

Can the Mana of Maori Men who Sexually Abuse Children be Restored?

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The problem of child sex abuse is prevalent across all segments of society, and Maori, unfortunately, are overrepresented in this problem. In the total prison population of 6591, 13.6% are identified as child sex offenders. Of the 3,299 Maori in prison 283 (8.5%) are identified as child sex offenders whereas 631 (18.6%) of the 3292 non-Maori have been so identified. However, Maori only represent approximately 15% of the general population. In proportionate terms, approximately one of every 970 Maori men is currently in prison for child sex offences, while for non-Maori that figure is one in 3125¹. Also, disclosures from offenders suggest that sexual abuse is particularly common in rural or disadvantaged areas, with offenders frequently reporting being abused by multiple offenders and being aware of chronic abuse, little of which was ever reported.

With regard to rehabilitation, child sex offences are a particular problem for Maori men, since the cultural and spiritual consequences of these offences on the offenders are worse than for most other offences. One could argue, for example, that Maori men convicted of violent offences could be seen as misapplying traditional concepts and failing to adapt to social change by continuing to behave as a warrior in a

peaceful society. Actions which Pakeha society would view as violence were, after all, once accepted in Maori society, within limits. For example, utu and muru involve causing psychological or physical pain, sometimes unto death, but this would not be seen as violence as long as it was constrained by complex social structures and norms. The sexual abuse of children never was. True, the age of consent in Maori society was at puberty, so there is a subset of Maori offenders with teenaged victims who might be better seen as misapplying the old concepts, as with violent men. Maori men who sexually abuse young children, however, not only incur consequences from the Pakeha legal system, but also deep and damaging cultural and spiritual consequences that would not accrue to other types of offenders. If we are to intervene meaningfully with these men, these issues need to be addressed alongside empirically derived dynamic risk factors which might contribute to re-offending.

In order to appreciate the Maori world view a number of key concepts must be grasped in order to provide a conceptual framework for understanding our tikanga (Maori lore). This is the framework upon which our relationships between ourselves, with others outside the tribe and with the spiritual realm are based. The key concepts in understanding the nature of and consequences of sexual offending are Tapu and Mana. In the Maori worldview, the Creator and other Atua (or spiritual powers) preside over and are made

¹ Population data is derived from the 2006 New Zealand census (Statistics New Zealand/Tauranga Aotearoa, 2008).

manifest in the natural world. These Atua (spiritual forces) are the source of the tapu and mana possessed both by man and the rest of the natural world.

The philosophy of tapu informs our conscience of the relatedness of all living things and instructs us on how to behave as fellow participants in the web of life. Tapu is sourced in the spiritual realm in Atua and in the Creator. The tapu sourced in Atua can be referred to as primary tapu and is a constant. Sexuality is a gift of Atua and is governed by tapu, meaning that there are strict rules governing human conduct in this area. Sexual contact with prepubescent children violates tapu, and any breach of this tapu has immediate and serious effects on the mana of the offender.

Mana has been defined as “the enduring, indestructible power of the gods. It is the sacred fire that is without beginning and without end” (Barlow, 1991). In a western paradigm, mana appears to share characteristics of self esteem and community standing. While not entirely accurate, this can be a useful comparison in understanding the effects of child sex offending on mana. Mana is sourced in the spirit realm, and can be divided into four subtypes. When revealed in humans and objects (both animate and inanimate) as supernormal qualities and or accomplishments, it is referred to as *mana atua*. Mana which is derived through descent from ancestors is referred to as *mana tipuna*. Customarily, the first born of a family is endowed with the most mana because he or she is nearest to the gods who transmit mana. *Mana whenua* refers to authority or ownership over the land. In the past, our moana (seas) and food gathering areas were owned very much like modern property ownership. Finally, mana which is derived through sheer personality, leadership or achievement is referred to as *mana tangata*.

