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Speak the words ki au nei

The intersection between Spoken Word Poetry and Public Health

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Health, The University of Auckland, 2015.

Abstract

Aim

The principal aim of this study was to explore how youth in Tāmaki Makaurau utilized Spoken Word Poetry and its relationship to health and wellbeing. This included documenting the Spoken Word scene and history in New Zealand, specifically within Auckland city. This study also investigated how Spoken Word Poetry resonated within Māori and Pacific participants with a focus on mental health.

Methods

This research project utilised three qualitative data collection methods: focus-group interviews, ethnographic observations, and finally autoethnographic data collated by the researcher. Thematic analysis of these data were triangulated when investigating the overall phenomenon of Spoken Word Poetry. Data was sorted thematically and then analysed using a general inductive approach.

Findings

Spoken Word Poetry was found to benefit youth within their personal lives but also as a collective activity and network that was consistent with wellbeing. Youth discussed Spoken Word as a medium for self-discovery, personal development, affirmation and empowerment, and resistance. Spoken Word Poetry also provided a social network and place to address relevant social and political issues within dominant spaces. Finally, it was also found to be culturally responsive to Māori and Pasifika youth as a site for cultural regeneration and increasing indigenous identity.

Conclusions

The findings of this research contribute valuable knowledge that links Spoken Word Poetry in Aotearoa with the educational and mental health needs of Auckland youth within the context of Public health. Given that these associations are complex, the present findings foreground Spoken Word Poetry not only as a form of addressing negative influences such as suicide, bullying, and self-harm but as a space for positive youth development. Spoken Word Poetry should be seen as a new and innovative mental health intervention for youth in Aotearoa in addition to its benefits as a scholastic tool. Public Health strategies should move toward incorporating interventions such as this that are positively engaging for youth.

Dedication

*For my Grandparents, William and Emily Bryant, for taking care of me when I
didn't know how to take care of myself.*

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Glossary

Flow	Also referred to as a Peak Experience, this describes periods of voluntary intense focus and attention.
Free-write	An unstructured format for writing commonly employed in Spoken Word Poetry workshops
Kaupapa Māori	A Māori methodological framework and body of academic theory
Mana	Prestige, respect, status, authority, social influence
Māori	The indigenous peoples of New Zealand
Pasifika	A heterogeneous composite of peoples with Pacific nation ancestry born and living in New Zealand.
Piece	A colloquial term among poets referring to an individual poem
Poet	Unless otherwise stated, this is term refers to individuals that practice Spoken Word Poetry.
Pūrākau	A traditional form of Māori story
Spoken Word	A shortened term describing contemporary performance poetry
Whāikorero	Formal Māori oration
Whakataukī	Proverbs or sayings used in formal speech
Whānau	Family
Workshop Facilitator	Poets that facilitate Spoken Word Poetry Workshops

Chapter 1 – Whakaūpoko (Introduction)

1.1 Research topic

This thesis seeks to qualitatively explore the use of Spoken Word Poetry among youth in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland, New Zealand) to understand how it influences their health and well-being. Spoken Word Poetry is a contemporary youth art movement and practice that adolescents engage in through writing and performing poetry. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the research aims and a summary of the thesis.

1.2 Researcher perspective

Growing up, I had always wanted to study medicine. Academic excellence was something my whānau was known for. My second year of university was potentially one of the most challenging years of my life after not being accepted into medical school. This situation required me to reassess my trajectory in life; the values that I held, and the person I wanted to become. This time in my life was also difficult because attending medical school was something that my family had groomed me for, hence those around me had expectations of me that I could not fulfil. Disappointment combined with personal difficulties at home affected both my personal wellbeing and scholastic goals, so that even the people around me noticed. During this time, I became involved in Spoken Word Poetry (performance-based poetry) and participated in a Spoken Word Poetry competition: The University of Auckland Poetry Slam. Prior to the Poetry Slam I would not have described myself as either creative or artistic. These words were reserved for certain types of people who were not like me. I continued to study through the Bachelor of Science programme and during my first and second years of study (part of which involved spending long hours on the computer sifting through data and watching YouTube biology clips), I came across Spoken Word. As a long time hip-hop fan what I saw was something that I not only liked but thought “I could do that, and I could do it better”. With the Poetry Slam only a few days away I began to write. Signing up for the competition and performing stories of myself, half written, virtually unedited, and in competition with others that I had never met. Strangely, the comfort of sharing my story was a revelation. From that point I became more involved with Spoken

Word, writing in my spare time and finding places to perform at local open mic (open entry) and another youth slam competition (poetry slam events for youth). Calling myself a poet was something that took a number of performances alongside facilitating workshops with different community organizations that utilize Spoken Word. During this time, I engaged with countless youths (persons aged between 15 and 25) at poetry workshops and slams and it became abundantly clear that youth, irrespective of their background, used Spoken Word for artistic purposes. Spoken Word also acted as a therapeutic way for youth to share their stories and what they felt was important. Personally, Spoken Word became a vehicle for me to express not only my personal struggles but also my culture and worldview. The more I became involved in the poetry scene, the more I became aware of this trend among other adolescents who also incorporated topics such as gender, religion and cultural identity into their poetry.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I pursued postgraduate study. Furthering my postgraduate education and my studies within both a population-based, and indigenous epistemological outlook, it became clear that my passion for Spoken Word had the opportunity to overlap with my scholastic pursuits. Kaupapa Māori methodology provided an opportunity for me to represent myself and those close to me within the world of research in a way that was representative and inclusive of my values and upbringing. Kaupapa Māori methodology allowed me to conduct research in a way that removes the distance between myself and those involved in the research. Finally, Kaupapa Māori offered me the chance to develop my own understanding of Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) and utilize Te Reo Māori within research.

1.3 Research aims

The overall aim of this research was to explore, articulate and ultimately further investigate Spoken Word Poetry as an art form practiced by youth in Aotearoa / New Zealand. The research aimed to explore the relationship between Spoken Word Poetry and adolescent health and wellbeing. In particular, this research aimed to explore how Spoken Word Poetry resonated within Māori and Pasifika youth in both contemporary and traditional ways.

1.4 Topic overview

Spoken Word Poetry is a form of performance poetry that is growing in popularity within youth educational, social, and recreational spaces (Marsh, 2010; Gregory, 2008). The vast majority of literature surrounding Spoken Word Poetry focuses upon its value as a critical literacy and pedagogical tool (Rudd, 2012; Stovall, 2006). The merit and use of Spoken Word Poetry in relation to mental health and wellbeing in Aotearoa is yet to be explored. Within a rapidly advancing world where youth and their perspectives are either problematized, ignored, or relegated to social media (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Fields, Snapp, Russell, Licona & Tilley, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014), this research exists as a serious inquiry into how youth affect change within themselves and those around them through the use, organisation, and communication of words and language. This study therefore explores the relationship between Spoken Word Poetry, well-being and identity. Through exploring these relationships, this thesis provides an original and unique contribution to public health research and knowledge.

1.5 Thesis outline

Chapter two provides a brief background of Spoken Word Poetry within the context of Public Health, and specifically, how participation in Spoken Word Poetry can relate to youth mental health. Chapter two also presents background information about mental health needs for youth in Aotearoa.

Chapter three reviews the current literature on Spoken Word Poetry, health literature surrounding social capital and subjective wellbeing. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, and the dearth of literature around Spoken Word and its interrelationship with health, literature was sourced from diverse fields extending beyond health literature, drawing upon anthropological, education, psychological sources to contextualize the phenomenon of Spoken Word in Aotearoa.

Chapter four discusses the theoretical positioning of the researcher and the methodological framing of the study as a Kaupapa Māori research project. This chapter describes the research

design and methods that included participant interviews, autoethnography and ethnographic observation.

Chapter five and six present the findings of the study in two distinct chapters. Chapter five provides a thematic analysis of the observations and interviews of participants throughout the study. This chapter characterizes both the wider social context of Spoken Word Poetry as a youth movement and also the perspectives of the youth participating within it. Two key meta-themes are discussed in this chapter. The first, The Internal, relates largely to the interior, individual, or personalized component of Spoken Word Poetry and includes the sub-themes of: self-discovery; personal poetry development over time; a sense of empowerment and the freedom of expression; and the negotiation of identity markers. The second key meta-theme, The External, incorporates the exterior, social or communal component of Spoken Word Poetry. Sub-themes of: the influence of the wider social network; performance and practice; safe social space; and finally speaking back are included.

Chapter six presents the poetry of individual participants as a representation of the art form and also provides a discrete description of some of the intended meaning and paralinguistic performance of the poetry. The poems complement the findings presented in chapter five and also emphasize the key findings that Spoken Word Poetry allows youth to embody and then speak back to internal and external influences to enhance wellbeing.

Chapter seven discusses the health implications for the research and future recommendations. This chapter presenting and affirming Spoken Word Poetry as a mental health tool that improves the personal wellbeing of individual adolescents, and secondly in relation to its wider social application for adolescents.

Chapter eight provides concluding comments for the use of Spoken Word Poetry within the field of public health.

Chapter 2 – Whakaahuatia o te Kaupapa (Background)

2.1 Population Health

2.1.1 Introduction

At first, performance or Spoken Word Poetry's connection to public health may seem tenuous, but behind both practices lies a distinct concern for the health and wellbeing of people. Spoken Word Poetry and its wide range of interpretation, as a contemporary form of performance poetry, is a burgeoning area of personal and social cathartic expression for adolescents within contemporary Aotearoa. Within private circles and upon the public stage, urban youth have been harnessing their own experiences, truths and stories, to be expressed in narrative form. This allows them to draw attention and harness their own intimate struggles, history(s), heritage, hardships, and that of their peers. When considering the depth, complexity and popularity of this art form, especially when considering the age demographic (16-25 years of age) of those who primarily practice it (Johansson, 2014; Marsh, 2010; Fiore, 2013; Boudreau, 2009), its recognized use and utilization within the youth health sector is not only innovative, but interesting and ideal.

2.1.2 An overview of Public Health

The field of public health is defined by a commitment to disease prevention, health protection and promotion, and the prolonging of human life at the level of the population (Griffiths, Jewell & Donnelly, 2005; Rayner, 2012). Public Health also extends beyond the eradication of disease by seeking to create physical, political and social environments (often outside the primary health sector) in which individuals, communities and other aggregate clusters within society can achieve a greater degree of health and wellbeing (World Health Organisation, 2015). As an evolving academic discipline, public health interacts with, overlaps, and in some cases encompasses a number of perspectives within health. The scope of Public Health has changed over time and now includes a variety of sub-disciplines, for example: health promotion; primary health care; community and indigenous health (Baum, 2007; Rayner, 2012).

Fundamental to public health is consideration of the environment, where it begins and ends, and a number of other broad socio-political factors that contribute to the health (or illness) of

a population (often referred to as social determinants of health) (Robson & Harris, 2007). Much of the focus of public health is situated outside the formal boundaries of the health sector (Labonte, 2008). In gazing beyond a purely medical context, the focus of public health broadens and becomes inextricably drawn to social and economic determinants of health such as education, gender, ethnicity, and social capital and networks (Griffiths, Jewell & Donnelly, 2005). It is these factors, the circumstances and structures in which individuals are born, raised, work, and grow old in, that underlie the health inequities of populations (World Health Organisation, 2015).

2.2 Mental health

In New Zealand, structural determinants of health inevitably impact on the mental health and wellbeing of youth (populations transitioning from childhood to adulthood). Inequities exist between adolescents / youth and the general population within higher unemployment rates, housing overcrowding, educational attainment and university entrance, healthcare access, and a number of other variables that all have the potential to influence mental health (Craig, 2013; Sibley, Harre, Hoverd & Houkamau, 2010).

Various understandings of mental health exist within available literature ranging from a focus on biological mental illness and dysfunction to positive psychosocial models of health and wellbeing (Keyes & Ryff, 1999; Keyes, 2007). This study approaches mental health pragmatically as a vital component of holistic health and thus as universally relevant (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007).

A number of concise definitions of mental health may be drawn upon; the most prominent provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (World Health Organisation, 2015) who describe mental health as

“a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” and not merely “the absence of mental disorder”.

While this definition is a useful starting point, seeking to encompass mental health within a single static definition may be unrealistic (Cattan, 2006). Therefore, a working understanding of mental health draws upon the former but also takes into consideration local variation that may include social and cultural additions of interpersonal and communal health (Tipa and Panelli, 2007). In this study, mental health and mental illness are viewed as functionally distinct. Mental health encompasses the emotional wellbeing, functioning and competency of an individual or youth within a given environment. Conversely, mental illness is synonymous with the presence of clinical disorder such as depression, bipolar, or schizophrenia. The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2008) describe how mental health and mental illness are not mutually exclusive and exist on separate continua (Keyes, 2002). Youth can thus experience periods of mental wellbeing with or without the presence of mental illness, and vice versa (Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2012).

A complete state of mental health, at which individuals are at optimal capacity, is achievable with the presence of positive mental health, or a state of flourishing, and the simultaneous absence of mental illness or disorder (Perry, Presley-Cantrell & Dhingra, 2012; Keyes, 2002). This understanding of mental health and mental illness allows for individuals to dynamically transition between various states of mental health in the presence or absence of illness over the various periods of life. (Spector, 2013). In critical periods, such as adolescence, focus can then be drawn on factors that prevent or mitigate acute or chronic illness, and increase and prolong mental health. Lastly, though mental health and mental illness exert influence upon one another, the loss of positive mental health places added risk of mental disorder. Likewise, recovery from mental illness can lead to advances in the level of mental health experienced (Perry, Presley-Cantrell & Dhingra, 2012).

2.3 Mental illness and inequity

While an operational focus on positive health is the central emphasis of this study, negative measures of mental health, that is, disorder cannot be ignored as they are a component in a state of complete mental health, and interventions that address mental health generally influence both positive and negative measures simultaneously (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007; Perry, Presley-Cantrell & Dhingra, 2012).

The current context of mental health within New Zealand depicts various inequities associated with age, gender and ethnicity. A study by Oakley, Browne, Wells and Scott (2006), found that just under one-third of adolescents (aged 16-24) in New Zealand were subject to mental illness related to poor or deteriorated mental health within a 12-month period (Table 2-1). The prevalence of serious disorders among youth was also higher than for adults.

Table 1: 12-month prevalence of mental disorder and severity

Disorder groups	Age group (years) % (95% CI)				Gender % (95% CI)		Total % (95% CI)
	16 – 24	25 – 44	45 – 64	65+	Male	Female	
Any disorder	28.6 (25.1-32.3)	25.1 (23.2-27.1)	17.4 (15.7-19.2)	7.1 (5.7-8.8)	17.1 (15.5-18.8)	24.0 (22.4-25.6)	20.7 (19.5-21.9)
Serious disorder	7.2 (5.7-9.0)	5.8 (5.0-6.6)	3.8 (3.1-4.5)	1.1 (0.5-2.0)			

(adapted from Oakley, Browne, Wells and Scott, 2006 Pg 31.)

Within the wider population, for those who experienced periods of mental illness over half began at age 18 years or younger, indicative of the early onset of many mental health issues and susceptibility of youth during this period of life (Oakley, Browne, Wells and Scott, 2006; McGorry, Purcell, Hickie, & Jorm, 2007; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Common issues that arise include bullying in schools, substance use and abuse, mood disorders that include bipolar disorder, depression, and eating disorders (Mental health commission, 2011). Others issues, such as self-harm (a quintessential indicator of mental illness), are also common among youth in New Zealand, particularly among females. It is indicated that 1 in 5 secondary school students over a 12-month period report intentional self-harm (Mental Health Commission, 2011).

Suicide is the leading cause of death for youth and accounts for just under one-quarter of all male and one-third of all female deaths between the ages of 15-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2015). Bullying in schools, sometimes estimated as high as affecting 46% of students, has long term implications that persist into adulthood. Suicide ideation and attempts are more than doubled in those affected by bullying or peer victimization (Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan & Ford, 2014). Additionally, those with mental health issues have a higher likelihood of suicidal behaviour (Oakley, Browne, Wells and Scott, 2006). Finally, barriers exist for youth to access appropriate health care services in New Zealand. A study by the Mental Health Commission (2011) found that access to health services was influenced by youth failing to meet treatment

criteria; if youth did not display severe enough symptoms they were turned away. This gap in services not only fails to meet the needs of those with mild to moderate illness, but also leaves unaided youth to be targets of the justice system (Mental Health Commission, 2011). In light of this information it becomes clear that within the context of Aotearoa that providing alternative youth-specific interventions that fill the gap between mental health need and access to health services are necessary. Providing youth populations with tools that increase their mental health advocacy, awareness, and overall efficacy (such as through Spoken Word Poetry) can help to redress some of these issues.

2.4 Illness for Māori and Pasifika peoples

When stratifying mental health statistics by ethnicity, it is apparent that significant inequities exist. For Māori the prevalence of mental health disorder (both mild and severe) is higher than for non-Māori non-Pasifika individuals (Oakley, Browne, Wells and Scott, 2006; Craig, 2013). Shown in Table 2-2, Māori youth had twice the rate of suicide compared to non-Māori and recent data reported in 2015 shows suicide rates in Aotearoa were the highest since recording began (Waka Hourua, 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2015). This is particularly concerning given that Māori and Pasifika youth were significantly less likely to have accessed mental health services (Craig, 2013; Mental Health Commission, 1998). Pasifika youth statistics present concerns in relation to suicide ideation and self-harm rates (Le Va, 2015). One in ten male Pasifika youth and more than a quarter of Pasifika female youth seriously consider suicide. Self-harm rates among Pasifika youth are equally dire, with three in ten Pasifika Female youth and 17 per cent of Pasifika Male youth reported having deliberately harmed themselves within the last year (Le Va, 2015; Helu, Robinson, Grant, Herd & Denny, 2009).

Table 2: Suicide mortality in young people aged 15 – 24 years

Ethnicity	Number: Total 2005–2009	Number: Annual Average	Rate per 100,000	Rate Ratio	95% CI
Māori	180	36.0	30.25	2.11	1.75–2.53
Non-Māori non-Pacific	317	63.4	14.37	1.00	

(Adapted from Craig, 2013, pg. 205.)

Multiple indicators (suicide, hospital admission rates, substance abuse) suggest that poorer mental health persists within Māori communities when compared with the general population; Māori youth (15-24 years) in particular are at risk (Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2010; Mason Durie, 2004; Mental Health Commission, 2011). Furthermore, mental health services are inadequately equipped to meet the specific needs of Māori and other minority groups due to a lack of culturally appropriate tools and services in assessing subjective wellbeing (Durie, 1999; Ministry of Health, 2012). Māori adolescents (aged 16-24) as a group are mobile, and have pressing social and financial obligations that extend beyond conventional clinically-orientated services, these life features make prolonged commitments treatment beyond the immediate future, a problematic reality (Durie, 1999; Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2008). Rather than placing emphasis on youth programs within conventional services, attention should be garnered toward services primarily aimed at youth (Durie, 1999). Findings from Te Ara Whakapiki Taitamariki indicate that while some progress has occurred in addressing Māori health inequities, among Māori youth there has been little or no improvement in rates of depressive symptoms, and in general Māori self-report lower rates of good to excellent health (Crengle et. al, 2013).

A strong association also exists between mental disorder and low socioeconomic status (Ball, 2010). Māori with lower equivalent household income have higher risk of mental distress (Ball, 2010). This trend was also verifiable between having fewer educational qualifications and a higher prevalence of mental illness (Kingi, 2011). This data while unsurprising correlates strongly with global trends that describe the pattern of common mental disorders being significantly more frequent within indigenous and socially disadvantaged sections of the population (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007). Within New Zealand, 39% and 51% of all Māori and Pacific children and youth respectively grow up in material hardship (Craig, 2013). There is thus a need to prioritise culturally appropriate mental health provision for Māori and Pasifika youth. Specifically, in the context of the increasing inequity in New Zealand, risk associated with poorer mental health and higher rates of mental illness and distress are even more pronounced in unequal societies (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007). Therefore, exploring novel and innovative methods of addressing mental health provision, such as using Spoken Word Poetry, within natural and everyday locations that may include primary healthcare settings, schools, and community venues (Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2008). This is important not only among the wider youth

population but specifically for Māori and Pasifika youth as they have both higher needs and greater socially derived barriers to accessing adequate mental healthcare.

2.5 A framework for the study of racism and health Model

To fully elucidate the underlying causation of mental health inequities for Māori and Pacific youth in New Zealand, a structural public health framework needs to be employed, that utilises elements of indigenous and mental health promotion (Houkamau, 2010; Cram, 2014). The framework for the study of racism and health model (refer to Figure 1 below) suggests that the central root of health inequities that continue to persist between groups are drawn from underlying or ‘basic causes’ such as racism and political structures (Williams & Mohammed, 2013). These basic causes are by and large beyond the ken of the clinical concern (Williams & Mohammed, 2013; Mills, 2010). Basic causes strongly influence the everyday interaction and lived experiences of populations, through complex interactions between existing socio-political infrastructure (social institutions.) and prevailing environmental contexts that impact on the wellbeing of the individuals, and thus populations (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007). For example, Williams, Neighbors and Jackson (2003) found that racial discrimination was positively associated with psychological distress and increased risk of mental illness in black and other minority populations in the USA. They found that recurrent acute life events, chronic psychological stressors and daily irritants were embodied through negative emotional and behavioural states which manifested through biological processes. Harris, Cormack, Tobias, Yeh, Talamaivao, Minster, Timutimu (2011) demonstrated by similar findings in Aotearoa were experiences of racial discrimination directly promoted risky health behaviour such as smoking, risky sexual behaviour or hazardous alcohol drinking.

