



Chapter

14

Maori and psychology: Indigenous psychology in New Zealand

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Introduction

Maori have their own approaches to health and well-being, which stem from a world view that values balance, continuity, unity and purpose. The world view is not typically thought of as 'psychology', yet it is a foundation for shared understandings and intelligible action among Maori. Maori behaviours, values, ways of doing things and understandings are often not visible nor valued. However, through these opening years of the twenty-first century, psychologists are slowly turning their attention to addressing this invisibility with the explicit agenda of building 'indigenous psychologies'

Indigenous psychology is characterised by critical challenges to the dominance of American psychological knowledge, and by indigenous peoples' demands for a voice in decisions that impact on their futures. Those similarities aside, there is considerable diversity in the approaches taken in indigenous psychology. Some indigenous psychologists are in search of universals or commonalities across humanity whereas others are interested in cultural variability. Indigenous psychologists may investigate the minute similarities and differences between cultures, or they may work with like-minded social scientists and action researchers to solve whatever local problems exist within their own communities (Adair, 1999; Kim & Berry, 1993).

An example of what could be understood as indigenous psychology in action is from the early 1980s, when the Maori Women's Welfare League conducted a survey of Maori women's health (Murchie, 1984). Over 1000 Maori women participated and about 50% indicated knowledge of '*he mate maori*', that is, a Maori defined ailment. Half of the responding women also indicated they would seek help from relatives, tribal or spiritual leaders, or *tohunga* (Maori faith healers). Twenty years on, it is not unusual to find *tohunga*, Maori elders and herbalists or *rongoa* Maori experts working alongside western-trained therapists, including psychologists. For all concerned, the objective is to restore health, balance and well-being to the person concerned.

As evident in the above example, the Maori world exists in parallel with mainstream New Zealand society. Maori accommodate to ordinary New Zealand culture yet maintain an equivalent and parallel reality within the Maori world. This can be a difficult point to understand. A widely held view is that there is no difference between Maori and other New Zealanders; that we are all Kiwis sharing a national identity and way of life. That view has some validity, but commonalities do not erase differences. All too often the distinctiveness of Maori as a people gets hidden from mainstream New Zealand society. Invisibility is a classic complaint of indigenous peoples across the globe (Seton, 1999). It is from a culturally blind position of 'sameness' that the assertion that Maori have no unique psychology comes.

The visions of indigenous psychologies are exciting. The objectives include: to further advance a psychology of indigenous peoples; to develop a psychology that is not imposed or imported from elsewhere; to consider the multiple contexts in which people live; to develop knowledge within and alongside cultures using a variety of methods; and to produce appropriate locally relevant psychological knowledge. There are many pathways to accomplish these objectives but they all share at least two dominant endeavours. The first activity is working towards having indigenous approaches recognised within the discipline of psychology in New Zealand; the second task is building the base of culturally relevant, sensitive and critical research. While there is much to be done, care is needed not to forget past accomplishments. Knowledge of the wealth of existing indigenous research is an important touchstone for future work.

Appreciating previous research

Although their purpose was wrapped up with the British colonial agenda, early ethnographers and anthropologists to New Zealand such as Elsdon Best (1856-1931), Edward Tregear (1846-1931) and Percy Smith (1840-1922) sought, through key Maori informants, to understand and document the Maori world view. Although heavily ethnocentric, these researchers and later those academic giants of the Maori world, Te Rangihiroa Peter Buck (e.g. 1962) and Apirana Ngata (e.g. 1972), left a richly descriptive information base for the contemporary researcher and practitioner. The search for Maori

psychological frameworks today often starts with these early works rather than more conventional sources such as 'PsycAbstracts'.

Up until the 1940s few academic psychologists took an interest in the Maori world. In the 1940s through to the 1960s those who did were criticised for doing research 'on' Maori, rather than 'with' Maori. Nevertheless, the Beagleholes, the Ritchies, and their students in the Culture and Personality tradition, marked an approach to Maori communities and to local contexts that set the background for the development of cross-cultural and community psychology through the 1970s and 1980s (Hamerton et al., 1994; Ritchie, 1992). Although the early efforts were guided by the dominant western psychological paradigms typical of the times, the ethno-psychological nature of their work has significant value; a worth that is often overlooked by contemporary researchers and practitioners. The documented descriptions of Maori life, living conditions, problem solving and responses to a rapidly changing environment provide a vital background to solving issues that occupy present day indigenous psychologists. In particular, the issue of culture change straddles previous and contemporary work (Beaglehole & Beaglehole, 1946; Ritchie, 1963) especially as it was played out by individuals as social beings.

