

Developing Relational Consciousness in Preventative Healthcare

Nikki Kiyimba

Mātai Rongo Trauma-Responsive Psychological Services,
Katikati, Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Corresponding Authors*Nikki Kiyimba,**

Mātai Rongo Trauma-Responsive Psychological Services,
Katikati, Bay of Plenty,
Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Abstract

Relational consciousness was proposed as an explanation of spirituality by British researchers Hay (2000) and Nye (1998). It refers to the conscious awareness of connections each person has with self, others, environment (nature), and divine. Interestingly, these same components map onto the indigenous Māori health model, Te whare tapa whā (Durie, 1985; Durie, 1994) frequently used in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition to attending to the wellbeing of mind and emotions and the physical body, the other dimensions of this model include respect for spirituality, social connectedness, and relationship with the land. In this article, these indigenous Māori indicators of hauora/ wellbeing are mapped onto the dimensions of relational consciousness to build a case for their universality. The third component of this argument is the inclusion of the theory of universal oneness of consciousness that is emerging within contemporary quantum theory. In relation to preventative healthcare, this article argues for a theoretical and pragmatic move away from historic polemic narratives that perpetuate perceptions of an artificial separation between mind and body, self and other. It also argues for the need to evolve from endemic narratives in healthcare that separate individuals from their social relationships, their physical environment, and their experiences of the spiritual. To embed the quantum scientific paradigm in our understanding of human health I argue that we need to move our practices and concepts away from working with 'parts' of people, and recognise the interconnectedness of human physiology, psychology, spirituality, relationally and the natural environment. This article offers an extension of the heuristic framework of relational consciousness by adding core components of mindfulness theory. These practices can facilitate development of intentional awareness of the interconnectedness between what we experience as the separate realities of self and everything else. This thesis is anchored to Bohm's (1973) beautiful work on the implicate and explicate order of things, which points to the dismantling of the a priori subject/object premise, and instead contending for the relevance of these constructs only post-wave form collapse (Zaghi, 2024). The combination of this ontological premise together with an embodied mechanism for its outworking offers a new paradigm in preventative healthcare.

Keywords: Connection; health; relational consciousness; Te whare tapa whā; quantum theory.

Introduction

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh stated that the purpose of our life is to “awaken from the illusion of our separateness” (Awaken, 2023). To a large extent, this encapsulates the premise of this article. Namely, that our experience of separateness is an illusion. Immediately, the implications for preventative healthcare become apparent. In a world that predominantly follows an individualistic medical model of healthcare; the ramifications of a shift in ontological basis from separateness to interconnectedness are radical. But it is not just those from various spiritual traditions who are urging us towards finally accepting our oneness, although that is certainly the case. Within the medical community, psychologist Kathy Forti, stated that “all things in the universe are infinitely connected” (Forti, 2014, p.178), after a revelatory near-death experience. Even

more potentially confronting is the recognition that our well-established reliance on the scientific process for knowledge creation has taken an unprecedented turn with the advent of the quantum paradigm. For example, the well-respected quantum theorist David Bohm has concluded that, “[i]t will be ultimately misleading and indeed wrong to suppose, for example, that each human being is an independent actuality who interacts with other human beings and with nature. Rather, all of these are projections of a single totality” (Bohm, 2005, p.117). Thus, to indicate a structure for this article, three theoretical components are presented to illustrate the way in which models of spirituality, indigenous wisdom, and contemporary quantum theory find compatibility with their frameworks for explaining interconnectedness. In the case of the indigenous model, this is specifically applied to the area of health or hauora.

