

Pakeha counsellors' bicultural journeys: *Claiming Pakeha identity and working towards partnership*

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I am discussing some of the findings from a research project, entitled Pākehā counsellors explore their positioning: Towards postcolonial praxis.

My focus will be addressing these questions

What does it mean to be Pākehā?

I will discuss this in terms of aspects of narrative therapy theory in relation to identity

What does it mean to be Pākehā and committed to partnership?

With a focus on:

Issues that arise when we need to call on Māori knowledge

Issues about Pākehā responsibility in and for partnership

And I will refer to these theoretical resources

–Three moments of Pākehā identity

–Cultural Safety

–The Treaty principle of partnership

Slide three

So Now I turn to the question:

What does it mean to be Pākehā?

This project involved conversations with five highly experienced Pākehā counselling practitioners.

Brief overview of the participants' identity stories

In the first stage of the research conversations I invited the participants to introduce themselves in terms of their Pākehā identity. There were considerable variations in how they took up this:

- One carried forward a Pākehā identity from her mother, and experienced this as standing against dominant 'settler' ways
- Two had significant experiences overseas which led them to view New Zealand differently
- Study was important for all
- Moving north and coming into closer contact with Māori as a child or adolescent was important for two –and then being told not to have friendships with Māori opened their eyes to the politics of difference

However there was a considerable convergence: books like *Being Pākehā* (King, 1985) and *Māori Sovereignty* (Awatere Huata, 1984) had been read by two or more; three of us had attended Treaty workshops run by the same facilitator. For all of the participants, being Pākehā was an identity that they had taken up over at least 20 or 30 years. Central to this identity was a commitment to the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for their counselling practice.

Reference to theory

I bring a social constructionist approach to understanding identity, one which is strongly influenced by Michael White's teachings about identity (p. 136) where he theorizes identity as a performance and as an achievement. In White's terms our identity is storied both by us and by those around us. Identity draws on selected aspects of experience. As a particular identity is taken up by a person so this identity shapes their ongoing actions.

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What does it mean to be Pākehā and committed to partnership?

So once a person, a counsellor, takes up an identity as Pākehā they take up a moral commitment to act in terms of this identity. Each participant in this research lived out their Pākehā identity differently. Many of us will be familiar with calls for biculturalism in practice. Are we to understand this as a call to structural biculturalism or a personal biculturalism? Are we expecting organizations to become bicultural? Or practitioners to become bicultural? None of these participants spoke of being personally bicultural. All supported structural or organizational biculturalism.

One, Lesley, had had access to significantly more Māori cultural knowledge than the others and had been supported in this by two whaea for over 20 years. One whaea had offered Lesley the metaphor of being comfortable in one pair of shoes (her Pākehā pair) and less comfortable in the other (her Maori pair) and said "Keep reaching out for that second pair".

So though not personally claiming to be bicultural these counsellors are actively committed to working in the spirit of partnership with Māori both within their organizations and for two at least in voluntary commitments.

- Two were active in their organization's 'bicultural journey', with one on an organization wide committee charged with leading this process
- One was extremely cautious about working with Māori, although she later thought that this caution contributed to successful outcomes.
- Another spoke of working within extensive community networks. She was able to tell a young female client who asked "yes I know your Nanny, and I know your aunty". Later the client said "Its funny I feel really comfortable working with you" when she had not felt comfortable with another counsellor.

Throughout the research I had a strong sense of these counsellors describing acting in response to the Treaty, as Pākehā, being aware of employing some Māori knowledge in practice, but also being aware that they are Pākehā and drawing on highly developed counselling skills.

Issues which arise when we need to call on Māori knowledge

Some organizations are responding to their Treaty responsibilities by making organizational changes. Two participants who had leadership responsibilities in their organizations had been given specific tasks in this regard.

Janet had been tasked to contract cultural supervision and Marie to locate a kaumatua. In relation to needing to contract cultural supervision Janet described this as:

“An over whelming task for a Pākehā organization to do it in a way that is respectful, not colonizing again and not using up resources of local Māori who are busy trying to set up their own organizations.