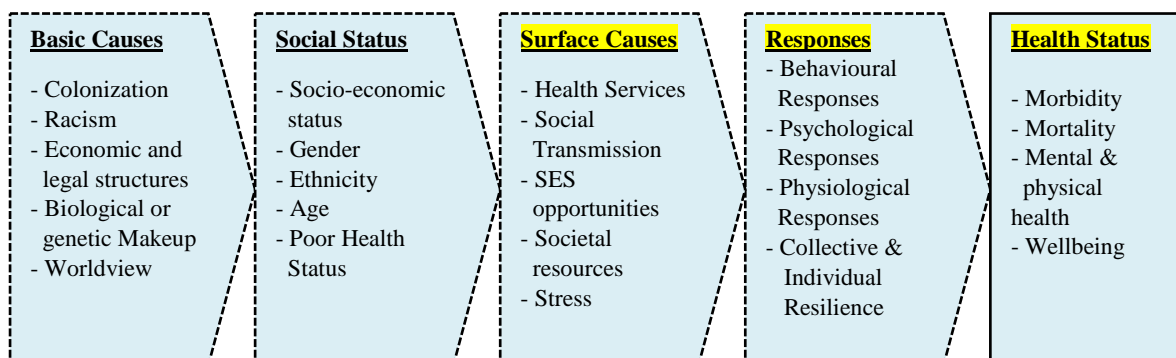


Figure 1: A framework for the study of racism and health

(adapted from Williams & Mohammed, 2013)

2.6 Mental Health Promotion and Spoken Word

The unfortunate reality of mental health is that the health or affliction of the mind is much less tangible, audible, and understood, in comparison to physical health; making mental health a complex field of engagement (Kingi, 2011). Likewise, the basic causes that both generate or maintain positive or negative health outcomes are often difficult to grasp. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the determinants of health that impinge upon the mental health of young people sits largely outside the responsibility of the health sector. A holistic understanding of health thus requires a range of strategies to be implemented across different sectors in seeking to improve youth health (Cattan, 2006).

Targeting youth through the community and educational sector therefore becomes a major focus of public health attention (Browne, Gafni, Roberts, Byrne & Majumdar, 2004). Research by Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan & Ford, (2014) demonstrated that children whose emotional needs are being met are much more able to apply themselves within an academic context. As mental and emotional health promotion programs in schools reciprocally affect the areas of peer and social interactions, scholastic attainment and cognitive processing, and moral and physical development, this also has more long-term health implications (Chin, & Rickard, 2014; Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan & Ford, 2014). The difficulty for mental health advocates lies in the prioritisation and competition from other commitments within the curriculum (Cattan, 2006). Spoken Word Poetry, already operates within educational and community venues, and thus has the potential to integrate health promotion, curricular requirements and positive social outcomes into a holistic intervention method.

Additionally, mental health promotion seeks to create individual, social and environmental conditions that allow optimal psychological development (Cattan, 2006). This requires a socio-ecological perspective that draws intrinsic links between people and their environments (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007). The everyday experiences and social environment of adolescents are of critical importance to this development. Sadly, this is often

disregarded entirely by adults based on a dominant deficit driven perspective of youth (Youniss et al., 2002; Crocetti, Erentaite & Zukauskienė, 2013). Reorienting focus and inquiry towards the creation of environments in which adolescents feel supported and understood is thus a critical task of the public health agenda in seeking to promote youth health. This also requires placing emphasis upon protective factors or activities that already exist within the population to enhance wellbeing and quality of life, and may have been overlooked in the past. Strategies and promotional methods that address wellbeing should also be place-specific as experiences of wellbeing are intertwined with location, and vary between them (Tipa and Panelli, 2007; Andrews, Chen & Myers, 2013).

This outlook stresses the conceptual importance of empowerment, as a process of local social action that individuals and communities should ideally be enabled to gain further mastery over their lives through effecting the surrounding social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life (Barry & World Health Organization, 2007). Empowerment in this sense cannot be conveyed by or upon individuals but is gained through the acquisition of powers different forms or practices (Labonte, 2008). Study of the contemporary youth Spoken Word movement aligns with these requirements as Spoken Word exclusively addresses youth perspectives within their immediate physical and social environment. Furthermore, it addresses adolescents' use of linguistic skills, and youth social and community interactions in relation to personal wellbeing and empowerment. This is analogous to other examples of empowerment-based mental health promotion including arts-based programs that build competence, self-esteem, social inclusion and a sense of wellbeing (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010).

Competence building describes processes where adolescents are enabled to communicate their own stories, whether through dance, music, or theatre (Rowling & Taylor, 2005). The use of theatre in this manner has gained acceptance globally as a culturally appropriate means of articulating youth mental health concerns, specifically in relation to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds such as Māori and Pasifika youth. By including voices that are typically marginalised within wider social and educational discourse, capacity, competence and advocacy is built both in the wider community and the individuals (Rowling & Taylor, 2005; Cattan, 2006). Spoken Word Poetry operates in a similar manner, as it also may utilize certain theatrical devices, but is ultimately unique in relation to its performance of self and

identity (Somers-Willett, 2009). Its ability to translate with the field of youth mental health is a key component of this research.

The rationale for such an approach exists due to the unmet mental health needs of youth and relative gaps of service within mental health services around NZ (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007; Mental health commission, 2011). Youth with mild or complex distressing and disabling mental health difficulties struggle to find appropriate outlets and assistance catered to their age and social context. Furthermore, many youth delay or avoid making contact with mental health services due to perceived stigma around mental illness or wanting to handle the problem internally (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie, & Jorm, 2007; Mental health commission, 2011; Oakley Browne, Wells & Scott 2006; Stylianos & Kehyayan, 2012; Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2010). Spoken Word Poetry may exist as an alternative format or strategy that could potentially be used to address this. Considering that the mental health needs of youth are complex, moving away from a clinical focus on illness aligns with positive outlooks that are community-based (Ghuman, Weist, & Sarles, 2002; Anae, Moewaka Barnes, Creanor & Watson, 2012). In order to provide a more comprehensive level of mental health care a greater equilibrium in the provision of hospital based and community-based services needs to be achieved. In this context it is important to define community based care in its broadest form as “any type of care, supervision and rehabilitation of patients ...outside the hospital by health and social workers based in the community” (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Within this definition Spoken Word Poetry can be qualitatively analysed in its relationship to youth adolescent health and wellbeing.

2.7 Chapter conclusion

This study adopts a public health approach by looking at the influence that Spoken Word Poetry has upon the wellbeing of adolescents in Aotearoa, with a specific focus on urban Māori and Pasifika youth. This study uses a definition of health that draws upon positive deviance or a strength-based approach to youth populations and public health (Crocetti, Erentaite & Zukauskienė, 2013; Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010; Anae, Moewaka Barnes, Creanor & Watson, 2012). Spoken Word is undertaken within social cultural spheres of society that intersects community, education and culture. Various aspects of Spoken Word implicitly related to mental health and wellbeing such as navigation of emotional trauma;

Speak the words ki au nei

physical or sexual violence; the construction of identity, ethnicity, and gender; social upheaval; colonialism and/or racism; spirituality; poverty; privilege; and other concepts that generally sit beyond the clinic and outside of the health sector per se.

Chapter 3 – Te Kete Aronui (Literature Review)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature available on Spoken Word Poetry. The paucity of scholarly inquiry into the art form of Spoken Word itself, let alone its relationship with health, required exploring a wide base of literature to create a foundation for understanding the association between the two. National and international literature was drawn upon to present broad groupings of evidence to: 1) construct a brief history of Spoken Word from its origins to Aotearoa; 2) briefly describe existing approaches of poetry use within health; 3) describing associated literature that was involved within the findings.

3.2 Overview of the method of literature review

From its onset, a very broad range of relevant literature was required to appropriately inform and frame the research. A systematic or ‘formal’ literature review was not specifically intended. Major databases including JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Elsevier were searched for relevant literature because they relate to health, arts and social science academic publications. Search terms included in the literature review were: “Māori”, “Pacific”, “health”, “poetry”, “wellbeing”, “indigenous”, “ethnic”, “race”, “slam”, “Spoken Word”, “flow”, “performance”, “youth”, “adolescent”, “young people”, “Hip-hop”, “identity”, “therapy”, “pedagogy”, “student”. Literature searches were refined and repeated between February, 2015 and July, 2015 as the scope of the research developed and evolved, this also ensured that current literature was included.

The criteria for the inclusion of literature within the research was based upon the following: being relevant to the research topic; wellbeing and its relationship to the genre of Spoken Word was the main focus of this research. Pragmatic limitations to the literature review also existed, with accessibility to full online texts in the English language being a major requisite for inclusion with the review. With the known limitations of available literature for the topic of this research, particularly in relation to the context of Māori and Pasifika individuals, the literature review necessarily included research drawn from abroad, in particular from the United States of America (USA), which studied other ethnic minority and indigenous groups who may have experienced similar impacts of colonization and structural racism.

3.3 Spoken Word Poetry as a genre.

3.3.1 A general understanding of Spoken Word.

Spoken Word Poetry is a broad term that encompasses a contemporary form of poetry writing and performance (Yanofsky, Van Driel & Kass, 1999; Boudreau 2009; Fiore, 2013). The term “Spoken Word” simultaneously applies to:

- the act of writing or performing a poem,
- a social scene among youth and adults,
- a current movement within the literary community

Within the bounds of this research, the use of the term “Spoken Word” or “Spoken Word Poetry” relates to its writing and/or performance, and the wider social scene and community among youth and adolescents, respectively.

The individual practice of Spoken Word Poetry can be defined as the composition of a poem that is written with the specific intention of performance (Weinstein, 2010; Boudreau, 2009). The term “poem” within the bounds of Spoken Word can be used broadly to encompass many forms of writing that may include prose, elaborate rhyme schemes, repeating meter, satire, extended metaphor and other poetic techniques, and as a narrative (Somers-Willett, 2009). The tone and use of language can range from descriptive to persuasive or even as a form of exposition.

In addition to its written characteristics and conventions, poems are usually devised with a number of paralinguistic features that may include gestures, movement, percussion, or the inclusion of a sung or chanted component (Weinstein, 2010; Dooley, 2014). While the poem may be a spontaneous act or performance, akin to a freestyle rap or poem, in most cases Spoken Word poems are rehearsed privately before being performed (Somers-Willett, 2009). A final defining characteristic of Spoken Word poems is that they are, with the exception of being recorded, live and embodied by the author (Dooley, 2014). Spoken Word poems are almost exclusively performed by the individual who wrote the poem and typically convey or perform the identity of the author (Somers-Willett, 2005).

3.3.2 Origins and creation

Within the literature the modern characterization of Spoken Word Poetry as a genre has largely been influenced by the poetry slam. Poetry slams are a unique and popular format of competitive poetry that present an interactive environment for poets to vie for the title of ‘Slam Champion’, over successive rounds of elimination (Somers-Willett, 2005; Kirsh, 2011). Created and developed in the late 1980’s by Marc Smith, a construction worker, the slam offered an entry point for everyday individuals who sat outside the bounds of academia (Rudd, 2012). The popularity of the poetry slam has in effect shifted the emphasis of poetry away from traditional poetry readings and into live performance (Yanofsky, Van Driel & Kass, 1999). The distinction between the two variations on poetry lying in whether the poem was created primarily for performance or if it was a means of exposing the public to a written work, that would then go on to be reread in its written form (Weinstein, 2010). While Spoken Word poets often print or publish their work so that it may be read, the slam is still one of the primary areas for the sharing of Spoken Word.

In addition to its emphasis on the performance by the performer, a critical element in the popularity of slam is the participation of the audience. As a competition the audience are active participants in the event. The audience under standard slam rules also serve as the judges of the slam. Individuals are selected at random from the audience and rate each poem with a numerical score between 0 and 10 after each performance. Similarly, audience members are actively encouraged, as part of the culture of slam but also by the MC, to react to the performances of poets and scoring by the judges through applause, hooting, cheering, booing, or even heckling throughout the event (Yanofsky, Van Driel & Kass, 1999).

3.3.3 Spoken Word Poetry & Urban Youth

The popularity of slam poetry, and Spoken Word among urban youth in the USA, led to the formation of the youth-only poetry slams. Gregory, (2008) describes the youth slam as the fastest growing area within the movement. Initially as an American art form it has spread across numerous cities within the USA, where slams and youth poetry events are regularly hosted (Fiore, 2013). Slam has also spread globally to countries that include but are not limited to the UK, Sweden, South Africa, Australia and more recently Aotearoa (Somers-

Willett, 2005; Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, 2015; Australian Poetry Slam, 2015). Likewise, since 1997 international youth slams such as Brave New Voices exist that allow teams from different nations to compete (Somers-Willett, 2005; Gregory, 2008).

While adolescents may take part in adult and all-age slams, they more commonly participate within youth slams. A range of school or community-based organizations generally support these events, and in addition to the slam, may include group workshops and youth gatherings prior to the event (Weinstein & West). These events often engage with schools and teachers conversant with Spoken Word Poetry to engage students and youth in participating or attending the slam. Overall, because of their strong emotional nature and heavy orientation towards controversial themes and the topic of identity, youth slams may be thought of as regular youth forums (Boudreau, 2009). Lastly, youth slams are typically more open events, with stronger social ties between participants, mutually encouraging one another on, and offstage, and often host participants from multiple ethnic minorities or genders.

Finally, while slam is an attractive part of Spoken Word Poetry, it is not the only venue for Spoken Word. In addition to slam, Spoken Word Poetry events include regular open mics, poetry showcases by individuals or poetry groups and collectives, and lastly, Spoken Word poets regularly create and refine their poetry in workshops and residency programs offered to the public and within the poetry community (Weinstein & West; Boudreau, 2009). Together with slam, these other non-competitive events offer a range of events and spaces for youth poets to write and perform their poetry.

3.3.4 Spoken Word and Hip Hop.

Numerous authors within the literature draw a link between Spoken Word and hip-hop culture (Fiore, 2013; Camanign, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Yanofsky, Van Driel & Kass, 1999; Somers-Willett, 2005; Boudreau, 2009; Denny & Liang, 2006; Stovall, 2006; Biggs-El, 2006; Shami, 2010; Somers-Willett, 2009). Descending from the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's, Zemke-White, (2005) states that Hip hop culture is structured around the four elements that include: Dj Turntablism; Rap or MC'ing; Graffiti art; B-boy or B-girl breakdancing. Strongly influenced by urban Black and Latino culture within the USA, and with its origins within Black Civil Rights and social justice movements, hip hop has become

a global cultural and musical phenomenon that expresses the life and stories of marginalized groups and minority populations around the globe (Boudreau, 2009).

The association between the Spoken Word and hip hop is fortuitous as Marc Smith and other early slam organizations did not rely on hip hop music, culture, and aesthetics to popularize the slam (Boudreau, 2009). The advent of HBO series *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry* has been referenced by multiple sources as contributing to the association between hip hop and Spoken Word Poetry (Somers-Willett, 2005; Boudreau, 2009; Kirsh, 2011).

The popularity of Spoken Word among youth and adolescents is in part based upon Spoken Word having both an aesthetic and a linguistic similarity to hip hop. Somers-Willett, (2005) describes how the producers of the *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry* presented Spoken Word poets alongside contemporary hip hop artists such as Kanye West, Common, DMX, Black Thought, and Consequence to mainstream youth audiences as the contemporary expression of a generation. The spread of hip hop culture worldwide, both through its aesthetics and clothing, and its musical and social scene when linked with Spoken Word helped to establish Spoken Word Poetry as a youth movement across the globe (Boudreau, 2009).

Kirsh, (2011) has described hip hop and rap music as a close cousin of Spoken Word Poetry. In addition to the visual aesthetics of hip hop, freestyle or improvisational rap is commonly exhibited in Spoken Word Poetry as a whole and youth slams in particular (Gregory, 2008). A linguistic parallel can be created between rap and Spoken Word due to natural overlap between the two as rap follows a set or improvisational rhyme meter that follows the dance beat. To contrast, a Spoken Word poem is not bound by either of these requirements and is not accompanied by instrumentation. Therefore, Elevand (2003) explains that rap, and by extension hip hop, falls within the bounds of poetry (Boudreau, 2009).

The common association between hip hop and Spoken Word Poetry has also allowed Spoken Word to be used within school contexts as part of educational curricula (Dooley, 2014; Jocson, 2006; Camanign, 2008). Hip hop has already been characterized by numerous authors as a literary and pedagogical tool for use within schools (Fisher, 2005; Biggs-El, 2006; Hall, 2011). Stovall, (2006) and Gregory, (2008) both articulate that many poets and youth workers

who engage with schools and educational providers use hip hop and improvisation rap as a tool to interact with youth and break down adolescent social defence mechanisms for dealing with unfamiliar topics such as ‘poetry’. Yanofsky, Van Driel & Kass, (1999) relays how using rap and hip hop has provided a relatively short jump for most youth, many having grown up with hip hop music and culture, between popular music and poetry, but a vast leap from what youth perceived poetry to be limited to. This in effect has created a bridge for young people between contemporary youth culture and Spoken Word Poetry, which can then link to more traditional elements of the curriculum (Gregory, 2008).

3.3.5 Spoken Word origins within Aotearoa

The aforementioned literature directly contributes to Spoken Word within Aotearoa. In addition to its relationship with hip hop and popular culture, the unique history and oral traditions and practices of the Pacific influenced the contemporary character and expression of Spoken Word Poetry in Aotearoa.

To characterize the contemporary expression of Spoken Word Poetry it is necessary to understand that oracy is a strong part of numerous Polynesian cultures (Barnes & Hunt, 2005; Taufa, 2015). Partially derived from a high degree of interaction between various island groups, prior to European contact, the notion of oratory is indigenous to the Pacific (Barnes & Hunt, 2005). The use, recital, and performance of oral traditions and poetry within formal and informal capacities are still common within many contemporary Pasifika and Māori contexts. Taufa (2015) describes the traditional and continued use within the Kingdom of Tonga of “heliaki”, indirect speech or metaphor, and “talanoa”, or talk, by notable individuals to convey meaning or social action (Vaiioleti, 2006). Marsh (2010) further shares how talanoa is used in educational context within Aotearoa to engage Pasifika youth. Likewise, studies by Lee (2005, 2009) and King & Goff (2010) explains how Māori have used Pūrākau, a traditional form of storytelling and narrative, and whaikōrero, or Māori speechmaking, to convey ancient and contemporary stories embedded with empirical, spiritual, social, political, and/or value-laden information to an audience.

Another example of the ubiquity of poetry within Pasifika and Māori circles was seen in the literature itself, through the common use of whakataukī, or proverbs, within the available text

reviewed (Mahuika, 2008; Royal, 2006; Lee, 2005; Taufu, 2015; Cram, McCreanor, Smith, Nairn, & Johnstone 2006). Finally, both Barnes & Hunt (2005), and Lee (2009), highlight that oral traditions and narratives of the Pacific are not static but adaptable with time, place, social setting, and the intention or motivation of the speaker.

The concepts stated above underpin the intersection with contemporary forms of expression such as Aotearoa-based hip hop and Spoken Word Poetry. Aotearoa-based hip hop has been a prevalent and persevering music and social movement within Aotearoa made popular among Māori and Pasifika communities (Zemke-White and Televave, 2007). The association between the music and these communities has also naturally incorporated relevant local and social issues such as poverty, colonization, genetic engineering, and religion (Zemke-White, 2005). Numerous Māori and Pasifika Artists have adapted and (re)presented the popular musical style of hip hop, rap, and its associated social scene and “vibe”, with their own personal and cultural adaptations to the local context of New Zealand and the Pacific (Zemke-White, 2005; Zemke-White and Televave, 2007). This plays into the visual, social, and aesthetic characterization of Spoken Word Poetry within Aotearoa, that is similar to the US, and provides an entry point for many youth through its natural linguistic and cultural affiliation or overlap with hip hop (Denny & Liang, 2006; Action Education, 2013; West, 2013; Johansson, 2014).

Drawing upon a legacy of Polynesian performance, music and social activism, and fusing this with hip hop-laden aesthetics, Spoken Word Poetry within Aotearoa is unique. The South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC) as pioneers within the field of Spoken Word combine the aforementioned elements to create the distinctive character of Spoken Word Poetry within New Zealand.

3.3.6 Aotearoa Spoken Words contemporary expression and social scene

The formation of the South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC) in 2007, and subsequent PolyNation showcase in 2008, can be described as one of the significant foundations of Spoken Word within Aotearoa (Action Education, 2013). The South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC), sprung out of a Youthline project and later developed into one of New Zealand’s first youth Spoken Word Poetry collectives. They have arguably become one of the

strongest contributors to the growth of the genre throughout Aotearoa, with many current and former members being involved with the creation of poetry scene through organizing annual slams, monthly open mics, and performing professional and amateur showcases throughout Auckland or regularly at festivals across Aotearoa (Action Education, 2013; Johansson, 2012; Johansson, 2014).

It is through the work of SAPC and other Spoken Word organizations and groups such as Action Education, Niu Navigations, the Waxed Poetic Revival and others that the construction of the social, pedagogical and competitive scene of Spoken Word Poetry exists within Aotearoa (Action Education, 2013; West, 2013; Johansson, 2014).

