

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The glue that binds us: The positive relationships between whanaungatanga (belonging), the wellbeing, and identity pride for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary

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## Abstract

**Issue Addressed:** This article explores how belonging can enhance well-being for takatāpui (a traditional Māori term that embraces all Māori with diverse genders, sexualities and sex characteristics) who are trans and non-binary across a range of contexts.

**Methods:** We drew data from the 2018 *Counting Ourselves*, a nationwide community-based survey of trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (N = 1178); of which 161 (13.7%) identified as Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa.

**Results:** Based on generalised regression models, feelings of belonging with friends, takatāpui communities, Māori communities, and work communities were correlated to higher feelings of life satisfaction, life worthwhileness, and identity pride for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. In Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview), such concepts of belonging and relationships are collectively known as whanaungatanga.

**Conclusions:** Our findings affirm whanaungatanga as foundational to well-being among trans Māori people, enabling them to locate themselves within nurturing and supportive networks.

**So What?** Whanaungatanga is a key policy agenda, alongside other system-level change, that is needed to buffer takatāpui who are trans and non-binary from poverty, stigma, and racism they face. This will require changes to the current policy and practice context. We argue that whanaungatanga, while an important strategy of well-being for trans and non-binary people, must also occur alongside wider system transformations to address transphobia, racism, and cisheteronormativity.

## KEYWORDS

ethnicity, indigenous, indigenous identity, Māori, trans and non-binary people, well-being

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In this article, we explore how belonging can both support well-being for takatāpui (a traditional Māori term that embraces all Māori with diverse genders, sexualities and sex characteristics) who are trans and non-binary while also guiding wider system-level transformation. This is the first large-scale quantitative data on this topic, based on the experiences of Māori who completed the *Counting Ourselves*, a nationwide community-based survey of trans health in Aotearoa. We have deliberately taken a strengths-based approach to our topic, looking at the strategies, resilience, and resourcefulness of trans and non-binary people, focusing on how community-building for trans and non-binary people can both support well-being and offer insight for wider policy and structural change. This responds to wider Indigenous calls for shifts away from deficit-framed research on Indigenous peoples. In particular, research has tended to prioritise risks, deficits and negative experiences for Indigenous trans and non-binary people.<sup>1-3</sup> While these articles highlight important barriers and needs for Indigenous trans and non-binary people, we (the authors) are wary of privileging narratives that emphasise the trauma and pathologisation of Indigenous trans and non-binary people.

Social support and belonging consistently replicate as significant factors that can enable trans and non-binary people to flourish.<sup>4-7</sup> Sense of belonging, or a connection to community and environment, is a fundamental need for humans, which leads to many positive well-being outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Social support can enable trans and non-binary people to develop self-confidence and congruency in their identity.<sup>9</sup> Important social connections include whānau, peers, and the trans and wider lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, asexual and queer (LGBTIAQ+) communities. In particular, research has emphasised the importance of whānau (family) social support for mental well-being<sup>6,7</sup> but that wider peer and community belonging is associated with the most positive mental health outcomes.

The literature on Indigenous gender diversity demonstrates that trans and non-binary gender identities were historically embraced within many Indigenous communities.<sup>10-13</sup> There are written and oral narratives that demonstrate the existence of gender diversity during the pre-colonial period in Aotearoa. These were the basis to reclaim the traditional term takatāpui by Māori scholars, activists, artists and practitioners.<sup>4</sup> The reclamation of Indigenous identities such as takatāpui highlights the importance of Indigenous identities as a source of strength to resist cisgenderism, racism, colonisation and to support healing for Indigenous communities.<sup>12</sup> Equally, the reclamation of takatāpui is a re-centring of takatāpui people within whānau (extended family), hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe) communities that shape the collectivist nature of a Māori worldview.<sup>12</sup>

The centrality of belonging for takatāpui well-being is reflected in the qualitative literature of takatāpui. Doyle (2023) in their work with 12 youth co-researchers, highlights the importance of mana hapori (community belonging) in supporting the well-being of takatāpui youth.<sup>13</sup> In particular, they affirm the importance of belonging for developing confidence and security in both individual and collective

identity for young takatāpui. Similarly, Laurence (2020) in her thesis on takatāpui identity development emphasises the centrality of family in supporting well-being.<sup>14</sup> Drawing from interviews with five takatāpui youth, she articulates how biological family and chosen family are crucial to supporting the well-being and identity development of takatāpui youth. First Nations qualitative research in the area also affirms the importance of culture, community and belonging to the land as central to well-being for Indigenous LGBTIAQ+ people.<sup>15</sup> The importance of finding a space of safety, belonging, care and cultural integrity are thus of key concern for trans and non-binary Indigenous people.