Janet went on to speak of a fear that this project was being taken on for the sake of political correctness. This was also a concern that Marie took up in speaking of challenges she faced in locating a kaumatua:

“I fear that it’s been driven by the need to get contracts. So in order to get contracts you have to prove that you can cater to the needs of Maori because that is another box to tick. And so we’re doing all this because we have to and we’re not coming at it from the right kind of spirit I guess.

Marie knew a person that she would want to consult about locating a kaumatua but she said he was,

“an amazingly busy man and to talk with him about that,... I can’t even have that conversation with him because it’s so disrespectful to think that he would want to come in [to] put a [Māori] face to a white organization because we need it to get contracts. ... I can’t even have that conversation with him until I can find a way to reconcile all these things in my head”.

The conversation shifted ways that Pākehā responsibility could be worked out in organizations.

So I now move on to consider ...

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Issues about Pākehā responsibility in partnership

As this conversation progressed Janet moved further into a consideration of Pākehā responsibility. She started by referring back to two elements:

- Firstly Pākehā identity development in the broad sense as indicated by Michael King’s *Being Pākehā* the growth of a shared sense of identity in relationship with Māori through the Treaty.
- Secondly, the history of separate or parallel development of Māori organizations in the late 80s & early 90s. Some local and national organizations split into two separate bodies.

Janet continued to explore how Pākehā and Pākehā dominant organizations might see themselves positioned today.

I think one of our challenges is... now how do we sit alongside?

How do we walk this journey together and not just leave it over [to Māori]?

[Separation] has then left Pākehā not thinking about the issues I think. Because while Maori are doing it for Maori... are we starting to think... that it’s our turn to pick up the ball and meet Māori organizations... and work with Māori to actually do the work of being an equal partner...

And I think ..the work for us in our organization with the Pākehā counsellors, Pākehā workers in the organization [is] to say: “Are you are you ready to be alongside? Can you pick up the ball and be an

equal partner? Or is it just as it was in the past, tossed over, and we just get on with our work?

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Janet has brought two threads to this conversation. Firstly, asking how Pākehā and Pākehā organizations can ask Māori for support such as cultural supervision and then in asking if Pākehā are prepared to take up their part and act as partners. She suggested that taking the research questions back to Pākehā colleagues saying

What if this sort of conversation [was] held amongst all the Pākehā in the organizations? To get together and say: “We bring in a cultural supervisor but that’s the lazy way of doing the work. You are wanting a cultural supervisor to come in .. but the cultural supervisor to almost raise the questions for you”.

What about Pākehā doing some work?

What if we didn’t bring in a cultural supervisor one time and [said] “Well let’s Pākehā do the work?”

What is your thinking?

What are the questions you ask?

And what do you need to do for us to be a more bi-cultural organization?

Or to be more bi-cultural in our thinking?”

So as I leave these thoughts about partnership, there are two key points:

1. Are Pākehā ready to stand alongside Maori?
2. How can Pākehā work to discover responsibility for their part of the Treaty partnership?

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Reference to theory

I want to refer to three theoretical resources

- Three moments of Pākehā identity
- Cultural Safety
- Understanding the Treaty principle of partnership

as I move towards a theorizing from these discussions, which has the potential to inform our practice.

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Three moments of Pākehā identity: I have developed these from Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) classic study on the social construction of whiteness. For me moments of colonization, assimilation & indifference, and postcolonial treaty honouring more closely fit the Pākehā experience in Aotearoa than Frankenberg’s terms. She argued that each moment was shaped by the preceding moments, I agree and also recognize that my redeveloping of her three moments also echoes them albeit in a different tone. I argue that to take up a Pākehā

identity is to seek to locate oneself in the moment of Treaty honouring. I do not imagine that I am alone in experiencing myself as regularly invited to act out of either or both of the preceding moments.

I incorporated Cultural Safety (Ramsden, 2003) in the third moment. It had assumed a larger place in my research than I had anticipated when I began.

