential. It



was also about individual achievement as a reflection of achievement for the wider whānau. However, this theme departed from the previous one because many of the achievement narratives were about protective and positive qualities rather than working through events for lesson learning. Being involved with sport at school was a source of resilience for Māori adolescents. Fourteen-year-old Tova used sport as a way of psychologically dealing with trauma and also improving her mood, as demonstrated in her high-point event narrative:

I really liked it [cross country], and that just kept all my fear and that away and I just started being a happy person and hiding my fear away and . . . yeah, sports and I still do that now.

For 16-year-old Jaxon, starting karate was a major turning-point event in his life because he realised he had the potential to be in control around same-age peers who were easily angered. Unlike many of these, Jaxon had avoided bad situations, for example, joining gangs and getting into fights, and he linked this resistance to the psychological and physical benefits of engaging in karate:

I notice because I’ve been doing karate, I deal with people differently um and I kind of look into things from, I dunno know if it’s a personal thing but I kind of analyse things more . . . I’m a lot more alert, like at parties and stuff, yeah. . . . I think it’s kind of changed like my, obviously my physical but and my mental strength as well.

For the Māori adolescents in my study, achievement was also important for the well-being of their whānau and community. Fifteen-year-old Erena identified her turning-point event as the time she was chosen to sing a solo part in the school choir. She expressed self-doubt at the beginning of the narrative by explicitly mentioning that she was shy and was not expecting

to be chosen. She reported her achievement in an understated and non-boastful way and did not immediately “own” it, saying she was “chosen” to do it. This humbleness was also apparent in her describing her achievement from the perspective of her family: “I think they felt good (about her singing the solo part).” This was an example of how achievement for Māori was a positive reflection on the whānau at large, and thus to be boastful and stand out as an individual in your achievement was not desirable. It also demonstrated that Māori adolescents were attuned to an interdependent way of being when it comes to achievement.

The theme of achievement depicted resilience and positive development for Māori youth. Specifically, engagement with extracurricular activities such as choir, karate and running was common. Adolescents demonstrated that meeting these challenges was associated with positive psychological rewards or “mental toughness”. Studies have shown a link between participation in extracurricular participation, lower depression and higher self-esteem in youth (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001). The benefits of structured and constructive activities for adolescents include acquisition of physical, social and intellectual skills, a sense of agency, and establishment of peer social networks (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003), which Māori adolescents in this study seem to have experienced.

### ***Whānau (family): The foundation for Māori adolescent well-being***

Most of the participants talked about having a very close relationship with their extended family, especially their grandparents. In many cases, Māori adolescents either currently lived with a grandparent or had at some point resided with their grandparents. The concept of living with a grandparent as a surrogate parent was never elaborated on by any of the adolescents for the purposes of my understanding as an interviewer. Instead, it was treated as the norm

for Māori family composition.

Māori grandparents have a unique position in the whānau. They play a protective and nurturing role, which was a source of strength and resilience for many of the adolescents (Metge, 1995), and ties this theme in with the previous one. There was an assumption that although they can rebel against their parents, no young people would defy their grandparents. Participants were sent to their grandparents to get “sorted out” or to avoid unhealthy lifestyles. There was a “safety net” surrounding a grandparent, and this sentiment was very much a given in the life narratives of Māori adolescents. The following extracts show how dependent Māori adolescents in this study were on their grandparents for guidance and support:

I can remember when mum and dad would fight, I'd ring her [grandmother] up and she'd come pick me up. So she was pretty on to it in the sense that she was always there for me. (Tova)

I had to go back to [name of place] with my papa [granddad] and just get sorted out from him and get him to tell me that like what I'm doing is wrong, cos I used to be quite disrespectful to my mum. (Anahera)

I found ever since I started hanging out with my cousins, I've kind of gone off all that drinking and stuff. Ah, I'm trying to stay healthy, as well as, I do it, because when I'm with them, my cousin's nan, you can't do bad stuff around there. It's your typical Māori nanny; kind of slap you on the arm if you do something bad. So um, but I feel it's good for me cause I hang out with my cousins, I'm having fun, and I'm not getting into mischief. (Kaleb)

This safety net also extended to other members of the family such as aunties and uncles and this provided further family support, possibly more so than in other New Zealand cultures, as illustrated in the following extract:

When I was adopted like um, my real mum and dad they had like too many kids so they couldn't look after me. So they gave me to my real dad's brother. (Jaxon)

For many of the adolescents, extended family was a source of strength in the family and it was not uncommon to have closely linked relationships with them. For example, 13-year-old Holly and her family turned to her aunty in time of need:

When I was Year 7, my mum and dad they had like this massive fight . . . and then like my mum took us to here, because this was when we lived in Swindon, my mum brought us here and we stayed with our auntie in Lonsdale, and um we stayed here for like, a month.

In one of the biggest studies of young people across all cultures in New Zealand, whānau was found to be the cornerstone for Māori youth development (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2004). Whānau composition includes several generations of people, with grandparents holding the greatest responsibility for guiding the younger generations (Metge, 1995). In the current study, the protective role of the grandparent was one of the strongest themes to come through the adolescent narratives. The positive influence that grandparents had on the lives of participants was undeniable. The current research suggests that Māori grandparents are the educators in the family, assuming a parenting role over and above that of the parents (Edwards et al., 2007). In the Edwards et al. (2007) study, all participants had close ties with other members of their extended family, especially the grandparents, but also aunts and uncles. The authors reported the importance of recognising these relations for young Māori people. The current study also supports the idea that a more traditional composition of family with a wider and more supportive network of people is important for Māori youth well-being.

## Conclusions

Firstly, this qualitative study draws from and complements the larger cross-sectional study (Reese et al., 2014), offering a richer description of the themes identified in the larger study related to Māori adolescent narrative identity. Exploring the process of identity development in narrative identity research needs to be accompanied by a consideration of the colour and voice of the narratives one is studying.

Secondly, the content of contemporary Māori adolescent critical life events in this study reflected a coexistence of cultural orientations (Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Sibley & Liu, 2007). Themes of reflecting on past events for self-understanding and developing peer and romantic relations were similar to preoccupations of adolescents from cultures that are independently oriented. What was specific to Māori youth development was a wider whānau composition and a stronger reliance on older generations for positive feedback and learning. In this study most of the participants mentioned their grandparents or extended family members at least once in their life narratives; some had lived with them at one point and all felt they were a crucial part of their life.

Lastly, in terms of Māori youth well-being, being part of a more traditional family network with grandparents at the head of learning and support was crucial. Although adolescents from

all cultures need supportive families to prosper, Māori adolescents did particularly well when grandparents were part of their daily life. Maintaining ties to wider whānau networks should be a priority for future programmes and policy with Māori youth. It is also important to note that contemporary Māori adolescents had their own unique ecology for well-being, demonstrating necessary navigation of mainstream New Zealand European culture and values while maintaining aspects of traditional Māori culture. Having the ability to successfully navigate themes from both worldviews could be the key to positive Māori adolescent narrative identity development and well-being.

## Glossary

karakia	prayer
kōrero	stories
pōwhiri	welcoming ceremony
pūrakāu	myths
te ao Māori	Māori belief system
te reo Māori	Māori language
tikanga	Māori customs
waiata	song
whaikorero	oratory
whakapapa	lineage
whakataukī	ancestral sayings
whānau	extended family

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