Social anthropology has also contributed a mass of research useful to building an indigenous psychology. Culture change and identity is what interested Fitzgerald (1970) when he looked at the lives of Maori university graduates in the 1960s. Harre (1966) took on the challenge of investigating Maori-Pakeha intermarriage and the cultural orientations of children from such unions. Culture change and adaptation to urban environments held the attention of researchers like Joan Metge (1964). In contrast, Hohepa (1964) was concerned with changes in his own rural community in Northland and the impact of urbanisation upon those who choose to remain 'at home'. Kawharu (1975) focused upon his Ngati Whatua people, lands and institutions at Orakei, Auckland and, in particular, the resilience of community spirit and leadership in the face of vicious government pressure for them to relinquish their land interests. While all of these researchers in some way concentrated on

Maori cultural institutions, Anne Salmond (1975) was probably the most focused in her work on *Hui* Maori rituals of encounter.

More recently, Maori academics across all disciplines have engaged the process of Maori development, the goals of which are: surviving and thriving as a healthy people (health); maintaining a unique cultural heritage (*te reo me nga tikanga*); and creating a better environment (physical and social) for future generations (development). All three of these requirements must be satisfied if the health of a people is to flourish. Most central to advancing the Maori development agenda has been psychiatrist, psychologist, and professor of Maori Studies, Mason Dude.

In contrast to the Beagleholes and Ritchies who were trained in the social science tradition, Dude's training was largely in medicine. Dude was more than qualified to practise in primary health care but chose instead to pursue an interest in Maori public health and policy development.

Dude's early work promoted Maori perspectives of health arguing for a more holistic approach rather than one based simply on the biomedical model. Dude represented Maori health as having four dimensions: physical, mental, familial, and spiritual (Dude, 1984, 1985a, 1985b). While not a new idea, it gained currency across the health, social and education sectors in New Zealand. He built upon this early work by questioning the nature of professional health training programmes (Abbott & Dude, 1987). Furthermore he observed the absence of Maori students in the academy, and he highlighted the need for training programmes to revise curriculum to make it more 'Maori relevant'. Dude saw a pressing need to build a health workforce better able to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele, something he is still passionate about today (Dude, 2003).

Whether Dude is attending to Maori health, or to social or health policy, or those issues related to Maori development, his keen concern with a secure and healthy sense of being Maori is always a central focus. A key point that he makes is: a secure Maori identity correlates with good health and wellness. To achieve good health outcomes for Maori, consideration of issues and circumstances that impact and contribute to the erosion of Maori identity must be addressed (Durie, 2001).



Professor Mason Dude at Waikato University during the Making a Difference Conference of Maori Psychology Graduates in 2002. From left to right: Linda Waimarie Nikora, Catherine Love, Mason Dude, Michelle Levy, Ngahuiia Te Awekotuku, Moana Waitoki and Bridgette Masters

For psychology, the Maori development agenda is to create psychologies to meet the needs of Maori people in a way that maintains a unique cultural heritage, and makes for a better collective Maori future. It is a journey towards Maori autonomy and self-determination (Nikora, 2001). To date, the primary focus has been on the development of a critical mass of indigenous psychologists capable of developing robust tikanga-based psychological frameworks. Although a slow process, there is a small yet active group of people who are making a contribution through practice, teaching, research, and involvement in professional organisations (see Nikora et al., 2002). In the sections below, I reflect on the experience of developing a Maori-focused research unit at the University of Waikato.

Maori and Psychology Research Unit

Learning and teaching psychology at Waikato differs from other campuses in New Zealand; a major difference being the notable presence of Maori students. Over the past 10 years the Maori student enrolment in psychology has, on average, been about 20% of all students – well above the percentage at other New Zealand universities. Maori students come to psychology with many aspirations, one being to simply obtain a qualification that will make them more competitive in the employment market

place. Other Maori students see psychology as a pathway to better understand themselves and the world around them. A large majority however, see training in psychology as a pathway to obtaining those skills and qualifications to allow them to make a meaningful contribution to their whanau, hapu and iwi, and to positive Maori development. With this aspiration in mind, they navigate their programmes of study questioning the usefulness and relevance of what is presented to their desired direction.

Most teachers of psychology are not short on teaching materials. When I was appointed to teach psychology at the University of Waikato in 1989, there were shelves of conventional psychology text books to build courses, but few written by or about New Zealanders, and none by Maori about the Maori world. While there was an obvious lack of teaching resources, there was also a lack of confidence to step out of the conventional mode of teaching psychology. My colleagues wanted fast answers packaged in the form of journal articles with rigorous research findings to support them in the lecture theatre. In the 1990s and even today, the volume of resources needed for this task does not exist. For this reason I turned to building the research base of Maori-focused psychological research trusting that my colleagues would support the enterprise. Many of my colleagues continued with their own interests, but some responded to the challenge even if they expressed reservations in doing so. One concern was that it is politically incorrect for non-Maori to carry out Maori-focused research. Another limitation was feelings of inadequacy and a fear of making cultural faux pas. Such concerns were valid, but not insurmountable.