3.3.6.1 Youth Slam

As shown within the literature, similar to abroad, slams are largely responsible for the popularity of Spoken Word Poetry in Aotearoa. A number of slams exist in New Zealand open to all ages that emulate the general conventions of slam with small exceptions. Examples of these include the Matariki Poetry Slam, Going West Poetry Slam, Poetry Idol, and the New Zealand National Poetry Slam (Action Education, 2013). Of particular importance within Auckland and this research, is the prominence of youth slams. The youth slam scene in Auckland is the largest growing area of the Spoken Word movement. This includes the Word the Frontline, an inter-high school team-slam, open to all ages of high school, Rising Voices Youth Poetry Slam, that targets youth between 16-24 years old, and the University of Auckland Poetry Slam, open to university students but predominated by adolescent poets between 18-26 (Action Education, 2013; West, 2013). In addition, both Rising Voices and Word the Frontline are accompanied by extensive workshopping to foster relationships and community between participants while they develop their poetry. Typical of youth slam, these events are large draw cards that target and exclusively involve youth, and illustrated above capture the entire period of adolescence/youth used within the study (Gregory, 2008).

3.3.6.2 Open Mic and non-competitive stages

In addition to slam, a number of non-competitive venues also exist for youth to perform their poems. These include seasonal exhibitions put on by Auckland Art Gallery or the Auckland Museum such as the UrbanLife program (Auckland Museum, 2011). Spoken Word is also performed consistently at numerous open mic nights held around the city. Prominent examples include Poetry Live, the longest running dedicated space for performance poetry. Unfortunately, as it is held in a bar, it limits the ability of under-18 poets from attending. In contrast, SAPC and Action Education host rotating open mics, referred to Stand Up Poetry or SUP, in South Auckland and North Shore dedicated to solely to youth Spoken Word (Johansson, 2014; West, 2013; Action Education, 2015). Johansson, (2014) describes events like SUP as important sites for identity renegotiation among adolescents, particularly among Pasifika and Māori youth.

3.3.6.3 Workshops in schools and educational providers

Lastly, within Auckland, Spoken Word Poetry has established itself among youth around Auckland not only from individuals watching and emulating Spoken Word Poetry seen online, but also through workshops provided in schools, alternative educational providers, and universities by poetry organizations such as Niu Navigations and Action Education (Action Education, 2013; Action Education, 2015). Marsh (2010) and Johansson, (2012) both describe instances of poets from SAPC being invited to perform and facilitate poetry workshops that share the art form of Spoken Word with youth and also draw on Pacific literature and associated oral practices to engage with Pasifika youth. Finally, the use of Spoken Word Poetry also has the ability to translate within the school curriculum. The best practice guide created by Action Education, (2013) presents areas where Spoken Word can be used to satisfy the requirement within the New Zealand National Curriculum.

3.4 Health related concepts and Spoken Word Poetry

3.4.1 Poetry and Wellbeing

Within the existing international literature therapeutic connection has been drawn between poetry (in the broader traditional sense) and wellbeing. Currently, the emphasis around the

use of poetry and health strictly describes traditional, classical, or otherwise described as 'page' poetry (Weinstein, 2010). While some overlap exists, Spoken Word stands apart as a performative expression of poetry, as a loose form of entertainment, as a social game, and a youth and community oriented practice, rather one tied to strictly to clinical outcomes or academia (Maddalena, 2009; Anae, Moewaka Barnes, Creanor & Watson, 2012).

Literature surrounding poetry therapy predominantly revolves around practitioners and individuals, such as nurses, researchers, therapists, or social workers, engaging in reflective practice that uses poetry, either for gaining personal wellbeing or in assisting interactions with individual patients (Mazza, 2003; Gold, 2012; McCulliss, 2013; Raingruber, 2004; Stepakoff, 2009). Poetry, in the wider sense, has and can be used to mediate relationships and direct conversations between individuals or in groups, through a practitioner sharing a pre-existing published poem or work. This is characteristically different from the description of how Spoken Word Poetry is understood or practiced based on its physical and social aesthetic. Likewise, in contrast to drawing on pre-existing or published works by an outside party, youth are the dual authors and performers of their own original works (Somers-Willett, 2009). Finally, Spoken Word events in most instances are not driven towards a prescribed topic, as Spoken Word events are generally held in recreational spaces rather than clinical environments.

3.4.2 Flow and Peak experiences

Another related concept is the notion of 'flow' or peak experience (Miranda & Gaudreau 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). An international study by Dooley (2014) stated that writing Spoken Word allowed or predisposed youth to enter a state of 'flow'. This concept describes a voluntary mental state of operation where individuals are completely encompassed within an activity. During periods of flow one's experience of time and awareness of other social cues are temporarily suspended (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Experiences of flow are perceived as intensely rewarding and are founded upon voluntary motivation rather than external pressure or coercion to complete an activity or task (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh & Nakamura, 2014). Finally, the presence of flow or peak experiences are positively associated with wellbeing and seeking to increase their frequency within everyday life has been correlated with higher self-reported mental and physical health (Croom, 2012; Miranda & Gaudreau 2010).

3.4.3 Social and Cultural Capital, and Mana

Social and cultural capital was also deemed a relevant concept when exploring Spoken Word's relationship to youth health and wellbeing due to the performance of identity and ethnicity and its dual individual and collective components. The notion of capital was originally defined by Bourdieu, (1986) and extended by Coleman (1988), Putnam (1990, 1993), and later other theorists such as Yosso (2005), to describe sociocultural knowledge, relationships, and networks as a resource that can be utilized by individuals and groups to influence their overall placement within the general social hierarchy. Within the literature, the concept of social and cultural capital remains contested as to its use and is often applied uncritically (Sobel, 2002; Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010).

Likewise, within a Kaupapa Māori framework, the conception of culture and colonial history as currency, with its wider implications of exoticism, tokenism, and appropriation can be problematic (Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2005). To address this, literature was critically appropriated to reorientate the terminology in a manner that was consistent with Kaupapa Māori, and secondly, drew upon research by Māori and Pacific authors that necessarily adapted and reoriented or reinterpreted the notion of capital in ways that were suitable for use within the local context.

The use of social and cultural capital within the following sections is based upon its interpretation as a similar or equivalent term for Mana. The epistemological stance taken within the research rather than aligning with a western, market-based model of interaction, chooses to assert social and cultural capital in relation to the subject, the adolescent use of Spoken Word Poetry, as a characteristic or trait that can be developed. This viewpoint was based largely upon the notion that the valuation of identity, culture and personal trauma as a form of currency for exchange is incompatible with the aims of the research and its connotations towards youth empowerment (Mertens, Cram & Chilisa, 2015).

Meads (2003) explains Mana as socially founded, power, authority, or prestige, and describes the place of the individual within the wider social group(s). Likewise, it can be based upon the skills, works or contribution of the individual. The enhancement of Mana, of either the

individual or of a representative group, is requisite upon these skills and/or accrued experience being manifested/displayed within public space. This definition is synonymous with Robinson and Williams, (2001) description of social capital as a composite measure of the status, knowledge and accrued opportunity or ability to interact and communicate possessed by an individual or group within a wider network. It/social capital is created through carrying out actions within networks and relationships. Finally, Robinson and Williams, (2001) and Stewart-Withers and O'Brien, (2005) describe that Māori and Pasifika conceptions of social and cultural capital overlap and are mutually dependent upon one another as social capital is the expression of cultural capital in practice. West (2013) and Johanson (2012; 2014) draw on a number of adolescent Spoken Word poets in Aotearoa who reemploy traditional Māori narratives to tell contemporary personal struggle or alternatively describe local events, in this case an environmental disaster. In each instance, Māori cultural concepts and language were used extensively, while the latter simultaneously conveyed wider political undertones, representative of resistance capital (O'Shea, 2015).

3.5 Chapter summary

In conclusion this chapter briefly outlines a review of available national and international literature on the topic of Spoken Word Poetry, health and its relationship to poetry, and finally social and cultural capital. The following chapter discusses the theoretical positioning of the researcher and the methodological framing of the study within Kaupapa Māori. Following these discussions, the chapter then describes methods and study design.

Chapter 4 – Tikanga Rangahau (Methods and Methodology)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the explicit aims and objectives of this study and discuss the theoretical positioning of the researcher within Kaupapa Māori. This chapter will also address methods of data collection used that included the use of: autoethnographic methods, focus group interviews, and participant observation. A brief summation of the research conduction procedures that includes the process of recruitment consultation is also included. Finally, this concludes with a brief description of data analysis and ethical considerations within the study.

4.2 Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of the research project was to investigate how oral and written poetry influences and has a role in the identity, health and wellbeing of urban youth in Auckland, New Zealand by:

1. Exploring how Spoken Word was utilized by urban youth in Tāmaki Makaurau. This included documenting the Spoken Word scene and history in New Zealand, and specifically Auckland city area.
2. Looking at the way youth wrote and presented issues of wellbeing (trauma, sexuality, family, community etc.) through Spoken Word Poetry.
3. Investigating how Spoken Word Poetry resonated within Māori and Pacific participants.

4.3 Positionality

Throughout this project addressing my own positionality was a recurring task that I undertook as a way of channelling, clarifying, and focusing the aims and objectives of the project. It also critically influenced my reflection on interpreting the data.

In beginning with the self, as an indigenous, Māori urban youth, with a strong interest in Spoken Word Poetry, it should be acknowledged that my choice to address questions of wellbeing and mental health come from an embodied realisation of the importance of poetry through my own experience of adolescence. Further, when combined with my own involvement within the Spoken Word scene in Auckland as an insider, both as a poet and later also a facilitator of workshops, naturally, aspects of ethnography and auto-ethnography aligned strongly with the research project.

In relation to the operational use of Kaupapa Māori, this choice was provoked both by my own experiential and epistemological stance (as Māori) but also the research environment surrounding me (locating the research within the Te Kupenga Hauora Māori). Kaupapa Māori theory may be approached in many ways, and upon reading and reflection I find myself located in a space of critical construction (Mills, Reid, & Vaithianathan, 2012; Cram et al., 2004).

Kaupapa Māori, like that of Māori people, is marked by a determined resistance to the initial and continued embodiments of colonialism, with academia historically not being excluded from this process (Smith, 2012). Kaupapa Māori creates a foundation within the academic world where Māori, such as myself are able to engage with academia in a way that is culturally safe and representative of values held by Māori people (Pihama, 2001).

The implications of the above statements in relation to conducting this research were not taken lightly as Kaupapa Māori theory in this research aligns with principles such as (Kerr et al., 2010; Pihama, 2001):

- For Māori, by Māori.
- That the Māori worldview and its associated customs are taken as the normative frame.
- Research must be for the benefit of Māori.

All these criteria posed critical questions that informed the process of conducting the research. Firstly, it could not be overlooked that I choose to invoke my own indigeneity within the research process. Understanding that by virtue of my own urban upbringing and

limited opportunity to engage with te reo Māori me ona tikanga (Māori language and customs), and relative dislocation from vital sources of Māori identity, my journey represented many of those that I would interview. Furthermore, my own relationship with the problem-laden notion of cultural authenticity was not only non-coincidental and hegemonically/societally derived, but also ultimately a subjective construct/barrier (Smith, 2012, p72.; Houkamau, 2010). In this sense it was recognised that the aforementioned criteria of normatively framing the Māori participants' worldview was one in which the practices of Māori (and by extension Pasifika) were legitimate (and the benefits therefrom) be they contemporary or traditional. This translated within the research as encouraging spaces and discourse in which whatever levels or manners of cultural expression participants chose to convey was ultimately treated as 'ordinary'.

The concept of critical construction is something closely akin to being both a Spoken Word poet and researcher, as each rely upon constructing a narrative to shed light upon a deeper reality or ideal (Callahan, 2013). This itself is also not a foreign concept within Te Ao Māori (Lee, 2009). Pūrākau, more than merely Māori legends or myths, simultaneously represent an act of resistance, through the active reclamation of story-telling as decolonisation, and also of creativity through the reconstructing and re-emphasising of the lived experiences of Māori (Smith, 2012; Lee, 2009; Royal, 2006). While this will be discussed further in-depth in Chapter 7, it illustrates the distinctive position I occupy in relation to Kaupapa Māori.

Post-modern analysis and critique of Kaupapa Māori Theory by authors such as Anaru Eketona act as an evaluative measure of Kaupapa Māori Theory. Anaru Eketona (2008) in one example highlights that much of what is currently considered "Māori" is vastly different from what would have been associated with the reality of our Tipuna (ancestors). In his view, oral and written traditions (e.g. passing down of Taonga (treasure) such as the Bible) are unable to adequately capture and encompass every facet of reality as it changes over time. As such they must be constantly recreated and reimagined, therein their reality is inaccessible and much of ours has been socially constructed. In contrast to a more general approach to Kaupapa Māori that utilises ideals aligned with critical and emancipatory goals (Mahuika, 2008), perspectives such as these can serve as valuable points of consideration and contrast.

Critical aims of Kaupapa Māori assert that resistance and a political stance is necessary (Pihama, 2001). Furthermore, asserting that there are deeper concepts within a narrative, is self-evident in poetry as most Spoken Word is about exposition and uncovering a hidden reality, many of the poems I have written are about allowing other sides of me to be seen or realised. Mere story telling is overridden by being aware of smaller details, key facts, themes, and prevailing ideas.

Another key to utilising Kaupapa Māori theory is its ability to draw from allied theories and methods such as Grounded Theory that illustrate not only that participatory methods are necessary but also that what is discovered from their application is an act of construction. The varying degrees of participation from 3rd parties (none in auto-ethnography, some in ethnography, mutually in interviews) act to uncover a deeper reality or set of ideals (Emerson et al., 1995; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

4.4 Data collection methods

4.4.1 Autoethnography

Auto-ethnography as a qualitative method gives ‘voice’ to the researcher making explicit their position and interpretations as their own as well as allowing them to use their personal experiences to explore broader socio-cultural issues (Bright, 2012; Sparkes, 1996). Auto-ethnography makes explicit in theory and in practice that the narrative is drawn through the researcher, simultaneously personalising the research and placing the researcher as a subject within the frame of the research (Ritchie, Morrison, Vaioleti & Ritchie, 2013). As was intended, auto-ethnographic narratives inherently stand as a challenge to the hegemonic universalising of knowledge production where the subject and knowledge is supposedly non-value-laden.

This method aligned naturally with the research considering my background as a Spoken Word poet and its observation in relation to health given its influence within my own life. The inherent risk of personal exposure was firstly a conscious decision but also familiar territory as my own poetry (a component of auto-ethnographic data) shared within the digital and public sphere intrinsically speaks to society, to my peers, and ultimately to myself (Ritchie, Morrison, Vaioleti & Ritchie, 2013).

It allowed myself as the researcher to be academically transparent about my relationship with the topic but also draw upon my unique experience as a relatively young urban Māori poet, while also drawing upon my background as researcher in the field of health. In addition, the analysis and deconstruction of others stories and poetry meant little if this expectation was not also applied to myself as well. The appropriateness of this method is not only legitimised by my own personal stance, in relation to Kaupapa Māori, it is also a traditionally viable means of conveying information. Additionally, auto-ethnography also permits a level of cultural explicitness (Pere, 1982; Smith, 2012; Kainamu, 2012) to the research.

Collection of auto-ethnographic data occurred over the duration of the project (28/02/2014 to 08/06/2015). Ethnographic data was collected over a seven-month period (from 08/09/2014 to 08/02/2015), workshops occurring on an irregular basis. Workshops lasted approximately 2 hours and were held either at schools or in local community venues (refer to Appendix B).

As an active member of the Spoken Word Poetry scene myself, I used a research diary to record my experiences as a Spoken Word poet and young urban Māori within the scene. These field notes, collected over the duration of the project from local shows, poetry slams and other poetry events, with the addition of poetry written during and prior to the study formed the basis of auto-ethnographic data set (McCulliss, 2013).

Participant observation was undertaken with consenting youths participating in Spoken Word Poetry workshops organized and run by Action Education. The data recorded consisted largely of ethnographic field notes taken during the space of workshops. Notes included social interactions between participants and their environments, informal conversations, and the devising of poetry and its performance.

4.4.2 Participant observation

Participant observation involves collecting data *in situ* by researchers ‘getting close’ to people through observing and participating in their everyday lives, therefore allowing for first-hand accounts of lived events (Emerson et al. 1995), and producing a rich in depth understanding of the data. This was complicated by the fact that I have been a member of the

scene as a participant and was now switching into the role of an academic. While being an area of ongoing tension and learning this was mitigated in each method by being as transparent and communicative as possible about the intentions of the project.

4.4.3 Interviews

Qualitative interviewing differs to ethnographic and auto-ethnographic data collection as it serves to explore, directly through dialogue, the internal thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of participants with regard to Spoken Word Poetry. Inclusion of interviews rested strongly upon the premise of dialogue as a requirement of true education and comprehension (Freire, 1996).

This study undertook six semi-structured focus group interviews. Interviews were no longer than an hour and held either at the University of Auckland, at participants' homes, and on one occasion outside in the park, based upon the request of the participants. Focus group data was obtained over a four-month period (from 15/12/2014 to 08/02/2015) based upon the availability of participants. Interviews were critical in understanding the effect and influence of Spoken Word Poetry on adolescents in relation to their mental health. By unpacking some of the deeper meaning and tacit associations that participants ascribed to individual poems and/or the movement as whole, a clearer, more informed, and holistic understanding could be drawn and interpolated with mental health literature.

A number of advantages consequently became clear in the use of focus group interviews. As participants gave their accounts along a flexible schedule of questioning, the dialogue produced could be steered by both the participants and/or the researcher (Cram, McCreanor, Tuhiwai Smith, Nairn & Johnstone, 2006). This could be seen practically at different points along the course of each interview in the topic and direction of each interview.

This method also addressed a number of features and aims of the research. Alluded to earlier, interviews functioned firstly, to acknowledge and attempt to address power relationships within the project, each interview included a section (refer to Appendix A) that allowed the participants to ask questions of the researcher (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Secondly, interviews gave voice to participants directly by allowing them to 'speak their world' and

'name their experiences' under their own terms (Freire, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Thirdly, this method also provided subjectivity and the conception of multiple histories and multiple realities unique to each participant, that could be documented and engaged with to better understand the phenomenon of Spoken Word between different individuals (Smith, 2012; Panelli & Tipa, 2007). Prior to each successive interview, questions were critically reassessed as to their relevance, and were naturally refined and altered in accord with the responses of the participants. Reflective of the unique and dynamic relationship held participants between each other and the researcher, the resultant questions and direction of each interview naturally adjusted (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). The ethnicity of those involved in the study included Filipino, Indian, Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Pākehā/New Zealand European, Cook Island Māori, Chinese.

Lastly, focus group interviews involved in-depth group interviews with participants from a purposive population, in this study, consenting youth who attend Spoken Word Poetry workshops (Rabiee, 2004). Data consisted of a flexible question schedule, the audio was recorded and transcribed at a later date. In certain cases, the structure of the interviews was discarded based on the context of the interview in favour of open dialogue, though this was rare. To ensure that interviews were consistent with Tikanga Māori, food was provided at all interviews and karakia was offered prior to interviews in an appropriate manner.

4.5 Participant Selection

Youth Participants were consenting youth (16-25 years of age) who took part in Spoken Word Poetry workshops run by Action Education within the Auckland region of New Zealand.

The inclusion criteria for participants were:

- Must be 16 years of age or older
- Have an interest in Spoken Word Poetry
- Must reside within the Tamaki region during the duration of the research process.

4.6 Research Site/s

The research took place within the Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland region of Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is the most active area in relation to Spoken Word Poetry and hosts the majority of large-scale poetry slams (competitions) and events. Tamaki Makaurau is also the largest metropolitan area in Aotearoa. This provided a diverse sample of participants from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds that was reflected in the workshops observed and illustrated during the interview process.

4.7 Consultation

Consultation was held with local poetry organisers: Grace Taylor, Dietrich Soakai, and Marina Alefosio, to provide direction on how to best engage with youth and young poets in a way that was both safe and engaging. All of these advisors are either current or former youth workers and all have Pacific heritage. Whaea Julie Wade, a cultural liaison at the University of Auckland, was also consulted in relation to observing Tikanga Māori.

4.8 Recruitment

The youth participants were recruited by Action Education, a non-profit youth-centred organisation that had pre-established formal relationships with various schools, educational institutions and community organisations (Action Education, 2015). Action Education regularly holds Spoken Word Poetry workshops in educational institutions and for community organisations as a core component of the services they offer.

Action Education approached the educational providers and community groups, via email and in person, when seeking to engage in the research workshop process. Action Education provided a written description of the research for their involvement in the research (refer to Appendix B), and upon acceptance, allowed Action Education to recruit consenting youth to participate in the workshops, including participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

For each consenting educational institution and organisation, an Action Education mentor passed on information about the study to youth participating in workshops and invited them

to participate in the research. Each youth was provided with a participant information sheet and a consent form to sign. Communication stipulated that inclusion or exclusion from the research project would not influence the relationship between any of the involved parties and that participation in the research is not accompanied by any fiscal or social rewards other than contributing to the knowledge base.

Consenting student participants and non-consenting students were able to be allocated into discretely separate groups within the workshop to ensure that the student researcher's presence did not influence non-consenting students at all and maintained the confidentiality of information for consenting students. Fortunately, this precaution was not required within study as all participants were comfortable to be observed. Consenting students were also invited to take part in focus group interviews. Once participants indicated their willingness to participate an interview date was later scheduled. There was some level of attrition between the size of workshops that ranged between 5-50 youth, and focus group interviews that usually consisted of 2-3 participants. This was intended as means of achieving manageable qualitative data from the latter interviews.

