

Tumeke Bro’?

A Personal Reflection of a Male White Counsellor Working with Male Māori Tamariki

Nick Mulqueeney

Abstract

This article was born out of reflecting on my relationships formed with Māori male tamariki as a White male counsellor. How possible is it for a Pākehā to be an effective counsellor with Māori tamariki? Or is the space between us too big to bridge? In addressing this question I explore and reflect on the implications of White privilege, and its effects on the space in which I meet with tamariki. Personal insights from reflecting on Māori concepts, the Treaty of Waitangi and my own culture and past confirm that yes, Pākehā can counsel Māori tamariki if they acknowledge the influence of White privilege in society, including in the counselling room; reflect on their own culture and past; are genuinely open, curious about and respectful toward Māori culture and language; and engage with the principles of the pōwhiri process in navigating their way through the space that invites both into respectful and safe relationship.

Keywords: White privilege, Māori, tamariki, relationship, counselling

Pākehā counselling Māori—tumeke bro’?

“Bro’, you look Skux.” I look at the young Māori boy standing next to me and laugh, a little awkwardly you would have noticed had you happened to be paying attention to us. “Umm thanks. What does that mean, bro’?” I say. “Don’t you know, bro’? It means you got style,” he says, educating me. “You too, my man, you too,” I say.

I invite you to take a minute and think about your response. In what way did your cultural lens tint what you thought was happening? What bias do you think you might have had toward either of us? Was one of us more powerful than the other? Did any negative feelings or views come to your attention? What was positive in what you saw and heard?

Tumeke bro', or too much bro'? Is the space between us too big to bridge? I believe the answer is in the relationship (Durie, 2003), and that answer is no—the space between us is a space that invites each of us toward the other in unique ways. Durie (2003) and Drury (2007b) invite us to consider how aspects of the pōwhiri, the rituals of encounter, guide the ways in which we enter and negotiate this space.

In this article I reflect on my experience of counselling cross-culturally with Māori tamariki (young people) for a community trust in a low socioeconomic area where my job takes me into five decile-1 schools. Often, tamariki who are referred for counselling present with complex emotional and behavioural problems and severe anger and verbal aggression, which have affected their interactions with adults and peers. These are the precious and often misunderstood boys with whom I attempt to form a therapeutic relationship. Some are Māori, others are Pasifika, and a few are Pākehā. This article focuses on my work with the Māori tamariki.

Because of the work I am doing I believe it is essential to reflect on how being White shapes my understanding of the counselling process. How is White privilege at work here? Māori customs, values, beliefs, and philosophies offer essential insights for my work with my clients (Drury, 2007b). How can I continue to reflect on and integrate these in the work I am doing? Similarly, how does the Treaty of Waitangi impinge on who I am as a Pākehā male? And how do the principles of protection, participation, and partnership inform the ways in which I join with Māori in building therapeutic relationships? (NZAC, 2002).

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What is the most important thing in the world? (I would say) it is people, it is people, it is people.

Join me as I explore some of my own assumptions about race and identity, and recognise how understanding where I have come from and where I am going could be a key to being able to work effectively cross-culturally as a counsellor in the present (Addy, 2008).

The “invisible elephant” in society: White privilege

Ancis and Szymanski (2001) noted that the privilege of being White is rarely critically examined and reflected on by White people. To acknowledge that, from birth, White people have certain rights that are only due to the light colour of our skin leads many

to react with feelings of defensiveness, discomfort, denial, and anger (Addy, 2008). To be White means that we often assume we speak on behalf of humanity, yet when a different race speaks they are often seen as speaking for their race or community, and not for humanity in general. An example of this would be when Don Brash, former leader of the ACT Party, spoke of one rule for all people regardless of race. Whether or not he had consulted “all” people seemed to be secondary to his assumption that he was able and entitled to speak for all. Yet when the Māori Party’s Dr Pita Sharples speaks, people tend to hear him speaking only for Māori.

The privileges of being White are said to be so ingrained in White culture that they are often invisible and unacknowledged by White people (Akamatsu, 2002). A study by Ancis and Szymanski (2001) assessing the awareness of White privilege among White counsellor trainees found that most had only a limited awareness of how being White often leads to a privileged and powerful position in society. Frequently, “whiteness is unquestioningly seen as the human norm, and race is something applied to non-white peoples” (Addy, 2008, p. 10).