Contemporary quantum theory

Quantum physicist David Bohm has led the way in extending our understanding of the quantum world by proposing an explanation of the wave-particle duality conundrum in his theory of the implicate and explicate order of things (Bohm, 1973; Bohm, 2005). As Radin (2009) explains, Bohm's theory demonstrates "[in] the implicate order everything is fully enfolded or entangled with everything else" (p. 254). It is only when the potentiality of the wave form (the implicate) interacts with consciousness, does it become a particle of matter in space-time (the explicate). More recently, quantum engineer Zaghi (2024) has invited consideration of 'Relational Quantum Dynamics' (RQD) which "treats the quantum state as a relational code—a predictive instrument that arises from and is defined by relational events" (p.7). The central premise of RQD is the abandonment of subject/object dualism in favour of the supposition that there is no observer separate from an observed world. This ontological position that "web of relational events' where the observer *is* the observed" (Talbot, 1991, p.50) presents the quantum world as a 'web of relational events' where the observer, and the observed are "context-dependent patterns of correlation" (Zaghi, 2024, p.26). From this perspective, labels related to the description of any external object "only make sense after stable relational configurations have formed" (Zaghi, 2024, p.17). This is the starting point and foundation of this thesis; that our ontological basis is one of wholeness and inseparability within the implicate order of things, and that we experience time space within the explicate order as if we were separate. I therefore propose that the 'illusion of separateness' spoken of by our spiritual leaders is what contemporary quantum theory now points to by way of scientific explanation.

Relational Consciousness

In 2004 Chris Cook undertook an extensive review of literature relating to spirituality and addictions, concluding that spirituality is a "universal dimension of human experience" (p.548). Whilst the premise of universal spirituality as a core human feature is not yet accepted by everyone, it is accepted here as a foundational tenet. In part the lack of agreement about universality is the contradictory and sometimes opaque attempts at defining it, as well as confusion and conflation of the differences and similarities between religion and spirituality. A reference point for defining religion is "affiliation with an organisation that is guided by shared beliefs and practices that have members who adhere to a particular understanding of the divine and participate in sacred rituals" (Nadan et al., 2019, p.12). From this perspective, religion and religious experiences are a subset or an organising structure that relate in part to the larger picture of spiritual awareness (Hay & Socha, 2005). Within the realm of spirituality, I differentiate spiritual experiences – those events which cannot be explained in psychosocial terms; spiritual beliefs – sense-making practices and ways of understanding existential matters; and spiritual practices – the activities and artifacts used to express or enhance spiritual experiences. These distinctions will become more relevant towards the latter part of this article where the theory developed in this section is applied to the development of practices that can enhance awareness of connection.

Emerging from this backdrop of seeking understanding about spirituality, surfaced research in the UK by Nye (1998) and Hay (2000), who had been studying children's experiences. It was they who first proposed the concept of relational consciousness. I adopt this conceptualisation and definition of spirituality because it both transcends religious language and avoids the ambiguity often present in other definitions of spirituality. Epistemologically, it also has utility for both explaining personal spiritual experiences, and providing a basis for application to practice. The four domains of relational consciousness were originally labelled as relationship between self and: self, others, world and divine. I have taken the liberty of renaming 'world' (sometimes called 'environment') as 'nature'. Nye and Hay noted that unexpected moments of children's increased perceptiveness of connection appeared spontaneously, and were infrequent, fleeting but memorable. Indeed, whilst many people do experience spontaneous moments of awareness of the oneness of all things, I suggest that it is also possible to engage in intentional practices to nurture conscious awareness of each of the four aspects of relational consciousness, and thus catalyse increased perceptiveness. In particular, the practice of mindfulness can serve as an embodied discipline for meditative reflection and attunement to each dimension (Chilvers & Kiyimba, in press), which in turn facilitates receptivity to seeing beyond the illusion of separateness, and experience something of the implicate order of oneness.

