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# Using indigenous kaupapa Māori research methodology with constructivist grounded theory: generating a theoretical explanation of indigenous womens realities

Denise Wilson <sup>a</sup>, Alayne Mikahere-Hall<sup>a</sup> and Juanita Sherwood<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>AUT Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre, Faculty of Health & Environmental Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand; <sup>b</sup>Office of Indigenous Engagement, PVC Indigenous Engagement, Charles Sturt University, Sydney, Australia

## ABSTRACT



In this paper, we use research with Indigenous Māori women to explain the research interface to bring together Indigenous and Euro-Western ways of knowing. Our research required using an Indigenous research methodology that drew on traditional cultural knowledge with embedded critical and decolonisation theories to understand this often-marginalised group of Indigenous women. Constructivist grounded theory provided a systematic and rigorous approach to generating theory. Because of the unique histories of colonisation and contemporary realities resulting in Indigenous women's marginalisation, globally, we argue research must be relevant, safe, and meaningful to those researched to produce transformative knowledge. Therefore, planning a research methodology to inform research with Indigenous women that counters current unhelpful constructions required careful consideration. We share how we used kaupapa Māori research methodology and constructivist grounded theory to generate an explanation of how Māori women keep safe in unsafe relationships.

## KEYWORDS

Indigenous research paradigm; kaupapa Māori research methodology; research interface; constructivist grounded theory; qualitative research

## Introduction

Research has been a colonisation tool that shaped the construction of Indigenous peoples post-settlement and how they were subsequently understood (Archibald et al., 2019; Smith, 2012). Indigenous research methodologies challenge the dominance and traditions of Euro-Western thought that has influenced perceptions of Indigenous peoples and the conduct of research that marginalised them. Worldviews have underlying epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies shape and frame methodological approaches that are unique. While positivist and post-positivist methodologies have dominated the social research landscape, the last two decades have seen the rise in Indigenous research approaches informed by Indigenous worldviews and ways of being. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (Smith, 1999, 2012) seminal work, *Decolonising Methodologies*, provided the impetus for globally evolving Indigenous research methodologies (Archibald et al., 2019; Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008). More recently, concerns about the non-inclusion of Indigenous researchers and communities in the framing of research and the methodologies used to collect, analyse, and interpret data has also seen the evolution of Indigenous data sovereignty (Walter et al., 2020; Walter & Suina, 2019). Indigenous researchers recognise the need to recover and use their

**CONTACT** Denise Wilson  [dlwilson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:dlwilson@aut.ac.nz)  AUT Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre, Faculty of Health & Environmental Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

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own ontological, epistemological, and axiological structures and the need to engage in relevant and meaningful research with their peoples.

The silencing of Indigenous ways of knowing occurred due to what Smith (2012) refers to as the ‘... positional superiority of Western knowledge’ (p. 62). Western scientific conventions negated and ignored Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, despite their long-standing existence before colonisation. Nevertheless, total reliance on non-Indigenous paradigms has limitations, especially regarding the appropriateness of the ideologies and tenets used to measure or judge Indigenous peoples. Restoring and privileging Indigenous ways of knowing is a response to challenges by Indigenous peoples globally about the centrality and dominance of Euro-Western research methodologies (Battiste, 2000; Cram, 2017; Pidgeon, 2018; Smith, 2012).

Positivist paradigms are ontologically founded on the notion that there is one reality or truth that is interpreted in an objective and value-free way established through scientific methods that draw on empirical data and the senses. Post-positivists moved beyond this perspective, recognising that such approaches were imperfect and prone to error and that truth is contextually-bound (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008). The objective, value-free approach of positivist and post-positivist paradigms contrasts with Indigenous worldviews, cultural values, practices and, importantly, their realities defined by the physical and metaphysical relationships and connectedness with people and the environment (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012). This relational orientation of an Indigenous paradigm grounded in collective obligations and responsibilities to others is opposed to the value-free objective and detached approach to research.

A lot of ‘scientific’ research fails to contextualise historical and contemporary events that determine Indigenous realities and experiences. As Todd (2016) highlighted, a colonialist approach to research involves navigating a tension between Indigenous stories told without Indigenous peoples’ involvement and not acknowledging Indigenous people at all. Either way, authentic Indigenous voices are silenced, perpetuated by a lack of accountability. Reliance on individualised, deficit and victim-blaming produced by positivist research often portrays Indigenous peoples negatively and overlooks their strengths and assets (Cram et al., 2013; Smith, 2012) and the resilience and resistance they possess (Penehira et al., 2014). Moreover, dependence on positivist and post-positivist research paradigms and methodologies alone overlooks the harmful and ongoing intergenerational effects of colonisation on Indigenous peoples. It is also a form of ongoing systemic colonisation (Mahuika, 2008).

The colonisation of Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous women, has marginalised, silenced and made invisible their ways of knowing as legitimate and valid. Integral to Indigenous paradigms is decolonisation. Decolonisation:

... does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives for our own purposes. (Smith, 2012, p. 39)

Indigenous research methodologies aim to not only decolonise but also indigenise research (Chilisa, 2012). Such approaches enable research to be informed by an Indigenous paradigm and utilise those Indigenous and more local methodologies, which may also use the third space (or research interface) to draw upon Western research approaches. Indigenous processes enable knowing the past and understanding contemporary realities, while complimentary positivist and post-positivist approaches can offer research tools and methods.