Certain aspects of recruitment within a Kaupapa Māori perspective took on an added dimension in relation to the principle of *Kia Piki Ake Ngā Raruraru o Te Kainga* or the mediation of socio-economic factors or barriers (Mahuika, 2008). This is a direct reference to difficulties surrounding some participants' ability to attend interview dates and locations, many being youth without a driver's license or a supportive family network. This was addressed by either picking up (or dropping off) some participants to/from their homes. This service was offered if stated as needed by participants, and was deemed appropriate as interviewed participants largely had a high level of rapport with the researcher due to repeated interactions over the course of the research.

This project contained to two main forms of data: Ethnographic and auto-ethnographic data, and focus group interview. These distinct sets of data were utilised as a point of contrast, drawing on both the internalised perceptions of the researcher and also the external perspectives' of those participants within the scene, in an aim to ascertain a more inclusive and holistic data set.

Finally, by being involved with the poetry scene prior to the research and also having some experience of workshop facilitation enabled the researcher a certain level of competence within the workshop environment and in engaging with poetry facilitators and youth participants.

4.9 Analysis

All qualitative data was transcribed by the student researcher and recorded in a secure digital format (Microsoft Word) in a password-protected computer. Data was then thematically analysed using a general inductive approach. This approach was used to develop meaningful thematic categories from raw qualitative data that were determined by both the research objectives and repeated readings and interpretations of the data, thus having both deductive and inductive aspects (Thomas, 2006). Coding consistency checks were provided by the two research supervisors (Dr. Anneka Anderson and Dr. Kirsten Zemke) to ensure trustworthiness of the data analysis.

4.10 Data Transcription

Data transcription is analogous to a method of data transformation between mediums. This process has the ability to change the findings and outcome(s) of the study dependent on how rigorous and in what manner the process is conducted (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004).

The researcher, without the assistance of a third party, transcribed all the data. This was the most appropriate option given the confidential nature of some of the data (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004). This allowed the researcher to convey particular non-verbal features and the mood present inside the interview room in the transcript (Bailey, 2008). Verbal transcription was also more consistent given that niche phrases, colloquial language, and unclear passages or terminology could be cross-referenced with memory of the actual interview (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004).

The process of transcription itself was a tedious and time-consuming activity as each hour-long interview took between 3-5 hours to transcribe (Britten, 1995; Bailey, 2008). All

Transcribed data was kept on a password-protected computer with participants' identifying information including names and audio files stored discretely. A backup was also created and stored in the same manner previously described on a secure secondary computer located at the University of Auckland. All transcripts were independently spot-checked for consistency with the audio-files (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004).

4.11 Establishing Data Categories and Analysis of findings

Data analysis drew upon an amalgamation of a general inductive approach and grounded theory approach. Both involve a gradual process of distillation defined by the researcher. Transcribed data was read in detail, line-by-line repeatedly to refamiliarise myself with the interview context before establishing primary categories and themes (Thomas, 2006). Focused code that frequently reoccurred, were later selected for reanalysis and thematically categorised in relation to each other to form a framework (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). The further revision of the framework continued to create subtopics, contradictory points and other complex or noteworthy aspects of the data until saturation occurred.

Primary coding took place simultaneously with data collection. This kept the data active and also allowed the researcher to mould or filter questions and pursue leads to increase the resonance of the data with the experiences of participants. It also left open the opportunity for multiple interviews to clarify particular passages or themes (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Through the coding process, the repeated reading of the primary transcript by the researcher helped to clarify strong primary themes.

Reflexive memos that included the researcher's disciplinary assumptions and preconceptions were also added in this process to help clarify the interpretation of the data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). This was included to clarify that codes were inherently reflective of the researcher's perceptions, interests, and disciplines.

The final analytic framework was latter cross-referenced with positive health criterion established by Keyes & Haidt (2003) (refer to Appendix C) and discussed later in Chapter 7. An in-depth analysis of data in light of mental health criterion was intentionally left till latter

portion of the data collection, to mitigate the researcher interfering with the data and telling the analytic story rather than that of the participants (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

4.12 Dissemination of the findings

The dissemination of the findings, vital to Kaupapa Māori research approaches as a means of community involvement and academic responsibility (Smith, 2012), was diffused through executive summary sheets to participants, interested groups and to the wider community via email and community organisations. The findings were also shared at a Tōmaiora seminar held at the University of Auckland, Tamaki Campus, with those aforementioned invited to attend.

4.13 Ethical Considerations

This project sought the ethical approval of the University of Auckland Human Participant Ethics Committee to ensure that methods were aligned with national and international research standards prior to initiating fieldwork. When received (reference number 012791) participant observation began and focus groups were subsequently scheduled.

Central to this study, consideration of anonymity, confidentiality and the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants were considered and practically addressed through clearly communicating verbally and in writing to participants the information conveyed in the participant information sheet and corresponding consent forms prior to beginning observations and during interviews. Each of these highlighted the right of the participants to anonymity.

Throughout the study confidentiality was maintained with participants, specifically in relation to focus group interviews. Each focus group participant was asked to maintain the trust and confidentiality of the other participants; this was also indirectly addressed during interview scheduling by creating focus groups in which participants were familiar with one another or paired with a friend(s).

Any information that possibly may have identified participants was either removed or changed in written or electronic documents. After each participant had read the information sheet and signed the consent form in a further effort to engage participants while maintaining confidentiality participants were offered the opportunity to choose the anonymous alias by writing it down on their consent form.

In the event that participants chose to: discontinue or withdraw from the interview; asked to pause, stop, or not be recorded; to abstain from answering any number of questions; there choice was respected. The right to each of the aforementioned was explained clearly both verbally and in written form on the information sheet prior to beginning the focus group (refer to Appendix A). None of the participants choose to withdraw or not be recorded.

The use of community organisations and also being an established and recognisable figure within the poetry community at times had the potential to complicate the research project or be perceived as a subtle coercion. To address this potential power imbalance, it was repeatedly made clearly to the participants both verbally and contained within the consent form that participation or involvement was purely voluntary, and that unavailability or non-participation in the research project would not influence the relationships with either myself, Action Education, or any of the other organisations within the poetry scene.

While conducting participant observation during workshops and throughout focus group interviews, had potentially harmful information or other forms of incidental findings arose, the researcher was able to draw upon the experience of Action Education staff as experienced youth workers and community organization with its own safety protocols to refer participants to appropriate channels for assistance. No incidental findings occurred through the research process.

4.14 Chapter summary

In conclusion this chapter addresses the methods and methodological framing of the study as a Kaupapa Māori research project. Through this outlook and the associated process of data collection the findings were then collated for presentation in the following chapter. This

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chapter combined focus group interviews, participant observation and autoethnographic data in two broad meta-categories: The Internal and the External.

Chapter 5 – Ngā hua o te mahi (Results)

Through a prolonged period within the field that drew upon ethnographic anecdotes, observational annotations from workshops and poetry events, transcribed group or paired interviews, and individual poetry submitted by participants the results were collated into meta-thematic binary categories of the Internal and External milieu. These two meta-themes were then allocated into subthemes as will be presented in this chapter. Although themes are presented as separate entities in this discussion for clarity of presentation, there was extensive thematic overlap within and between themes indicating they should not be understood as mutually exclusive but as distinctive, but as related parts of a common discourse.

5.1 The Internal

One of the most common themes observed throughout the duration of the research was the association between Spoken Word and the internal emotional wellbeing of participants. Without fully expanding on the explicit emotional nature of many of the performances and written poems observed, a primary goal of Spoken Word for many participants was to evoke and communicate emotion to the audience, to *“let others know”*. Interviewed participants consistently described how Spoken Word had influenced their personal, emotional life, they commonly described it as a tool to: *“explore”, “dig deeper”, “vent”, “heal” or “let it out”*, all in reference to their changing emotions. Spoken Word was described frequently as an avenue or pathway to investigate different or conflicting emotions and exploring ways of conveying a specific emotion to an audience of their peers.

5.1.1 Self-Discovery

The first ubiquitous theme among all participants was the tendency to describe Spoken Word as the starting point or facilitator in aiding them towards a general process of self-discovery and reflection. Throughout every interview, each participant mentioned at one point or another how becoming involved with Spoken Word and beginning to write poetry had assisted them in becoming cognizant of subliminal or subconscious emotions or thoughts that

they themselves had previously been unaware of.

Yeah, because like I think a poem starts writing itself long before it starts to write itself on the page..... I think for myself, I operate on a subconscious level of thinking, then writing the paragraph thing its bringing my subconscious up to my conscious so I can know what it is that I am dealing with and know what I need to address for the poem. That is how I write my poems. – Joe Toffee

The influence that recurrent, or extended periods of free-writing strongly contributed to this process of self-discovery was visible over successive workshops with youth and was also mentioned by many participants during interviews. Free writing usually occurred over 5-20 minutes and was sometimes accompanied by light instrumental hip-hop music. During these periods, participants were informed that this time was their own and were without direct instruction from workshop facilitators. Participants had the agency to leave, draw/doodle, or not engage at all. Youth would begin writing alone in workshops or alternatively mentioned writing privately at home or in their spare time.

Participants referenced that when they wrote a particular piece, usually their first poem, that it “*just came out*” and that they “*didn’t realize that it was a thing*” until it presented onto the page. Some participants likened it to a process of digging into the self to discover or refine new areas or entirely different aspects of themselves.

it is not knowing all of who you are, no one knows who the fuck they are and that is not the point of being here. It is about letting yourself be open to discovering parts of yourself and letting your body, and your mind, and your spirit and your voice be a safe place to learn and to discover and to express yourself. - Nikky Tardust

While many participants described or vocalized real or fictional events in their past, present or future, what remained evident was writing about their emotional states. Participants described Spoken Word in terms of a filter, to distinguish between superficial or transient emotions that they “*write past*” in order to find or relocate their deeper sense of self within the moment.

I totally agree with [redacted name] about like performing someone who isn’t you but its just there, like I reckon those sort of pieces we just wanna get ride of, we just wanna, its sort of like a writer’s block. Um the only way to get ride of it is to write past it, and so yeah I don’t know, those type poems where theirs someone in me, their a part of me but their not me. So that’s been positive for me getting those out of the way

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*so I can write past it and write what's genuine to me and who I am. –
Frida Kahlo*

Furthermore, one participant noted how writing was not always a linear process but that it gave him the opportunity to further attach or detach emotional meaning from his life event(s).

I started and it wasn't really coherent, it was kind of like lines. Then, I would step away and come back and try and search a different part of myself. I had to do it a couple of times but then eventually I found a kind of avenue that I could go down. From there, I would pick little bits and pieces that came up or [I] felt inside. – Jaybee Rocolcol

The thematic description of self-discovery was closely associated with the presence of peak flow experiences. This was observable during freewriting periods by the researcher, and further confirmed by descriptions provided by participants. Participants were routinely seen not only engaging with writing but being encapsulated by it. They could often be observed with a sense of intense concentration or focus while writing, disengaged from the social environment of the classroom. This was apparent in multiple workshops with participants in clear view of their peers crying or shedding tears, while writing their pieces. Some participants wrote so much they had to ask for extra paper.

In addition to using pens and paper, many participants wrote on their smartphone or tablet. This was significant in light of the Internet and other functions such as texting provided the potential for distraction. These were for the most part avoided, with participants using their phones solely to write poetry and engage with the activity.

The significance of writing poems was further amplified in cases where the youth came from troubled or non-scholastic backgrounds. Many participants initially made it clear themselves, or through inference from their teachers, that they “*don't write*”. In most workshops, it was also common for them to ask for more time, as it was clear that awareness of the time allocated had in most cases been ignored or forgotten entirely.

This state of flow during freewriting was dependent on the facilitator building rapport and momentum in the workshop to a point where people felt comfortable to share with each other within the space, and secondly, this required a sense of closed space. Situation where the space was compromised by frequent interruptions greatly reduced the presence of flow in workshops.

5.1.2 Personal/poetic Development over time

Thematically speaking, Spoken Word for participants was not solely confined to one point in time. Participants, irrespective of how long they had been involved in Spoken Word Poetry, routinely described their experience in terms of personal development over time or as a “*journey*”. Interviewed participants highlighted the influence writing poems and processing or editing them over time had upon their view of the world and their experience of adolescence.

I have written a poem in the happiest time or the shittest time, big break up's and all the clichés, and happy in love, and fuck that racist person down by the dairy, fuck this kid got raped. Everything, everything from 0 to 100 to 1000. – Chloe

Some participants described Spoken Word as a “*life changing*” activity that allowed them to “*get it out of their system*” and put events, and their response to them, “*in stone*” by writing these experiences down in the form of a poem. Participants described how noteworthy occurrences or events in their life were characterized through individual poems or over a series of poems that they could collate and/or reflect upon to create a mental “*timeline*” of who they were/are.

“It feels strange because you feel like a different person at different times, well I felt like a completely different person at times... I think with poetry it has sort of helped me create a timeline, so I can identify who I was as a child, who I was five years ago, who I was at this time and I can recognise it. And there's still a part of me, I can still recognise that they have made me who I am and that they are still a part of me but they are not, they are not the exact copy of who I am at this second and that is constantly changing” – Nikky Tardust

Far from concrete or rigid, poems and ideas or concepts were described as being frequently open to re-imagination, refinement, or reinterpretation, on multiple occasions.

The meaning of [a] Spoken Word [poem] for me has shifted and manipulated itself, depending on my growth or where I am as a person. – Nikky Tardust

This also extended beyond the writing itself and into their performance.

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“Nowadays I kind of mellow it out. I say it in different kinds of stance, softer and definitely use aggression when I need to but that first one was really raw” – Chloe

The concept of “*journey*” and the ability to document, reflect and organize their thoughts and emotions chronologically was also not limited solely to traumatic or proximal events but could also incorporate mundane or distant events that occurred in daily life and that they felt were noteworthy.

When I first started writing, I first thought poetry was only restricted to like problems in your life and stuff. I didn’t.... um I didn’t learn about just writing about things in general things about the way you feel about certain things happy or sad. But um sometimes it would be like world problems, other times it would just be stuff that happens at home or at school. – Janis Hendrix

The notion of personal development and organizing or “*straighten[ing] out things inside*” into a virtual timeline assisted them in terms of ordering their thoughts and emotions into a coherent or logical pattern. One participant added that while memorizing their poem, it also allowed them to explore and refine their recollection and experience of the event(s).

It gets things outs of you, and once those things are outside of you, you can view them better – Cindy Lauper

5.1.3 A sense of empowerment and the freedom to express

For many participants what characterized Spoken Word and differentiated it from other art forms was its association with feeling empowered and having the liberty to speak on any topic. Many described the simple act of writing poetry as empowering, with the additional opportunity to orate or perform, further amplifying this sentiment. Multiple youth expressed the importance of being able to share what they deemed important or meaningful and were quick to distinguish Spoken Word Poetry compared to regular conversation and intimate discussion.

You can’t simply understand someone by just talking to them and knowing them. You have to express it in a different way, in a way that you love words and stuff. They can hear it and really truly understand you and stuff like that. – Frida Kahlo

The excerpt above also echoed a broader sentiment that many youth felt inadequate or had difficulty in vocalizing their unique or serious opinions and thoughts around adults, peers and

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strangers alike. This was particularly evident for topics that sat outside the ‘normal’ range of discussion. Spoken Word Poetry, in contrast, was described as providing an alternative format of dialogue for them to express themselves:

back then I was at a completely different state to where I am now. So, back then I was... it was so much inward battling, that I had. And I couldn't voice myself, so poetry was that for me. – Nikky Tardust

Over the duration of a standard poetry event, usually lasting between 1-2 hours, youth who took the stage would regularly take full advantage of the perceived lack of censorship.

I have been to a lot of Spoken Word evenings that are so heavy and everything.... people are sharing poems about bad experiences like sexual abuse or a death in the family. They share real heavy stuff – Pocahontas

In these performance spaces, participants’ recounted feelings of internal motivation, connection, and empowerment, from hearing others share their own, similar or relatable life experiences.

They know what it feels like to be up close and live when somebody is saying a poem. It definitely uplifts them. It kind of becomes a cool way of knowing yourself as well. – Chloe

Even stronger sentiments of empowerment were described by participants after either simply sharing or performing their own poetry, usually for the first time, and realizing that an audience of peers and/or strangers actually listened to them.

*you come away and think, oh people actually listened to me? Maybe I should do it again. So I don't know, it can be kind of like a process.
- Beyoncé*

While this was a common revelation expressed by many youth, it also expanded past initial or singular experiences, with some participants asserting that Spoken Word Poetry represented an avenue and continuing opportunity to convert their perspectives and personal experiences in to a form of knowledge or social capital.

“what Spoken Word is all about and its definitely from making your own kind of knowing to what you know as a person and changing it into knowledge.” – Chloe

Finally, participants also derived a sense of empowerment from their experiences being representative of their social group or ethnicity.

*“I also know that a lot of people are behind me when I say that poem. “
– Chloe*

5.1.4 The negotiation of identity markers

Its like taking out the parts of yourself that you want to show to people, you polish it out a bit, add fancy dust, but I feel like that is what it is, so in terms of the question, just your identity, not necessarily just your ethnicity, but your identity is really what makes the poem.

– Jaybee Rocolcol

Across all participants, whether observed in conversation, through their poetry or within the interviews, a near-universal trend was the declaration, expression and contestation of identity and identity markers. Although not limited to the subjects of ethnicity and sexuality or gender, these were the most prominent topics discussed. Multiple participants described Spoken Word Poetry as a personal forum where they were able to ground themselves and negotiate unresolved aspects of their adolescent identity in a way that was safe or non-threatening.

that was my first poem, actual, full. I have had other ones but they were just paragraphs. Those were ones where I was figuring out whether I still wanted to be Christian or not.

– Beyoncé

One participant articulated the commonly voiced perception of lacking an identity, and Spoken Word Poetry existing as a place for them to (re)establish and “latch onto” this:

I entered Spoken Word without an identity or with a lack of identity or an identity crisis and from Spoken Word, I managed to grab my identity, or what I perceived as an identity. Something that I could latch onto....

- Joe Toffee

5.1.4.1 Ethnicity

*It isn't really a question of do I? It's how can I not?
Culture is like your environment; it is your upbringing.*

- Nikky Tardust

Ethnicity was a dominating or central facet of multiple poems and a grey area for discourse by all participants. Whether in written form or in sharing or performing their work, youth

would routinely draw upon and craft their cultural heritage, history or mythology into their poem to impart the central message(s).

Among adolescents, their understanding of their own ethnicity(s) varied significantly between age and workshop locality, this ranged everywhere from a focus on their knowledge of specific traditions (or lack thereof) to everyday situations where culture and ethnicity could be observed, contested, or marginalized through stereotyping and other negative forces they perceived as prevalent in society. This was particularly evident among Māori and Pasifika youth who often made frequent allusion to meaningful cultural symbols, concepts or language within their poetry.

By thinking, writing, and performing poetry that used ethnicity, several participants described how poetry had acted as a thought-catalyst for how they interacted with their ethnic or cultural identity(s). They described how it had led them to further refine, or reify their personal understanding of their own ethnicity, that this also influenced their actions. This was most evident for participants who came from multiple ethnic backgrounds, some sharing or performed poetry that described how they found ways to integrate their identity with or between the two. One such participant clearly described this during an interview, sharing how through the guise of poetry they were able to begin dialogue with their parents about Samoan language from which they felt dislocated under normal circumstances:

the cool thing is with poetry I also get to talk to my mum and my dad and ask them about language, about how to talk about language directly, if I try and pronounce a Samoan word and I get it wrong, then my mum just uses that phrase and the English version is "if I were to teach you and the dog, the dog would learn quicker" and that for me it really, it sucks. But being able to write poetry and then being able to say this Samoan word for a poem, it makes it entirely different and I can mispronounce it as much as I want and she will be patient with me for as long as possible before I get the pronunciation right. So, I do try and borrow from culture or from my own understanding of culture as much as possible, where I see fit. - Joe Toffee

The notion of bilingualism and language as an expression and marker of identity was quite commonly observed during the study. For some participants, the simple act of incorporating new words outside their everyday vernacular, and from inside their culture, was a concise and accessible method to expand their cultural knowledge and engagement. This even extended to

specific participants feeling comfortable with drawing words and phrases from outside their own culture. This was clearly articulated by a non-Māori participant in the following excerpt:

The second one, is that I integrate slang, Māori, Te Reo and Niuean words into my poem as well. – Chloe

5.1.4.2 Gender and Sexuality

A second omnipresent topic was that of gender identity and sexuality. It was a common theme among many poets within the Spoken Word scene and replete within the poetry and writing observed in workshops. It dominated as a visible and audible arena for youth to negotiate and voice their personal and collective understanding of sex and sexual behaviour, gender queer identity, and normative masculine or feminine gender roles, for the most part in a safe, semi-closed off environment.