Te Whare Tapa Whā (The Four-Sided House)

In the first two theoretical sections of this article (quantum theory and relational consciousness), I have presented two sides of the same coin, spirituality and science; both of which through different routes arrive at the same conclusion, that the world as we know it, under the surface of things, is intrinsically interconnected. Whilst there are probably many more fields of knowledge that may also arrive at the same destination, the final piece of the argument I will contribute here, is an example of an indigenous wisdom tradition. I draw on the ancient knowledge of the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori. Whilst much Māori knowledge is inaccessible to non-Māori such as myself due to the precious care of passing down more esoteric knowledge orally from one generation to the next, the model I present here is well established within the public domain. This health model was developed by psychiatrist Sir Mason Durie (1985) to help western health and social care practitioners understand the differences in Māori psychology. Te whare tapa whā [pronounced tair farray tappa fa] consists of four walls/tapa which are mind and emotions/hinengaro, body/tinana, family and social group/whānau, and spirit/Wairau. I also include the dimension of land/whenua as if it were a fifth component. In reality, this connection with Papatūānuku (Mother Earth) and the rest of the natural environment are so intuitively embedded in the Māori psyche as to not be considered a separate aspect, but integral to all the other four components. Wellbeing or hauora in all dimensions is deemed necessary in order for a person to be well. The model departs quite significantly from the western individualistic medical approach which in itself reflects the wider western culture of

within the cosmos” and therefore must be prioritised (Lee, 2024, p. 11).

Application

Developing conscious awareness of the relationship between self and self

By reintroducing te whare tapa whā in this context, my goal is to reposition indigenous health models not just as a peripheral consideration for a minority group, but as highly important pieces of knowledge of which we should all take serious notice. Let me now bring back the components of relational consciousness, and map them onto the components of Te whare tapa whā in Table 1. As a caveat, I remind the reader that at this point we are utilising the notion of subject/object as separate in line with our current majority experience, in order to move from that position later, to a greater awareness of the underlying unity between all things.

Table 1: Comparison of relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006) and Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985)

Components of Relational Consciousness	Components of Te Whare Tapa Whā
Conscious awareness of relationship between self and self	Hinengaro / mind and emotions Tinana / physical body
Conscious awareness of relationship between self and others	Whānau / family and close social group
Conscious awareness of relationship between self and divine	Wairua /spirit
Conscious awareness of relationship between self and environment/natural world	[Whenua / land]

Historically, in the field of consciousness studies, there has been the notion that consciousness is a product of the thinking mind. Challenging this belief, there are now many renowned scientists who accept and attempt to convince others that consciousness is pre-eminent; the epiphenomenon rather than a product of mind (see for example Goswami, 1995; Faggin, 2021). It is this pre-eminent consciousness that has the ability to observe and evaluate every aspect of the self. Therefore, it is both part of the self and ‘separate’ from it. This seeming contradiction leads us back to our discussion of the subject/object anomaly in

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quantum science that concludes ontologically that the observer is also the subject of the observation (Talbot, 1991; Zaghi, 2024). The premise is thus one of universal wholeness, which determines that both the singular and the whole are a unified inter-connected system, an 'undivided universe' (Lohrey & Boreham, 2021). When we apply intentional practices such as mindfulness to the development of conscious awareness of the inter-connection between self and self, we do so in the knowledge that we are actually observing a facet of self as if separate from it, but in fact also connected to and part of it.

Developing conscious awareness of the relationship between self and others

The psychologist Kathy Forti stated that, "[n]o-one is separate – be they a subatomic particle or a human being made up of subatomic particles" (Forti, 2014, p.178). Although Forti said this as a result of what she was shown in a near death experience, the sentiment remains the same within science, that no one is separate. Challenging though it is, quantum science points to the fact that the whole determines its parts rather than being a product of the sum of its parts. British quantum physicist Basil Hiley stated, "wholeness implies that the properties of the individual parts are determined by the order of whole, rather than the parts determining the whole" (Hiley, 2008, p.7). The best analogy for this explanation is a hologram, where each part of a hologram contains the whole image (see for examples Bohm, 1980; Lohrey & Boreham, 2021; Pribram, 1971; Peat, 2024). The hologram metaphor states that the whole is in the part, and the part is in the whole. Thus, the global and the local are interconnected. In other words, in quantum holography, every part of the universe retains information about the whole.