When I was just beginning my role at the trust, I remember wondering at times why it seemed that I was asked a lot of questions as if I was an “expert,” when my Māori wāhine (female) colleagues had a lot of experience and knowledge on the topics they were seeking answers about from me. Could it be White privilege subtly subverting our relationships? Possibly. However, a wise Māori wahine broadened my view, perceptively noting that “Māori often engage in circular conversations as a respectful way of connecting with people and to gauge where that person is coming from...The search for information is not always about finding out the best or most expert answer but simply to see if that person can be trusted to work alongside of and to work for and with Māori.”

Two questions are worth reflecting on, however: “Can I be wrongly elevated simply due to my colour?” and “Do I contribute negatively to this myself?” I would have to say that if White privilege exists, and I believe it does, the answer to both is yes.

The ‘invisible’ elephant from Aotearoa New Zealand’s past

When we reflect on New Zealand’s colonial history, Māori have been required to fit in to White or Pākehā culture and systems in areas such as education, health care, and justice (Addy, 2008). Pākehā encouraged this one way, or “White way,” of living together that rejected Māori language, customs, and beliefs, leading to *anything* Māori being

seen as inferior to *everything* European (Consedine & Consedine, 2005, as cited in Addy, 2008). As a consequence of colonisation, Māori account for a disproportionately high number of people who are unemployed, incarcerated, and suffering from poor health (Durie, 2003; O'Connor & Macfarlane, 2002). As Durie (2003) has pointed out, Māori need to be able to live as Māori, which means access to language, tikanga (traditional customs), marae (the meeting area or focal point of whānau or iwi), land, whānau (family), and iwi (tribe), and not as Pākehā. Similarly, in a dialogue on tikanga and ethics (Lang & Katene, 2007), Kahuwaero Katene says that in “the past Maori have been encouraged to define themselves in Pakeha terms. The requirement for Maori has been to become bicultural, which has meant being bilingual at home and school, and bi-national as Aotearoa and New Zealand” (p. 38). Durie (2003) observed that after World War II, when Māori families moved from rural New Zealand into the cities in search of higher pay and subsidised housing, Māori instead became a new class of urban dwellers—poor, unhealthy, more at risk of committing crime, achieving poorer results at school, and living in substandard housing. Thus, one result of the urbanisation of Māori was the continuation of Māori being encouraged to define themselves in Pākehā terms, so that “being Māori was measured more by deficits in comparison to Pākehā middle class than by any notion of a secure Māori identity” (p. 91).

From an educational view, Drury (2007b) pointed out that he has encountered a number of Māori practitioners struggling to fit their knowledge of Māori into non-Māori paradigms learnt while studying for a qualification. Waldegrave (1998) and Drury have both ironically observed that indigenous people wanting to work in the helping professions can be required to leave their own people and values to study under people with different values in order to gain a qualification so that they can go back and work with their own people. Waldegrave has warned that this type of learning process could disable indigenous, cultural “insiders” in their work to help their own people. O'Connor and Macfarlane (2002) pointed out, however, that Māori values of respect for other ways of knowing and bridging across cultures can guide us in how to be open and respectful of difference. They identified three values:

The first of these is tika or justice, the plea for cultures to “listen” to each other and hear each other’s voices. The second is pono, which refers to affirming the integrity of traditional, as well as contemporary, knowledge. Finally there is aroha, that concept which has depth and scope in abundance, but with a central core referred to as acceptance and compassion. (p. 232)

The ‘invisible’ elephant in the counselling room

In light of what we have reflected on so far, the question becomes “How does White privilege affect the counselling process cross-culturally?” Wiggins Frame and Braun Williams (2005) point out that many counsellors and counsellor educators have underestimated the reality of White privilege in the profession, suggesting that this has resulted in unintentional racism. They observe that such counsellors and educators are “hampered by their own Eurocentric and monocultural positions” (p. 172).