This paper presents the research interface constructed for our study that enabled using Indigenous kaupapa Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) research methodology and Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). We begin by discussing an Indigenous research paradigm, followed by a description of kaupapa Māori methodology, the specific methodology constructed for our research, and the research interface’s role. We draw upon examples of how we implemented this with constructivist grounded theory.

## Indigenous research paradigm

The premise underpinning an Indigenous research paradigm is based on a shared way of viewing and thinking about the world that is reflective of Indigenous peoples' unique worldviews, beliefs, values, and ways of living – it is holistic, collective, relational and spiritual in nature (Chilisa, 2012; Pidgeon, 2018; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ways of knowing and living are based on systematic observations and oral transmission of knowledge that evolved over many generations (Pidgeon, 2018). An Indigenous research paradigm is contingent on the relationships established and maintained between the researchers and the Indigenous community that ensure the research outcomes have relevance, meaning, and practical application for the community that can lead to transformation (Smith, 2017). Utilising a paradigm that privileges Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies enables culturally relevant engagement and approaches for analysing data and interpreting the findings that reflect participants' realities better, which then produces evidence of greater relevance and meaning to inform transformational policy and practice. An Indigenous paradigm enables the telling of Indigenous peoples stories well and in a way that reflects their realities, something that has been problematic for research undertaken *on* Indigenous peoples (Cram, 2017; Smith, 2012).

Research from an Indigenous standpoint must recognise the distinct cultural and linguistic traditions, unique historical experiences, and colonisation's enduring effects (Sherwood, 2013). Within and between nations globally, Indigenous peoples are culturally diverse despite sharing similar experiences and inequitable health and social outcomes compared to other groups of people living in their respective countries. An Indigenous research paradigm holds central Indigenous peoples and their communities, which differs from a Euro-Western research lens that positions them at the research margins (Pidgeon, 2018; Smith, 2012). An Indigenous research paradigm is also an act of reclaiming and restoring traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge while simultaneously including contemporary knowledge and realities.

The potential for transformation by using Indigenous research approaches is that they are culturally responsive and sensitive to power, historical events, social positioning, politics, and culture that affect contemporary Indigenous realities (Chilisa, 2012). We would also argue that to be transformational, knowledge lies in the multiple social constructs and realities that define modern Indigenous peoples' diversity. Importantly, research must also challenge deficit and pathologised constructions that do little to create the transformational change that makes a difference in Indigenous people's daily lives (Cram et al., 2013). Instead, it must enable Indigenous peoples themselves to utilise research to create self-determined changes they deem are needed (Cram et al., 2013). Thus, critical to transformation is knowledge sharing between Indigenous peoples (Smith et al., 2019).

Using an Indigenous research paradigm privileges Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices as part of the research process. It begins with Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing that define the research processes and practices to frame and reflect Indigenous peoples' views and realities. Lambert (2014) suggests Indigenous research has four distinctive dimensions:

- (1) It focuses on issues of local concern rather than being reliant on Euro-Western theory to define the research;
- (2) It is contextually bound, and therefore, produces relevant and meaningful knowledge grounded in local experiences;
- (3) It can utilise both Indigenous and Western theories; and
- (4) An Indigenous research paradigm informs assumptions about reality, knowledge, and values.

Within this context, we positioned our research within an Indigenous research paradigm underpinned by notions of decolonisation, healing, transformation, and mobilisation (Smith, 2012). Continued reliance on dominant cultural understandings of Indigenous peoples and their realities

perpetuates inequities and structural power imbalances that adversely affect them, which we, along with others, argue is a social justice issue (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Smith, 2012). As potential ‘thought leaders’ for transformation in the area of violence affecting whānau, ‘getting the story right, telling the story well’ (Smith, 2012, p. 226) was our priority in this research. Thus, embedded within any research with Indigenous peoples must be their worldviews, knowledge, culture, and protocols.

### ***Kaupapa Māori research methodology***

Māori challenges regarding research have emerged from the misrepresentation of their realities, the lack of control over research agendas, and poor conduct of research (Cram, 2001). There has been a move to (re)claim the research space by Māori, so research that affects Māori meets their needs and aspirations better. It also provides the opportunity to counter negative and deficit portrayals of Māori that do little to effect positive change. Kaupapa Māori Theory offers a ‘by Māori, for Māori, with Māori’ approach to research, which puts Māori interests at the centre. It also challenges ‘accepted’ ways of ‘knowing, doing and understanding’ Māori, in order to make a positive difference (Smith, 2017, p. 85). More specifically, Smith (2017) cites that while many whānau encounter daily struggles, research needs to be meaningful and transformative to lessen their challenges and promote success. On this basis, we elected to use a Kaupapa Māori research methodology to inform the generation of a theoretical explanation of how Māori women keep safe in unsafe relationships because of its embeddedness in Māori cultural worldviews, beliefs, protocols, and local critical theory (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012).

Cram (2017) asserts the task of Kaupapa Māori research, a New Zealand Indigenous research approach, is making sure that it ‘... informs an agenda of Māori being Māori, being fully human, and living in health and prosperity’ (p. 1). To this end, using Kaupapa Māori research methodologies normalises te ao Māori (the Māori world) and ensures, as researchers, we privileged indigenous Māori worldviews and knowledge. Using an Indigenous methodology like Kaupapa Māori was crucial in developing knowledge and theory grounded in traditional Māori culture and their historical and everyday realities in culturally acceptable and relevant ways. This imperative arises from the revitalisation of Indigenous knowledge forms and historical research experiences that were negative and invalidated or misrepresented the culture and the realities of Māori and other Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012). Continuing to rely on these ways of constructing knowledge perpetuates the unfavourable positioning of Māori women. As already mentioned, a kaupapa Māori approach ensures we are ‘... getting the story right, telling the story well’ (Smith, 2012, p. 226).

