

Journal of Indigenous Research

Full Circle: Returning Native Research to the People

Volume 12 | Issue 2024

Article 2

5-30-2024

Te Kupenga – Reflecting on the Purposeful Collection, Interpretation, and Stor(y)ing of Māori Women’s Knowledges.

Deborah M. Heke

Auckland University of Technology, deborah.heke@aut.ac.nz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir>

Recommended Citation

Heke, Deborah M. (2024) "Te Kupenga – Reflecting on the Purposeful Collection, Interpretation, and Stor(y)ing of Māori Women’s Knowledges.," *Journal of Indigenous Research*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2024, Article 2. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol12/iss2024/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Indigenous Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



Te Kupenga – Reflecting on the Purposeful Collection, Interpretation, and Stor(y)ing of Māori Women’s Knowledges.

Cover Page Footnote

The author wishes to acknowledge each of the women who have contributed to the development of this work. From the 19 women who participated in the original research to those who continue to engage with Te Kupenga and the ongoing stor(y)ing of Māori and Indigenous women's knowledges.

**Te Kupenga – Reflecting on the Purposeful Collection, Interpretation, and Stor(y)ing of
Māori Women’s Knowledges.**

Whakapapa – the strands that weave us together.

This paper reflects on the methodology – Te Kupenga – and explores, from the first-person, insider perspective of a wahine Māori researcher, the use of this intersecting methodology as an approach to gathering, interpreting, and stor(y)ing mātauranga wahine (Māori women’s knowledges). The application of this methodology and associated methods provided a means to understand the ways of being of physically active wāhine Māori and their connections to atua wāhine (feminine deities). The metaphor of the kupenga derives from an open weave net, used for fishing or gathering kai (food). This research focused on weaving together three approaches that intentionally gathered Māori women’s stories. The distinctive philosophies and methods woven together in Te Kupenga allowed the research design to keep only what was needed and allowed the rest to pass through the gaps in the weave. Ultimately, it enabled an illustration of the power and potential of wāhine – as active and sacred holders of the knowledge and blueprints of both ancestors and descendants (Heke, 2023b).

What is a kupenga?

The kupenga is an open weave net constructed using a specific knot and weave whose gaps provide a degree of discernment, durability, and flexibility. These nets were often used to collect kai (food), so they would serve as the mechanism for collecting, sorting, and storing. The gaps in the weave would allow water, dirt, or smaller items to pass through, retaining only what was desired (Pendergrast, 2003; Puketapu-Hetet, 1999).

Why a methodology with so many holes?

This methodology is purposefully designed, just as the woven kupenga is purposefully designed with the kai it intends to collect in mind. The practical nature of this design allows for discernment between what is wanted or needed and what is not. Māori and Indigenous Peoples alike, share the creative ability to adopt and adapt technologies and tools beneficial to survival and thriving; to repurpose their environment and available resources for their intended outcomes (Hudson et al., 2010). For example, our early Māori ancestors who travelled from and through the Pacific, would soon discover that the resources they were accustomed to in the islands, were not abundantly available in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This did not mean they dismissed their existing knowledge but that they were purposeful about which practices were used. This methodology acknowledges and applies these creative and adaptive aspects of Indigeneity, providing the freedom to discern what is required of particular research methods (both Indigenous and Euro-western in origin) and filtering out practices that are not (Heke, 2022a).

Whom does this benefit?

Inherent in this methodology is the acknowledgement of the power that resides within the processes of research. Power can often lie in the hands of the researcher, who determines the research, its methods, and the way its findings are translated. Power can lie in the institutions that inform the philosophies and practices of the researchers (Smith, 1999; Smith et al., 2016). More importantly, the sites, stories, and perpetuation of power, especially within research about Indigenous communities, can result in narratives that do not accurately represent the aspirations of those communities (Walter & Carroll, 2020). Te Kupenga was designed with the intention to address the often-unbalanced power dynamic of research, thus prioritising methods that shift the power to wāhine and their potential aspirations.

The intention of the research was to empower the embodied stories of Māori women who described themselves as physically active. It was a process of reclaiming the power to tell our own stories, to control the narrative, and to (re) affirm our connection to our own mātauranga (knowledge), whakapapa (lineage), and mana (authority). It involved the gathering of stories that aligned with these aspirations and allowing the, often colonially informed, narratives of deficit to filter out of the kupenga as unwanted, unnecessary, and ultimately unused. In this paper, it is also demonstrated in the use of the first person by the author, to position myself as a member of and a voice from this community.