Sometimes as guys, we don't want to have to deal with that but if you're looking to say something as a guy, Spoken Word gives you that space, gives you that medium and people listen. - Jaybee Rocolcol

The topic of gender and sexuality for adolescent was much more sensitive than ethnicity in some performance spaces due to the ever-present underlying social stigma around sex and homosexuality. This was particularly evident in a boys-only workshop but this was broached effectively by the workshop facilitator. Even without the influence of the facilitator, on many occasions participants shared poetry that openly discussed, deliberated, or explicitly disclosed their gender and sexual identity irrespective of the social atmosphere, sometimes even in the presence of family members. For some Māori and Pasifika youth this was an inherently risk laden activity. One participant shared their perception of the importance they placed on themselves and others like them speaking out about their gender-identity:

I think seeing other people within the same groups as me has been really influential. Like I often have to watch myself because seeing female poets, it's like, do I like them because they are good or because they are female? - Cindy Lauper

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that for many youth, particularly Pasifika youth, ethnicity and sexuality often intersected. Spoken Word was a place where they felt they could negotiate the overlap between their ethnicity, their gender and/or sexuality. Poetry provided a medium that was both internal and actively performed. One participant vividly described this process:

so trying to find my voice.... and then finding that culture and sexuality are two very different issues, but two very related issues that I couldn't escape from. Then trying to make sense of that..... that is what 'Pink Plastic' was. I labelled the title 'Pink' to just sort of make a reference to how others perceived me, or how I came across and that is specifically in terms of how others thought of my sexuality and things like that. And that was a really scary experience, coming to terms with not just culture but ideas of sexuality. When you smash the two of them together and try and make sense of it in poem, it gets quite messy and I remember vividly, shaking in my bedroom with my pen, and just like madly writing and I don't know what got over me. – Joe Toffee

5.2 The External

The second prevalent axis used to categorize the results revolves around the external and/or social components of experiences among participants in the practice of Spoken Word Poetry. The expressive, reciprocal and wider interpersonal nature of this art form was noted on many occasions and intuitively formed an axis for the description and interpretation of the results and emergent themes. The vast majority of themes fit easily into this category, although theme of safe social space could be categorized either internally or externally. Placing it in the latter was based on participants describing concealment, even within Spoken Word, as an urge that was socially mediated from the environment to the individual.

5.2.1 The influence of the wider social network

Youth participants all described external sources of encouragement as important for them becoming involved with Spoken Word Poetry. Many described being “*inspired*” after seeing a live performance or a recorded Spoken Word video online, but noted that they became “*involved*” with it after being encouraged by a close friend, family member or a teacher.

5.2.1.1 The online presence of Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken Word Poetry itself is an imported style of poetry to Aotearoa, similar to many other forms of imported music, which over time has been adapted by youth in Aotearoa. This

Speak the words ki au nei

process of adaption has occurred largely through social media and the Internet. Virtually all participants described the Internet as the initial point of contact with Spoken Word.

I think in Year 11. Rebecca sent me a YouTube video..... So, she sent me a Anis Mojgani poem, so he is my favourite poet. It is because he was the first poet I had listened to...

- Jaybee Rocolcol

Multiple participants described how Spoken Word Poetry has circulated among youth through social media like Tumblr and Facebook.

you don't realize but when you go on Facebook, you go on for poetry and I didn't realize how much poetry is on Facebook

- Joe Toffee

Some described how not only friends but also followers, many who they did not know in real life, would share poetry with them.

I had like a Tumblr and one of my followers sent me a message and she wrote, 'look at this' and I clicked it and it was that poem

- Evangeline

Likewise, they differentiated Spoken Word Poetry from music videos and other online content as being about something meaningful.

it gives you an appreciation for rhyming about things that actually matter, and actually making sense of everything that you are saying. And not just saying nothing.

- John Smith

One participant even described how over the Internet they were led to Spoken Word Poetry:

How I started writing, But um... I started writing music, like lyrics, And I had my like composition all figured out. I got my lyrics down But the thing is I couldn't sing, and I wouldn't want anyone singing my lyrics. So I just started speaking it..... and so I researched on the Internet "how to speak your lyrics" and then I just got, I found like Spoken Word Poetry. And then I found some poets [recorded performances on YouTube] and I was like "oh maybe I'll just write some poetry", but that's how I actually got into it. - Janis Hendrix

After being inspired or attracted to Spoken Word Poetry participants described “researching” it online and watching cues on how to “do” it. Sites like YouTube functioned as a library for Spoken Word where youth could find their “voice” or perspective inside the poetry of others and then latter emulate it.

5.2.1.2 Teachers and the education system

Teachers were critical in encouraging youth to pursue developing their capacity in relation to Spoken Word Poetry. It was clear from time spent in the field that for school aged youth in particular (who comprised significant proportion of the adolescent poetry audience and scene), that teachers played a number of important roles in facilitating the growth and development of individual poets and the Aotearoa Spoken Word movement in general.

*The teacher that helps us a lot his name is Mr. Thomas...
- Frida Kahlo*

Over time within the Spoken Word field it became clear that teachers and educators who acknowledged the poetic capacity of their students and its importance in schools, correspondingly went to great length to encourage their students to undertake Spoken Word. This occurred not only through direct verbal support and encouragement but also through harnessing school resources, promoting awareness of local poetry slams, creating or hosting in-school slams and/or Spoken Word clubs either during or after school, transporting students to extracurricular poetry events, bringing performance poets into school assemblies or as special guests to perform, and lastly, by allowing organizations such as Action Education into schools to facilitate Spoken Word workshops for students.

“For the first one, I was like cool and showed up, barely anyone was there, I still thought it was cool. Over the year, it progressed as people heard that we were carpooling for SUP [Stand Up Poetry, open mic] in South Auckland” - Sienna Rose

Participants described how their teachers had set events in motion within their school and created a special curricular module dedicated to Spoken Word that had the entire class create Spoken Word pieces that could be put into an assessment format that they could be academically accredited for.

“Yes, from the start. She even went through all the trouble of forming an entire Spoken Word group, just for us.” – Evangeline

The significance of bringing Spoken Word into the classroom cannot be understated. Firstly, multiple participants described having the feeling of requiring a form of tacit permission to begin writing Spoken Word Poetry that they needed to be “*taught*” how to write Spoken Word before continuing to develop and pursuing it independently.

Secondly, by bringing Spoken Word into the classroom, participants described how it fostered their identity and allowed them to build a form of social capital amongst their peers and within the broader network of the school, even to the extent where it could change the social culture of the school. One example of this was described by two of the participants who through the assistance and encouragement of their English teacher went on to mentor younger students at their school through Spoken Word.

“That’s been a positive for us, just knowing that our poetry, Sir acknowledges it, and wants us to share it with the students and he wants us to guide them and help them to understand poetry at a level that we understand it, so yeah” - Frida Kahlo

5.2.2 Performance and Practice

The performance was a defining aspect of what made Spoken Word attractive and contemporary to youth. In comparison to drawing an association to more traditional *page or written* forms of poetry, participants described Spoken Word in relation to its performance, performativity and its visible and audible components. Although they spoke at length about the private and internal process of creating Spoken Word that required writing and expressing themselves, the critical focus for many youth was on its transformative ability to communicate and be “*real*” with people through performance. It is along this reasoning the theme was categorized accordingly.

When participants were asked what defined Spoken Word Poetry as a genre, in comparison to simply writing poetry or keeping a journal or diary, multiple participants described the added clause and possibility for it to be “*heard*” and “*seen*”. They related that the intention while writing Spoken Word was for it to be “*Spoken when you read it*”. When this was combined with a social environment that was safe and encouraging, the poetry of participants could shift from entertaining or insightful, to therapeutic.

Spoken Word has become that pathway.... It has become a pathway to heal myself publicly. – Chloe

The notion of catharsis or healing through writing was also echoed in relation to utterance or performance:

Speak the words ki au nei

It's sort of like being a counsellor without having to visit a counsellor, once you say it, it is out there, then it's not you anymore, you have separated that thing that is not you. - Joe Toffee

Although youth who were able to perform were usually only able to share one poem, outside of the competitive format of slams, the overall effect of a diverse range of poets and subject matter was an important part of what made Spoken Word “real”. The narrative structure of most Spoken Word Poetry is perceived to be intrinsically linked to or about the author, in contrast to drama where the actor assumes an identity or character.

Because you sort of become this actor performing your own monologue, which is, I have written poems but they're not me so I'm not sure if I can share those, because they are someone else's story and I guess, that goes back to; Spoken Word is a direct representation of you. – Joe Toffee

A significant aspect of the adolescent poetry movement for participants was seeing people their own age and demographic not only speak their mind but actively perform it. In the following anecdote, one participant shared the effect of witnessing a poet their own age performing a poem at a workshop:

*Before I would just think that their words. But they come out of you, and only you know what you wanna say. Um yeah, I think it's a positive for me cos I now understand that my words have a lot of value, People want to hear it, also people wanna speak like that. That's how I felt towards [Redact name - Brian], I wanted to speak like him, I saw that he knew he had value in what he was saying and I wanted that for myself.
- Frida Kahlo*

Embodiment and ownership of one's poetry was particularly significant of “realness” and something participants felt they could discern and observe in the way a poem was performed:

It isn't about choreographing pieces and shit. When I can see in someone that the words are just so natural and it is sitting so well in them. That it is naturally extending to their body, responding to it, that's how I know it is authentic and it's real. - Nikky Tardust

Likewise, embodiment of a poem and its practice was something that participants took with them and perfected over time.

*Half of the time a lot of it was practicing it over and over again in the car when I was driving around to different gigs
- Chloe*

Some poets even integrated traditional mannerisms or elements of movement, in one instance, a participant simultaneously took specific movements from the Samoan Sasa and the Tongan Kailao and integrated it into the performance of their poem.

The other one will be the different tones and body language that I use just to respect my own upbringing and culture.
- Chloe

The thematic importance of performance was largely what allowed Spoken Word to translate to youth from different backgrounds across multiple mediums, through live performance or recording. Participants described it as something they could “*immediately digest*” and relayed how they perceived Spoken Word as something they thought was within anyone’s capacity to attempt, as writing but more specifically “*speaking*” was something that came instinctively.

There is overlap but a lot of people want to listen more than they tend to read because in an audience, there will be at least one person that connects with it. - Pocahontas

Some participants also described how they felt Spoken Word was an inclusive social movement that came naturally to young people and that all they needed was “*permission to see it*” and that the rest were all things they “*already knew [they] could do*”.

Spoken Word Poetry is to me, it is a high art form that borrows from a lot of different things from a lot of different places, but that makes its own, because it is a mixture of these different things. – Joe Toffee

5.2.3 A safe social space

The notion of safety and safe social environments was a huge concern for participants and poetry facilitators alike. The perceived lack of restriction on content within Spoken Word events caused youth to broach potentially volatile and/or sensitive subject matter within spaces both inside and outside classroom settings. With Spoken Word’s relatively loose definition among participants for what constitutes ‘poetry’ three main concerns were apparent these included: the desire to conceal or protect one’s self and one’s story or identity; the issue of tall poppy culture and self-censorship; creating supportive environment that facilitated communication and creativity.

5.2.3.1 Concealment

While the practice of Spoken Word for many participants provided a new and/or alternative form of dialogue for them to express themselves, this was not always in a completely neutral or risk-free environment. Many participants spoke at length on how even within the poetry scene, they had to navigate specific social pressures.

that was a big thing for me, that once you share something so personal of yourself to a large amount of people, it is up to them to interpret that, however they want. – Joe Toffee

The theme of concealment in Spoken Word Poetry was made apparent through the use of second and third person linguistic devices, partial non-disclosure, and the creation of semi-fictional narratives, all indicative of adolescents' concerns over safety. These safety practices also revealed a much broader social phenomenon of New Zealand, the 'Tall Poppy'¹ culture'. The immediate environment surrounding various poetry events held a contentious relationship for adolescents between creativity and sharing their personal reality. Spoken Word events were promoted or recurrently described by audience members as "raw", "open", "real", "heavy", and "powerful". What was shared upon the stage could easily oscillate between a series of public-private confessions or anecdotes, to highly crafted metaphors and thoughts. Irrespective of which end of the spectrum this tended towards, it was common for poets to warrant caution in front of others.

*how much is about you or about something that is not you. If it's not about you but you feel passionate about it, then that's fine, but when it is about you, I find it very scary for it to be known that it was about me
- Sienna Rose*

To avoid experiencing conflict and contention, participants mentioned protecting themselves or others through avoiding first person narratives and limiting the information they disclose about themselves:

the thing that I learned was that you have control in what you want to say, and how much you want to share to certain people. So, personally, I think that if I use the words I, me, within a certain story that I have to share with everyone, I wouldn't be able to be emotionally strong in that area because it might be sensitive or something like that. But, if I say, she or someone else, not names but just that type of area, it feels more comfortable. – Beyoncé

¹ Tall Poppy, refers to a New Zealand social tradition and practice of stigmatizing skilled individuals or high achievers

Even in situations where poets used second and third person pronouns or narrative structures, it was evident that in many cases the poem was about their own personal experience(s). In contrast, many youth performed solely in the first person with poems that utilized ‘I’ or ‘me’. These personalised poems more often than not drew upon partially or entirely embellished or fictional accounts, some participants even wrote poems that took on persona or alter ego.

It is like I am telling my story but it is a different persona – Beyoncé

For performers there is no escaping from the association between themselves and the contents of their poems. This proximity of content is in contrast to other art forms such as music or drama. One participant described that how the proximity of the performer to the audience creates a natural assumption that what the poet is revealing is anecdotal, even when this may not necessarily be the case:

with Spoken Word, because you are there and you are there in the flesh, you don't get that privilege of being able to play with the crowd in that sense..... It is a lot harder to separate the performer or the author from the Spoken Word than it is to do that in a written page poem. – Joe Toffee

Participants relayed that sometimes creating distance between themselves and the content of the poem was necessary or desirable to avoid confusion or misrepresentation of themselves or others:

*As clear as you are or as clear as you think you are, they [the audience] can read into that [poem] whichever way they want. They can interpret it and do whatever the hell they want with that.
– Joe Toffee*

5.2.3.2 Tall Poppy

Even though most if not all poetry spaces were perceived as open social environments to share and articulate even the deepest and most traumatic emotions, thoughts, and experiences; the phenomenon unique to New Zealand of discouraging individuality and excellence was still evident. Better known as ‘Tall poppy syndrome’, it is this social practice that promoted an initial reluctance among participants to fully engage in Spoken Word performance (particularly for boys).

The characteristics of ‘tall poppy syndrome’ were manifested in a number of ways that were usually successfully mitigated indirectly by facilitators and participants. However, in attempts to prevent tall poppy syndrome from having deficit impacts on Spoken Word performers, in some workshops, a significant amount of time was spent by facilitators trying to overcome the inertia opposed to opening up by using ice-breaker and trust building activities.

Numerous participants expressed that they had felt the compelling urge to self-censor, omit, repress or refrain from speaking or sharing their poems on different occasions. One of the interviews captured this in an off-topic conversation between the participants as one participant spoke about their perceived need to alter or ‘dumb-down’ the written content of their poetry, only to be challenged by another poet not to.

Cindy Lauper: I have written pieces where I mention Faleali’i, where I mention fine mats, well not fine mats just mats, and I say “the night is ripe”. Well, saying things like that I can understand it because I write my own poetry but in saying that, if I say it out loud, a lot of people wont understand it? You know?

Nikky Tardust: Do you know that for sure? Or is that something that is kind of just in your head?

Cindy Lauper: Yeah, it is more something I feel, like I don’t know for a fact.... it’s funny because [when] Alex, when we were writing stuff for [a poetry show] he was like “no, just put it in, you know it, its you, it is part of you”

It was also clear that thoughts and attitudes such as those described in the quote above, are indicative of a culture of internalized collective censorship and could act as a significant impediment or barrier for some youth in Spoken Word. Some participants, such as Chloe, described these insecurities as something she had to overcome.

You subconsciously roll over the awkwardness but at that time, I don’t know if that person is like “this bitch, oh my gosh who does she think she is?” Instead of thinking of it as something positive and something they could do.

- Chloe

This attitude of seeking conformity in social situations was also described by participants as a hesitancy or reluctance towards social distinction when performing, supposedly for the sake of the audience.

Nikky Tardust: little bits of Samoa or little bits of being a woman, do they naturally filter in? or are you hesitant to place those things inside your poetry?

Speak the words ki au nei

Cindy Lauper: its funny [with] a couple of things, because they are natural to me, I put them in and then when I think of the performance aspect I think, 'oh a lot of people wont understand that' so I take it out..... Its weird because I have found myself

Nikky Tardust: Censoring your own work a little bit sometimes?

Cindy Lauper: Exactly, oh my goodness, I have actually written about censoring myself and I can't say that

Another emanation of tall poppy syndrome was described by one participant's dislike or inability to take compliments after coming off-stage, stemming from a feeling of unwarranted praise and attention. Even in situations or events where participants were engaged and acquiescent, some stigma still existed that was emblematic of New Zealand 'tall poppy' culture. Although it was subtle and relatively innocuous the overall effect led people to sometimes hold back.

*you don't want to be that guy that just ruined the whole night for everyone, so you just go along with it but...
- Joe Toffee*

This was also audible after what was perceived as a strong performance with comments like "so I have to go after that" or disclaimer in the form of an apology for how what they had to share was not very good or was not finished.

5.2.3.3 Affirmation and positivity

In light of the potential risk involved in Spoken Word, the fostering of an environment of approval and positive encouragement was one functional aspect across the poetry scene that was vital to its efficacy among youth. Participants described many of their first experiences within the poetry scene as an "extreme" form of affirmation. Some stating that even initial encounters radically changed their own perspective on their own identity.

I went from feeling like I shouldn't be performing poetry, to like, I am meant to be doing this for the rest of my life. All in one night, because all of those people at that event - Nikky Tardust

The provision of an environment and a culture of positive affirmation was a crucial part of the facilitation process. Workshop participants were consistently encouraged and reminded verbally that their poetry was uniquely their own. The emphasis on "*speaking your truth*" and sharing "*what was on your heart*" was combined with visual stimuli and in micro-group

exercises to “*get free*” and relieve the social stigma and tension usually associated with sharing content of a personal or intimate nature.

it's just that all through that, the less you try to be universal, the more you actually help other artists. Someone will actually find themselves as weird as you are and be like 'oh shit, its not just me, and I don't have to conform to just that one box' yeah, I was just thinking that.
- Nikki Tardust

Without openly forcing participants to share, the ability to take the stage, at an event, or the floor, within a workshop, was left to the participants themselves. Workshop facilitators and MC's relayed that the performers' words were to be respected and this should be demonstrated through clapping and a host of novel gestures (including stomping one's feet and snapping fingers) to communicate approval during or after a poem.

5.2.4 Speaking back

The research identified that Spoken Word was a space that allowed youth to voice *their* opinions and '*speak back*'. This engendered the performative and public rebuttal, reclamation and challenging of tribulation and contested areas within their lives. The choice to express their mundane, traumatic, comedic or light-hearted, and other times political or very serious views in a public manner was not only a significant source of attraction to youth.

It's coming to a realization about who you are and asking these tough questions about what it means to be Tongan or Samoan and how do you reflect that? Or how don't you reflect that? And then through poetry, asking yourself, or asking the audience, is it ok that I am this way? Or that I am this way? Or that I am not this way?
- Joe Toffee

Speaking back or contesting a topic was not limited to experienced poets or performers, it was routinely seen in the first poems of many youth. From the numerous observations it was normal for youth to structure their poem or prose in an adversarial manner or tone to contest or place context around the choice or choices they made as adolescents. While a number of linguistic and performative techniques existed to convey and portray this, it was often delivered as a direct address to a particular individual, group, or even existential concept, for example racism.

5.2.4.1 Speaking back to racism and injustice:

Speaking back to racism was common among numerous poets but particularly for Māori and Pasifika youth. Māori and Pasifika youth drew upon familial or historical narratives to challenge social norms and stereotypes that they perceived to pervade in contemporary Aotearoa.

“I feel like my strength is in my reality of injustice. I am always feeling like that is my go to kind of theme. If you want to treat me like shit, then I am going to write about it in a way that is so different.” - Chloe

One participant, as a New Zealand European youth, briefly described how witnessing another poet, also non-Māori non-Pasifika, had inspired her own views on the subject of race within Aotearoa.

“I wouldn’t write a poem about how hard it is to be white. But honestly, I haven’t seen her perform it live but I saw Sasha Norries work [YouTube video] on the SAPC website about invisible privilege, and it was soooo good.” – Sienna Rose

5.2.4.2 Speaking back to Cultural or Familial expectation:

Closely related to racism, many participants often referenced issues of “*culture clash*” and/or hidden familial expectations that placed pressure on their everyday lives. One participant relayed the following explanation of his poetry:

*“My mum and dad would never teach me Samoan and Tongan, they would always privilege Maths and English and Science but as soon as we would go to visit extended family things like “Ua mai oe” and they 4teach me jack. And I feel like I am an imposter in my own family, not welcome there, but at the same time its not my fault, so that’s why I speak and that is why I was writing poetry, because I was like screw you, if you are going to chuck me under the bus, at least let me say what I need to say”
- Joe Toffee*

He also further went on to elucidate a common subject present in many of the poems shared by Pasifika youth:

“In my poems I criticize all of those people, the older people specifically, who put so much pressure on their kids to not just learn their cultural ways but to be tough, to be the good student in school, to be the best rugby player or netball player, that was what I wanted to start with. I wanted to say, you can’t have both, you can’t have a super brown person and a super white person, or either, or and I am not saying that that is

right or wrong, im just saying that that's really hard and unfair to have to have all these expectations"

- Joe Toffee

5.2.4.3 Speaking back to Social Perception:

Another aspect of 'speaking back' hinged upon poets' thinking critically about their situation or environment and trying to reorientate the worldview of the audience to that of their own:

"when I was writing that piece I was thinking of my brother and how people hardly understand his creative side. They mainly just look at him being real naughty and stuff, I don't think he's being naughty, I just think he's just being a kid. Yeah, just his real creative side that people hardly see, and I knew myself and I knew I had that in me as well. So I was just tryna get in touch with that and just looking at all the things I think are cool and what I would make of this scene if it would happen to me"

- Frida Kahlo

5.2.4.4 Speaking back to personal struggle and intangible loss:

While ethnicity and culture were common topics in poetic discourse, some poets also shared poems that responded or relayed aspects of their personal life or experience and how they overcame adversity. One participant described how her poetry spoke back to cancer.