The foundations that characterise the nature of an Indigenous research paradigm, such as Kaupapa Māori, are the:

- nature of reality, and what it means in the case of our research to be Māori women keeping safe amid partner violence (ontology);
- relationships and connections between knowledgeable people and what needs to be known (epistemology);
- systematic inquiry guided by an approach that is appropriate to answer the research question (methodology); and
- culturally-based values and ethics inform to complete how the research (axiology) (Cram, 2017).

Ontologically, whakapapa (genealogy) establishes the genealogical relationships and connections that form the foundations for the organisation of knowledge. Establishing these relationships and connections is through whakawhanaungatanga (the process of making connections), which is the process Māori use at the point of engagement with other people to make connections (Barlow, 1994; Bishop, 1996). Whakapapa also establishes the basis of collective obligations and reciprocity to

manaaki (to host and care for other people). Thus, whakapapa signals the collective worldview of Māori that contrasts with the individualist worldview of Euro-Western paradigms. The following dimensions represent Māori ontology:

- tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty and self-determination as outlined in Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>1</sup>);
- he taonga tuku iho (cultural aspirations embedded in tikanga (cultural customs));
- te reo (Maori language) and mātauranga (Maori ways of knowing and knowledge) transmitted across generations for use in contemporary contexts;
- akoranga (culturally preferred mediums for learning);
- kia piki ake i ngā raruraru (acknowledgement of the social, cultural and economic disadvantage and the oppressive forces that affect contemporary whanau);
- whānau (extended family networks that organise Māori social realms); and
- kaupapa (the collective Māori philosophy that drives communication and links to Māori aspirations for wellbeing) (Smith, 2017).

Embedded in mātauranga (Maori knowledge and ways of knowing), kaupapa Māori epistemology relates to knowledge and meaning contained within a Māori worldview. Linked to cultural values, practices, and the oral transmission of knowledge (via mediums such as in waiata (song), carvings in whareniui (traditional spiritual houses), and Mōteatea (incantations)) (Black et al., 2014), mātauranga Māori facilitates the distillation of meaning from learning. Unlike the greater availability of written and recorded knowledge generated from Western science, traditional mātauranga was oral, considered sacred, and frequently had restrictions placed on its access. Depending upon the attributes and talents a person displayed, limitations applied to the access to information to only those deemed appropriate and relevant – for example, access important genealogical details limited to only those people seen to be future keepers of whakapapa. However, contemporary kaupapa Māori research involves engagement with mātauranga Māori while simultaneously deconstructing and challenging Euro-Western epistemologies that construct and position Māori in negative or harmful and unhelpful ways (Chilisa, 2012; Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 2012).

Māori methodologies enable culturally acceptable exploration and discovery to produce beneficial and transformational knowledge that can make a positive difference in outcomes for Māori. Kaupapa Māori research methodology is both culturally prescribed and acceptable, and therefore, must inform any Kaupapa Māori research design. To ensure this occurs, Smith (2012) recommends considering the following questions to guide the planning of research:

- Who defined the research problem?
- For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
- What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
- What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
- What are some of the likely positive outcomes from this study?
- What are some possible negative outcomes?
- How can the adverse outcomes be eliminated?
- To who is the researcher accountable?
- What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher? (pp. 175–176)

Regarding axiology, cultural values and tikanga (cultural protocols that guide behaviour) define and guide what it is to be Māori. Axiology also underpins how Māori whānau, hapū (constellations of whanau), iwi (nations, tribal groups) and communities and researchers interact and carry out their activities. Ethical protocols derived from cultural values provide researchers with the necessary

guidance for their engagement with Māori and the expected conduct while researching with Māori whānau, hapū, iwi and communities (Table 1). These cultural values underpin ethical practice from a kaupapa Māori research perspective and require researchers to become known, work collaboratively and proceed cautiously with Māori. It guides researchers' conduct themselves in ways that Māori sees to be respectful, humble, and mana-enhancing (upholding people's status and prestige).

## Māori women living with violence

Adopting a Māori worldview was particularly important to inform our research. For the most part, dominant cultural understandings about family violence (the context of this research) or violence within Māori whānau dominate and prevail (Smith, 2012). Māori women living with violence in their relationships, and for some within their whānau (extended family networks), are viewed, and then often portrayed, in negative ways. Consequently, such misinformed constructions influence others' and agencies' responses to their requests for help to keep them and their children safe, often leading to unmet safety and wellbeing needs and harm. Unmet needs occur because those in positions to assist the women instead act on negative personal biases and ill-informed constructions and beliefs about Māori women (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Wilson, Smith et al., 2015). Such negative biases and ill-informed assumptions can result in some people responding in judgemental and discriminatory ways (Cormack et al., 2018; NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016). Unfair judgements and discrimination further compound the trauma of entrapment in relationships by partners who use a range of tactics associated with coercive control (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Tolmie et al., 2018). Many Māori women are also structurally entrapped by services designed to help women and children in need of assistance, often related to breaches in service providers' cultural competence (Tolmie et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). Māori women have a disproportionately high prevalence of partner violence (Fanslow et al., 2010; Koziol-mclain et al., 2004, 2007) and homicide rates (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2017) associated with partner and family violence. Therefore, producing transformative knowledge to improve the understanding of this group of women necessitates the use of relevant, safe, and meaningful research (Smith, 2017). Importantly, we argue that knowledge produced from any study should be beneficial for Māori women living with violence, not inadvertently entrap them further.