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Many will be aware of its origins as a highly contested focus of the decolonization of Nursing Education and practice. From the mid 90s Nurses were expected to ensure that their actions would be considered to be appropriate to their patients. In this research Marie commented that there were professional environments where she felt at risk of being identified as culturally unsafe if she spoke in particular terms. She clarified that these environments were meetings where she did not have strong relationships with all of the other participants. Cultural Safety was then explored in the research meetings. Was this a silencing of Pākehā? Was that problematic? I was able to explore the implications for Pākehā practitioners with my supervisor Professor Ted Glynn. I have come to understand that while Cultural Safety is a firstly way of shaping practice in the terms of the client – thus is the precondition for Pākehā counsellors if we are to step into the postcolonial moment – it also provides a way for Pākehā to work for our own safety in cross-cultural conversations. Thus Marie's choice of silence in some situations maintained safety. She was describing meetings where her effectiveness in standing in the postcolonial moment of Treaty honouring was actively being shaped by the others in the room. To speak in particular ways without the foundation of trusting relationships may have exposed her to judgements that she was acting in colonizing or assimilationist ways.

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Finally I consider the Treaty principle of partnership. I have submitted a paper to the NZ Journal of Counselling which addresses partnership implications for counselling practice. There I argue our ethical commitment to working in the spirit of partnership needs to be expressed across a wide spectrum of practice tasks. Looking back at the research stories I have included, I suggest that the problems that Janet and Marie described:

- contracting cultural supervision in a way that does not diminish Māori resource for Māori purposes;
- challenging Pākehā to take responsibility for cultural issues and not leave this to Māori
- seeking a way to honour Māori perspectives in fulfilling contractual responsibilities

...are significant actions which demonstrate the spirit of Treaty partnership. I had hoped to include some more examples from client practice here also. Clearly that needs another paper on its own. 16.50

I am left now with the problem I started with, perhaps, rephrased perhaps. What does it mean to be Pākehā and committed to Partnership? Clearly it means that I seek to stand in the postcolonial moment (whenever possible) accepting that the implication of this is that my stance, my acts, my

identity are all subject to the scrutiny and judgments of those Māori, Pasifika and others that we work with as colleagues, clients or other contacts in the community.

I have found Judith Butler's writing helpful here. At the end of *Giving an account of oneself*, she writes

[W]e must recognise that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human (Butler, 2005, p. 136).

I can identify with this. I was *formed* as a child of the 50s and 60s within the moment of assimilation and indifference. Through taking up a Pākehā identity I have reflected that what *formed* me as a child of settler heritage *diverged* from what *lay* before me. Some of the positions I was offered were not consistent with other core beliefs. Beliefs in something as easy to say as equality were inconsistent with the history of colonization. I speak personally terms and in a way consistent with the experiences of the participants. I imagine that many, all here might share this dissonance. So Butler frames the challenge. Does she guide us in the postcolonial moment? She goes on to say

To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession(p. 136).

Can this be seen as referent to the business of being Pākehā? Certainly in the sense of seeking an identity which acknowledges a settler heritage and is committed to justice and just relationships. I see resonance here with being *addressed, claimed, moved, prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere*. I have some wondering about the applicability of '*being bound to what is not me*', although I am comfortable with that if I read that as being in relationship in the spirit of treaty partnership.

And I claim the right for myself as Pākehā to consider my cultural safety – in the same way that I want to ensure this for all who do not share my culture. In committing ourselves to the postcolonial moment we are entitled to consider our own cultural safety. We can only take up the postcolonial moment within trusting relationships. If like Marie, we recognize that those relationships are not immediately present then we might be advised to be silent until we are able to build relationships of trust. She concludes

If we speak and try to give an account from this place we will not be irresponsible, or if we are, we will surely be forgiven (2005, p. 136).

Claiming Pakeha identity and working towards partnership

- involves taking action in relation to our own identity,

- standing in the postcolonial moment of Treaty honouring
- working for the cultural safety of our clients and ourselves

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