

## Chapter 5

# What the “Catalyst of Happiness” Means in the Tangata Whānau Māori Paradigm

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The intention of this chapter is to critically examine what happiness is, what happiness might look like, and what happiness might even feel like from the Māori perspective. It incorporates a personal record of the author's journey of resistance and transformation. It aims to discuss some realities that Māori wahine, including the author, have faced in a colonized Aotearoa. The chapter reclaims a space for Māori women defined by tikanga and kawa while investigating the physiological functions of the whare tangata, whare, hinengaro, and whare tinana and how these inform philosophical constructs. While the methodology used to bring these stories to light was auto-ethnography, qualitative, and kaupapa Māori, combining these methods allowed the validity of the voices to be heard from their own lived experiences and narratives. The chapter articulates to identify and describe “happiness” and what that could possibly look like from a Māori wahine worldview.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I will investigate unique aspects of Māori happiness and how these may contrast with western expectation - for example, concepts of hardship; ‘limited accessibility to housing and related monetary issues’. While the ‘mauri’ or ‘quintessence’ of being a part of whānau we live our lives immersed in our own autonomy. This enables us to access the key resources that are required on daily basis. My purpose of this study is to investigate what happiness through the eyes of Māori wahine. I have conducted my field research in one of small city known as Tairāwhiti, Gisborne, Turanga-nui-a-Kiwa. A city in northeaster New Zealand, the largest settlement of several small bays in the Gisborne district of 36,100

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residents (October 2016) (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). It stretches approximately 10 kilometres from Young Nick’s Head in the southwest to Tuaheni Point in the northeast. While Gisborne’s unemployment problems, already amongst the worst in New Zealand. As on February 1, 2017, the Gisborne has the highest unemployment rate in the country, at 8.1 percent (Stats NZ, 2017). ‘Happiness’ is not only hard to measure, but it is also difficult to singularly define. Happiness cannot be defined without using a synonym for happiness. Mental illnesses have dramatically increased. The major contributing risk factor of suicide is the impact of mental illness. Mood, anxiety, substance use and eating are all disorder factors and are all linked with suicidal ideation, plan and attempt (Lino, 2015). In 2003 an analysis of mental health service data, including both hospitalisation and other outpatient and community services, was undertaken (Ministry of Health, 2017). The analysis suggested Māori males had higher scores on psychotic symptoms and lower scores on depressive symptoms than non-Māori, male service users. It further identified that among those living in areas of a similar level of deprivation, Māori consumers of mental health services had, on average, higher level of severity and lower levels of functioning than non-Māori service users (Ministry of Health, 2017). “Psychological researchers have, for years, distinguished between “life satisfaction,” or the overall assessment of your feelings and attitudes about your life at a particular point in time, from “subjective well-being,” which captures the actual feelings of happiness you have at the moment” (Whitbourne, 2014).

“Anxiety disorders were the most prevalent disorder group among Māori: 31.3% (or one in three) had experienced an anxiety disorder in their life up to the interview and 19.4% (almost one in five) over the past 12 months” (Ministry of Health, 2017). “Specific phobia, social phobia and posttraumatic stress disorder were the most common anxiety disorders in Māori over both periods” (Ministry of Health, 2017). Some may be of the mindset and easy for others to slip into all-or-nothing mindset; a person who has some psychological problem and therefore their life must be miserable and unhappy. A team of Dutch positive psychologists, studied over a thousand participants with a psychological disorder found 65.4 percent of the mentally troubled felt happiest during the preceding four weeks, compared to 89.1 percent of those without a psychological problem (Bergsma, Have, Veenhoven, & Graaf, 2011).

My study investigates and articulate whether happiness can be measured, and if so how? The research is to study the influences of what happiness and to evaluate the effectiveness of the various influences that perpetuate happiness from a Māori wahine worldview, and influences of a whānau, hapū, iwi and society in general. The first (A) part of the chapter articulates on the Introduction / methodology and review of literature followed by Second (B) part field work analysis of the participants and conclusion.

## **AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The overall aim of this research is to identify and describe ‘happiness’ and what that looks like for Māori wahine. I did field study with Māori wahine, Māori philosophies and Māori methods of managing, identifying and contextualizing happiness in a Māori worldview, as an individual wahine, and as the missing piece to a whānau, hapū and iwi. My goals are to explore past experiences of my participants and that of my own based on our own journey’s in times of happiness, what that happiness felt like, what it looked like and why ‘happiness’ might have been so hard to grasp onto or to hold. Further goals are to identify the strategies effective in a Māori worldview and to identify as to whether happiness is a singular notion or a collective. I did articulate to explore how to apply strategies into one’s life (if any) to obtain happiness, and identify happiness within the spaces we position ourselves. I met with my target participants

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