For some time, Māori and other Indigenous peoples have challenged the misrepresentations of their realities along with their lack of control over the agendas and the conduct of research on them, rather than with them (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2017; Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 2012). Indigenous people globally, including Māori, have moved to (re)claim the research space so that any research meets their needs and aspirations. In Aotearoa New Zealand, kaupapa Māori research methodologies offer a 'by Māori, for Māori, with Māori' approach to research. The primary aim of our research, *E Tu wāhine, E Tu whānau* (stand up women, stand up extended family networks), was to explain the processes and strategies Indigenous Māori women used to keep safe within 'unsafe' intimate relationships. We aimed to challenge current unhelpful constructions of Māori women living with partner violence (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016) and complement the existing theories and understandings in partner violence, which are based mostly on Euro-Western viewpoints. Our research also aimed to advance knowledge by offering a new, distinctively Indigenous approach to understanding how Māori women, often marginalised, maintain the safety of themselves and tamariki (children) when exposed to partner violence and seek 'helping' services' assistance with unhelpful people. Our approach to this research required a safe and respectful process for exploring Māori women's experiences.

Moreover, we anticipated that new theoretical explanations about Māori women keeping safe in unsafe partner relationships would influence and inform health and social policy and service delivery practices. Simultaneously, these new explanations could also challenge the array of unhelpful stereotypes and misconceptions that cause further harm and trauma. For example,

assertions that these Indigenous women are neglectful, abusive, and unsafe mothers contradict our ‘insider’ experiences. To achieve our aim to offer an alternative ‘story’, we designed the research to uncover relevant traditional mātauranga Māori (Maori ways of knowing and knowledge). Simultaneously, we also aimed to gain a better understanding of how Māori women keep safe in ‘unsafe’ relationships amid contexts of social marginalisation, and in some cases, social exclusion (NZ Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016). The outcomes of this research grounded in cultural and whānau realities would inform future praxis.

### ***E Tu wāhine, E Tu whānau methodology***

Our Kaupapa Māori research methodology draws on Mana wāhine (the status and authority of Māori women) theory. Mana wāhine is a theoretical perspective that is centred on Māori women’s cultural status and informed by decolonisation (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). Fundamentally, Mana wāhine acknowledges the traditional power, status and authority of Māori women while incorporating critical decolonisation. This approach ensured the recognition of the traditional position of Māori women<sup>2</sup> while also responding to the traumatic and detrimental effects of colonisation on contemporary Māori women’s diverse and challenging socio-political contexts (Mikaere, 1994, 2017) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the mana wāhine theoretical perspective informing this study. It outlines the impacts of colonisation that transformed Māori women’s lives over time, whereby Māori women moved from having recognised social status and complementary roles with men. Cultural values, beliefs and practices Māori lived by protected Māori and kept them safe. Today, because of colonisation, they have lost this social status, their connections to land, language and culture, notably the protections cultural practices afforded in keeping them safe. This transformation resulted in many Māori women being burdened by multiple forms of social, economic, and political oppression, living with colonisation and historical trauma’s detrimental effects. Addressing the

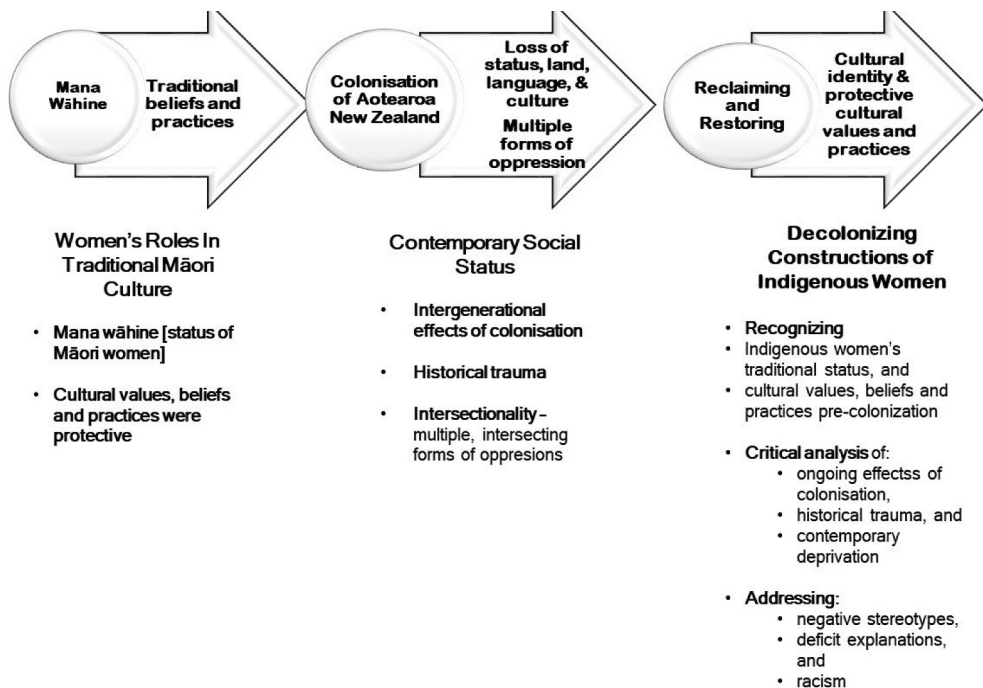


Figure 1. Overview of a Mana wāhine theoretical perspective.