While there is a growing body of qualitative research in Aotearoa and globally, that considers how community belonging supports Indigenous trans and non-binary people, there is still little quantitative research that explores this topic. This forms the rationale for our study, that explores how belonging within whānau, peer-groups and communities supports the well-being of takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. We hypothesise specifically that greater levels of self-reported belonging to whānau, friends and community will be associated with higher self-reported well-being and identity pride.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Procedure

Developed in consultation with Māori collaborators, the 2018 *Counting Ourselves* survey was informed by Māori ways of knowing and being through drawing on *Te Pae Māhutonga*, a framework developed by Professor Sir Mason Durie to examine the four domains of health promotion (cultural identity, physical environment, healthy lifestyles and society participation), underpinned by two guiding principles (community leadership and autonomy).<sup>16</sup> The survey was open to participants aged 14 and above, with most (99%) electing to complete it online. Multiple recruitment strategies to increase representation of takatāpui people included connecting with trans and takatāpui community groups, and inviting Māori community leaders to share quotes through social media campaigns about the importance of completing the survey. See Appendix A for examples of illustrated images of these quotes. The *Counting Ourselves* survey received ethical approval from the New Zealand Health and Disability Ethics Committee (18/NTB/66/AM01). The more detailed survey methodology can be read in the survey's community report.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.2 | Participants

Table 1 presents the demographic details of takatāpui participants. There was a high proportion of participants who were young adults or adults ( $M_{\text{age}} = 29.7$ ;  $SD = 12.14$ ). A total of 161 Māori participants commenced the survey and 101 continued till the end of the survey, giving a completion rate of 62.7%.

**TABLE 1** Demographic details of *Counting Ourselves* Māori participants.

	n (%)
<b>Age groups</b>	
14–18	25 (15.5)
19–24	50 (31.1)
25–39	54 (33.5)
40–54	21 (13.0)
55 and over	11 (6.8)
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>	
Non-binary	54 (33.5)
Woman or wahine	48 (29.8)
Takatāpui	46 (28.6)
Man or tāne	45 (28.0)
Trans man	38 (23.6)
Trans woman	33 (20.5)
Genderqueer	30 (18.6)
Gender fluid	29 (18.0)
Agender	16 (9.9)
Tangata ira tāne	12 (7.5)
Whakawahine	9 (5.6)
Tāhine	8 (5.0)
Tangata ira wahine	6 (3.7)
<b>Regions</b>	
Auckland	45 (28.8)
Wellington	46 (29.5)
Other regions in North Island	41 (26.3)
Canterbury	9 (5.8)
Other regions in South Island	15 (9.6)
<b>Religion<sup>b</sup></b>	
Christian	13 (12.6)
No religion/Atheist/Agnostic	70 (68.0)
Pagan/Wiccan	7 (6.8)
Other religions	13 (12.6)
<b>Education<sup>b</sup></b>	
None	7 (6.9)
Level 1 to 5 certificate	49 (48.0)
Level 6 diploma and Level 7 bachelor	25 (24.3)
Postgraduate	22 (21.4)
<b>Personal income in the last 12 months<sup>b</sup></b>	
Loss and Zero	13 (12.6)
\$1 to \$25 000	57 (55.3)
\$25 001 to \$50 000	17 (16.5)
\$50 001 or over	16 (15.5)
<b>Current employment<sup>b</sup></b>	
In paid employment including self-employment	59 (57.3)
Not in paid work and looking for job	21 (20.4)

(Continues)

**TABLE 1** (Continued)

	n (%)
Not in paid work and not looking for a job (e.g., retired, homemaker or full-time student) <sup>c</sup>	23 (22.3)
<b>Deprivation measures in last 12 months<sup>d</sup></b>	
Gone without fresh fruit or vegetables	23 (22.3)
Postponed or put off visits to doctor	28 (28.0)
Done without, or cut back on, trips to the shops or other local places	43 (41.7)
Spent less on hobbies or other special interests	55 (53.4)
Put up with feeling cold	37 (35.9)
Delayed replacing or repairing broken or damaged appliances	38 (36.9)

<sup>a</sup>Participants could select more than one option.<sup>b</sup>Imputed based on response options of income, education qualitative, employment status and deprivation measures.<sup>c</sup>Eight participants were attending school.<sup>d</sup>Responses options for 'To what extent have you done any of the following things to keep cost down?' included 'not at all', 'a little' and 'a lot' and percentages reported here were based on participants who selected 'a lot'.