The metaphor Bohm has used to clarify this holographic explanation is that of a television set; The original visual image is folded many times or implicated so that it can be carried on radio waves. The television set then acts as a receiver to unfold or explicate the images (Bohm, 2005). The interesting thing is that when we re-apply this metaphor to the human brain and consciousness, the brain is paralleled with the television set. In other words, it is a receiver. This is the opposite of the notion that consciousness arises from the mind. Furthermore, "the interconnectedness between brain and cosmos is an instantaneous nonlocal connection" (Di Biase, 2009, p. 661). In quantum physics, the process or enactment of 'entanglement' happens when two particles interact and then separate, and then thereafter, when changes occur in one they immediately co-occur in the other (Moran & Fitzpatrick, 2008). The entanglement or non-locality of connection between all things is becoming much more widely studied, to the point that Thaheld has stated, "research which has been going on for several years now at various universities continues to show that something very unusual is being successfully replicated involving entanglement and biological nonlocality between human subjects" (Thaheld, 2003, p. 40). This last statement moves our knowledge further forward from the argument that entanglement only happens at a quantum level. What we are beginning to see more and more, is evidence of entanglement at a macro, human level.

Indeed, Schrödinger concluded that although there are billions of apparently separate minds, most humans have a view of the world that is coherent. His explanation was "the unification of minds or consciousness. Their multiplicity is only apparent, in truth there is only one mind" (Schrödinger, 1992, p. 139). This 'one mind' or 'non-local mind' theory has been further explained (Dossey, 2015). Dossey equated the availability of the one mind to stem cells on the body which are pluripotent. In other words, they do not randomly transform into any kind of cell the body needs, but do so "depending on the body's need" (Dossey, 2013, p. 28). The one mind theory is another way to describe what Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung called the 'collective unconscious', which he described as a shared reservoir of thoughts and memories across humanity (Jung, 1969). Both the one mind, and collective unconscious theories propose the same concept, that as humans we have a holographic relationship with all minds. To take this seriously and apply it to our respective fields of practice, requires consideration of a new way of thinking about the seeming self/other divide. We can in truth no longer actually consider ourselves to be separate from one another. Holographically 'I' am a kind of fractal of the whole, of which 'you' are also a holographic fractal. We are in effect "projections of a single totality" (Bohm, 2005, p. 117). Logically therefore, what I change in my 'self' will effect change in the 'other'.

Developing conscious awareness of the relationship between self and divine

The starting point or pre-supposition of this article has been that humans are spiritual as beings, which is a 'universal' perspective separate from cultural or historical determinants (Cook, 2004). Although this section on awareness of the relationship between self and divine is presented as separate due to following the pattern of the four areas of the whare tapa whā and the relational consciousness model of spirituality, it is arguable that the divine is actually implicated in all other aspects. Following on from the conversation initiated previously about the deconstruction of the self/other, subject/object divide, similar considerations can be applied to the notion of the divine as separate or other-than the self. Arguably, one could say that developing a more conscious relationship with self is the same as developing a greater awareness of relationship with the divine. However, despite the theoretical arguments of quantum science and spiritual tradition presented here about the oneness of all, at some level, we experience separation. As with all other things that we experience as separate, the divine is also frequently experienced in this way. For example, according to the Spiritual Theory of Everything Model (STOEM) proposed by Douglas Youvan "a divine entity [w]as the initiator of the first iteration, leading to the universe's birth" (Youvan, 2024, p. 5). This idea positions the divine as a pre-creation entity. Indeed, in many religions the divine is taught and experienced as an entity outside of or "beyond the self" (Scott, 2003, p. 126). Thus, cultural as well as ontological assumptions are part of the conversation about whether the divine is 'external' or integral to self.