current social position of Māori women to reclaim and restore their mana and status, particularly within the context of family violence, requires decolonisation of the construction of Indigenous Māori women. Restoring the importance of cultural identity and connection (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011) also requires the critical analysis of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, historical trauma, and contemporary deprivation (Dhunna et al., 2018). It also requires addressing the negative stereotypes, deficit explanations and racism that have detrimental impacts on their wellbeing (Wilson et al., 2019).

Mana wāhine also supports a framework for developing a contemporary theory inclusive of the complex intersection of multiple forms of oppression related to colonisation and its enduring effects on the contexts of contemporary Māori women and their daily realities (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011).

The use of both Kaupapa Māori and Mana wāhine theories afforded Māori women participating in our research the opportunity to voice their views and knowledge and explain how they managed their safety in ‘unsafe’ partner relationships. They did this with researchers who understood their realities and the diversity typical of contemporary Indigenous women.

Furthermore, this methodology assisted in understanding safety for these women within past and contemporary contexts. The following whakataukī (proverb) expresses this approach: *Me titiro me anga ki whakamua* (Look to the past as we move forward). This whakataukī signifies the need to understand teachings and learnings from the past, historical events, and new circumstances to inform moving into the future. The whakataukī provided the basis for (re)claiming and (re)storing traditional knowledge about how Māori women and their children were kept safe and incorporated their contemporary realities and actions they take to stay safe amid violence within their whānau and relationships. Having this understanding of Māori women’s past and present then enabled the production of knowledge for the future. Such an approach was essential for developing relevant, meaningful and transformative knowledge informed by traditional mātauranga that restores essential cultural understandings and grounds these in Māori women’s realities for moving forward into the future. This model strengthens women’s sense of themselves instead of further demoralising their standpoint.

## The research interface

To draw multiple sources of knowledge together with the ultimate aim of producing a theoretical explanation of how Māori women keep safe in ‘unsafe’ relationships, we blended Kaupapa Māori research methodology with Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Durie (2004) stresses that if research does not reflect Māori realities, it will not realise the expected outcomes – something Smith (2017) also affirms. Thus, local Māori cultural values and practices formed the foundation of Kaupapa Māori research methodology within a Western research approach (Wilson, 2017). Seaman (2008) claims:

... a historically and culturally oriented form of grounded theory research might not be concerned exclusively with the ways in which individuals’ actions take patterns but might also relate to how individuals’ actions change patterns or, perhaps more accurately, how individuals change in patterned ways and how, when, and under what conditions historical patterns of individual, social, and cultural change are transformed (pp.14-15)

Given the colonising histories, social and health inequities, and social marginalisation that many Māori women live with (Simmonds, 2011; Wilson, Jackson et al., 2015), it was crucial to privilege a kaupapa Māori lens in this research. As much as kaupapa Māori theory is about Māori regaining control of research about Māori culture and realities, it does not reject Western knowledge (Durie, 2004; Smith, 2017). Instead, it balances and respects that constructivist grounded theory offered a systematic way of generating a theory to improve understanding about how Māori women

managed their daily lives within the contexts of violent relationships. Data created using a safe kaupapa Māori research methodology is essential to enhance understanding.

The research interface provides a complementary place and space for both Indigenous mātauranga and methodologies to come together with appropriate Euro-Western methodologies and methods to answer the research question optimally (Durie, 2004). It also offers a site of innovation and convergence that facilitates producing culturally responsive theory (Macfarlane et al., 2015). To this end, the research interface is a functional space whereby two compatible approaches to knowledge development can come together without contest. It is a space for interactive conversations, negotiation, and the establishment of culturally appropriate processes and practices to ensure the conduct of culturally safe and meaningful research (Wilson & Neville, 2009).

Social processes facilitate the learning and sustenance of knowledge and are lived and expressed in cultural contexts (Macfarlane, 2015). According to Macfarlane (2015), understanding the social and cultural contexts is necessary to inform transformational change. Constructivist grounded theory is philosophically rooted in symbolic interactionism and offered a mechanism to understand the social and cultural contexts of Māori women living with violence. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the social construction of individuals who collectively engage in interactions with others that are interpreted and lead to shared meanings and actions (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists believe meaning derived from actions and events emerge from interactions and reflects people's ever-changing social reality. According to Blumer, meaning motivates people to interact, leading meaning to be socially constructed. Therefore, this social interaction is dynamic and ever-changing, and Charmaz (2014) and others (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2009) contend that it is people's interactions with themselves, others and their environments that bring about interpretation and action (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, it was vital for our research to understand how Māori women managed and survived amid complex, at times chaotic, and often unpredictable circumstances – how they interacted and gained meaning from seemingly dangerous circumstances.

