The multiple selves and realities of a Māori researcher

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Abstract: Research methodology texts often start with an anecdote about the 'bumpy road' to research insight. Linda Smith (2005) posits that indigenous researchers engage in "research in [...] a time of uncertainty, and in an era when knowledge as power is re-inscribed through its value as a commodity in the global market place, this presents tricky ground for researchers" (p.102). Smith further refers to this tricky ground as a space of marginalisation that can also become a space of resistance and hope. It is nothing new that Māori engaging in an academic career in a mainstream university face numerous compromises necessary in order to succeed (Irwin, 1997; Johnston, 2001; L. Smith, 1993). This paper contributes to these themes as a personal reflection on the discontinuities, contradictions and disruptions of identity that occur as an emerging Māori researcher in a mainstream university setting. By openly reflecting on the complexities impacting my research, and through sharing my inter-subjectivities and personal observations, I hope this paper goes some way towards validating the naturalness of transitional and intellectual spaces of uncertainty, encouraging other new researchers to engage in interrogating these uncomfortable positions, creating new spaces and imagining future possibilities.

Keywords: Identity; Māori; research; self-reflection.

Ideologies of authenticity: the imagined and the real

Identity, both at the individual and collective level, is dynamic and fluid. Our identities are shaped by the contexts in which we live and people with whom we interact. All of us have a multiplicity of identities, which under most circumstances rest layer upon layer, overlapping and contoured around each other (McIntosh, 2005). I am a Māori researcher, a social psychologist who has spent the last seven years working in teacher education. My, mostly qualitative, educational research aims to better understand the ways in which ethnic identity development is impacted in school contexts. However, I am also a teacher, mother, daughter, lecturer, language learner, and PhD student. In the domain of my work and career it seems there are implicit challenges to my right to claim ownership of some of these identities. My role as a young emerging Māori researcher is complex, challenging and often fraught.

In the New Zealand context, to declare Māori identity is to take part in a particular process of claims-making. To be Māori is to be part of a collective but heterogeneous identity, one that is enduring but ever in a state of flux (McIntosh, 2005). The term 'Māori' is not a word Māori have traditionally used to describe themselves. Māori generally describe themselves according to their tribal membership, rather than their national membership. They are Māori only in relation to Pākehā (NZ European). Therefore, Māori and Pākehā identities are products of relationality and social and political struggle. This struggle continues to shape where Māori live, whom Māori interact with, and how Māori understand themselves (and others). It does so in specific, and sometimes harmful, ways based on social and historical location.

Thus, Māori identity reflects the subjective outcomes of political consciousness *and* choice, the objective reality of biological *and* cultural origin, and structural constraints that condition the opportunities to access and express identity (Kukutai, 2006). Historically, Māori identity has been

a contested concept, and has been as much about determining rights and privileges, as it has about drawing clearly defined boundaries about who can, and cannot, claim this identity. Partly because of this, the discourse over defining who Māori are has rarely been a neutral site, but one where individual and group rights have been, and continue to be, vigorously debated and contested.

Therefore, useful research should recognise the diversity of the Māori experience, refuting the tendency within NZ society (including within institutions) to refer to Māori as if they constitute a homogenous group. The high degree of cultural, social, linguistic and physical difference that characterise Māori peoples should be emphasised because there has historically been a tendency to emphasise what Jennett & Stewart (1987) call, “the tribal (traditional) versus non-tribal (non-traditional) polarity, to argue that urbanised and non-tribal Māori are not representative of traditional Māori” (p.70).

A dilemma I face in my current role as a lecturer, PhD student and emerging researcher is determining what role my being Māori will play in that journey. For me, and those family, friends and colleagues who know me, being Māori is without question an inseparable part of who I am, how I operate and why I persist. They know and trust the intentions of my research and work. For some of my other colleagues and academic contemporaries, my being Māori is seen as a privilege, a bonus, a step up that makes my journey easier than theirs. For some others still, my claim to being Māori is a right that has to be earned, proven and authenticated via my adherence to prescriptive ideologies and demonstration of the ‘right ‘Discourse’ (Gee, 1996). These dichotomies are both internal and external to *te ao Māori* and constrain my work as a Māori researcher.