"I usually write about my childhood, and mostly about my mum. But, I reckon that's a cool topic to write about. You can write about anything that has to do with cancer and stuff like that, you can put it in a lot of ways. Its cool you just grab one thing that you feel passionate about and then turn it into this whole different thing."

- Janis Hendrix

5.3 Chapter summary

To conclude, the emergent themes presented from this study fell under two strong thematic categories; the internalized dimensions of Spoken Word, and the external influences of Spoken Word.

The Internal, characterized participants describing Spoken Word as the following 1) a means of self-discovery and reflection namely through freewriting and revision, 2) as a written and internalized record of personal development, 3) as a practice that provided a sense of

empowerment and freedom, and 4) as an opportunity and way of negotiating aspects of their adolescent identity such as ethnicity or gender.

The External, described and presented: 1) the influence of the wider social and educational network such as the Internet and the role of teachers in enabling participants. 2) the central role of practice and performance, 3) Spoken Word Poetry as a safe social space, and finally 4) youth speaking back to events and social constructs in their lives through poetry.

The following chapter will present some examples of Spoken Word pieces created and performed by participants. Chapter six compliments the text with a description of the paralinguistic features of the poem to further reinforce and reify the concepts shared in this chapter.

Chapter 6 – Tatari Toi Kupu (Poem analysis)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents individual Spoken Word poems created by participants and an accompanied analysis of their works. These ethnographic samples of poetry are characteristic of those shared during time in the field. Each sample is an original poem written by participants that was requested and used with their permission. This collection of poems represents how Spoken Word is not just about performance to be shared in an open space on a stage, but is also valuable as a form of written and visual art.

The inclusion of poetry by participants serves two functions. Firstly, each of the samples below exists as a snapshot or representation of the participants' identity, subjective worldview, and/or experience(s). It was therefore critical that this be included within the research as a means of centring the research and being participant focussed (Smith, 2012; Vaioleti (2006). Secondly, McCulliss (2013) describes how the inclusion of poetry within research can offer deeper insight and qualitative inquiry into psychosocial elements of their personal and social reality.

The selection of poems below was taken largely, but not exclusively, from younger participants and demonstrate strong elements of resilience and creativity. In considering the samples below, it also became clear that within Spoken Word specifically, each poem should be understood as a subjective compilation of statements portraying the thoughts or feelings of the author on a particular topic. While the overall message of each poem is usually concentrated on a particular subject, this by no means equated to each line or stanza being coherent with the next or with the overall theme of the poem. On many occasions, seen in the samples below, and representative of those in the broader study, individual lines and stanzas within poems would often diverge from the main idea or theme.

Due to the subjective, open-ended or at times deliberately ambiguous nature of the participants' poetry, each poem had to be read alone prior to being analysed and latter reread in relation to its performance, with the expressed guidance of the author, to discern, unpack and convey an overall view of the meaning of the poem.

The first poem presented illustrates the use of poetry to navigate personal topics such as the intangible loss of a loved one and how the process of writing reflects a level of self-discovery and personal development of the author. It demonstrates that even the youngest participants in the study were able to construct strong poems that presented the diverse mundane and meaningful elements of their everyday reality.

6.2 Sample 1 - Emmeline

Emmeline

She is gasoline.

her fuel tank eyes bite candle light flames.

her trailer park finger nails, cigarette lighters.

Warning.

do not touch her. She is dangerous.

she will be arsonist when her bones feel like ash,

crucifying forehead figures,

so it burns like newspaper articles,

the headlines are all that is left

But they never tell us anything.

she is not woman.

Emmeline you are not woman,

you are circus.

Emmeline

she is circus.

balancing her belly on empty bottled embryo's

tug of war with umbilical cords can tangle into animal balloons.

she is not woman enough to become her mother.

She is not child enough to become her daughter.

*The rumpsteazer of stage is snatching innocence and running away
with it,*

*The grizabella is left lonely, Scratching at her concrete silhouette to
remind herself that she.*

she is only a shadow to her ambiance.

Emmeline.

She is ambulance.

*She does not know how to help herself, but she sure is a damn good
comfort before dying.*

How many have i seen?

Just one.

Emmeline.

I have seen just one.

And a whole family sleep in her death.

I am not woman enough to wake up beautiful anymore.

*While the stems of her greased hair reach pagan skies,
her mouth speaks a poets only dream of sympathy.*

*The emphasis on 'nightmare', is mumbled through a fathers
paralysis,*

And I have seen just one.

While we balance our memories on tight ropes,

My mother knows amnesia is a state of mind.

But we sure hope we can use it to cut thin lines.

*Because, if i see her live like this any longer, I swear I'm dying with
her too.*

*Let her body not inhale oceans but breathe her swimming pools
lungs out from tubes,*

The manner of time waits for it's hour to run out, but before it does.

Let us get the chance to spend it with her.

Let me know why the bathroom drains are clogged with her hair.

Only fathers are supposed to be bald mother.

*Let me know why silicone breasts are only apparent when a woman
wants to expand them.*

Let me know why hospital hallways always seem to haunt me.

Why is there always silence whenever there is fear

You've always been quiet when you know something.

So tell me Emmeline.

What do I fear?

I fear that I am gasoline.

Biting the jaw of her television heart rate with my fuel tank eyes.

*I am tired of seeing her fucking drooling out the only words she
could speak.*

"I'm proud of you bub"

but I am not something you should be ashamed of mum.

I am dangerous. I am something you should be afraid of.

I am circus,

shedding the childhood out of me,

and I become mother enough to be daughter.

Let me be daughter.

Maybe, because I know that I will never know how to be it again.

Written by one of the youngest participants in the study, the author of this poem was a 16-year-old Māori, Tahitian, Kūki Āirani Māori young woman from Mangere, Auckland. Her ability to write deep and intensely moving poetry on distressing and personal topics was a stark contrast to her bubbly demeanour and amiable character outside of the stage. She described the above poem as being about herself, her mother, and coping with her mother's death from cancer. It was one of the most powerful poems I have ever witnessed, and drew the entire audience of over 100 people to tears.

She described it as her first effort to articulate initially to herself, and then latter to others what navigating the loss of a loved one was like, in the first significant event of her life, and trying to “*put everything in one poem for a woman that [she] really loved, [her] mum*”. This poem leaves the identity of the protagonist “*Emmeline*” ambiguous. When performed, more often than not the author explicitly introduces herself by name. It becomes immediately clear that the poem alternates between addressing or describing the character of Emmeline but without addressing the relationship to the author, whether it is her mother or another person entirely. This is reflected in the odd structure and tone of the poem and frequent jumping between different pronouns as seen in the follow excerpt:

she is not woman.
Emmeline
you are not woman,
you are circus.
Emmeline
She is circus.
...
She is not woman enough to become her mother.
She is not child enough to become her daughter.

When asked about masking the relationship between herself and ‘*Emmeline*’, the author described that this was her attempt at trying to connect to her mother and to her pain going through cancer. She explained that by initially associating her mother with the character of Emmeline, and then realising, as the poem progressed, that her mother could not connect or empathize with ‘*Emmeline*’ and that in the end, she, the author, was Emmeline.

I am circus,
letting flame hug circles around my pupils

The author described how the final resolution to identify with the character of Emmeline was due to her own resilience. The name itself was drawn from a 1920's song that the author

Speak the words ki au nei

heard and felt connected to, she described Emmeline as her alias or alter-ego. The poem represents the author's effort at personal development and her struggle with her identity throughout the writing process. The last stanza of the poem described her realization of growing up too soon and then realising her identity as a daughter:

*Shedding the childhood out of me,
and I become mother enough to be daughter.
Let me be daughter.
Maybe, because I know that I will never know how to be it again.*

Likewise, the author displays a high level of creativity when describing the gravity of the hospital environment and juxtaposing this with everyday imagery:

*Balancing her belly on empty bottled embryo's
Tug of war with umbilical cords can tangle into animal balloons.*

Similarly seen in this reference to her mother using an intubation tube:

*Let her body not inhale oceans but breathe her swimming pools lungs out from
tubes*

The author makes several novel references to the musical 'Cats' by Andrew Lloyd Webber, using "**Rumpleteazer**" and "**Grizabella**" as characters in the poem to reflect her personality. While the author mentioned her affinity for the play, she also mentioned that part of her inspiration was the connection of theatrical play to poetry, many of the songs being drawn from the poetry of T.S. Elliot.

Another theme present in this poem was speaking back. The author in a sharp contrast to the majority of the poem offers a subtle critique of society and social norms seen in the following line:

*Let me know why silicone breasts are only apparent when a woman wants to
expand them.*

The above quotations all highlight the intensely personal nature of Spoken Word that allowed this participant to describe and explore an event while simultaneously offering the participant the opportunity to disclose these thoughts and feelings in a way that allowed them to feel safe and "heard".

6.3 Sample 2 - Inside the Box

Sample 2 illustrates how poetry is not solely written on primary events but also through the relationships between adolescents as peers supporting each other through writing *about* and *to* each other's experiences, namely the traumatic events of those close to them and seeking to "connect" or "relate" to each other. This poem demonstrates the personalized aspect of Spoken Word, as even in situations where the narrative of the poem is about the traumatic events of a friend, comparisons are still drawn to the experiences of the author/self. Likewise, the issue of childhood nostalgia was also present.

*She dances inside the box
And moves one step ahead of her body
So her tongue can twist in shivers down the spine of body language.*

*She rocked an 8-year-old baby to sleep
With eyes that read fantasies of
'once upon a time' wonderlands,
where families consist of
four sisters,
one father
And
Cancer
As a step-mother.*

*She wraps herself in sheets,
that orphans hid their memories under
when the storm would roll past
and knock down doors with their Steinlager breath.*

*She skins the warmth off of polar bears
and stitches it to her soul.*

*Her fingers pick at the thread
that hides the stitches of her heart's tiredness from skipping beats.*

*She puts pen to mouth
and mind to paper.
Her fingers run through frustrations of writers block.
As her hair grows out her childhood does too.
Blonde becomes black just like her mother's used to.
But she, is pink Floyd, comfortably numb.*

*She lets lanterns loose in her unlit room,
Sets flames to her shadows*

*and dances on the tips of them.
Her feet glow,
they look as if they're caressing the moon's cheeks.
She looks as if she's moon walking.*

*So swiftly she confides in her confined space.
Shapes her box into a globe,
So that when you shake her,
the continents of her world will fall,
Like shooting water crystals,
Like Roimata,*

Loimata,

Tears,

*Christening her head and forming a crown made of fairytales.
Where many have lost themselves in the beat of their own dancing
drums.*

*I know you're alone my friend,
so let me peel off your cobweb tattoos,
shake them,
so your lace veil can fall from it.
To be burned and offered as a sacrifice to the God,
who put a ring around us
and vowed to love,
but suffocated us from learning what it meant to lose it.*

And we lost mother.

And father.

Peace in mind.

We're not alone.

*We've created symphonies from our own "once upon a time"
memories.
It's hard to understand because we were sure from the beginning
we had asked for our boxes to be handled with care.*

*What's the point of sealing screams from nightmares with fragile
stickers?
When all that would be opened up to you
Is a girl who couldn't find any remedy to heal her broken fists,*

*that pounded on
The side of her mother's death bed.
Her mother's covered in white sheets bed.
Her mother's lost the beat bed.
Her mother's fed cancer's greed bed.*

Her mother's death bed.

And my father's turned his head.

*We had nowhere to glide.
Only four dark corners to fall into.
I see you dance inside the box,
Where the zig-zags of your mother's heart rate danced with you.
Moving to the beat of,
1,2,3
 1,2,3
Beep.
Beep.
 Beep.
 Beeeeeep.
 Beeeeeeeeeep.*

You want to be alone.

Now I know why you dance inside the box.

It's because everyone wants to think outside of it.

The author of this poem was a 17-year-old Samoan girl from South Auckland. A close friend of the author from the first sample poem “*Emmeline*”, she described her motivation for writing the poem “*Inside the Box*” was due to a deep love and respect for her friend, watching her cope with the loss of her mother to cancer. She stated that while devising the poem it took “ages” to write as she dedicated meaning to each line and stanza, and wanted it to be completely genuine for the sake of the audience and for her friend:

I think if you were to ask me at the time I was writing it I would be able to explain each stanza cos there is heaps of meaning behind one stanza, it took me quite a while to write.... cos I really ... I dint want any bit in their to be unnecessary, I didn't wanna say it just because it flowed, I didn't wanna put [anything] in their just because it rhymed with this word, I wanted it to make sense and be part of the story.

- Frida Kahlo

This poem represents both her friend's story and also her own reflective attempt to draw a comparison between their shared experience of growing up in solo parent homes. In our conversations, she related how a defining element of the poem was reflecting upon their different experiences, with her own father choosing to leave while in contrast her friend's mother had died. For the author, this was critical stating that she felt she could not say "*I know how you feel*" to her friend, and thus chose to write the poem to try to relate to her friend and "*put myself in her shoes*". This is a simple example of the author seeking to extend beyond mere sympathy for her friend. For the author, this poem was an opportunity to transcend a simple conversation with her friend about her friend's mother's death, and relate to her in a way that had added meaning to their friendship:

You can't simply understand someone by just talking to them and knowing them. You have to express it in a different way, in a way that you love words and stuff. They can hear it and really truly understand you and stuff like that
- Frida Kahlo

One example of the hidden meaning within the text is demonstrated in the way the author draws on different words for tears, Roimata (in Māori), Loimata (in Samoan), that aside from the obvious rhyme corresponds to the ethnicities of both the author and the subject of the poem as Māori and Samoan respectively. This itself is one particular example of homage to her friend, a number of which are seen continuing through the poem, and an illustration of the connection between the two.

*Like Roimata,
Loimata,
Tears,*

Another theme throughout the poem is the author's reflection on childhood nostalgia, and how traumatic events forced her and her friend to grow up earlier than expected:

*As her hair grows out her childhood does too.
Blonde becomes black just like her mother's used to.
But she, is pink Floyd, comfortably numb.*

Likewise, the author relates the personal importance of fragility to their connotations of childhood:

It's hard to understand because we were sure from the beginning we had asked for our boxes to be handled with care.

Speak the words ki au nei

What's the point of sealing screams from nightmares with fragile stickers?

And the following stanza that describes the difficulty she experienced in healing from intangible loss:

*When all that would be opened up to you
Is a girl who couldn't find any remedy to heal her broken fists,
that pounded on
The side of her mother's death bed.*

Below is an example of empowerment where the author talks both of her and her friend's personal experiences of loss, and reinterprets her narrative into one of empowerment, stating that they are not alone despite their shared losses:

*And we lost mother.
And father.
Peace in mind
We're not alone.*

A central metaphor of this poem revolves around the abstract idea of boxes or “*the box*” and their surrounding connotations as safe places, prisons, and a creative place. The author plays with the idea of being inside or out of the box, inside and out of these places. This is important in the final stanzas of the poem as it illustrates a level of empathy developed from the author toward her friend, the subject of the poem.

*We had nowhere to glide.
Only four dark corners to fall into*

This is shown in the following verse, that may at first seem to make little sense upon the page due to the intention of being Spoken and performed rather than read and accompanied by movement and paralinguistic features. Shown in the verse below the author merges the metaphor of a ballerina music box and a cardiac monitor, her friend inside the box, her mother outside the box. Outside of the metaphor, this is a clear illustration of the emotive use of Spoken Word in creating connections and empathy between adolescents.

*I see you dance inside the box,
where the zig-zags of your mother's heart rate danced with you.
Moving to the beat of,
1,2,3
1,2,3*

The performer, from behind the microphone, while standing relatively still for the majority of the poem, then extends her index finger and draws in the air, from left to right, the ECG

Speak the words ki au nei

waveform following each “**Beep**”. The stroke lines represent the failing life of characters’ mother, the final extended “**Beep**” flat-lining, drawn from right to left, to represent her friend’s mother finally passing:

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

Beeep.

Beeeeeeep.

6.4 Sample 3 - Pink Plastic

Sample 3 demonstrated how Spoken Word Poetry was used to negotiate and declare one's identity, while simultaneously contesting the social norms of gender, sexuality, culture, and religion. Likewise, it also illustrated the issues with intentional ambiguity and misrepresentation of Spoken Word, its potential risks and at times adversarial nature. Lastly it also highlights the roll the Internet plays both as a cite and source for poetry but also as an avenue which allows the conversations started in poetry to transcend the immediate audience and create dialogue among other youth.

This is my voice.

There are many like it.

But this one is mine.

But.... being told that you're gay.

Fat. A fag. A White washed islander,

by your own people,

in your own language

that you don't even understand... Culture.

For me is painful,

emasculating

and on a really bad day

irrelevant.

And sometimes I wish I could just package it all up and ship it away

Because according to my records

it has over stayed it's welcome

and it's visa has expired

Many moons ago

But the colour brown has a mind of its own.

And maybe I don't get it

But from where I'm standing

Culture is representative of expectations I cannot seem to meet

and people I cannot seem to connect with.

It is not what I want to jump on,

because the only way that you'd accept me

is if I wear higher heels than your Mrs.

And sing "Proud Mary" at the Teuila festival.

And I'm sorry to disappoint you but I am not one of those people.

*Much love and respect to them though, for being who they are
But in the vast ocean of singing star fish, rugby playing turtles and
diva clown fish... I am the third love child of a sea urchin father and a
manatee mother... #awkward*

*And quite honestly I see the beauty and intricacy of our culture
But quite honestly I don't want to be a part of it, if that means I have
to associate myself with you.
You are my family, you are my community, you are an inseparable
part of me and I will always try to learn to love you on that basis*

*But we are not of the same culture.
Because culture is your way of thinking, it is your way of being
And I'm definitely not the same being as you
And I definitely don't think like you, nor act like you
So we are not of the same culture.*

*We are not of the same culture.
Yes absolutely I am partially to blame for believing your lies
But please answer me why...*

*Why is it that when a boy fails to like rugby, coconut tree climbing or
pig hunting he fails in becoming a man?*

*Why is it that when he fails in becoming a man he is quickly
pigeonholed as a fafa, fakalady, faggot?*

*How is it that we in one breath can praise him for his courage and
charisma on stage and in the next use him as the prime example of
shame, disgrace, sexual immorality?*

*How did we get the power to tell our sons that they are no longer
sons of the father?*

*And how come they never had that power to begin with?
Look me in the eye and tell me WHY?*

*Oh I'm sorry did I offend you?
Oh I'm so sorry I forgot
You need to subtitle me because my voice isn't of the same octave as
yours*

*No I'm completely wrong, my bad... it's because you're a man and
clearly I'm not.*

You decided to have artistic freedom

*and direction over what was once fearfully and wonderfully made.
You decided to scream out fag or gay
every time he tried and yet you ignorantly wonder
why the marriage equality bill is being passed.*

*Hi my name's Joe. Here's a cup of koko
and can I just say,
that judging from your skin colour
you must be part Polynesian...
which would also mean that you're part hypocritical?
Well I guess I'm neither because I'm from the culture of acceptance.*

Wake up and smell the koko because we're making it.

This poem, written by an 18-year-old Samoan-Tongan youth, describes the intersection between gender-identity, culture, religion, masculinity and social stigma. It draws upon the author's deeply personal struggle with being perceived as “*gay*” due to his manner and outward appearance, and having to resist superficial or restrictive constructs of culture. This piece demonstrates a number of the aforementioned themes, notably the importance of performance, the importance of concealment for poets, and the freedom to express and speaking back to societal and cultural expectation. In the opening stanza the author states:

This is my voice.

There are many like it.

But this one is mine.

Intuitively, these first 3 lines act as a declaration of his ownership for himself and his words. In performance, this is simply a powerful affirmation to begin with, from which his story and the thesis statement of the poem can gradually emerge.

Furthermore, this is also a direct reference to a poem “This Voice is Mine” by another notable Spoken Word artist Shane Koyczan that open with the same 3 lines. This could either represent the author drawing inspiration from and paying homage to the original poem, or alternatively identifying strongly with this phrase and choosing to use it in his poem. Whatever the reasoning it is a concise illustration of the influence the Internet plays in shaping the poetry of youth in Aotearoa, not only through watching and then imitation or

mimicking the way international poetry is performed but also in youth directly adopting lines straight out of popular poems.