Culture is socially constructed and is responsive to changes in the symbols, objects, situations, and events that people interact with and derive meaning from – it is a shared perspective based on shared meanings that define individuals' reality and influences their interpretations and actions (Charon, 2009). Informed by symbolic interactionism, constructivist grounded theory's location is within social, historical, local and everyday contexts. Given the relational basis of kaupapa Māori research methodologies, we considered that constructivist grounded theory could sit uncontested within the research interface and provided us with a systematic process to manage our data and generate theory. Charmaz (2014) maintains that constructivist grounded theory is flexible for working within cultural contexts and can bridge the '... cultural gaps and chasms between the cultures of methodological origination and application' (p. 336). Thus, Kaupapa Māori research methodology and constructivist grounded theory ensured a Māori worldview and Māori realities informed the entire research process. We conducted data analysis in a culturally acceptable and appropriate way. Figure 2 provides an overview of the research process and the various phases, depicting the process used for data collection, analysis and constructing a theoretical explanation that Mana wāhine and constructivist grounded theory simultaneously informed.

The inductive, comparative analytic process and the iterative conceptualisation characteristic of constructivist grounded theory all enabled discovering and theorising the processes Māori women used to construct their social and cultural realities. Importantly, any theory we produced needed to be grounded in the participants' pūrākau (Indigenous stories or narratives) while preserving a kaupapa Māori lens for the data analysis and interpretation (Wilson, 2004). Therefore, this blending of a Māori cultural world with constructivist grounded theory's inductive and open-ended approach enabled us to use a rigorous systematic method to produce a theoretical explanation grounded in Māori women's realities. Constructivist grounded theory also enabled culturally-based participant recruitment and data collection and analytic processes. We were conscious of

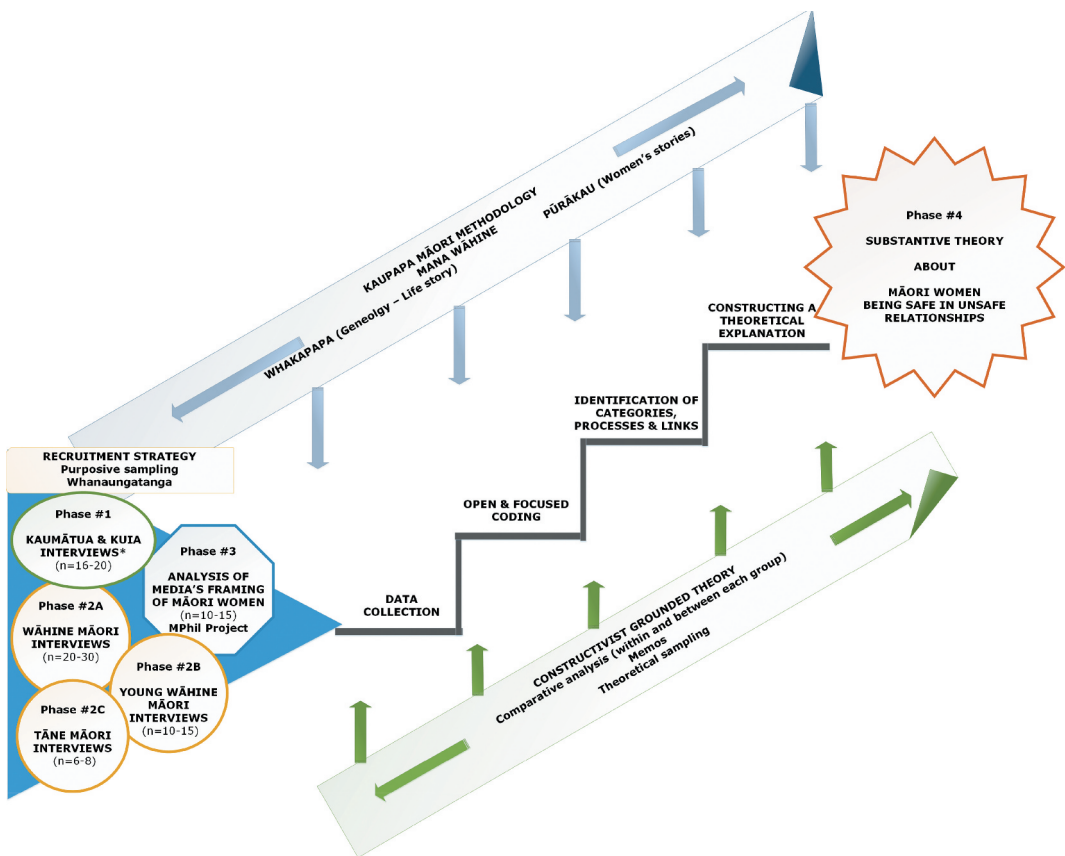


Figure 2. Research design overview integrating kaupapa Māori methodology with constructivist grounded theory.

Māori knowledge, systems, processes, practices, and people throughout the data analysis and interpretation phases. We sought peer review and advice to ensure rigorous cultural and Indigenous research throughout the process to assist us.

## Research design and methods

Informed by the methodological underpinnings of kaupapa Māori research and constructivist grounded theory, our qualitative research design comprised four phases (Figure 2): Phase 1 was the identification of traditional knowledge and understandings about wāhine Māori (Maori women), their roles, and maintenance of their safety embedded in cultural knowledge forms, such as:

- whakapapa (genealogy, and in the case of the research, life stories),
- pūrākau (narratives, traditional stories about wāhine toa (strong women)),
- whakataukī (proverbs), and
- mātauranga Māori within the traditional messages of our ātua (spiritual ancestors), tūpuna (ancestors), and wāhine toa (women in our myths) that guided undertaking daily life (Graham, 2009; Lee, 2009; Smith, 2012).