One example of my being “hampered” by my Whiteness occurred during an art therapy session with one of my Māori tamariki clients. He had previously done some great art work about his heart being bigger and stronger than the monster, his anger, concluding that “his heart always wins.” In this session, however, I had invited him to draw whatever he wanted to. He liked this freedom and proceeded to draw the land, the sea, and the beach. I noticed that he had really focused in on what he was creating, so I chose to sit back and not ask any questions. After some time, he said, “Finished.” I looked at his picture and asked him if there was anything he wanted to share about it. He replied, “Nah, not really.” I remember thinking at the time that maybe he just drew nothing in particular and I questioned myself about whether I was trying to read too much into it. I decided to ask him if there were any words he would like to write down on it that described the picture. He wrote “Peaceful.” At the time I thought it was a connection to his past drawing of his heart winning and peace being restored, but there was so much more there. Now that I am aware of the strong connection of land and sea to Māori identity (Durie, 2003), I can see in hindsight that he was connecting and processing at a level I couldn’t fully appreciate due to my lack of awareness. I also missed an opportunity to assist him in strengthening and exploring his unique connection to the land and the sea, and the meanings that this peaceful place held for him, representing much more than I first thought. As Durie (2003) has reminded us, most Western counselling theories presume that insight is achieved through looking inwards and probing memories, attitudes, and thoughts, whereas Māori belief is that this is achieved by looking outwards through the relationships we have with the whānau, marae, land, and wider society.

White paua—addressing the power differential

The subtle and invisible work of White privilege, unintentional racism, and ethnocentrism can sabotage therapeutic relationships. Addy (2008) noted that when you add these elements to the position of power that a counsellor already occupies in

counselling relationships, you have a power differential that can obstruct a counsellor's ability to work effectively cross-culturally. In my work with Māori tamariki, I am sensitive to the way in which my Whiteness positions me in the eyes of the young people while we are negotiating our relationships. Their comments often reflect assumptions about socioeconomic differences: that because I am White I am rich, have had an easy life, have expensive clothes, drive nice cars, and don't go hungry.

One technique I use to try to diminish the power differential between us and challenge some of their assumptions is to hand over the question-asking to them. This process takes into consideration the notion of "time, space, boundaries and circularity to the counselling process" (Durie, 2007, p. 6). They can ask me anything they want and I will answer them. For example, a young client kept asking me what I ate, what I did at home, and how I grew up, making assumptions that I "had it sweet" by actually answering some of his questions on my behalf with the famous "I bet you had...I bet you didn't have to..." As I answered his various questions, I was aware that even though we seemed to live in different worlds—he had 15 people in his house and I have four; he babysits his cousin's kids while being a kid himself, while I am learning how to care for my wife and my new baby girl; he eats KFC every night and I haven't had it for three years (okay, one year)—many of my life experiences were similar to his. These include parents being divorced, alcohol abuse, living in state housing, feeling sad, and feeling alone.

As he asked more questions, I began to see that he was evaluating my answers in relation to his own experiences. In his own way he was applying the notion of *tapu*, or assessing risk, and whether our relationship could be *noa*, or safe, for him (Durie, 2010). Once he began to become aware that I too had parts of a story that resonated with his, he could see that he was not alone in this and that here was someone who, in some way, understood parts of his story in a way he hadn't thought possible just minutes before. In this manner, space, time, and boundaries were respectfully negotiated by each of us on our own terms. Our conversation also encouraged and respected the centrifugal direction of psychological energy by encouraging a "type of communication that alludes to but does not necessarily focus on a detailed point" (Durie, 2007, p. 6).

Paiheretia or the relational approach to counselling

A Māori-centred approach to counselling as defined by Durie (2003) puts greater importance on the relational aspect of counselling, as opposed to the focus from most

mainstream therapies on overcoming a particular problem, either behavioural or emotional, by acquiring a particular set of skills. This latter focus is seen “to be inwards and downwards, to the relative exclusion of the wider world and often with inadequate recognition of culture as a force for change” (p. 48). Paiheretia, or relational therapy, takes into account the four fields of experience: physical, social, mental, and spiritual. The focus of paiheretia is to “develop a secure cultural identity, establish balanced relationships with whanau and society, and achieve a sense of reciprocity with the wider social and physical environments” (p. 50). As Durie explained, this relational focus reflects the Māori belief that awareness, knowledge and personal understanding develop from outside the individual as opposed to from within.