Kaupapa – an intersecting methodology

In the original research (Heke, 2022a), Te Kupenga (see *Figure 1*) incorporated three approaches. Each approach would offer a unique way to view the research, while the intersecting spaces would present important opportunities to shape the research, its philosophy, and its methods.

Whakapapa provided an important structural component and describes the genealogical and relational framework that positions every living and non-living entity as interconnected. In essence, it helps make sense of the world by understanding the nature of

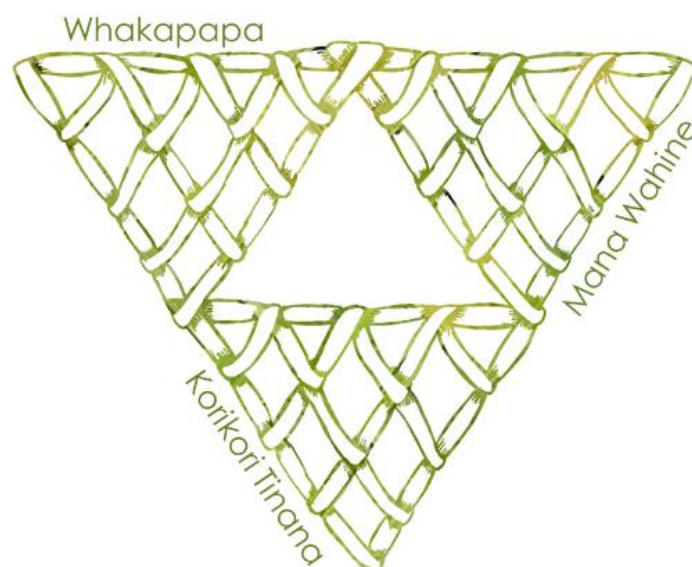


Figure 1 Te Kupenga methodology

things and their relationship with each other (Roberts et al., 2004; Royal, 1998). It would frame wāhine as descendants and reflections of the divine (Heke, 2022a; Yates-Smith, 2003).

Mana Wahine theory acknowledged the unique intersecting space inhabited by contemporary Māori women. This approach considered the often-political positioning between being Māori, being a woman, and the intersecting experiences therein (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). Amongst the many multifaceted dimensions of Mana Wahine, this research sought to empower wāhine narratives, (re)claiming the power to tell our stories in our own way, as a means to (re)affirm our mana within our contemporary societies.

Korikori tinana (physical activity) informed the methodology more than merely being a variable or behaviour, but as a vehicle of shared space and experience. Beyond the health benefits of physical activity (Penedo & Dahn, 2005), in this research it was framed as an expression of mana and whakapapa, allowing wāhine to demonstrate their reflections of ancestors through their chosen activities. Physical activity became a vehicle for wāhine, both researcher and participant, to move and transfer energy together. Whether through physical exertion or through conversations, the movement provided a space for stories to be told.

Tikanga – concepts to methods.

The concept of this methodology evolved from intersecting lenses on how research is viewed to intersecting threads on how research is conducted. The structure of these threads enabled an ability to be dynamic, adaptable, and discerning, and the research methods were illustrations of that (Heke, 2023b). At each juncture of the research were demonstrations of practices that derive from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous methods, but by passing through Te Kupenga only what was valued remained. This included data collection through Korikori Kōrero (Heke, 2023a), to the culturally adapted data analysis (see *Figure 2*), to creative translations (Heke, 2022b) and beyond.