Phase 2 of the research involved the collection of pūrākau (narratives) about Māori women who have lived in unsafe relationships how they kept themselves safe and rangatahi wāhine (young

Māori women) about their understanding about safety. As the research progressed, we undertook theoretical sampling to explore emerging concepts, which also included tāne Māori (Maori men). This decision, based on the need to understand their perspectives about the new categories and properties emerging, aligned with the traditional, complementary status of Māori women and Māori men – Mana wāhine, Mana tāne. Phase 3 involved interviews with Māori women and their portrayal in mainstream media and how these influenced their decisions to seek help. Phase 4 involved the synthesis of data from all of the research phases to produce a culturally informed grounded theory that theoretically explains the processes and strategies Indigenous Māori women use to keep themselves safe in unsafe partner relationships. The following sections provide examples of how we enacted the kaupapa Māori methodology and constructivist grounded theory.

### **Data collection**

We used individual and small group interviews during Phases 1 and 2A, 2B and 2 C (Figure 2), depending on participants' preferences. Interviews began with mihimihi (cultural greetings), followed by offering participants karakia tīmatanga (a beginning prayer). Whakawhanaungatanga (the cultural processes of making connections) is an integral part of researchers initially engaging with participants. In the research, this involved the mutual sharing details such as where you are from, iwi (nation) connections, and who you are – establishing all of this before saying what you do or beginning with the interview. Following this process, we offered kai (refreshments as part of manaakitanga (taking care of participants)). As the interviews ended, the researcher brought together key points participants shared in their pūrākau. We offered participants karakia mutanga (an ending prayer) before finishing the interview. We provided participants with a small koha (a gift as part of reciprocity) to recognise and value their input and reimbursed travel expenses where appropriate. Interviews mostly lasted between 45–120 minutes. We digitally recorded the interviews, transcribed the recordings, and then checked the transcripts for accuracy and removed all identifying features.

We used whakapapa (Graham, 2009) and pūrākau (Lee, 2009) to gather traditional knowledge from kaumātua (elder, usually a man) and kuia (elder woman), and life stories from Māori women and men in 'unsafe' relationships. Inherent in whakapapa are Māori creation stories, and many kaumātua and kuia retain genealogical relationships whereby knowledge handed down to subsequent generations of Māori by their tūpuna (ancestors). Furthermore, we assumed some kaumātua and kuia were of a possible age where they may have also witnessed and experienced traditional practices related to keeping women safe. Whakapapa sets in place key relationships and obligations Māori have with others, the environment, and living things. It is the basis of whanaungatanga (connections and relationships). In our research, whakapapa informed the establishment of respectful relationships with communities and underpinned researchers' humility, actions, obligations, and responsibilities to kaumātua, kuia and the women participating (Mikaere, 2011). Together with whakapapa, we used pūrākau to recover traditional beliefs, practices and strategies about how Māori constructed safety for women. We also uncovered processes and strategies they used to keep themselves safe in unsafe partner relationships while at the same time navigating the multiple, diverse challenges in their lives, including unsafe service providers.

### **Data analysis**

The analysis of transcribed interviews aimed to identify a range of traditional tikanga (Maori protocols), kawa (protocol or etiquette in Māori meeting settings) and other processes and strategies used to keep contemporary Māori women safe. We utilised a collective Indigenous approach, Mahi a Roopū (collaborative group work), to guide the process of constructing the grounded theory (Boulton et al., 2011; Gifford et al., 2014). Mahi a Roopū involved research team members meeting to analyse data collectively. Gathering together enabled researchers to engage in

critical discussions to reach a consensus decision about what was arising from the data and the emerging codes, categories and properties. Mahi a Roopū was beneficial for working with outlier categories and properties (Boulton et al., 2011; Gifford et al., 2014). This process of negotiated data analysis required researchers' commitment to reach a consensus and respect other members' contributions. Aided by humility, this approach enabled a vigorous debate as part of the consensus decision-making. Rather than relying on one or two researchers undertaking the analysis, Mahi a Roopū strengthens the analytic process by involving a collective critical Indigenous interrogation, decolonising the data analysis and interpretation. Mahi a Roopū aided in establishing the authenticity, reliability, and rigour of the findings (Charmaz, 2014). It also ensures meeting Indigenous markers of research trustworthiness: respect, relevance, reciprocal relationships, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

### **Interpretation**

Decolonisation underpinned Mana wāhine theory was important for interpreting the research findings (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). These theories assisted in ensuring that we culturally located the conclusions within the traditional status Māori held pre-colonisation; the impacts associated with colonisation historical trauma and their ongoing effects for many Māori women and whānau; and their current complex socio-political contexts that challenge them, especially for those who live with violence in their whānau. In this way, the findings are situated within the broader historical and current social circumstances rather than produce a relevant and meaningful theory for Māori women.