After these 3 lines the intention of the poem becomes clear, articulating the complexities of culture and gender and grounding them collectively in a narrative of being ostracised based on superficial characteristics:

*being told that you're gay.
Fat. A fag. A White washed islander,
by your own people,
in your own language
that you don't even understand... Culture.*

In the poem he later intimates the confusing nature of being categorized as a “*fag*” or a “*fafa*”² and the rigidity of being othered, but then being relegated to marginal forms of acceptance. In this instance referencing a Samoan cultural festival that has a beauty pageant where fafaine culture is performed and singing a song that’s commonly associated with drag culture, “Proud Mary” by Tina Turner:

*the only way that you'd accept me
is if I wear higher heels than your Mrs.
And sing “Proud Mary” at the Teuila festival.*

Similar to many Spoken Word pieces by youth, this poem is structured in a manner that is deliberately adversarial, directed at an imagined antagonist. Latter in the poem the author goes onto clarify to this antagonist that he is in-fact not “*gay*” in the following line:

And I'm sorry to disappoint you but I am not one of those people.

The line above is crucial for several reasons, namely it is the *only* definitive indication in the poem that the author is heterosexual, though it is deliberately ambiguous and easily missed. Secondly, it highlights the importance of performance within Spoken Word Poetry as the audience only has one opportunity to hear the poem and interpret its meaning. If crucial lines, like the former, are missed then the meaning of the poem can go awry, in this particular case coming across as a poem about coming-out³ rather than a declaration of his own heterosexual identity. The author during the interviews revealed that this had been an actual occurrence during a slam, with a slam judge misunderstanding the poem and applauding him for being brave about his ‘perceived’ homosexuality.

² “Fafa” is a pejorative term for a fafaine or individual outside of normative gender binary

³ “coming-out” refers to the common disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity

Many Spoken Word pieces by adolescents, poems begin with a personal narrative written in the first person pronouns “I”. Characteristic of those that address social justice and contest societal norms, they shift into second and third person pronouns to address the audience, and use the collective “we” to create solidarity between the audience and the performer. His use of the second person tense is one that references current political events and also holds elements of his own story and speaks back to both:

You need to subtitle me because my voice isn't of the same octave as yours

.....

*You decided to scream out fag or gay
every time he tried and yet you ignorantly wonder
why the marriage equality bill is being passed.*

Latter he shifts to use the third person to discuss the inflexible standards and criteria used to assess manhood; the author highlighting the dichotomy he feels exists within his culture(s) between masculinity and homosexuality.

*Why is it that when a boy fails to like rugby, coconut tree climbing or pig
hunting he fails in becoming a man?*

*Why is it that when he fails in becoming a man he is quickly pigeonholed as a
fafa, fakalady, faggot?*

The above line also highlights that even in a poem that is relatively explicit about the author's positionality, youth still feel the need to conceal themselves or limit how much they reveal of their own story. The above excerpt demonstrates that even though he uses the word “**when he fails**” to create distance between himself and the “**boy**”, the functional meaning within the poem becomes personal, as in “**when [I] failed**” shown in the following reinterpretation:

*Why is it that when a boy fails to like rugby, coconut tree climbing or pig
hunting [I fail at] becoming a man?*

*Why is it that when [I fail] in becoming a man [I am] quickly pigeonholed as a
fafa, fakalady, faggot?*

This is seen in the following line where he makes a direct reference to himself being onstage, in front of the audience:

*How is it that we in one breath can praise him for his courage and charisma
on stage
and in the next use him as the prime example of shame, disgrace, sexual
immorality?*

Speak the words ki au nei

Importantly the author also draws on the aforementioned condemnation of homosexuality extending beyond cultural disapproval and translating into religious denunciations by the imagined antagonist of the poem, indicative of the overlap within Pacifika nations between religious and cultural views:

How did we get the power to tell our sons that they are no longer sons of the father?

This is a concise reference to the church and its treatment of members of the queer community as “*the prime example[s] of shame, disgrace, [and] sexual immorality*”. Each use of the plural pronoun “we” function as a critique and questioning of societies values and collective behaviour, it is in this sense that youth Spoken Word poets are given the opportunity to *speak back* to their peers and their society. This can even transcend the immediate audience within the room, through the Internet. The author was part of a project that recorded and published this poem online so the wider public could view it. He also related that while potentially risky, the video itself created a form of social capital through being sought after by academics and institutions to share his work:

*I have like 3 different interviews and 3 different anthropologists from around the world, who have found me on the Internet or Facebook, tracked me down and have wanted to ask me questions about ‘Pink Plastic’ and about being Pacific and what it means to be a Pacific youth
– Joe Toffee*

6.5 Sample 4 - Boys will be Boys

Sample 4 presented a clear social critique on the topic of rape culture and the media portrayal of women. The surrounding context of the poem also illustrated how teachers and supportive environments contributed to the overall atmosphere of Spoken Word within school settings.

*When she was little she ran around
And with laughter fell to the ground as her brother tickled her.
Between giggles she'd beg him to stop
But she was smiling, so she couldn't really want him to.
"Boys will be boys" their father said.
Fast-forward twenty years.*

*"Police work tirelessly to piece together this morning events" says
the reporter on the television.*

*A vision
Nobody should have to witness—
A witness
Who wishes he was walking past a moment earlier,
Because maybe he could have saved her.
Maybe he could have made
her
Life
Last a little
longer.*

*The voice in your head tells you she shouldn't have been out so late
at night
But remember, the witness was out late at night
Too (two)
People doing the same thing
The difference was he was wearing a ring
The difference was he was a he who was wearing a ring
And she was a she who was viewed as a thing.*

*Now the police are looking for a stranger in the dark
Or a creeper in the park
Or a shadow in an alley
But she didn't get that bad feeling in her belly
When she first met him.*

*She was young when she met him and
He used her because she'd been used less
But now that he'd used her*

*He saw her as useless
So she ended up on the news.*

*No matter if you sit in the pews every Sunday
Or go out on the town seven nights a week
This should not be happening.*

*She locked her doors like they told her
Held a key between each finger
She never lingered.*

*The reporter on the TV says solemnly,
"Can you imagine if she was your sister or your daughter?"
Was it not enough that she was a person?
Before she was a sister or a daughter or a mother or a friend, she
was a person.
She was not made for you.
We are not made for you.
But hey, boys will be boys.*

The first public performance of this poem was at an in-school slam organized by an English faculty member during the lunchtime break at an all-girls school and was the author's first poetry performance. The author of the poem identified herself as New Zealand European and described herself as quite shy. This event was well attended, packing out the entire hall of approximately 200 people. In contrast to most slams it was casually organized and was perceived more as an opportunity to share and support friends rather than a competition. When the author performed this poem it was largely read off the pages of her journal, due to her relative inexperience on the stage, having recently finished the poem without time to memorize it. Although it was largely a reading rather than a performance, the written component and message of the poem was well received, capturing and captivating the whole audience into silence, and at particular lines such as "*And she was a she who was viewed as a thing.*" and "*This should not be happening*" snapping their fingers (in support) following each punch line and after completing the poem the crowd erupted in applause.

In relation to the central message and close reading of the poem, thematically it aligns with aspects of *speaking back* and *concealment* as a strong social commentary on the perception of women and rape culture. The author, as 17-year-old first time performer, offered some very critical statements on the way women are "*used*" and objectified, and perceived in relation to

men, particularly in relation to the privileged position of married men and the safeness associated with them, seen in the following excerpt:

*The difference was he was wearing a ring
The difference was he was a he who was wearing a ring and she was a she
who was viewed as a thing.*

Likewise, she also highlights the false connotation that sexual abuse, comes from stereotypical and fringe elements of society rather than from those within the family or close to victims:

*The police are looking for a stranger in the dark
Or a creeper in the park
Or a shadow in an alley
But she didn't get that bad feeling in her belly
When she first met him.
She was young when she met him*

The poem touches on the issue of concealment as its messages are made in the third person allowing the author to articulate her feelings but not have the content exclusively associated with her as the subject of the poem. It also illustrates how Spoken Word is used by youth to speak back and create advocacy for social issues and topical agenda that arise.

The discourse of the poem makes a strong declaration against sexual abuse, through her use of the critical use of the idiom “**boys will be boys**” and the statement that “***This should not be happening***”. She then goes to deconstruct the social narratives of seeking or needing to protect women from men, rather than placing the onus on men’s actions. This is made clear in the following excerpt when she highlights the common media narrative of drawing attention to violence against women through their relationship to males and family life rather than their inherent right to life as individuals:

*The reporter on the TV says solemnly,
“Can you imagine if she was your sister or your daughter?”
Was it not enough that she was a person?
Before she was a sister or a daughter or a mother or a friend, she was a
person.*

6.6 Chapter Summary

The previous two chapters display the results of the study 1) from the perspective of the participants and the observations throughout the research, and 2) through a brief analysis of their poems. Both chapters assist in creating a dynamic image of Spoken Word Poetry as a

phenomenon among youth, its internal or personal component, and its external milieu. The following chapter discusses the contribution of the research to existing literature, also presenting its use within the realm/field of youth health and summing the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

Chapter 7 – Whakawhiti Korero (discussion)

7.1 Introduction

The overall goal of this study was to explore and investigate Spoken Word Poetry among youth in Aotearoa, its relationship to health and wellbeing, and how it specifically resonates with Māori and Pasifika youth in Tāmaki Makaurau. This chapter will demonstrate how Spoken Word Poetry can act as a medium through which the embodiment of broader determinants of health can be expressed. This chapter will also discuss the findings of this research and their relationship to the broad research context. Finally, this chapter will address the potential of using Spoken Word Poetry as a public health intervention.

7.2 Spoken Word through the lens of a framework for racism and health

Discussed in Chapter 2, broad structural determinants such as colonisation and racism have shaped social discourse and policy in Aotearoa, privileging certain values and groups in relation to others. This consequently leads to discrimination, ostracism, and other social actions that negatively impact upon mental health of some groups and lead to risk-oriented health behaviours among adolescents (Harris et. al, 2011; Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2010). This thesis demonstrates that Spoken Word spaces in Tāmaki Makaurau operate as a site of resistance where youth can challenge and critique hegemonic social norms, social institutions, and societal structures (Park, 2004; Biggs-El, 2006). Social critique was a natural component of identity renegotiation for youth (shown in Chapter 5 & 6) that was commonplace in workshops for Spoken Word and broadcast by adolescents within poetry slams.

An adapted figure of the framework for the study of racism and health model (Williams & Mohammed, 2013) below helps to illustrate how adolescents not only embody the structural determinants of health, but that these are then filtered into active expression through their physical performance in Spoken Word.

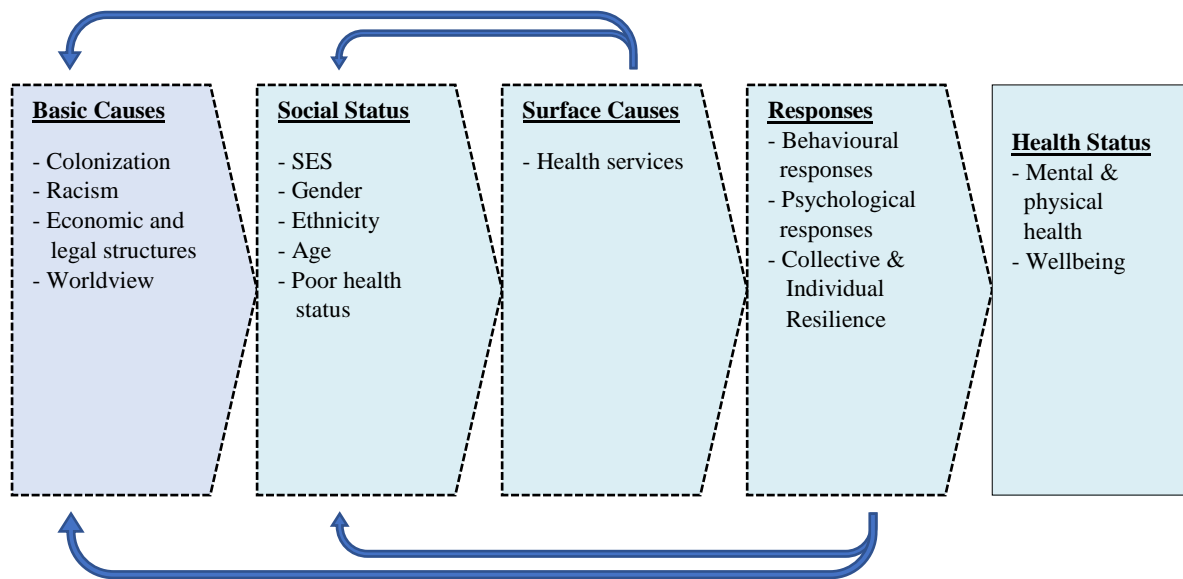


Figure 2: The embodiment process of Spoken Word Poetry based on a framework for the study of racism and health

(adapted from Williams & Mohammed, 2013)

Secondly, the findings of this research also show that the relative impact of basic causes and social status that determine adolescent health can be contested through Spoken Word Poetry. Spoken Word Poetry either as part of a health service or from within the education or community sector, could present a socially prescribed space to address issues of personal and collective wellbeing. The presence of the youth Spoken Word movement in schools, is currently perceived only as a form of entertainment and education, without any recognition of its ability to create change and transformation for health. Therefore, Spoken Word Poetry is an ideal activity that can be explored as a potential intervention for public health intentions. The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2014) state that strategies are needed to reduce discrimination among youth particularly in relation to ethnicity and gender. Harris et al. (2011) also indicate that racial discrimination negatively effects physical and mental health and promotes risky health behaviours. If as Krieger (2000, p. 41) asserts “discrimination is a socially structured and sanctioned phenomenon that is intended to maintain privileges for members of dominant groups at the cost of deprivation for others” then Spoken Word Poetry interventions are one potential strategy to address racial and gender discrimination through participation and description of their own subjectivity. Within the confines of a classroom workshop, or as a performance within slam, or as individuals sharing

their Spoken Word pieces at open mic event, the critical opportunity for discourse and resistance of hegemonic structures (Freire, 1996) is apparent giving the findings of this study.

7.3 Discussion point

7.3.1 Spoken Word Poetry in Aotearoa

The findings of this research foreground Spoken Word Poetry as a relevant and contemporary genre and youth culture within Tāmaki Makaurau that prior to this research remained largely undocumented. This research contributes to the sparse set of international literature on Spoken Word Poetry and an even smaller set of national literature on the topic (West, 2013; Johansson, 2014; Denny & Liang, 2007). Likewise, this project is the first iteration of a New Zealand-based study of Spoken Word Poetry that is health-oriented. The intersection between public health and Spoken Word Poetry is based upon the latter's feasibility as a viable youth mental health intervention.

The influence of Spoken Word Poetry stretched across numerous venues and schools throughout Auckland City, and had the capacity to affect the majority youth population. The findings of this study showed that Spoken Word was available to youth from diverse ethnic, minority, or social groupings. Youth entered into the scene associated with Spoken Word Poetry through being involved with poetry slams or open mics, and participating within poetry workshops held in schools or community centres. Therefore, it seems obvious that slam and/or Spoken Word workshops are ideal for adaption into universal health intervention (Browne, Gafni, Roberts, Byrne & Majumdar, 2004; Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan & Ford, 2014). The use of creative arts programs for therapeutic use with young people and in schools is not a new concept. The importance of engaging youth with culturally appropriate mental health tools and interventions is one strategy to address current youth health issues among an underrepresented population (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Morgan, 2015; Ball, Quigley & Watts, 2010). Consistent with wider literature, my findings show that for many youth these places for performing and writing poetry were perceived as areas where they could safely speak to and / or address personally meaningful and socially relevant issues (Stovall, 2006; Boudreau, 2009).

7.3.2 The therapeutic benefits of Spoken Word Poetry

The findings of this study show a therapeutic⁴ benefit to writing, sharing, and performing Spoken Word Poetry for young people. These benefits are positioned within a strength-based approach and premised on a wide body of literature that dictate the therapeutic effectiveness of creative arts and self-expression (Beauregard, 2013; Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Stepakoff, 2009). The present findings showed that the youth Spoken Word movement in Aotearoa presented to youth an accessible, bricoleur approach to writing stories and opinions without reproach, in the guise of ‘Spoken Word’ (Lee, 2009).

7.3.2.1 Writing

Writing was a distinctive aspect of Spoken Word Poetry that participants described as cathartic, healing, and empowering. The physical process of creative expression and the transformation of inner emotions into outward forms, into poems⁵, has intuitively been shown to benefit self-esteem, personal development, and holistic wellbeing (Stepakoff, 2009; Croom, 2015; Atkinson & Robson, 2012). My results showed this occurring initially through participants being enabled in Spoken Word spaces to free-write their thoughts and emotions. While some participants did this privately, it was also a facilitated process during workshops held in schools and community locations for those new to Spoken Word. The technique of free-writing resembles Pennebaker’s (2004) method of expressive writing. This entailed writing continuously without regard for spelling or grammar over a period of 5-10 minutes where participants’ generated text and content in a rough Spoken Word draft or manuscript. Youth would frequently immerse themselves within this activity, and consistent with elements of ‘flow’ or peak experience, release intense emotions all within a normalized environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). These written drafts were often a collage of different and sometimes incoherent emotions, thoughts, and ideas. This process and other semi-structured Spoken Word exercises critically engaged students in literacy, firstly as a means of encouraging educational participation, and secondly, as a means of combining curricular and

⁴ The use of the term ‘therapeutic’ in this thesis refers strictly to Spoken Words benefit to either the individual and/or collective benefit of its use.

⁵ Within youth Spoken Word, a ‘poem’ is devoid of strict definition and simply refers to what the individual chooses to share.

positive mental health outcomes (Bruce & Davis, 2000; Browne, Gafni, Roberts, Byrnea & Majumdar, 2004). Through the facilitated removal of regular class routine and every day social order, Spoken Word provided an entry point into an alternative social encounter that was centred around adolescent emotional health (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Keyes & Ryff, 1999).

The findings of this study have underlying implications for public health given that Spoken Word Poetry workshops and related poetry exercises encouraged individuals with low self-esteem, poor social skills, or those at the boundaries of scholastic ability to engage with the activity. In many cases these were Māori or Pasifika youth who did not like or know how to 'write'. Therefore, these findings demonstrate how these individuals can move from the educational margins to the centre. Youth within this study often thrived in these activities because of the subjective non-didactic approach to writing. Given the persistent educational inequities that surround Māori and Pasifika students in secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2013), scholastic opportunities oriented towards students within these groups may help to increase educational participation rates (Lock & Gibson, 2008). Likewise, Spoken Word Poetry, as a natural extension of the core English syllabus, may provide a way through which negative stigma associated with the expression of mental health (or illness) (often seen as a sign of weakness) can be addressed (Oakley Browne, Wells and Scott, 2006; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007; Mental health commission, 2011).

7.3.2.2 Sharing

Complementary to the process of writing Spoken Word was the tendency for it to be informally shared with others as a structured aspect of all Spoken Word workshops and performance spaces. Facilitators often opened the floor for adolescents to share prewritten pieces, or what they had just written. This critical element actualised everyday places into sites for discourse and identity negotiation by adolescents of various ethnicities and genders (Croom, 2012; Sengupta et al., 2013; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh & Nakamura, 2014). These types of sharing activities have been shown to facilitate bonding between adolescents as they open up to one another and provided immediate feedback.

Creating positive social attachments and shared norms around emotional dialogue in everyday life is also important in coping effectively with stressors (Croom, 2012; Alvarez and Mearns; 2014). Pennebaker and Graybeal (2001) found that sharing emotional writing about trauma can transform the way individuals speak about distress with friends and peers through creating empathy and awareness. This has important implications for public health. The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2008; 2014) has stated the importance of strategies that reduce discrimination and bullying among adolescents that have adverse long-term health consequences (Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan & Ford, 2014; references). Normalizing the practice of speaking openly about contentious youth topics by and between adolescents, through the guise of ‘poetry’, is a potential strategy for creating health promotion within adolescent populations. This strategy also draws on Kaupapa Māori ideals of seeking to normalize the social and educational margins that Māori often reside within (Ormond, Cram & Carter, 2006). The findings of this study showed that youth involved with Spoken Word Poetry fostered empathy, acceptance, and validation, at its greatest and at the very least created mindfulness of those from different backgrounds or genders.

7.3.3 Social significance the youth Spoken Word movement

The Spoken Word Poetry movement is critically significant in Tāmaki Makaurau for a number of reasons. Social and civic engagement⁶ of youth in Aotearoa is currently in decline as a result of a persistent deficit-driven view of adolescents (Hayhurst, 2014; Youniss et. al, 2002). As the largest and fastest growing city in the country, Auckland houses the majority of the youth population of Aotearoa. Youth disengagement impedes adequate decision making within social and political processes. This also reduces the collective autonomy of young people within society (Wood, 2013). In addition, many forms of civic and community engagement are either oriented towards adults or inaccessible to youth under 18 years of age (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Fields, Snapp, Russell, Licona & Tilley, 2014). The findings of this research contrast this deficit perspective and provide a window into a growing youth culture of sharing and speaking, in a manner consistent with positive wellbeing (Keyes, 2002;

⁶ Civic engagement refers to the way that youth citizens participate within the life of the community, to improve its conditions for the whole and help shape the communities’ future.

Simmonds, Harre & Crengle, 2014). Here, both in these spaces and in this research, youth are portrayed as socially engaged, and, given adequate opportunity, articulate, competent, empathetic, and conscious (Morgan, 2015).