## 2.3 | Measures

### 2.3.1 | Sociodemographic variables

Gender was recorded using the question: What gender or what genders do you currently identify with? Mark all that apply. See Table 1 for the list of options provided. We reported these findings based on the concept of total response (i.e., participants can be counted toward more than one gender).

Income was recorded using the question: What is the total income that you yourself got from all sources, before tax or anything was taken out of it, in the last 12 months? See Table 1 for the list of options provided.

### 2.3.2 | Well-being and pride as outcomes

In line with recommendations by Indigenous researchers to use self-reported health as a measure of Indigenous people's health status,<sup>18</sup> we used OECD subjective well-being measures to allow participants to incorporate multiple dimensions of health when considering life satisfaction and worthwhileness.<sup>17</sup>

Life satisfaction: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?' Response options ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Life worthwhileness: 'Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?' Response options ranged from 1 (not at all worthwhile) to 5 (very worthwhile).

Identity pride was measured using a single-item question adapted from the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Measure to assess

gender identity pride<sup>9</sup>: Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements. 'I am proud to be a trans or non-binary person.' Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### 2.3.3 | Whanaungatanga/belonging

In this article, we used belonging measures within the limitations of the survey questionnaire by focusing on family support, friends caring and overall belongingness, as a proxy for whanaungatanga.<sup>19</sup> This is by no means a comprehensive understanding of the Indigenous concept whanaungatanga, but includes some core concepts.

Family support was measured using the question: 'On average, how supportive of you being trans or non-binary are the whānau / family you grew up with (e.g., mother, father, sister, brothers, etc.)' Response options ranged from 1 (very unsupportive) to 5 (very supportive). This variable excluded those without a family member and those who haven't disclosed their trans identities to family.

Friends caring was measured using the question: 'How much do you feel your friends care about you?' Response options were 1 (not at all), 2 (some), and 3 (a lot). This question was adopted from the Youth2000 survey series.<sup>20</sup>

Belongingness was measured using the question: 'On the scale of zero to ten, how would you describe your sense of belonging to?' The LGBTIAQ+/rainbow or takatāpui community; The company or organisation I work the most hours for; My neighbourhood; My ethnic group. Response options ranged from 0 (no sense of belonging) to 10 (very strong sense of belonging). The research team adapted these questions from the New Zealand General Social Survey.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.4 | Analyses

Data analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics v26. We began with descriptive analyses of participants' sociodemographic characteristics. Missing data for socioeconomic status-related variables (i.e., income, employment status, education qualification, and deprivation measures) ranged from 1.0% to 22.3%; these were imputed using the expectation maximisation method through the means and covariances of socioeconomic status data.<sup>22</sup> Generalised ordinal regression analyses were employed to identify the associations of whanaungatanga with subjective well-being and identity pride. Demographic (age and income) and whanaungatanga variables that displayed statistical significance in bivariate models were subsequently included in multivariate analyses. We used an alpha level of *p*-value of <.05 to determine statistical significance in all analyses.

## 3 | RESULTS

Table 1 describes the takatāpui participants. The sample included 47% under the age of 25 years, reflecting the younger population structure

of Māori more generally in Aotearoa.<sup>23</sup> Participants were allowed to select more than one gender that they identified with. The most common gender descriptors were non-binary (34%), wahine or woman (30%), takatāpui (29%) and tāne or man (28%). The trans and non-binary population were more likely to live in large urban centres in the North Island of Aotearoa and state they had no religious affiliations. Almost half (47%) of the participants had a diploma, degree, Masters or higher postgraduate educational qualification; however, this was not reflected in their personal income, or employment, with 87% earning <\$50 000 per annum (annual median income in Aotearoa in 2019 = \$52 832)<sup>21</sup> and 57% reporting employment, compared with the population employment rate of 67.3% for December 2019 (Stats NZ). This is likely to have influenced deprivation measures, with many participants reporting going without essentials like heating (37%) and healthy food (23%).