### **Reflections on the methodology**

The collectivist and relational approaches that underpin an Indigenous paradigm and methodologies that fit within it proved invaluable. Working with community providers enabled the development of trust-based relationships that affirmed as researchers our work aimed to be beneficial and promote telling a story that reflected Māori women's realities and experiences in keeping themselves and their tamariki safe. Such relationships also fostered a mutual understanding of the value and benefits of the research. Therefore, based on these relationships, we could access Māori women who are often highly marginalised and not included in research about them. These relationships also extended to developing trust among the pool of potential participants. For example, one Kaupapa Māori provider ran community presentations to present the research we had done and were doing – unknown to the researcher at the time. Potential participants were sitting among the audience and asked questions. Attendance at the presentations enabled them the opportunity to assess our credibility as researchers, and we believe it facilitated their willingness and generosity to share their stories.

Using a Kaupapa Māori research methodology enabled the analysis and interpretation of the research through an Indigenous lens. Using a culturally appropriate lens meant a more acute sensitivity to and understanding of the contexts within which Māori women manage their safety and protect themselves and their tamariki to survive against incredible odds. It also revealed the contexts within which they do this that countered dominant understandings of their everyday realities and notions of intimate partner or domestic violence. Importantly, it showed the family violence system's significant role in their entrapment within relationships (Wilson et al., 2019). The findings of *E Tu wāhine*, *E Tu whānau*, provide an original contribution to the family violence literature about Indigenous Māori women that provides a different understanding than that provided in much of the evidence about domestic and family violence.

## Conclusion

Using a culturally appropriate research approach enabled us to explore a previously under-researched area – Māori women’s perspectives of keeping safe in unsafe relationships. Using a culturally relevant and meaningful research process meant that we could activate networks and connections to attract participants with a diverse range of experiences that have enriched the research outcomes and provides ‘new’ knowledge to inform health and social service policy development and service provision. Unhelpful negative constructions of Māori women living amid violence in their homes do little to support them and their children. Knowledge grounded in traditional Māori ways of knowing and contemporary experiences of Māori women and men provides an alternative ‘story’ about managing their lives when multiple challenges come their way. Using an Indigenous research paradigm and a kaupapa Māori research methodology, informed by Mana wāhine and decolonisation, enabled the use of constructivist grounded theory. The research interface is a useful space for bringing together Indigenous and Euro-Western methodologies to produce more relevant and meaningful research outcomes that are transformational.

## Notes

1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori version of an agreement between Māori and the British Crown. Commonly referred to as the Treaty, Te Tiriti sets out the relationship between these two parties and established the rights of Māori in four articles (although it should be noted that the English version of Te Tiriti only has three articles). Article 1 refers to kawanatanga (governorship), Article 2 outlines the right of tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty and self-determination), Article 3 sets out the right to Oritetanga (equity); and Article 4 guarantees wairuatanga (spiritual wellbeing) – it should be noted that Article 4 did not appear in the English versions of this treaty. It should also be noted that the Māori and English language versions differ in intent, but Māori signed the version in te reo Māori (Maori language).
2. Māori society prior to colonisation, women held equal status and had complementary roles with men. Unlike contemporary times, Māori women’s important status was as te whare tangata (the house of humankind) because they were the bearers of future generations. Like men and children, they were essential for whānau and hapū whakapapa (genealogy).

## Glossary

Akoranga:culturally preferred learning methods; ātua:spiritual ancestors or deities; Hapū:constellations of whānau with a common ancestor; He taonga tuku iho:cultural knowledge and practices handed down from ancestors; Iwi:nations or tribal groups; Kai:food, refreshments; Karakia mutunga:ending or closing prayer; Karakia tīmatanga:beginning or opening prayer; Kaupapa Māori:Māori way of being, knowing and doing; Kawa:cultural protocols and etiquette; Kaupapa:purpose, principle or policy; Kawanatanga:governorship; Koha:acknowledgement (usually gift) as part of reciprocity; Mahi a Roopū:collaborative or collective work; Mana:status, authority, prestige; Manaaki:responsibility to host and care for others; Mana wāhine:status and authority of Māori women; Mātauranga:Māori ways of knowing and knowledge; Mōteatea:incantation; Oritetanga:equity; Pūrākau:Indigenous stories or narratives; Rangatahi wāhine:young Māori women; Tamariki:Māori children; tāne:Māori men; Te ao Māori:the Māori world; Te reo Māori:Māori language; Te Tiriti o Waitangi:Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi; Te whare tangata:house of humankind; Tikanga:Māori protocols; Tino rangatiratanga:sovereignty and self-determination; Tūpuna:ancestors; Wāhine:women; Wāhine:woman; Wāhine toa:strong Māori women; Waiata:song; Wairuatanga:spiritual wellbeing; Whakapapa:genealogy; Whakawhanaungatanga:process of making connections; Whakatauki:proverbs; Whānau:extended family networks; Whareniui:traditional spiritual house.

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## Notes on contributors

**Denise Wilson** is a professor in Māori health in the AUT Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre and the Associate Dean Māori Advancement in the Faculty of Health & Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. Her research interests include family violence, Indigenous health, cultural responsiveness, Māori health services engagement, and workforce development.

**Alayne Mikahere-Hall** is a senior lecturer in the AUT Taupua Waiora Māori Research Centre at the Auckland University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. Her research interests include Indigenous health, violence and trauma, historical trauma, therapeutic interventions, Indigenous child-rearing practices.

**Juanita Sherwood** is the Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Engagement at Charles Sturt University in Sydney, Australia. Her research includes First Nation Health, cultural safety, family violence, birthing on country, and Aboriginal women's justice system experiences.

## ORCID

Denise Wilson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9942-3561>

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