What differentiates Spoken Word Poetry from other art forms and modes of expression is its relationship with embodiment (Somers-Willett, 2009, p.69). My results show that youth memorised their poems to the extent that it resided within their mind *and* body, and when the poem came out again they are not just 'saying' it, they *are* 'it' (West, 2013; Somers-Willett, 2005). In addition to text, movement and gesture conveyed the nuances of cultural or gender difference that traditional forms of poetry and conversation cannot (Somers-Willett, 2009, p.18). This active embodiment and display of youth opinion, identity, and struggle in public spaces was what allowed individuals to generate social and cultural capital (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010). My results illustrate that Spoken Word Poetry among adolescents represents an embodied form of cultural capital in both the literal⁷ and figurative⁸ sense. O'shea (2015) explains that embodied forms of cultural capital, draw upon the knowledge, education, and skills inherently possessed by individuals or groups. Spoken Word Poetry took this one step further and allowed participants to demonstrate their own knowledge and linguistic capital, in a normative manner at slams and open mic events. Supplementary to the associated benefit of social mobility within their own and other related networks (social, educational, religious), performance also acted as a process for cultural regeneration. Performing required individuals to develop or refine their personal understanding of ethnicity and/or gender, and other social constructs. For urban Māori and Pasifika youth this was a significant contributor to wellbeing and one process for overcoming intergenerational cultural dislocation and/or urban isolation from sources of cultural identity (Houkamau, 2010; Carlson, 2013).

Performance of Spoken Word Poetry, in addition to youth-orientated poetry events, occupied dominant spaces such as churches, schools, festivals, and conferences (O'shea, 2015; Yosso 2005). Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010) argues that possession of cultural capital enables

⁷ As the poem is a personal narrative that is embodied, not solely memorized but performed.

⁸ As distinguished from institutional-gained (specialized knowledge) and/or objectified (belongings) forms of cultural capital

individuals to be strategic within different cultural contexts (Houkamau, 2010; Harre & Crengle, 2014). For urban Māori and Pasifika youth in this study, Spoken Word was a place to cultivate their heritage and personal outlook through performance into strategic opportunities for empowerment.

7.3.4 Responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika youth

A central aim of this research, through its Kaupapa Māori framing, was that the findings be beneficial to Māori and Pasifika youth. One application of this research lies in the considerable contribution that Māori and Pasifika youth added to the study that illustrates that Spoken Word Poetry may be used or developed as an appropriate indicator of subjective health and wellbeing (Cram, 2014). In contrast to a sole-focus on the individual, Spoken Word also provides youth the opportunity to express, and likewise be assessed on, the impacts of colonisation, dislocation, and racism in their everyday lives (Cram, 2014; Dingwall & Cairney, 2010).

The findings of this study demonstrated Spoken Word was a positive and autonomous means for youth to present what it means to be Māori or Pasifika. Their poetry was 1) subjective, accounting for heterogeneity within each respective population, and 2) culturally responsive to adolescents' level of engagement with their cultural background, specifically as urban youth (Cram, 2014; Houkamau, 2010; West, 2013; Mahuika, 2008). This may be beneficial to informing health promotional and / or educational resources aimed at Māori and Pasifika youth.

In addition, Spoken Word Poetry allowed participants to explore and negotiate ideals such as the lived experience of discrimination, marginalization, and direct critique of the lingering consequences of colonialism in Aotearoa. By assessing Māori and Pasifika individual and / or collective wellbeing Spoken Word Poetry raised awareness among adolescents and their surrounding community to effect change or seek support (Cram, 2014; Tobler, Maldonado-Molina, Staras, O'Mara, Libingston & Komro, 2013).

7.3.3 Strengths and Limitations

7.3.3.1 Limitations

This research project was limited by a number of factors that included time, sample size, and the broad scope of the research. Given that the study methods required a high level of involvement within the field, this impacted on project timeframes and limited the outcomes of the research. The qualitative approach to data analysis was time consuming, both in transcription and analysis. The use of interviews, observations, and auto ethnography, all respectively required separate attention that required additional time (not necessarily available within the constraints of a Master's programme).

Within any given research field, it is also necessary to consider who has and has not been included within the research and 'provided a voice' (Smith, 2012). This project included youth who were offered and chose to participate within the research. Naturally this may have limited representation from the wider youth population of Tāmaki Makaurau who may have had distinct or contrasting experiences and views of Spoken Word Poetry. In addition, as this project was limited to a relatively small sample size, it cannot be generalised to all youth who engage in Spoken Word but may serve as an exploratory piece of research to inform future projects.

The broad scope of this research project drew upon multiple fields of inquiry and academic literature. A heavy reliance on associated literature and international sources that were deemed consistent with the aims and methodological outlook of the research were therefore necessary. The need to collate literature from a wide range of knowledge fields (some new and innovative) limited the ability to fully explain some concepts and may require further study.

Finally, this study was a Kaupapa Māori research project and as such sought to normalise and privilege Te Ao Māori values and perspectives. However as 10 participants were non-Māori, the study may not have been able to capture the diversity of experiences of youth participants.

What working with a Kaupapa Māori Research framework was able to achieve however, was a critical decolonising approach that was useful for understanding youth experiences of health and wellbeing from a non-Western perspective. Future research should consider how to apply Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika frameworks to provide a more comprehensive and appropriate understanding of youth wellbeing.

7.3.3.2 Strength

The strengths of this study include the overall appropriateness of the approach to the topic that allowed for exploration of the research area and produced a rich depth of results. Accuracy of the research design and analysis was also sought through triangulation of analysis, and through feedback with Pasifika cultural advisors and the participants themselves. Further, as an insider within the world of Spoken Word, I was able to gauge a level of access to participants that may have been difficult for outsider researchers. Likewise, the use of Kaupapa Māori and advice from Pasifika cultural advisors and youth workers helped ensure this process was culturally appropriate and responsive to the participants. Kaupapa Māori also provided a critical lens to analyse the literature and findings in a way that was fitting to the researcher and the context.

7.4 Recommendation

Given the findings of this research that illustrate the association between Spoken Word Poetry and positive health and wellbeing, a number of implications and recommendations can be put forward:

In relation to the field of research and Public Health:

- More research should be undertaken that further elucidates the connection and intersection between youth creative expression and health in Aotearoa.
- Further research should be conducted in to contemporary forms of social, political and cultural expression. This could include analysis of the intersection between traditional artforms and their contemporary expression, in relation to health and wellbeing.

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In relation to mental health promotion:

- Spoken Word Poetry should be considered a useful tool within potential youth health interventions in schools and other educational providers.
 - This could include creating and encouraging slams and Spoken Word workshops themed around prevalent mental health issues within the community sector and in schools.
 - As poetry is already a component of the english curriculum, reorientating educational providers to include the use of Spoken Word within learning spaces and classrooms.
 -
- The benefits of using Spoken Word Poetry within interventions at schools and in the community extend beyond creative or scholastic merit. Recognition as a mental health tool requires allowing potential intervention that use Spoken Word to draw on funding allocated for mental health promotion rather than solely from the creative arts or educational sector.

Chapter 8 – Korero Whakamutunga (conclusion)

The findings of this research contribute valuable knowledge that links Spoken Word Poetry in Aotearoa with educational and mental health needs of Auckland youth within the context of Public health. Spoken Word Poetry provides for youth a medium through which their emotional, cultural and political voices can be expressed and heard in an environment that is empowering. This is important given that broad determinants of health and wellbeing for youth in Aotearoa have created social environments within which their voices are often undervalued. Given that the outcome of these social environments have seen rises in youth mental health need, suicide, self-harm and bullying; the present findings foreground Spoken Word Poetry not only as a form of addressing negative influences but as a space for positive youth development. Spoken Word Poetry should be seen as a new and innovative mental health intervention for youth in Aotearoa in addition to its benefits as a scholastic tool. Spoken Word Poetry is particularly positive for Māori and Pasifika youth as a site for cultural regeneration and a safe place to express the complex realities they face within the modern era. Public Health strategies should move toward incorporating interventions such as this that are positively engaging for youth.

Appendix A – Focus group question schedule

Focus group/Whānau interview questions

Can you tell me a little bit about yourselves?

- Your name(s)
- Where your from
- The Ethnicity(s) you identify with
- Time spent living in Tamaki/Auckland
- Home context
- Occupation

Tell me about you got involved in Spoken Word

- What first inspired you to get into Spoken Word Poetry?
- How did you become involved in the scene (performance)?
- Do you know much about its history in Aoteroa/New Zealand?
- Where did you first hear about Spoken Word/slam poetry?
- Do you write and perform regularly? If so where?
- Is there any support provided by your school/family/community for writing and performing Spoken Word?

Is Spoken Word a place you feel safe to name your experience(s)?

- In your poetry, do you ever talk about your community, your home or school environment, or do you create it? (how, and why?)
- how much/often do you try to reimagine where you live in you poems? (how, and why?)
- What makes you want to take the stage and perform your poetry?
- How does it change the way you view your life?

Does writing and performing Spoken Word Poetry you explore issues of wellbeing?

- Before you sit down to write a poem, what makes you want to write?
- Do you write in response to events or strong emotions? Or do poems come spontaneously?
- Do you write a poem in one sitting/event or do you slowly put poems together of over time?
- While your writing/performing a Spoken Word poem how do you feel? (can explain that abit?)
- In your poems do you ever draw on events that happened to you or those close to you?
- When you perform and in the writing of a poem, do you want the audience to know that this is your story? (Why or why not?)
- How do you go about writing topics which are close to you? what makes you want to perform those poems over others?
- Have any of the poems you've written changed the way you view your family/community/identity?

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- Have any of poems you have written had negative consequences on your life or health?
- Do you ever worry that writing about certain events and topics might have some negative consequences?

How would you describe the role Spoken Word play in your life?

Being Māori/Pacific, does Spoken Word have any special importance to you or your Whānau?

- Does your ethnicity play a role in the way you write/perform Spoken Word?
- Have you ever found any similarities/differences between Spoken Word and Māori/Pacific oratory traditions?
- Do you express your ethnicity through your poetry? (if so how?)
- Do you think Māori/Pacific youth are more receptive to messages in Spoken Word formats?

Are there any questions or comments you would like to make?

Appendix B – Participant information and consent forms

Te Kupenga Hauora Māori

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Te Kupenga Hauora Māori
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142
New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet (Whānau)

Kia ora, my name is Rewa Palliser Worley (*Nga Puhi/Ngati Porou*), I am a researcher in Te Kupenga Hauora Māori, The University of Auckland. I would like to invite you and your whānau to participate in a study about the experiences of youth and young people that write and perform spoken word poetry within Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland Region). Your participation in the study is entirely your choice (voluntary) and will not affect your relationship with your school (or educational provider), the University of Auckland or any of the parties involved in the research. If you agree to take part in the study you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason, and this will not affect your health care. If you are willing to take part in the research, we will contact you in approximately one week.

About the study

The aim of the study is to find out about how spoken word poetry effects the health and wellbeing of youth and young people so that it might be used in the future.

If you decide to participate we would like to invite you to be involved in 6 weekly/bi-weekly spoken word workshops run by myself in conjunction with Action Education (AE). Through this process we will spend time with you and the other participants as the group writes and performs their poetry (participant observation).

We will also spend some time interviewing the group as a whole (focus group interviews), and will also individually interview participants. Your whanau are also welcome to attend the individual interviews if they choose.

Your school/educational provider/organisation has identified that you may be interested in participating in the research. Action Education in association with school/educational provider/organisation will invite you to take part in the research, if you agree, or would like to know more about the research, then the nurses will pass your contact details onto us so we can get in touch with you and organise a time to meet.

Approximately 20 people will take part in this study.

The study will take place in various venues in Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland).

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The study will take place over 12 months, finishing in February 2015.

Who is invited to participate in the study?

Youth aged 16-25 that write and/or perform poetry (spoken word), and who live in Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland) are invited to participate in this study.

What is involved?

Each workshop will take between 1 to 2 hours. During this time, poetry and writing will be shared followed by writing and performance exercises and food. While sharing is at the discretion of the participants, participation is encouraged and the social space provided is safe, closed environment. The research team (myself) will be facilitating and taking notes but also be participating in the workshop. The audio from these sessions may also be recording to assist the me in writing up the final research later in the year. The audio recording will then be kept as an electronic document until it is transcribed (typed out) by a researcher or a research assistant and then it will be deleted. The typed copy will be kept by the researcher for 6 years. During any of the workshops you can leave at any time without having to give a reason. However, if you do decide to leave, we will not be able to withdraw/delete the information you have given us before you leave.

These workshops will be held at a local community centre and run through Action Education. These workshops are a safe space to develop your poetry in and will only be attended by the facilitators (myself and AE staff) and those who wish to participate in the research.

After the final workshop session, you and the other participants are invited to a focus group interview. It will take between 1 to 2 hours. During this session, the questions and discussion will be centred around how the process of writing/performance has influenced your life and sense of wellbeing. The groups consent the interview will be audio recorded. Again, interview participants do not have to answer all of the questions and can leave at any time without having to give a reason. However, if you do decide to leave, we will not be able to withdraw/delete the information you have given us before you leave. The audio recording will then be kept as an electronic document until it is transcribed (typed out) by the researcher and then it will be deleted. The typed copy will be kept for 6 years.

The individual interviews will take between 1 to 2 hours. Interview participants do not have to answer all of the questions and can stop the interview at any time. These interviews will take place at local community centres, your homes or other places of your choice. You may also request to have members of your whanau at these interview. With your agreement, the interviews will be digitally audio recorded. You can choose to have the audio recorder turned off at any time during the interview. The audio recording will then be kept as an electronic document until it is transcribed (typed out) by the researcher or a research assistant and then it will be deleted. The typed copy will be kept for 6 years. You will be given the choice of receiving a typed copy of your interview to read, check or withdraw any information you do not want used in the study. You will have three weeks to make changes or withdraw information from your individual interview.

Confidentiality & privacy

The outline of this study seeks to empower the participants and the material produced in workshops may in future, be used by the participants in formal creative publications and poetry journals etc. In regard to this, confidentiality and anonymity is at the discretion of the participants and will be offered

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to you at the beginning of the study and at the completion of the focus group interviews prior.

In this study, material (submitted material and interview data) that could personally identify you (let other people know who you are) may be used in the final copy of this study. If you would like to preserve your anonymity your details and information will be concealed.

During the focus group interviews, because the participants will know each other, we will not be able to guarantee that your identity will be kept confidential (secret). However, we will ask that you each keep one another's identity and what was talked about in the interviews confidential (by not telling people outside of the study who has been involved and what has been said in the interviews). Identity of individual interview participants will be kept confidential. Information collected from the study will be stored in a locked cabinet on University of Auckland premises, separate from participant consent forms, for a total of 6 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed by a disposal company that provides security for confidential documents.

Results and dissemination

The study will finish in February 2016. Information from the study will be used to improve health services, particularly for youth. The findings from the study will be presented in academic publications (journals and books), to health care service providers, at academic conferences, and reported back to the community through oral presentations and through summary documents.

Risks and benefits

There are no direct risks or benefits to you or your whānau as participants in this study. There is also no cash payment for your participation in the study. You will be provided with koha (\$20 petrol voucher) in appreciation of giving up your time for the study (even if you decide to withdraw from the study after the information is collected).

Any questions?

If you have any queries or wish to know more please contact the principal investigator, Dr Anneka Anderson, a.anderson@auckland.ac.nz, Te Kupenga Hauora Māori, University of Auckland, Tel 373 7599 Ext 83373.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study you can contact an independent health and disability advocate. This is a free service provided under the Health and Disability Commissioner Act.

Telephone: (NZ wide): 0800 555 050

Free Fax (NZ wide): 0800 2787 7678 (0800 2 SUPPORT)

Email (NZ wide): advocacy@hdc.org.nz

If you have any medical questions or health concerns, please contact Health line (a free service with trained nurses to give you advice): 0800 611 116

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact:

The Chair,

The University of Auckland Human Ethics Committee

The University of Auckland

Office of the Vice Chancellor

Private Bag 92019

Auckland 1141

Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 83711.

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 05/08/2013 for 3 years, Reference number 9922**

Speak the words ki au nei

Te Kupenga Hauora Māori

Speak the words ki au nei



Te Kupenga Hauora Māori
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142
New Zealand

Participant observation consent form

This form will be kept securely for a period of 6 years.

Please circle yes or no for each question.

I have read and understood the information sheet for this study. I understand how and why I have been invited to participate in the study and I have been able to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. Yes/No

I understand that my participation in this study is my choice (voluntary) and I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give a reason. Yes/No

I understand that my participation in this study will not affect health care for myself or my whānau or our relationship with the University of Auckland or any other parties involved in the project. Yes/No

I understand that if I tell the researcher that I do not feel comfortable being observed (or that any of my whānau/friends feel uncomfortable being observed) the observations will stop immediately. Yes/No

I understand information I provide which may identify me (let other people know who I am) will be used in reports on this study, and that at my request, this information can be concealed to keep my identity anonymous. Yes/No

I understand that the participant observations will be written into a field journal at the end of each session and that this information will be typed out, then the written notes will be destroyed. I understand that all information collected in the study will be stored in a locked cabinet on University of Auckland premises, separate from participant consent forms, for a total of 6 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed by a disposal company that provides security for confidential documents. Yes/No

I understand that data from the study will be presented in academic publications, at academic conferences, to health services and disseminated back to the community through oral presentations and through summary documents. Yes/No

I agree to take part in the research. Yes/No

Participant's name _____

Participant's signature _____

Speak the words ki au nei

Participant's details _____ contact

Date: / /

Researcher's name _____

Researcher's signature _____

If you have any queries or wish to know more please contact the principal investigator, Dr Aneka Anderson, a.anderson@auckland.ac.nz, Te Kupenga Hauora Māori, University of Auckland, Tel 373 7599 Ext 83373.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 05/08/2013 for 3 years, Reference number 9922

Speak the words ki au nei

Te Kupenga Hauora Māori

Speak the words ki au nei



Te Kupenga Hauora Māori
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142
New Zealand

Individual interview consent form

This form will be kept securely for a period of 6 years. Please circle yes or no for each question.

I have read and understood the information sheet for this study. I understand how and why I have been invited to participate in the study and I have been able to ask questions and have them answered in a way I understand. Yes/No

I understand that my participation in this study is my choice (voluntary) and I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give a reason. Yes/No

I understand that my participation in the study will not affect health care for myself or my whānau and it will not affect our relationship with our Public Health Nurse. Yes/No

I understand that I do not have to answer all of the interview questions and I understand that I can stop the interview at anytime. Yes/No

I understand information I provide which may identify me (let other people know who I am) will be used in reports on this study, and that at my request, this information can be concealed to keep my identity anonymous. Yes/No

I agree to the interview being digitally audio recorded. Yes/No

I understand that I can choose to have the audio recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Yes/No

I understand that if I want, I will be given a typed copy of the interview to read, and I will have 3 weeks after being given the interview to change or withdraw any information I do not want used. Yes/No

I **WANT** to be given a typed copy of the interview? Yes/No

I understand that the audio recorded interview will be deleted after it has been typed out and that all information collected will be stored in a locked cabinet on University of Auckland premises, separate from participant consent forms, for a total of 6 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed by a disposal company that provides security for confidential documents. Yes/No

I understand that data from the study will be used to improve health services, presented in academic publications, at academic conferences, and reported back to the community through oral presentations and through summary documents. Yes/No

I agree to take part in the research. Yes/No

Participant's name _____

Participant's signature _____

Participant's details _____ contact

Speak the words ki au nei

Date: / /

Researcher's
name _____

Researcher's
signature _____

If you have any queries or wish to know more please contact the principal investigator, Dr Anneka Anderson, a.anderson@auckland.ac.nz, Te Kupenga Hauora Māori, University of Auckland, Tel 373 7599 Ext 83373.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 05/08/2013 for 3 years, Reference number 9922

Appendix C – Positive Health Criterion Established by Keyes & Haidt (2003)

Operational Definitions of Symptoms of Mental Health

Positive feelings:	Positive functioning:	
Emotional well-being	Psychological well-being	Social well-being
<p><i>Positive affect & Happiness:</i> calm and peaceful, satisfied with past or present life and events.</p> <p><i>Life Satisfaction:</i> Sense of contentment or satisfaction with past or present life overall or in life domains</p> <p><i>Connection:</i> Connection with the past or present. Interconnectedness or contentment with events preceding the</p>	<p><i>Self-acceptance:</i> Positive attitude toward oneself and past life, and concedes and accepts varied aspects of self.</p> <p><i>Purpose in life:</i> Has goals, beliefs that affirm sense of direction in life, and feels life has purpose and meaning.</p> <p><i>Environmental mastery:</i> Has capability to manage complex environment and can choose or create suitable environs.</p> <p><i>Autonomy:</i> Comfortable with self-direction, has internal standards, resists unsavory social pressures.</p> <p><i>Personal growth:</i> Insight into one's potential, sense of development, and open to challenging new experiences.</p> <p><i>Positive relations with others:</i> Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships, and is capable of empathy and intimacy.</p>	<p><i>Social acceptance:</i> Positive attitude toward others while acknowledging and accepting people's complexity.</p> <p><i>Social actualization:</i> Cares and believes that, collectively, people have potential and society can evolve positively.</p> <p><i>Social contribution:</i> Feels that one's life is useful to society and that one's contributions are valued by others.</p> <p><i>Social coherence:</i> Has interest in society, feels it's intelligible, somewhat logical, predictable, and meaningful.</p> <p><i>Social integration:</i> Feels part of, and a sense of belonging to, a community, derives comfort and support from community.</p>

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