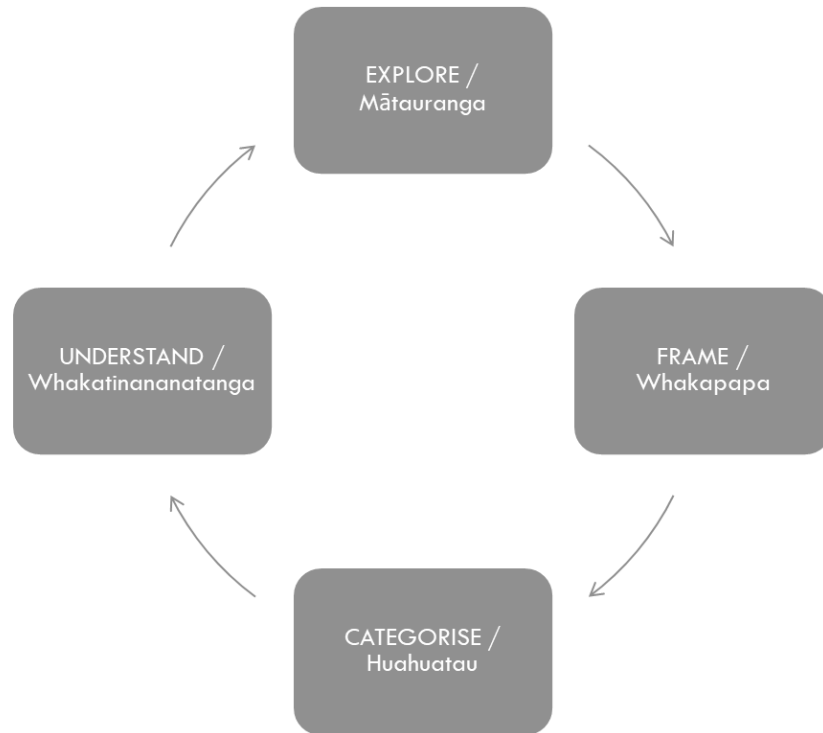


Figure 2 *Whakaāria* - an adapted reflexive thematic analysis

I developed the data analysis method, *Whakaāria* (to make a likeness or theme), deriving from the tools of Braun and Clarke’s Reflexive Thematic Analysis - RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020) and applying a Māori lens informed by the Atua Matua Māori health framework (Heke, 2019). As an analytic approach, RTA is used to identify “patterns of meaning” and offers tools to aid in making sense of data (Braun et al., 2016, p. 1). This provided an opportunity to implement a set of validated tools while engaging in sense-making from a Māori worldview. Dr. Ihirangi Heke outlines the concepts of Mātauranga/Knowledge, Whakapapa/Lineage, Huahuatau/Metaphor, and Whakatinananatanga/Action as important processes to understand natural phenomena and our relationships with/to them (Heke, 2019). In this research, I adapted these concepts to guide a process of coming to know “data”.

The sense-making process began before data collection formally began, with reading, thinking, discussing, and learning (*Mātauranga*). Then moved to (re)framing understandings from a relational and connectedness perspective (*Whakapapa*). Creativity and critical thought

lead to categorising and developing metaphors with broad meaning and application (*Huahuatau*). Finally, the embodiment and realisation would occur when put into practice through application, writing up and continued dissemination and discussion with communities (*Whakatinanatanga*) (Heke & Vera, 2023).

Nga Hua(huatau) – collected treasures.

Wāhine ways of being were expressed through the development of huahuatau or metaphorical categories. Shaped by purposeful methods, metaphors are seen to resonate with an Indigenous worldview by organising broad principles and having the potential to shape powerful reflective representations of life (Marsden & Royal, 2003). Similarly, these huahuatau were purposefully and uniquely designed and defined to interpret and understand wāhine ways of being. The intention was to better reflect the way Māori may view themselves or resonate with how they might prefer to be seen.

Table 1.

Definitions of Huahuatau (metaphorical categories)

Huahuatau	Definition
(1) Ko au te taiao, ko te taiao ko au	I am the environment, and the environment is me.
(2) Ngā taonga tuku iho	Treasures passed down, heritage.
(3) Rakanga Waewae	Dexterous or nimble footwork.
(4) Ahuwhenua	To heap up or mound earth oriented in a certain direction, to be industrious, conscientious, to cultivate.
(5) Poipoia te kākano kia puāwai	A Māori proverb (<i>whakataukī</i>): Nurture the seed and it will grow/flourish.

The huahuatau became illustrations of how wāhine moved about their physical activities but also how they moved about their lives. Huahuatau described wāhine as agile and able to move between many different spaces and roles – through the concept of *Rakanga Waewae*. They connected wāhine to the natural environment and displayed the reflections

between them, illustrated by *Ko au te taiao, ko te taiao ko au*. They depicted wāhine as conduits for knowledge transmission, as avid learners, teachers, and sharers of knowledge – *Ngā taonga tuku iho*. The resourcefulness and creativity of wāhine was depicted through *Ahuwhenua*. Finally, the acknowledgement of latent and active potential within wāhine that was likened to a nurtured seed – *Poipoia te kākano, kia puawai*. The five huahuatau (defined in Table 1) now exist as demonstrations of wāhine ways of being that depart from the deficit terms often previously used (Heke, 2022a).