Among takatāpui who had disclosed their trans and non-binary identities to their whānau (*n* = 79), 65% reported most or all of their family members were supportive of them. Close to two-thirds reported having friends who cared about them a lot (62%). When asked to rate their degree of belongingness to different networks of community, participants reported relatively high belongingness (a rating of 6 or more on a scale of 0–10) in the following order: to the takatāpui community (66%), to one's place of employment (52%), to their ethnic group (46%), and to their neighbourhood (29%).

Table 2 details the regression findings. In bivariate models, all belonging variables (except for family support) were found to be associated with higher ratings of well-being. Specifically, participants who rated higher proportions of friends caring, or belongingness to the takatāpui community, their ethnic group or neighbourhood were more likely to feel proud of their trans and non-binary identities.

Multivariate analyses when adjusting for age, income and other factors that might influence belonging revealed belongingness to one's place of employment was associated with life satisfaction. Belongingness to one's ethnic group was associated with increased life worthwhileness. Friends' caring and belongingness to the takatāpui community emerged as significant predictors that takatāpui were proud to be trans or non-binary.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this article bring insight into the importance of belonging for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. First, a strong sense of ethnic belonging was associated with life worthwhileness, affirming that Māori identity, knowledge, and history can inform well-being. Second, friends' caring and belongingness to the takatāpui community were associated with gender identity pride, emphasising the key role of community in promoting pride and acceptance. Within community, takatāpui who are trans and non-binary are seen, valued and can access a shared vocabulary and history that reminds them they are a part of a wider legacy. Third, a sense of belongingness to one's place of employment was associated with life satisfaction,

**TABLE 2** Regression analyses of whanaungatanga, subjective well-being, and identity pride of *Counting Ourselves* Māori participants.

	Life satisfaction		Life worthwhileness		Proud to be trans	
	Bivariate	Multivariate	Bivariate	Multivariate	Bivariate	Multivariate
	OR [CI]	OR [CI]	OR [CI]	OR [CI]	OR [CI]	OR [CI]
Age	1.05 [1.02–1.08]**	1.04 [1.00–1.09]*	1.06 [1.03–1.09]**	1.07 [1.03–1.12]*	0.99 [0.96–1.02]	–
Income	1.56 [1.00–2.5140]*	1.03 [0.59–1.79]	1.62 [1.04–2.53]*	0.94 [0.53–1.65]	0.51 [0.33–0.79]**	0.48 [0.29–0.77]**
Family support	1.30 [0.85–1.98]	–	1.21 [0.80–1.85]	–	1.06 [0.69–1.63]	–
Friends caring	2.02 [1.11–3.68]*	0.95 [0.45–2.03]	2.23 [1.18–4.23]*	0.90 [0.41–2.00]	3.28 [1.69–6.34]**	2.64 [1.26–5.52]*
Belongingness to rainbow or takatāpui community	1.14 [1.02–1.27]*	1.01 [0.88–1.17]	1.13 [1.01–1.26]*	0.98 [0.84–1.13]	1.38 [1.21–1.56]**	1.30 [1.12–1.50]**
Belongingness to ethnic group	1.38 [1.22–1.57]**	1.13 [0.94–1.36]	1.43 [1.26–1.63]**	1.27 [1.06–1.53]*	1.23 [1.09–1.38]**	1.08 [0.91–1.28]
Belongingness to neighbourhood	1.37 [1.21–1.56]**	1.12 [0.93–1.34]	1.37 [1.20–1.56]**	1.10 [0.91–1.32]	1.17 [1.03–1.32]*	1.02 [0.86–1.21]
Belongingness to place of employment	1.41 [1.25–1.59]**	1.21 [1.06–1.39]**	1.34 [1.19–1.50]**	1.14 [0.99–1.32]	1.07 [0.97–1.19]	–

Note: Multivariate analyses adjusted for age, income and other whanaungatanga variables that were significant in bivariate models. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

highlighting the profound relationships between positive and affirming connections at work and well-being.

All of these findings are key aspects of whanaungatanga; Māori practices of caring, connection, support, and relationship-building that enable collective well-being.<sup>10,19</sup> Māori scholars have long described the sense of whanaungatanga as an essential component of mental health and well-being.<sup>19,24</sup> Whanaungatanga is a central concept and everyday practice for Maori wellbeing, described as the ‘basic cement that holds things Maori together’ or the ‘glue’ that connects people together.<sup>25</sup> The sense of kinship implicit in whanaungatanga is central to providing people with opportunities for intergenerational growth, mentoring, and knowledge and skill sharing within networks of care and support.<sup>26</sup> Further, it is through the relational bonds of whanaungatanga that collective well-being is nurtured and enhanced.