I am reminded of the Bible verse “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) in relation to this discussion. Typically, Biblical hermeneutics has interpreted this verse to mean that as we quiet our hearts and minds, we become more aware that the external creator God is present. However, another interpretation could equally mean that as we quiet our mind from all of the encultured influences, we may recognise self as God. One way therefore to understand this seeming paradox is the example of looking at our reflection in a mirror. Expert on ancient philosophy, David Johnson states; “The mirror appears to produce a separate object for our vision and our intellect, and thus allows us to see ourselves while looking at something other than ourselves” (Johnson, 1999, pp. 8-9). This is a helpful way to consider the notions of separateness and unity. If we think of what we see that seems to be external and separate to us as a kind of reflection, then our experience of subject/object dualism begins to make more sense. The reflection in the mirror is not someone else, it is a reflection of self, and we just experience it as external and ‘other’. Quoting Socrates, Johnson reports; “So looking to God we would make use of the finest reflector and, of human things, looking to the virtue of the soul, and in this way we would most see and know ourselves” (Johnson, 1999, p. 12). Socrates himself made the analogy direct for us by referring to God as a reflection, through which we come to know ourselves. Thus, whatever position one takes with regard to considering the relationship of self with divine, the mirror analogy helps us with all aspects of our quest for greater understanding and embodiment of relational consciousness.

Developing conscious awareness of the inter-connection between self and nature

At a physiological level, natural environments contain chemical components which support immune function (Djernis et al., 2019). For example, phytoncides from plants lower blood pressure (Jiang et al., 2018), and the negative ions in air near moving water and in forests can reduce depression (Goel et al., 2005) and anxiety (McMahan & Estes, 2015). These findings have led to people engaging in ‘forest bathing’ (Mazzoleni et al., 2024). Forest therapy is a version of forest bathing that takes a more deliberately mindful approach. It “involves the mindful engagement of the five senses while unwinding in natural settings” (Wan et al., 2024, p. 1). The natural environment, however, is more than a resource or a beautiful outlook. Māori, like many other indigenous peoples relate to the earth, stars, forests, rivers and mountains as brothers. The Māori word *mauri* means the life force energy, and in Aotearoa New Zealand, some mountains and rivers have been legally given ‘personhood’ status (Māori, 2025). In many traditions, Mother Earth/Papatūānuku/Gaia/Pachamama is revered as a conscious being.

Indeed, several researchers including Dr Masaru Emoto, have discovered that water responds to words and intentions, changing its crystalline structure in response to consciousness directed towards it (Emoto, 2011; Radin et al., 2006). Additionally, the work of ex-CIA polygraph expert Cleve Baxter indicted what he described as “extrasensory perception”

in plants that responded immediately to the immersion of nearby brine shrimps tipped into boiling water (Baxter, 1968, p. 347). The Baxter effect has not attracted as much research interest as might be expected, but those who have explored this phenomenon further have concluded that plants have very sophisticated perceptual systems, similar in complexity to those of many animal systems. It is clear that plants are active in monitoring information from their environments “and respond in ways that profoundly influence their interactions with other organisms” (Mescher & De Moraes, 2015, p. 431). It would be ignorant therefore to merely approach natural elements including flora, fauna, air, water, fire and earth, and the areas of our planet made up of these, as passive and unconscious of our interactions with them.

Embodiment

Arguably, any spiritual practice involves a process of embodiment in order to ground the esoteric on the earthly plane. I say arguably, because this has not always been the accepted wisdom. In fact, quite the opposite has been the case for some religious traditions. For example, Christianity has from its earliest times purported a definite distinction between spirit, soul and body. The theological notion of ‘original sin’ introduced by St Augustine was a factor in the evolution of a religious doctrine that placed a very clear separation between body and spirit (Trousedale, 2013). The needs and desires of the physical body have in this religious tradition, been positioned as a hinderance to spiritual growth, requiring subjugation, repression and regulation in order to realise the goals of spiritual consciousness (Ferrer, 2008). Conversely, there are other spiritual practices such as Shaolin Kung Fu where the inclusion of physical movement as part of the spiritual tradition of Chan Buddhism are regarded as a form of dynamic embodiment (Nešković, 2024). My position in this debate is that embodiment is an essential part of spiritual development. Just as in the indigenous traditions discussed earlier, spirit and flesh are not positioned as enemies, but as co-operative partners. Indeed, many contemporary spiritual leaders such as Sia-Lanu Estrella (2020) exhort that we need to ‘re-embody’ our divine connection.