Whakamāori – translating our ways.

Resisting convention

Instead of a conventional discussion, the process of drawing connections became about translating wāhine ways of being into language that reflected a Māori worldview. The sense-making and connecting to current knowledge manifested into the tracing of whakapapa or genealogy, from the feminine to the divine. The metaphors allowed a way to understand wāhine and ultimately a way of understanding of atua wāhine (feminine deities).

Through poetry, came a sense of freedom in interpreting, translating, and then transmitting a sense of knowing. I wrote freely about what I came to understand about atua while also infusing what I had come to know and interpret about wāhine. One piece would describe the fresh flowing waters of a divine feminine ancestor, Parawhenuamea, as reflected in our social relationships and behaviours – like a river, we're shaped by the many elements around us. Another acknowledged our Earth Mother, Papatūānuku, and our obligations to each other, through reciprocal care. One more would wonder at the multi-faceted, multi-talented, and multi-purposeful Hineteiwaiwa, whose divine power pulls the tides, gentle hand guides childbirth, and strategic acumen leads armies (Heke, 2022b). Each written word, penned in resistance to convention, would allow a closer, more personal connection with the whakapapa of wāhine, from atua to ancestor to descendant.

From the written to the embodied.

The practices of embodying and realising can “become self-affirming, culturally affirming and ultimately decolonizing” (Campbell, 2019, p. 2). Making sense of these concepts and metaphors would always require a collective element. It would require an embodying of wāhinetanga (womaness) through wānanga (deliberation), through collective kōrero (conversations), through creativity. The first of many embodiments resulted in a wāhine wānanga (facilitated gathering of wāhine) to express and share our perspectives. The gathering allowed us to connect and reflect the environments we were in; to shift between spaces and don the many feathers woven into our kākahu (ceremonial cloaks) (Smith, 2017); to be creative and resourceful; to learn, teach, and share mātauranga with each other; to nurture each other as seeds of potential, and to foster flourishing (Heke et al., n.d.).

Whakatinanatanga – realising intentional attention.

The realisation of Te Kupenga (*Figure 3*) now resides, not merely within a research project, but within the many seeds of potential planted each time an Indigenous student, scholar, or community engages with it. Although still evolving, the response from presenting this work at a number of international conferences and a facilitated wānanga has been

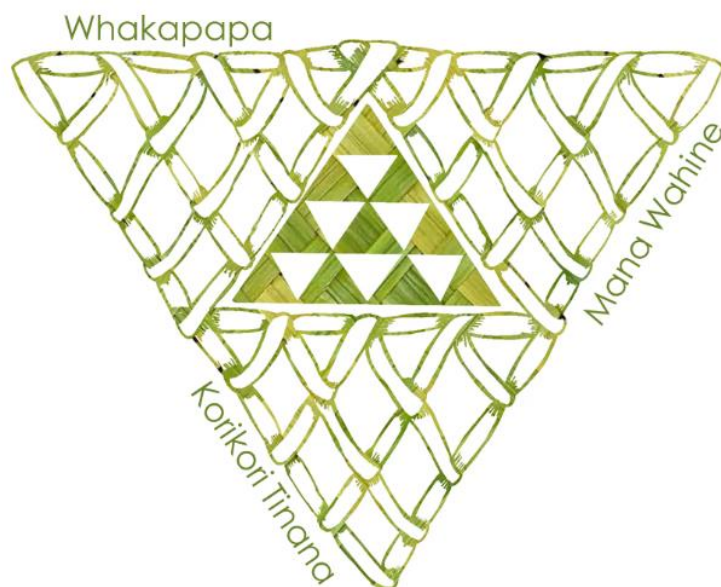


Figure 3 Te Kupenga - Realised and stor(i)ed

profound. The ability to demonstrate Indigenous research to Indigenous researchers and students and have them reflect upon its relevance to their Indigenous self, is (re)affirming and exemplifies the distinct need for contemporary Indigenous methodologies in our contemporary Indigenous research.

