

Māori graduate students' hopes, reflections and recommendations for psychology in Aotearoa

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Finley Ngarangi Johnson (Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga) is a PhD student in the Te Herenga Waka's (Victoria University of Wellington) Kura Mātai Hinengaro (School of Psychology). Supervised by Professor Paul Jose, Associate Professor Priscilla Wehi and Dr Tia Neha, his thesis explores Māori wellbeing through the development of a psychometric scale. Passionate about research and teaching in the interface between Mātauranga Māori and Science, Fin is pursuing a career in academia and aims to grow Māori capacities through education.



Annalisa Strauss-Hughes is a PhD candidate and clinical psychology student at Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington. Annalisa's whakapapa is unknown as a result of whāngai and whānau disconnection, which heavily drives her interest in understanding the impact of historical and sociocultural factors on individual health and wellbeing. Her mahi rangahau is supervised by Prof. Tony Ward and Dr. Tia Neha. Annalisa is particularly passionate about working at the interface between Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Pākehā and what the lessons learnt here can mean for all peoples, but especially those who come from similarly disconnected backgrounds.



Ririwai Fox (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Ngāti Porou) is a PhD candidate and clinical psychology student at Te Herenga Waka (Victoria University of Wellington). His thesis introduces the concept of Māori cultural embeddedness - the integration of cultural values, beliefs, and practises into general behaviour and identity. He is developing a measure of cultural embeddedness and is supervised by Professor Paul Jose and Dr. Tia Neha. He is passionate about the interface between mātauranga Māori, Psychology, and wellbeing, having been educated through Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa before moving to mainstream secondary and tertiary education



Carrie Clifford (Waitaha, Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe) is a Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar, currently completing her Doctorate in Psychology (University of Otago) and clinical psychology training (Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington). Carrie is passionate about ensuring that the psychology workforce and the broader discipline of psychology reflect the needs, hopes and values of Māori communities'. Driven to recognise and revitalize Māori intergenerational healing practises, Carrie's PhD explores the use of pūrākau in mental health settings in Aotearoa.

This paper explores Māori students' experiences and reflections studying psychology in Aotearoa. In documenting their experiences as young scholars, the authors and their respective narratives both challenge and provide hope for the future field of psychology. This article aims to validate and inspire other taurira Māori while providing valuable insights for non-Māori through the authors' lived experiences. This article concludes by summarising key themes shared across and within the kōrero and provides clear recommendations for enacting positive change. These recommendations are not exhaustive and included are several reading recommendations to facilitate meaningful understanding and action.

Fin

Describe your experience studying psychology as a Māori student and your hopes for those following in your footsteps.

I started studying psychology in response to seeing my own whanaunga struggle with mental health issues and the desperate need for more Māori in the field of psychology. Majoring in Māori Resource Management alongside Psychology was key to how I came to understand and engage with psychology. Papers on Māori Science and Indigenous Knowledge championed Indigenous ways of knowing and Cross-Cultural Psychology classes further challenged the dominant Western psychological paradigm. This opened my eyes to kaupapa Māori research and nurtured a more critical lens in which to view psychology. I hope future taurira Māori can also engage with these more critical and culture-focused areas of psychology that highlight the Eurocentric biases in the psychological literature

and further promote research that empowers and gives voice to marginalised communities.

Throughout my study, the warm, whānau-oriented Māori classes were a stark contrast to the individualistic and competitive psychology environment. I remember being specifically disappointed leaving an enriching Te Reo class where we discussed the atua and wairua to attend a lecture that pathologised paranormal beliefs. It was disappointing to see key cultural beliefs being reduced to hallucinations and delusions. At that moment I understood why I didn't see more Māori faces in the lecture theatre. I later met taurira Māori from other universities who had similar uncomfortable experiences in studying psychology. This demonstrates the importance of Māori involvement and oversight in the development of the Aotearoa psychology curriculum. We need psychology to be taught in a culturally safe way that respects our unique local context and is ultimately predicated on Te Tiriti.

I am extremely privileged to be in a position to pursue doctoral study and being Māori, I feel compelled to use this privilege to serve and empower my community. Further, I am blessed to have two pou rangahau in my supervision team to ground and guide the tikanga and kaupapa Māori aspects of my research. I would not feel safe conducting my research into Māori wellbeing without my pou rangahau as they provide a priceless level of cultural security and support. Due to the underrepresentation of Māori academic staff in Aotearoa's psychology departments, it saddens me to know that this same support and supervision is not available to all taurira Māori. I hope there comes a day when Māori psychology

students can have the option to conduct research relevant to Māori with the confidence that comes with appropriate guidance from a Māori supervisor.