Insights from the pōwhiri process

Being familiar with the pōwhiri process is fundamental for non-Māori counsellors in building relationship and enhancing the working alliance with Māori clients. The following seven steps to the pōwhiri are summarised and adapted from Drury (2007b).

Mihi: The forming of the therapeutic relationship. We discuss the reason for our meeting, focus on strengths by acknowledging the client’s mana, and attempt to have equal standing so that no one is overpowered by the other. The application of *tapu* and *noa* to the relationship negotiations begin here, either consciously or unconsciously (Durie, 2010).

Karakia: Being open to the divine. Humility by both people in the relationship fosters opportunity for both to experience a transcendence beyond their own egos and to welcome the “yet to be known” about the self and each other.

Whakapuaki: Bringing that which was not visible into a place where it can be known. The counsellor is encouraged to share his or her responses to the client’s stories, creating a relationship that fosters the possibility for each to be changed by the other.

Whakatangi: Emotional shift or expression. Through the sharing and retelling of stories by the client, and the counsellor’s own response to what has been shared, both are affected by the process and are now, in some way, different from who they were before.

Whakarata: The act of physical contact. Normally this can be through a hongi, the shaking of hands, or a kiss. With my Māori tamariki, we normally high-five.

Whakaora: Restoring wholeness, and reflecting on how new ways of being might be enacted in relationships with others and the wider community. Both the counsellor and the client can share what these changes mean for them now from their unique

perspectives. There is also an opportunity to reflect on those who have gone before us and their awareness of holistic ways of being. As O'Connor and Macfarlane (2002) observed, for “Maori, the past is inextricably woven into the present and future, and departed ancestors (tipuna) remain present in spirit (wairua) (Doig, 1989, p. 17), available to provide psychological and spiritual nurturance and guidance” (p. 225). I have often heard tamariki speak the words of beloved papas and grandmas from the past, nurturing and guiding their grandchildren in the present.

Whakaotinga: “A covenant of maintaining the new way of being beyond this powhiri” (Drury, 2007, p. 16). The concepts of mutuality and reciprocity between client and counsellor are fostered and point to the celebration of changes that have occurred. This can lead to the sharing of a meal, which I have often done with some of my Māori tamariki in our last session before the term break. We reflect on our time together, what we have learnt about ourselves, each other, and the world, and celebrate the relationship we have with each of these.

The Treaty of Waitangi and how I view myself as Pākehā

Snedden (2005) noted that it was the Māori Land Court Judge Eddie Durie who “first described Pakeha as tangata Tiriti—those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty” (p. 59). Māori, on the other hand, are tangata whenua, the original people of the land, and belong to the land because of this (Drury, 2007b). “Durie argues that as a Bill of Rights for both Maori and Pakeha, the Treaty places obligations upon both parties to form a partnership that benefits the community” (Drury, 2007b, p. 9). As Snedden (2005) rightly reminds us, it’s Pākehā’s treaty too. This is a point that I need to reflect on further as a New Zealander—that I belong to the land by right of the Treaty and that I am obligated to form a partnership with Māori that benefits the community. The NZAC *Code of Ethics* (2002) also charges counsellors with the responsibility of understanding and acting on the Treaty principles of protection, participation, and partnership with Māori. Undertaking more research and reflection on the Treaty and how I might better reflect these principles in my work as a counsellor—and as a Pākehā New Zealander in the 21st century—is part of a continual, reflexive process of exploration, reflection, understanding, and action. As Addy (2008) noted, “Culturally sensitive counsellors have a set of attitudes and beliefs that grow out of self-awareness, a sense of self as a cultural being, and insight into the dynamics of their own cultural realities” (p. 18). I agree wholeheartedly with those who argue that, similar to Māori, Pākehā need to know:

where you come from, who you belong to, what your history is, what your reflexes are, what are the ways that your family does things, how do they do death, how do they celebrate birth, how do they experience all these various things, and the particular impacts of historical events on their culture. (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 2003, p. 137, as cited in Addy, 2008, p. 18)