If we are to consciously seek to engage with the concepts of relational consciousness through tangible application, we need a mechanism for its embodiment. I propose mindfulness as a logical method for the pragmatic outworking of this premise. Mindfulness is an acultural, simple tool that people of all ages and abilities can adopt to assist the intentional outworking of relational consciousness through embodiment. Specifically, mindfulness can facilitate a greater awareness of the inter-connectedness between self, others, nature and divine. This is not intended to be forced or deterministic, but is offered as a framework to create an appropriate environment within which allowing awareness of oneness can be realised. The practices presented are intended to offer a way to allow greater conscious awareness of the inter-connectedness of all things.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere at any time because it is not so much a specific kind of activity, but a state of mind, or an approach, that can be brought to any ordinary everyday task. For example, taking a shower is pretty mundane, and can be done without any conscious attention, or it can be approached with a state of mindful, embodied, attentive, sensory awareness. Mindfulness has been described as “a state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p.822). Our lives consist of a string of current moments, and in reality, the past and future do not actually exist apart from how we think about them in the current moment (Kiyimba, 2020). So, mindfulness is primarily about focusing our attention on ‘now’. As we move into this next section on applying mindfulness theory and practice to the four aspects of relational consciousness, I have selected a few key principles of mindfulness to focus on. There are many books and articles written about mindfulness, and if you wish to go into greater depth to understand the different approaches to mindfulness there is a lot of information available. For the purposes of proposing a method for the embodiment of relational consciousness in order to cultivate a greater awareness of the inter-connectedness of all things, I will outline just four aspects: be present here and now, drop into the body, release thoughts, let go of judgments.

- Be present here and now: The aim of this aspect of mindfulness is to bring the mind and the body into the same time zone. In other words, to restrain the mind from wandering into the future or ruminating on the past and bring it into an awareness and focus on the current moment of time as we experience it.
- Drop into the body: This means to direct your attention towards the physical sensations in your body. Doing this automatically draws your awareness away from the mind chatter, because the physical body has no choice but to be present in the current moment of time. Tune into the physical senses of taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing to experience everything that the body is noticing.
- Let go of thoughts: As you focus on the present moment and increase awareness of your physical body, your mind has a different focus than thinking. This can help you to let go of any new thoughts that pop into your mind. Usually thoughts will keep emerging, and so it takes gentle patience and persistence to keep letting go of them every time they come back.
- Without judging: As you notice sensations in your body, and as you keep reminding yourself to release intrusive thoughts, it can be easy to be frustrated with yourself. This final aspect of mindfulness practice is to not judge our experience or ourselves, but to have self compassion. As you become aware of sensations in your physical body or around you in the environment, letting go of labels of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ helps you to stay with the practice.

These four principles of mindfulness can be used as a starting point for establishing a practice to intentionally generate a greater awareness of the already existing interconnectedness of all things. By enhancing our awareness, it is argued that our

professional interactions with patients and clients will start to look quite different.

Conclusion

This article has drawn on three strands, namely the principles of the relational consciousness model of spirituality, the indigenous Māori model of Te whare tapa whā, and some of the new scientific discoveries of quantum physics. Throughout, I have maintained the position of the inseparable nature of reality, the oneness of all. It seems fitting therefore, to draw on the words of David Hay in pulling together a summary of this article. He concluded that, “[p]articipation (recognized in relational consciousness) is the true mode of relationship with reality. The idea of an objective world out there that we observe coldly and scientifically from some Archimedean point, detached and serene, is no longer tenable. The cosmos is one, indivisible whole” (Hay, 2004, n.p). Although the idea of removing the subject/object dichotomy may at first be confronting, there opens a whole new vista of possibilities once we accept the holographic principle. From this understanding that the individual parts we experience ourselves as being, actually both contain and constitute the whole, we may explore creative ways to utilise such knowledge for the benefit of the whole.

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