Annalisa

Describe some of the challenges that you have faced as a taurira Māori and some of your hopes for the future workforce.

Being a taurira Māori in a Western academic setting is a multi-faceted experience. My particular position as someone who cannot show their whakapapa - although not an uncommon one - is accompanied by lots of feelings of inauthenticity and has a deeply significant impact on my work and wellbeing. What I often find especially difficult is explaining this position to those who take a more biological-genealogical perspective of whakapapa. This is complex and intersects with other experiences, particularly the many common scenarios for taurira which result in a significant sense of disempowerment (such as being treated as unpaid experts and having to play the perpetual 'bad guys' when identifying individual and systemic discrimination and inequality). On the other hand, if I had not pursued this pathway, there are so many things I would have missed out on learning about which have greatly enriched my wellbeing and knowledge of myself. Working with my awesome supervisors on a project that seeks to weave together Western scientific and Indigenous epistemologies is empowering as it is not just an academic enterprise but something that teaches me how to best understand and care for myself and my community. Especially impactful and awe-inducing has been connecting with other taurira Māori, who are truly some of the most inspiring learners and teachers I have ever seen.

My hopes for the future of the psychology workforce are manifold. The ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma cannot be overstated, which is no less true for taurira (and we remain among the privileged who are able to access this level of training and study). I feel very strongly that the solutions lie in Indigenous empowerment and self-determination, the right and the resources to utilise our own knowledge systems, and the active and meaningful commitment of our Tiriti partners to this relationship between our peoples. Not only do we need better representation of Māori (and the diversity that characterises tāngata Māori) in psychological research and practice, but also better representation of our own systems of governance and knowledge in addressing the multi-faceted domain of mental health/behavioural issues. Part of this is the necessity of non-Māori allies who are willing to take on the risks that are associated with disrupting systemic and intergenerational racism. There is much rich potential available to us if real biculturalism can be achieved, where there is equity across the autonomy and resources of each cultural partner.

Ririwai

How would increasing the number of Māori staff members in Psychology departments support Māori graduate research and wellbeing?

Being a Māori graduate student in Psychology is both empowering and overwhelming. Empowering because I have the privilege of representing my whānau and hapū through educational success and because I can bring Māori perspectives to the academic forum; but overwhelming because of the significant pressures that come with being a Māori graduate student. When there are

little to no Māori staff in psychology departments, the burden of cultural issues can often sit squarely on Māori graduate students.

As a social science, it seems intuitive to me that psychological research can benefit greatly from the mātauranga of a culture that is grounded in relationships. However, in order to receive these benefits, it is imperative that psychology departments are drawing on the expertise of senior Māori researchers who have roots in kaupapa Māori methodology. Having senior Māori academic staff is also important for nurturing a groundswell of research by Māori postgraduate and postdoctoral scholars. As a postgraduate Māori student, it is important to me to have a tuakana who can guide me through the academic process.

My own research seeks to incorporate Māori cultural values, beliefs, and practises into our scientific understanding of behaviour. There is a very real risk that, without appropriate guidance, these concepts become diluted or appropriated. I have many support networks within my whānau, hapū, and iwi, but having a supervisor who can provide guidance through the academic process and who also understands how to navigate the issues that are pertinent to Māori is critical. An example of such is how to appropriately incorporate mātauranga Māori into psychological research.

Although there is still a lack of Māori staff in Psychology departments across Aotearoa, I have noticed an increasing support for Māori research, as well as attempts by non-Māori to increase their cultural capability. I applaud and appreciate all of these efforts, but especially the efforts of people in positions of authority within

academia. Seeing these efforts fills me with hope for the future – one where Māori worldviews are understood, appreciated, and integrated where appropriate. Having grown up in overtly discriminatory communities and environments, I am pleased when I see positive changes in society, big or small, towards the true collaboration

Carrie

What are your hopes for Psychology in Aotearoa?

Having learned the stories of my tipuna and personally experienced how they provided me with strength, belonging, and purpose as a young wāhine Māori, I knew I wanted to bring Māori intergenerational storytelling practices into my own clinical work and provide this for others, in the same way, our tipuna would use storytelling to promote many aspects of wellbeing and respond to those experiencing difficulties. This desire led to my PhD exploring the use of Māori storytelling practices in mental health settings in Aotearoa.