James Gee notes that “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles of specific *groups of people* . . . They are always and everywhere *social* ” (1996, p. xix). Therefore, if discourses are viewed as forms of social practice which are intimately tied to the cultural affiliations of groups of people, a person’s adoption and use of particular discourses would signify his or her alignment with or membership in particular groups. Hence, discourses are group-specific and, in Māori communities where the distribution of privileges is exercised through group differentiation and social hierarchy, the discourse practices of diverse groups can stand in conflict with one another. This conflict is exacerbated by the perceived opportunities those in the in-group might have access to, as opposed to the access offered to those who exist on the peripheries of the these groups. These intercultural insider/outsider boundaries are not challenged often enough. Gate-keeping regarding what is deemed as ‘appropriate discourse’ inside and outside of Māori research communities can mean that access becomes elusive and opportunities restricted. What makes one Māori is never clear-cut and, like culture, it is dynamic, contextual, and situational. That is, one can know the rules in one context but not in another. In the face of changing situations and contexts, how does he or she ‘get it right’ all the time? There are multiple roles and statuses that we all occupy, and what might privilege us in one context may be used to marginalise us in another.

Making space for contradictions, complexities and conundrums

Writing and research is never innocent. Indeed we have to consider how, in describing what we see in an ‘objective way’, we are already locked into frameworks of cultural understandings which can inevitably be critically assessed in terms of their political contours and interests. The idea and act of observing, and thus researching people’s experiences, is fraught with complexity. Institutional protocols and guidelines for working with indigenous communities can help, as can

guidelines from within te āo Māori. However any complexities that impact on research, the researcher and/or the researched, need to be emphasised and explored as a means of making explicit the borders that exist within borders. Our work as Māori researchers can be constrained in multiple ways, particularly in a time when the academy is driven by a research output paradigm. Requests to seek institution-based Māori approval for research within our own communities can be demoralising and at times culturally inappropriate. However, we are often bound to the institution's ethics approval processes as a vehicle for having our research supported. In addition to negotiating an often competitive and unstable research pathway, the teaching workload associated with being one of few Māori academics in the 'mainstream' university programmes can be exhausting. However, students of all ethnicities need to see Māori teaching and researching in a diverse number of courses and academic subjects. We need to recognise these complex transitional spaces as valid spaces to occupy as a researcher and/or teacher. Like Selby (2004) I believe there is no seamless fit of researcher to researched. It is an achievement involving emotional life, the researchers' subjectivities as ever present, and should also be recognised as crucial in the development of ideas. Our writings and visions are never politically neutral.

Linda Smith (2005) continues to encourage indigenous scholars and researchers to talk openly about indigenous research, protocols and methodologies. She further asks us to ask and seek answers to our own concerns from within our own communities. In light of this request, I wish to make clear that I am an indigenous researcher who struggles to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research in my academic institution and the realities I encounter amongst my own research communities. The importance of my research within the Western academy often seems minimised because I teach and research in a tertiary institution which seems very intent on making exotic what I do by insisting on the use of an essentialised and prescriptive 'Māori research methodology'. The crux of my problem lies in the critical disjunctures between Māori determined standards of ethical, reciprocal and beneficial research practice and Western institutional frameworks that aim to standardise, guide and enforce their version of rigorous Māori research practice. I suspect that this, in part, justifies their approval regarding the 'ethnic nature' of the research. In some ways it seems like a post-script to why the research has been funded, or approved. I wonder if it is a kind of safety mechanism, a justification for the institution's approval of research that proceeds without the absolute adherence to set methods often used to satisfy western scientific notions of rigor, validity and reliability. Said (1979) has long commented on this orientalist positioning, stating that exoticising our work allows colleagues to feel they are supporting 'the other', but ironically provides an excuse for later dismissing the validity of our work. There is an urgent need for further cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary dialogue where multiple ways of knowing and being are emphasised. Andreotti (In press) states such dialogue requires an acknowledgement that all perspectives are socially and historically constructed and, therefore, partial and situated, but also contingent and provisional.