Our research also affirms the importance of chosen family in supporting the well-being of takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. This includes *whakapapa whānau* (family by shared ancestry) and *kaupapa whānau* (friends or other supportive networks such as takatāpui communities, workplace colleagues, and neighbours). These findings further build on existing quantitative findings within Indigenous Māori populations, that whanaungatanga is a core protective factor for mental health and well-being. For instance, *Te Oranga Hinengaro* report showed Māori adults with good access to social support and who could rely on a friend or whanaunga (relative) had higher levels of life satisfaction and less psychological distress symptoms.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, the *Youth'19* survey showed Māori youth who had established whanaungatanga with whakapapa whānau, kaupapa whānau, and other supportive adults such as teachers and mentors were more likely to report better well-being and less depressive symptoms.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, international studies have found associations between various protective factors (e.g., social support from family,

friends, and trans communities) and lower levels of mental health problems among trans and non-binary people.<sup>6–8</sup> Our findings therefore add further evidence that being able to access protective factors is crucial for trans and non-binary people to mitigate the harmful effects of cisgenderism on mental health and well-being, as found in past research in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

The social bonds fostered through whanaungatanga are central to enhanced well-being as Māori identities are relational.<sup>27</sup> Opportunities to cultivate and sustain whanaungatanga allow Māori to be equipped with resources and resilience to buffer the adverse experiences related to economic hardship, identity loss, cultural isolation, and poor health. These outcomes result from colonisation and maintain material and political privilege for Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent, mostly from the United Kingdom) as colonial settlers.<sup>11,28</sup> Findings from the Honour Project Aotearoa also showed takatāpui draw on inner strength, that originates from meaningful connections with wider supportive networks, to counteract discrimination and oppression related to transphobia and racism.<sup>11</sup> Whanaungatanga for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary is therefore a resourceful strategy to navigate systems and structures that seek to oppress them.

Many takatāpui in our survey reported rich experiences with chosen family who affirmed and accepted their identities, reiterating findings from other takatāpui research.<sup>10</sup> We expected there would be a significant relationship between family support and well-being for takatāpui. However, this was not found. We suspect this may be due to the framing of our family support question, which included examples such as father, mother and siblings. These examples reflect a nuclear family as opposed to the broader concept of whānau or chosen family. It may also reflect the alienation from some members of their nuclear family because they are trans or non-binary.<sup>3</sup> The

analyses also excluded participants who reported they did not have or could not define their family/whānau ( $n = 5$ ), did not know how their family/whānau was doing ( $n = 3$ ) or had not disclosed their trans or non-binary identities to their whānau ( $n = 13$ ).

Our findings aligned with an Australian study that found First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people spoke of finding a 'second family' within social networks who could provide a safe space without having to worry about discrimination.<sup>15</sup> In social spaces where young people had to carefully negotiate their First Nations LGBTIQ+ identities, they were likely to avoid establishing meaningful relationships with individuals if they did not feel accepted.<sup>15</sup> Creating affirming contexts, both within families, and more broadly across society is thus of crucial importance to address the well-being of takatāpui who are trans and non-binary, as it is for other trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.1 | Implications

Conversations around health disparities for Māori in Aotearoa are often confined to an individual's behaviour without critically analysing the social determinants of health.<sup>29</sup> In this case, we are referring to how racism, colonialism, and transphobia cause avoidable health disparities for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. Māori have rights and privileges guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a treaty signed in 1840 between the British Crown and hapū, that affirms Māori sovereignty and rights in Aotearoa) that continue to be unfulfilled in Aotearoa's dominant political systems and structures.<sup>30</sup> Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi includes recognising the acceptance of Māori who were gender diverse in traditional Māori society and respecting a legacy of trans and non-binary leaders who have held formative roles within Māori, takatāpui, and wider LGBTQAI+ political movements in Aotearoa and beyond.<sup>12</sup>

Takatāpui who are trans and non-binary face intersecting forms of oppression due to their race and gender identity, yet this population does not necessarily have worse mental health and well-being when compared with Pākehā trans and non-binary people. This could be due to the specific relational and cultural resources that are enabled through whanaungatanga.<sup>31,32</sup> Our findings on the benefits of whanaungatanga to well-being and identity pride, reiterate the call of Māori scholars<sup>10–12,14,33</sup> to ensure takatāpui have reliable access to supportive networks in the forms of whakapapa whānau and kaupapa whānau. This is crucial work being done by organisations like *Tiwhana-whana*<sup>1</sup> and *Gender Minorities Aotearoa*<sup>2</sup>, and many takatāpui and allies within iwi, hapū, whānau, and Māori communities. This work should be effectively resourced and supported through government funding.