In 1997, we established the Maori and Psychology Research Unit (MPRU). The core focus of the unit is research that has at its centre the psychological needs, aspirations, and priorities of Maori people. The unit provides a central hub for a range of research related activities. For example, we are a clearing house for Maori-focused psychological research. The results of our research are made available as rapidly as possible via the unit's website (<http://psychology.waikato.ac.nz/mpru/>). We also provide invaluable practical experience to both Maori and non-Maori students and staff through involvement in Maori-focused research, planning and management,

as well as professional development activities. Through winning grants and awards, the MPRU helps to provide options for students to supplement their income, and to further their academic development. For staff it means having the facility to buy out our time to engage more fully in research and mentoring activities.

Since 1997, the MPRU has been involved in a myriad of projects. The publications website organises over 101 articles and reports using the following key words: Bicultural approaches; Clinical; Disability; Environment; Epilepsy; Ethics; Evaluation; Health; Identity; Indigenous Psychology; Maori students; Media; Men; Mental health; Migration; Moko; Pacific; Prejudice; Reo; Research; Women; Youth; and Crime. However, it is the Moko project that I would like to highlight here.

Moko: Public opinions and perceptions

The Moko project is an example of research that is Maori-focused and concerned with the psychological needs, aspirations, and priorities of Maori people. Part of the project involved an online public attitude survey where we set out to investigate the extent to which moko, the Maori art of marking the skin, is seen as a positive or negative practice, the types of attributions made of moko wearers and public expectations of them. I have chosen to review a small aspect of this much broader project (refer to

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From left: Prof Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Puawai Cairns, both researchers for the Moko project

Nikora et al., 2004) to illustrate how a conventional survey schedule can be coupled with modern internet technology to investigate the re-emergence of a traditional Maori practice in the contemporary period.

The language of the survey was English, with translations where Maori was used. The schedule contained some open-ended questions, but most were 'closed' requiring participants to check a box. There were questions concerned with demographic characteristics; specific questions for wearers of skin art and questions about visibility, motivation, amount of 'work', and choice of technician. We also included items that examined views about people who have visible 'work', particularly wearers of kauae (women's chin markings) and pukanohi (men's facial markings). Age of consent and whether moko was an enduring trend or just a fad were also investigated.

Given the low number of Maori with access to the internet we initially had reservations about the appropriateness of this technology, anticipating a low response rate from Maori. To increase participation by Maori, we used what might be described as a 'knock-on' approach to advertising the survey hyperlink. Members of the research team sent personal email invitations to others making sure that a live hyperlink to the survey page appeared early in the message. They were invited to participate and to also forward the link on to others. We also advertised on Maori discussion

boards (e.g. <http://www.aocafe.com>) and targeted organisations with a concentration of Maori workers (e.g. Te Puni Kokiri, Te Kohanga Reo). Lastly, we invited students in courses offered by members of the project team. The net result was that about 50% (190 of 368) of our sample identified in some way as Maori. To us, this indicated an interest in the topic, a wish to participate and faith in us as researchers to tread carefully with their information.

Contrary to previous psychological research that tends to pathologise, criminalise or marginalise tattoo wearers, 'self-identity and expression' are the major reasons identified by participants for their acquisition of their skin art. Participants expected moko wearers to be more law-abiding, free from tobacco, drugs and alcohol, and less violent than those with general tattoos. Indeed, the opinions about moko wearers held by participants were generally favourable. Few participants agreed that it was appropriate for children and young persons to obtain kauae or pukanohi before turning 16 years of age; and most felt that the resurgence of kauae

Photographer – Linda Waimarie Nikora



Uhi work by Artist Henriata Nicholas carried by Vic Hensle

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Moko kauae by artist Mark Kopua carried by Ngahuia Ngata

and pukanohi in recent times was an enduring trend. While the large number of Maori participants in this survey may have favourably biased the results, statistical comparison between Maori and non-Maori did not support this idea, leading us to conclude that the re-emergence of moko in the contemporary day is perceived generally as a positive development and that wearers might expect largely positive reactions to their chosen marks of identity, heritage and difference.

Concluding comments

Psychology text books and psychological knowledge are largely dominated by an American world view that hides the existence of indigenous ways of thinking and behaving. One of the objectives of indigenous psychology is to challenge that dominance and promote a field of psychological research that is culturally relevant and sensitive to indigenous peoples. In New Zealand the initiatives of Professor Mason Durie and the Maori and Psychology Research Unit at the University of Waikato are exemplars for an international academic community of the kind of shape an indigenous psychology can take.