Kaupapa Māori theory (G. Smith, 1997) continues to be a useful and appropriate guide for research in and with Māori communities. Its conceptual framework reflects the point in time in which it was theorised and written, and the goodness in its intentions. Like any theory or ideology, kaupapa Māori can be liberating and it can be constricting. But it is also important to gauge whether the institution's interpretation, and subsequent standardisation, of the kaupapa Māori approach and its conventions, is being used in a manner that is prescriptive about 'real' Māori research practices. It all depends on the circumstance and who is involved. In the hands of some, it does, in others, perhaps not. According to Williams (2006) there are always constraints in any system or structure and whilst these constraints set limits for action and define what cannot be done, they also set degrees of freedom for action. If the goals of kaupapa Māori are to continue to be realised, the time has come for us to act, rethink and revise the ways we actualise our

commitment to this challenge. We need to be developing internal critiques and strengthening some of our ideas in order for Māori research practices to not remain entirely closed and static. The Māori subject is ever-changing and through a process of cultural ecology, all people's create new realities, new knowledges and new cultural journeys. If Māori research were truly open to critique, questions, negotiation, trial, error and change – internally as well as externally - the question would be, then, not how to arrive, but how to journey. In what ways might we move kaupapa Māori forward in terms of the ways we operationalise its principles? The first step might be to take a risk and share our questions and concerns regarding the development of Māori-centered methodologies, the ways in which we address Māori research priorities, and indeed, the contradictions inherent in unraveling our Māori research conundrums (Eketone, 2008; Mahuika, 2008). I acknowledge the courage required to do this.

However, in sharing our research stories and methodologies, we validate the processes we have been through and ensure our research activities remain context relevant, ethical and beneficial. Through articulating what it is we do when we engage in research as Māori people, we demystify the research process and subsequently reinforce the importance of methodological evolvement. There are already a number of Māori academics and researchers like me, and unlike me, who have openly shared their research stories. One example of a Māori research methodology is that developed by Māori academic Jenny Bol Jun Lee. It is termed 'purakau' and is a culturally responsive approach to narrative inquiry. According to Lee, purakau are Māori oral literatures or stories that preserve Māori knowledge and world views, and their narrative forms (Lee, 2003). Another is a research model developed by Martin, McMurchy-Pilkington, Tamati, Martin, & Dale (2003) termed "Tūtahi Tonutanga". This Māori research approach was developed to enable all participants within Te Puna Wānanga (Auckland College of Education's Māori Department) to locate themselves within a Māori context, specifically the carved house at The Auckland College of Education. Their specific research ethics of care, conditions of conduct and methodological procedures were based on the customs of this particular carved house. According to the authors, this evolving model of research methodology is based on Māori worldview and Tutahi Tonu ways of knowing and doing, incorporating what Baker (2001) calls "propositions rather than prescriptions; insights rather than edicts" (p.132). More recently in this particular journal, Māori scientist Melanie Cheung (2008) has described the complementarity of having both Māori and Western scientific worldviews to draw on, and advocates reveling in the diversity and richness those two different worldviews bring. She also however, acknowledges the parallels and paradoxes of occupying a space inside of, and in between, these two worldviews.

All theories and methodologies need to evolve, to ensure they address the changing time, space and cultural contexts. Thus, further revisions of how research might proceed - for, with and by Māori - need to be embraced. Not as a further means of brokering what Māori research is, or who a Māori researcher is, but rather to re- focus on research intention or motive. I suggest that we celebrate the different ways we can work within, and outside of, our communities of interest whilst being true to our own developing and situational 'native theories' about how research proceeds. The key is the research intention, context and the cultural capital of those being researched. Like Raumati Hook (2008) I believe that in any research project with, for and about Māori peoples, the most important issue is the preservation of *mana* (status), both theirs and yours. Any act that diminishes a person is inappropriate. A key question to challenge ourselves with is: What is the purpose of the research and in what ways will it contribute to Māori development? We need to write, publish and constructively critique our narratives, research protocols and methodologies so that emerging researchers, and those embarking on research with Māori communities, see multiple ways of operating as valid. Then, and only then, will research truly reflect the multiplicity of the Māori experience.

Networks: insider, outsider, inside out?