Our research suggests that access to employment, including workplaces that promote the belongingness of takatāpui who are trans and non-binary, is not only essential to improve socioeconomic status, but also for our participants to express life satisfaction. In Aotearoa, Māori and trans and non-binary communities are known to experience excessive burdens of unemployment, precarious employment conditions including lower pay, and under-representation in higher valued occupations and industries.<sup>34,35</sup> Trans and non-binary

people also experience unique workplace discrimination and are inadequately protected under anti-discrimination laws and in workplace policies resulting in precarious employment and lack of job security.<sup>36</sup> Takatāpui who are trans and non-binary have needs and barriers that are not simply additive, but unique to their experience that warrant specific consideration.

For workplaces to create meaningful whanaungatanga opportunities, they need to address discriminatory employment practices, provide safe and welcoming environments that are inclusive and allow Māori trans and non-binary people to thrive at work. Wider structural changes are required to enable takatāpui to flourish. In particular, we must address the ongoing nature of colonisation, as expressed through transphobia, racism and other forms of oppression. Specifically, we highlight the importance of; (re)affirming takatāpui as members of their communities, whakapapa whānau and kaupapa whānau; ensuring workplaces, educational and health settings are able to fluidly engage with whanaungatanga with takatāpui who are trans and non-binary; and ensuring all policies have an intersectional lens to protect against discrimination.

#### 4.2 | Future directions and limitations

We advocate first and foremost for further strengths-based research. Future studies could explore how takatāpui communities can thrive as both Māori and trans and non-binary. This could include exploring examples of excellence in the workplace, in health care, in education and other contexts, and how whanaungatanga supports well-being throughout whakapapa whānau, kaupapa whānau and communities.<sup>10,19</sup> Given that many trans and non-binary people connect with their peers online,<sup>17</sup> scholars should also examine how whanaungatanga can be fostered on different online platforms. As this is a nascent area of research, we are excited about the research directions others take in the field. Second, we advocate for recognition of whanaungatanga as a key policy lever to improve the health, social, and economic opportunities of takatāpui Māori and trans and non-binary communities.

While having a variety of useful implications, we also recognise some limitations of the research. Given the *Counting Ourselves* study did not employ probability-based sampling, the research team instead utilised multiple recruitment strategies to achieve a large sample size of Māori participants. These included establishing a community advisory group with trans people of diverse ethnic groups and building rapport with takatāpui trans and non-binary leaders to ensure the cultural appropriateness of the survey questions. While this may impact the size and demographics of the Māori sample, we argue the proportion of Māori recruited in this sample was similar to the reported proportion in the New Zealand Health Survey in the same year.<sup>17</sup> Further, our findings are also restricted to cross-sectional analyses which limit the interpretations of causality of whanaungatanga on subjective well-being of takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. Future longitudinal studies are required to establish the temporal precedence of these relationships. However, our arguments about the predicted directional relationship between whanaungatanga and well-being is supported by the wider research on whanaungatanga.<sup>10,19</sup>

## 5 | CONCLUSION

Using a strengths-based lens has enabled us to focus on what takatāpui who are trans and non-binary need to flourish. Our study has highlighted novel findings about the relationship between whanaungatanga, well-being, and identity pride for takatāpui who are trans and non-binary. Specifically, we found important links between feelings of belonging with friends, and takatāpui, Māori and work communities, and increased feelings of life satisfaction, life worthwhileness, and identity pride. This suggests that supporting networks and services that facilitate whanaungatanga among takatāpui who are trans and non-binary are crucial for their well-being.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Tiwhanawhana* is a takatāpui community group based in Wellington. For more information, refer to <http://www.tiwhanawhana.com/>

<sup>2</sup> *Gender Minorities Aotearoa* is a nationwide transgender organisation. For more information, refer to <https://genderminorities.com/>

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## APPENDIX A

### A.1 | IMAGES FOR THE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