Self-reflective questioning may encourage practitioners to develop a “respectful curiosity and joint process of enquiry that is less likely to privilege one culture over another” (Akamatsu, 2002, p. 51). A narrative question that I have adapted from Akamatsu is “How has being a Pākehā male with blood lines from Ireland and Norfolk Island shaped me as a counsellor?” The short answer is: significantly. A few years ago my wife and I were travelling in Ireland. As we drove around the country I found that I had a strong connection to the land and to the Guinness. One experience that stands out vividly was that when we arrived at the Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland I felt as if I had been there before, even though it was my first visit. As I stood on the causeway, memories of my poppa and his family flooded my mind and entered into the present with me. I went and grabbed some flowers and did an impromptu remembrance service for my poppa, throwing the flowers into the sea and saying a prayer. My wife recorded this, and on our return to New Zealand I showed it to my gran, Poppa’s wife. Gran and I were in tears as we shared the moment together, reconnecting with the memories of my poppa who had gone before us, and the way he continues to guide us in the present by the way he lived, how he treated us, and his care for others.

Similarly, when I reflect on my connection to Norfolk Island, themes of adventure, resilience, and the Pacific way of life provide insights into my view of myself. Firstly, my gran has lovely dark skin due to her Tahitian blood. Consequently, she suffered from racism growing up. Hearing these stories has given me a heart for speaking up against injustices toward people, especially when based on colour. I also see her resilience, her love of family, the need for adventure, and a natural respect for Pacific cultures as values and principles that I live my life by now. As Lee (2006) maintains, “knowledge of oneself in relation to cultural heritage can produce a strong identification with one’s people, and helps to bring a deeper feeling of belonging and meaning in life” (as cited in Addy, 2008, p. 18). Understanding where I come from has been, and continues to be, a key factor in being able to form effective therapeutic relationships with Māori tamariki as a counsellor.

Concluding thoughts

We return then to the question at the start of this essay: *tumeke bro’?* or *too much bro’?* Is the space between the Māori tamariki I work with and myself too big to bridge? The answer lies in the relationship and that answer is no. The space between us can be the space that invites each of us toward the other when Māori worldviews, beliefs and ways of being are respected, valued and embraced, and when I know who I am—a Pākehā New Zealander who is proud of my blood lines from Ireland and Norfolk Island—and how this affects the way I relate to others different from me.

Some personal implications for professional development and further research

Marae experience—in light of this reflection I look forward to spending a night on a marae. Reading about the pōwhiri and how it can assist me in negotiating relationships is one thing; experiencing it in the context of a marae is another.

Learning te reo Māori—although the counselling sessions with my tamariki clients are in English, integrating Māori terms and images more regularly and intentionally could deepen the possibilities of relationship building through modelling a respect for the language and culture. I am not sure whether I can really say I genuinely respect Māori culture without making an effort to learn the language.

Treaty obligations and social justice—Keddell (2007) states that the Treaty of Waitangi provides a constitutional imperative for Māori values and concepts to be included within legislative frameworks. In what way can I advocate publicly for the rights of Māori tamariki and their whānau when this process seems to be ignored or overlooked? I need to reflect more on the ways in which the Treaty of Waitangi and NZAC’s commitment to partnership are expressed through my work as a counsellor with my clients and what I advocate for publicly on a national political level (Crocket, 2009; Te Wiata, Crocket, Woolf, & Mika, 2011).

Collaborative supervision—a possibility is to find a Māori advisor to spend time with who can join me in the process of careful reflection and support. Reading articles is one thing; time together talking, listening, thinking, questioning, learning, and laughing person-to-person is another.

Effective resources for evaluating counselling effectiveness designed in collaboration with Māori tamariki for Māori tamariki—Houkamau and Sibley (2010) aimed to create a culturally appropriate multidimensional model of Māori identity and cultural engagement as a therapeutic tool, because of the need they saw for “more detailed empirical research and theory on Maori identity” (p. 23). Drury’s (2007a) Kaupapa

Outcome Rating Scale, which monitors client progress and the alliance from the view of the client, is another tool that has proven successful. Further research and collaboration with Māori tamariki on adapting these for use with Māori children could be of value. Similarly, the development of session outcome scales and tools that are designed by Māori young people based on their understanding of the counselling process is worth exploring. This is a conversation I am starting with the tamariki I see at present.

After all, who is the counselling for? It is not for us. And shouldn't our clients have a sense of control over what their therapeutic pathway might look like? I for one say yes, and so do the tamariki I ask when they are given a voice.

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