While I have hugely enjoyed my PhD research, in pursuing this Māori-centered kaupapa, there were several challenges; there was limited research to work from, and little of my earlier psychology education helped prepare me - having never sat in a class that discussed Māori ethics, research methodologies, or hauora Māori. Nevertheless, like many Māori academics, these experiences (or lack of) drive me to create space for others and build a strong foundation for further mahi.

My hope for psychology in Aotearoa is that it honours tangata whenua, our language, culture, and worldviews, and increases the visibility of and access to Māori healing practices. Much knowledge and wisdom lie within mātauranga

Māori and recognising Mātauranga Māori has the capacity to enhance and advance the discipline of psychology. It is essential we move away from the deficit framing and “othering” of Māori in research, teaching, and practice. Te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori need to be genuinely valued and considered more than an “add on” - cultural tailoring in efforts to meet cultural responsibility - and instead embraced as an integral part of psychology in Aotearoa. Looking at the inclusion of Eastern mindfulness practices, we can see the knowledge and huge potential benefit that lies outside of Western psychology’s current parameters. Moreover, we can also see the limitations of extracting knowledge and practices from one culture without fully appreciating and incorporating broader values and worldview. However, there are several barriers to achieving this, in particular, Māori only make up around 5% of all academics and psychologists, and the psychology curriculum in Aotearoa continues to reflect overseas peoples, research, and knowledge systems (Ruru & Nikora, 2021).

Moving forward, I am excited to draw upon my Western clinical psychology training and Te Ao Māori to develop the discipline of psychology further and contribute to the hauora of all. I encourage others to consider how they can do the same.

Synthesis

From the above narratives there are several recurring themes and ideas from each person’s korero which highlight challenges, barriers, opportunities and hopes for the discipline of psychology. Considering these narratives alongside existing research and

legislation, we make the following recommendations to achieve the hopes identified in this article.

- **Increase the hiring and retention of Māori staff:**

It is paramount that psychology departments employ more Māori academic staff. Senior Māori academics are especially important in their capacity to nurture and mentor junior Māori academics, further supervise postgraduate Māori students and provide leadership in the department. This requires a dramatic increase in the enrolment, retention and growing of Māori students from undergraduate studies into senior academic positions.

- **Establish a bi-cultural curriculum and review training programmes:**

It is critical that all those engaging with psychology in Aotearoa understand Te Tiriti o Waitangi and their responsibility to the biculturalism relationship - which does not solely sit with Māori to uphold. As such, the course material that both Māori and non-Māori students engage with should prepare every student to become a part of the local workforce and reflect everyone’s responsibility to Te Tiriti of Waitangi. This requires meaningful integration of a Māori lens across learning outcomes and course content, rather than singular Māori classes.

- **Increased visibility and respect for Mātauranga Māori:**

There needs to be a greater respect for and visibility of Māori language, history, culture and worldviews in Aotearoa’s psychology curriculum. Mātauranga Māori is a complex and extensive knowledge system that spans a range of important domains and is legitimate in its own right. We believe that psychological research,

practice and understanding can be greatly enhanced through aligning and cooperating with Indigenous knowledge systems like Mātauranga Māori. We believe that further education in Mātauranga Māori will nurture a greater respect and appreciation among Psychologists.

- **Safe spaces:**

More spaces need to be put aside for Māori within psychology departments to further foster tūrangawaewae, whakawhanaungatanga and tuakana-teina relationships. These spaces provide Māori students and staff with a place to be Māori and develop Māori research and practise. Above all else, these spaces are crucial for providing Māori an area to express Māoritanga in the often isolating, sterile and segregated psychology departments.

- **Māori workforce development - Meeting the unique needs of Māori tauira:**

Māori students often utilise different research methods, face additional ethical considerations and carry extra expectations of fulfilling leadership and supervisory roles in the department. This often results in tauira Māori having a greater workload than their non-Māori peers and therefore need to be supported with opportunities for extra development and training. This is inclusive of community, cultural and academic events that foster the growth required to complete their research and fill the roles they are being hired for.

There is no single solution. The recommendations outlined above are among many steps critical to fostering Māori psychology and the revitalisation and understanding of Mātauranga Māori and Te Ao Māori. The implementation of these

key points is vital to the development of both the Māori and Pākehā psychologist workforce, ultimately leading to a more equitable future for all who live in Aotearoa. Equity is the only acceptable outcome and until it is achieved, ka whawhai tonu mātou mō te āke, āke, āke - we will fight on for ever and ever.

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