The impact of sharing this methodology includes, receiving encouraging feedback from a Torres Strait Island woman now considering the relevance of one her own ceremonial treasures as a frame for her future research. I discussed my work with a group of Indigenous doctoral students of nursing, in Texas, later hearing that Te Kupenga had been applied in one of their recent assignments. Through these shared spaces and perspectives, I have grown potentially life-long friendships and working relationships, centred on being Indigenous, being women, and being drawn to weave our Indigenous stories, together. Te Kupenga was designed as a framework for conducting research, but its application and influence extends beyond that. Te Kupenga (along with other Indigenous methodologies) can be a mechanism for collecting and stor(y)ing the taonga or treasures we discover as Indigenous researchers, in community.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 213-227). Routledge.
- Campbell, D. (2019). *Ngā kura a Hineteiwaiwa: The embodiment of Mana Wahine in Māori fibre Arts* [Unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Waikato]. Hamilton, New Zealand. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12583>
- Heke, D. (2022a). *Atua Wahine - Mana Wahine. A whakapapa expressed through the physical activity of Māori women in contemporary Aotearoa* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Auckland University of Technology. <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/15024>
- Heke, D. (2022b). *Hine-te-iwaiwa. Awa Wahine*. <https://www.awawahine.com/blog/deborah-heke-hineteiwaiwa>
- Heke, D. (2023a). Korikori Kōrero - an active method of inquiry for moving Māori women and their mātauranga. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2023.2177176>
- Heke, D. (2023b). Te Kupenga - A woven methodology for collecting, interpreting, and stor(y)ing Māori women's knowledges. *MAI journal (Online)*, 12(2), 205-216.
<https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2023.12.2.1>

- Heke, D., Bartlett, L., Staniland, N., Smith., H., & Vera, M. (n.d.). *Mahi ā wānanga – A mana wāhine-led collaboration to co-construct meaning* [Manuscript under review].
Taupua Waiora – Centre for Māori Health Research, Auckland University of
Technology.
- Heke, D., & Vera, M. (2023). Whakaāria – a Māori approach to reflexive thematic analysis: Exploring the active identities of Māori women. *Sage Research Methods*,
forthcoming.
- Heke, I. (2019). *Atua Matua Health Framework - Using Māori environmental knowledge to improve Indigenous well-being*. Integrated Hauora Initiative Ltd. Retrieved August 15
from <https://toitangata.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Atua-Matua-Health-Framework.pdf>
- Hudson, M., Roberts, M., Smith, L. T., Hemi, M., & Tiakiwai, S.-J. (2010). Perspectives on the use of embryos in research. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *6*(1), 54-65.
- Marsden, M., & Royal, T. A. C. (2003). *The woven universe: Selected writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*. Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden.
- Pendergrast, M. (2003). *Raranga Whakairo: Maori plaiting patterns*. Reed Books (NZ).
- Penedo, F. J., & Dahn, J. R. (2005). Exercise and well-being: A review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, *18*(2). 189-193
- Pihama, L. (2001). *Tihei Mauri ora. Honouring our voices: Mana wāhine as a kaupapa Māori theoretical framework*. [Unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Auckland]. Auckland, New Zealand.
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.7833&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

- Puketapu-Hetet, E. (1999). *Māori weaving*. Addison Wesley Longman.
- Roberts, M., Haami, B., Benton, R., Satterfield, T., Finucane, M. L., Henare, M., & Henare, M. (2004). Whakapapa as a Māori mental construct: Some implications for the debate over genetic modification of organisms. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1-28.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/23722949?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- Royal, T. A. C. (1998). Te Ao Mārama - A research paradigm. *He Pukenga Korero: A journal of Maori Studies*.
- Simmonds, N. (2011). Mana wahine: Decolonising politics. *Women's Studies Journal*, 25(2), 11-25. <http://www.wsanz.org.nz/journal/docs/WSJNZ252Simmonds11-25.pdf>
- Smith, H. L. (2017). *Whatuora: Whatu kākahu and living as Māori women* [Doctoral thesis, The University of Auckland]. Auckland, New Zealand.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2292/51820>
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. University of Otago Press.
- Smith, L. T., Maxwell, T. K., Puke, H., & Temara, P. (2016). Indigenous knowledge, methodology and mayhem: What is the role of methodology in producing Indigenous insights? A discussion from Mātauranga Māori. *Knowledge Cultures*. 131-156.
<https://shorturl.at/xCJT8>
- Walter, M., & Carroll, S. R. (2020). Indigenous data sovereignty, governance and the link to Indigenous policy. In *Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Policy* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.
- Yates-Smith, A. (2003). Reclaiming the ancient feminine in Maori society: "Kei wareware ia tatou te Ukaipo!". *He Puna Korero: Journal of Maori and Pacific Development*, 4(1), 10-19. <https://bit.ly/3tahk8R>