



# 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.
  - ⊗ (after Hall, 2001, cited in Burr, 2003, P.67)
  - ⊗ *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.



# Cultural Safety

- ⊗ 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*?



# Cultural Safety for our clients

- ⊗ “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

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