Mana atua is transmitted directly from Atua. The breach of tapu inherent in child sex offending destroys this mana, and it cannot be restored. Mana whenua could be restored through assisting the offender in acquiring more land, for example, but this is hardly likely to be of use as a treatment target. Mana tipuna could only be restored through the good will of the hapu, whanau and iwi. The only type of

mana which is subject to the influence of the individual and could be restored by them once lost is mana tangata. Once that is restored, the individual might be able to access whanau land and restore mana whenua and may also be able to restore mana tipuna through their continued demonstration of positive behaviour. Mana atua cannot be restored.

The restoration of mana tangata is only possible through the efforts of the individual, but can be assisted within a bicultural setting or a Maori framework. Doing so requires a treatment approach which involves several linked components; education, whanaungatanga, and karakia. The offender must be educated in the nature of mana and tapu and the consequences of their transgression against mana. Whanaungatanga can be enabled through whanau hui and restorative justice approaches where the offender is confronted by their victim and their whanau, ideally on a marae. Karakia and waiata can be used throughout the restoration process to strengthen the wairua of the offender and enable whanaungatanga processes to resolve smoothly. These processes can be combined into a mana restoration plan developed with the offender, which would guide the restoration process during the early phases, and would become a living plan which the offender could use to guide his behaviour through the remainder of his life.

The effectiveness of such an approach has never been fully tested by Pakeha science, but there is anecdotal evidence that these approaches can help. For example, a treatment group was run at Te Piriti in 2005 which incorporated a number of these approaches due to the large number of Maori men in the group and the presence of two Maori facilitators. This group appeared to exhibit a higher level of mana than that shown by Maori men who were involved in other treatment groups. The effect was not universal, and some men appeared to believe they had more mana than they actually did, but the experience of the group was overwhelmingly positive. The positive results shown by bicultural treatment in Te Whakakotahitanga (Nathan, Wilson & Hillman, 2003) may also speak to the somewhat inadvertent restoration of mana, although mana was not directly evaluated in this study.

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Clearly, any interventions that we can make as treatment providers which will reduce an offender's risk of further harm to the community should be followed. Those interventions which improve an offender's mana are no exception, and should be built into treatment programs. However, treatment programmes are funded according to demonstrated effectiveness, and excludes those which rely on anecdotal evidence of success. There are two approaches to dealing with this difficulty. On the one hand, we can say that mana is unknowable and indefinable, but should be treated regardless of the absence of empirical evidence supporting it, on the basis that Maori are entitled to do so under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. While this argument may result in funding, it is a weak argument, and would result in our programmes seen as cultural alternatives or adjuncts to real treatments, completely lacking in credibility. On the other hand, we could accept the challenge to prove our interventions work according to empirical rules and show that our ways are effective and worthy of funding and respect.

So, why can we not research mana according to Pakeha science? If we can assess how much mana a man has at the beginning of an intervention to increase his mana, then again after such an intervention, and if we can show that this change reduces his risk to others, should we not be entitled to the same funding as our Pakeha colleagues? For too long, we have said that concepts such as wairua and mana cannot be tested, but if they are real, then they

can be tested. True, wairua and mana are unquantifiable, but then, so are self-esteem, anxiety and depression, concepts well loved by our scientist-practitioner colleagues. Measures of depression, for example, assess only the degree to which a person reports symptoms or exhibits behaviour consistent with the construct of depression, and measures them relative to how others have responded or behaved. Why can we not do the same with mana?

There are those who will say that Maori have a separate way of understanding the world, and that it is inappropriate to use Western empirical traditions to gain knowledge of tikanga. At their heart, though, the Western tradition consists of little more than an attempt to gain knowledge through observation and the testing of ideas. This paper is not concerned with testing the literal truth of mana, tapu or tikanga. If tikanga based interventions are effective, then such effectiveness should be measurable. There is little point in arguing that tikanga based interventions are beneficial in ways other than reducing re-offending. While karakia may be good for the offender's wairua, there is no point in paying for it to be done if the man then continues to harm others in the community.

This might well be a fertile ground for a seeker of mohiotanga who dares work in two worlds. The authors are considering the development of a *Mana Index* which may be researched either quantitatively or qualitatively. Enquiries are welcome from anyone who would like to pursue either.

References

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