The tension between the ways that identity is defined by members of the community and the ways that identity is discussed by the academy are like night and day. Māori people – both those who are like me and those who are very different from me – hold views based on traits that are established informally and vary depending on with whom they interact and with whom they place legitimacy and importance. Essentialised ways of viewing groups fail to recognise differences among groups and are limited by a belief that individuals from certain ethnic, gender, sexual preference, or economic class groups hold identical or even similar views, ideas, or behaviours. There is an ongoing need to challenge the continuing development of hegemonic orthodoxies within 'Māori research', grounded in essentialist notions of 'Māoriness'. Inquiry and open critique should not be seen as threatening, disrespectful or controversial, but rather a challenge to that orthodoxy and the *orthodox*. It is imperative that we guard against Māori essentialism, or else we confine so many Māori to silence and simply visit upon other Māori another form of disempowerment.

I work with a complex intercultural space, constantly reflecting on the dual and conflicting nature of being an emerging Māori researcher in a research driven academic institution. Whilst 'being Māori' is not the totality of my identity or research capabilities, I am pigeon-holed by the university as just that - 'a Māori researcher'. What does this mean? Will it benefit the 'currency' of my research career by privileging me insider access to research grants or ministry funding associated with 'being' Māori? At the same time will it disadvantage my opportunities to diversify my research scope by reducing the 'currency' of my research to Māori research only? Like many others I belong to more than one social category and cultural group, but they are often in conflict with one another. This divergence has created a need to constantly negotiate between my academic and cultural discourses and the discourses that signify ties to those I research with, in my various communities of practice. Like many of you, my cultural, academic and social networks and identities transcend the totalising concept of being only a 'Māori researcher'.

He whakaaro whakamutunga
(Some final thoughts)

In this paper I have raised slippery and problematic issues in the hope of demonstrating that academics, and the institutions they work within, become more specific about seeing the differences among Māori peoples and their world-views. We must recognise the disparities between our theories, and the real lives of those we study. It is time to acknowledge, reflect upon and re-examine the forces that have led us to differentiate among ourselves in such specific and potentially destructive ways. Thus, this paper has sought to highlight some of the struggles and contradictions involved with being a Māori person, indeed an indigenous person, who is also a researcher. To the uninitiated, being both may not appear to be a dilemma. For me however, being both Māori and an academic is fraught with difficulties and costs, for I am constantly aware of the ways that I am being positioned by those with whom I interact as a researcher as well as those I interact with as a Māori, and the differences between the two. This positioning becomes extremely complicated when both my researcher and Māori identities must be simultaneously fore-grounded. I have also challenged some of the prevailing ideologies of authenticity - the ways that individuals are defined and assessed by others within particular contexts and situations. First and foremost, I question claims that authenticity is derived from specific, static qualities which one *must* have in order to be a *real Māori*. In so doing, I also raise questions about what it means to be described as *real* as well as who has the right to define authenticity or realness.

These academic ponderings are the beginning of a new research journey that celebrates my multiple-subject positioning. I choose not to obscure that I utilise different forms of cultural connections to serve specific needs or purposes. Said (1993) has long argued that the hybridisation of cultural identity, and the syncretic perspective that arises from it, can constitute a new space where it is necessary "to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover a *third* nature" wherein resides the potential for better understanding one's experiences (p. 226). In the same vein, Bhabha (1994) reacts against the polarisation and simplification of culture and instead uses the metaphor of "a third space" to signify a new frame of reference and process of signification that occurs *in between* cultures as a result of contact and the clash of difference.

Discursive dialogue should enable all members to represent who they are however they want, allow equal access to the floor, permit all to express any opinion and allow any view to be criticised without prejudice. Habermas (1970) calls these conditions of absolute freedom, truth, and justice. However, these situations can also be distorted by asymmetries in power, status, or the capacity for self-expression. Bhabha (1994) calls this an 'un-homely' moment – a moment that provides us with the sense of discomfort of being in-between, of loss, of 'floundering in un-chartered seas' – revealing the notion that you can never again see yourself as of only one coherent community or identity. There are borders within borders within borders - a clash of voices', which results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. This then creates borderlands, that are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where different peoples occupy the same territory and the space between shrinks into intimacy (p. iv). In terms of my claim to being Māori, a Māori researcher, a researcher – I exist in these borderlands. At times it can be a very un-homely place. However, it is where I reside.

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