Cultural Safety:

A resource for

or

a challenge to our practice?

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Resource or challenge?

“...a fear for me of getting that label of being culturally unsafe keeps me from ever speaking up unless I know who I am speaking with and [am] comfortable with the people.”

(Marie research participant)
My research

- I hoped to draw on knowledge of experienced practitioners to inform practice education
- Participants: Five experienced counsellors who claim a Pākehā identity
- Explorations of helpful and unhelpful influences on their practice with Māori and other non-Pākehā clients
Drawing on

- Ideas about
  - Discourse
  - Agency
  - Positioning

- Examples of culturally relevant discourses
  - Colonization, assimilation and postcolonial discourse
Discourse

- Discourse… constructs the topic.
  - It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge.
  - It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about.
  - It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.


- Cultural safety is a discourse
Agency

- In a moment where a counsellor is able to act in a desired way she can be said to have agency.
- Restraint implies that in that moment, or on the current terms, a discourse denies the counsellor an agentic position.
- Access to agency enables a counsellor to choose between the positions offered by different discourses; they may be able to decline non-agentic positions and take up agentic positions.

(Davies, 1991)
Positioning theory

Positioning theory offers a way to understand the interface between discourse and person in the moment-by-moment performance of their subjectivity.

In each moment we receive a myriad of position calls often from conflicting discourses.

When one participant in a conversation takes up a position in discourse others in that conversation also receive a consequent call into a discursive position (Van Langenhoven & Harré, 1999), quite possibly from a different discourse.
In Nursing it draws on the work of Irihapiti Ramsden:

“Cultural Safety began with the Māori response to difficulties experienced in interaction with the western based nursing service. ... [It] gives the power to the patient or families to define the quality of service on subjective as well as clinical levels.”

(Ramsden 2003, p. 110)
Cultural safety in social practice

- Has implications for our work with our clients
  - Are we offering clients what they need to experience cultural safety?

- Also has implications for our practice identity.
  - Might we be considered culturally unsafe?
“For myself as a counsellor the hardest [thing] has been to reconcile the ideas about Māori working with Māori – what right do I have to work with Māori? That leads me to a very tentative way of working with Māori, which I think can be agentic for client and counsellor.”

(Marie, research participant)
Cultural Safety for our clients

Working in clients’ homes

“I start off obviously tentatively, I’m obviously on someone else’s turf. I’m not the Pākehā expert. … Expertness is not so evident [when you take] your shoes off at the door, [check] out … what is appropriate and what’s not appropriate. I’m there as their guest and I feel I start off so differently and I’m not saying I’m more respectful but it feels I have a lot less to sort of cut through in terms of negotiating who we are and how we are, than I do when I’m sitting in the office with somebody who’s basically been sent along to see me because this is going to be helpful to them.”

(Lesley, research participant)
Cultural safety for clients

- Clients may be supported to feel culturally safe
- How are they positioned?
- Do they experience agency?
Cultural safety for us as practitioners

Practitioners may be judged to be safe or unsafe

- What is the context?
  - What discourses produce this context?
- How is the practitioner positioned?
  - In which discourses?
- What position calls might others experience?
Labeled as unsafe?

- “...a fear for me of getting that label of being culturally unsafe keeps me from ever speaking up unless I know who I am speaking with and [am] comfortable with the people.”

- Context: doesn’t know everyone

- Positioned: outside of trusting relationships

- Agency? But in which discourses?
  - Without agency in cultural safety discourse
  - May have agency in assimilation discourse
Colonizing, assimilation and postcolonial discourses

- Three powerful discourses
- Each has different effects
- There is an historical progression through these three
Cultural Safety: Resource or Restraint?

- Can be both resource and restraint
  - We can view each possibility positively

- Marie recognized the restraints on her practice
  - Silencing

- Discovered exceptions to silencing
  - Times where dialogue possible

- Found a way to increase dialogue in her workplace around difficult cultural issues

- We can seek to practice in awareness of the effects of discourse and work with the possibilities and restraints of cultural safety discourse
References


