

Armon Tamatea is a psychologist with Psychological Service, Department of Corrections. This paper was initially written in response to a number of issues and discussions regarding Maori psychology and science that arose in the course of the Annual Conference in Dunedin 2005. Since then, the paper has undergone a number of revisions and expansions, but has been submitted here in a shorter and hopefully more readable form. The author wishes to acknowledge those individuals who participated in the initial and ongoing talks and encouraging the publication of these ideas.

ON THE LEGITIMACY OF A MAORI PSYCHOLOGY

*"Not only darkness is known through light, but that, conversely, light is known through darkness".
(C.G. Jung, Aion, 1951)*

The emerging presence of Maori academics involved in the field of psychology, the nature of psychological research as applied to Maori persons, and Maori researchers engaged in psychological research suggests that some Maori have ascribed value to insights afforded by predominantly Western psychological models. Furthermore, attempts are being made to inform the general discipline of psychology (at least as practiced in New Zealand) with Maori-based approaches. General developments in New Zealand-based psychological research reveal work of emerging importance to Maori (eg health-promoting behaviour and smoking). Given that Maori are currently engaged in the task of doing psychology and that Maori communities are benefiting from psychology as *applied to* Maori, a question remains: Is there a Maori psychology?

'Psychology' denotes certain things. For the sake of argument, I'll consider the term in its simplest form, namely, the science of behaviour. Even here it is assumed that psychology in its broadest sense is considered to be a scientific discipline that rests on a legacy of established rules and conventions much like any other discipline. Although the term 'Psychology' is relatively new, conceptions of behaviour are not. Various efforts have been attempted through the ages (and across peoples and cultures) to engage with behavioural phenomena in ways that make sense. The last 100-years, for instance, witnessed the proliferation and decline of a number of significant movements across Europe and the United States that exhibited considerably diverse theoretical foundations and premises such as psychoanalysis and radical behaviourism. However, despite the differences of these movements and their context within the prevailing paradigm, they share critical scientific elements such as description, function and regularity of behaviour, inferring personality structure, consistency, accuracy in developing relationships between known phenomena and objective evaluation. If we accept the general field of psychology as a science, what then, is 'science'?

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I submit that 'science', at its most basic, may be considered as consisting of the methods and outcomes generated within an identified scientific community with the aim of explanation and prediction in an effort to provide an account of the natural world. If this is the case, should those investigative endeavours that fall outside of the conventions set down by this community be excluded? In other words, if psychology is considered to be acceptable as a scientific discipline (provided the research practices are deemed acceptable by the principles of this community) then should all other efforts that don't conform to the rules of the scientific community be considered as 'non-science' (and subsequently, non-psychological)? Furthermore, can there be a uniquely Maori psychology that is based on the governing principles of a scientific community? And if not, would it be better to call a Maori science of behaviour something else?

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In my view, this begs the wider question of the nature of Maori science. Is there a tradition of knowledge-generation that is uniquely Maori? Historical data reveal pre-colonial innovations in, amongst other things, medicine, agriculture, navigation, and construction (Owens, 1992; Durie, 1998). These findings indicate *outcomes* and *products* (i.e., technology) that provide evidence of scientific investigations. However, what would be of interest would be to explore traditional *Maori processes of discovery* and the logic behind these processes. Given the evidence in favour of a Maori scientific tradition or traditions that have served and assisted the survival and wellbeing of our ancestral communities with regard to health, food-technology and engineering, is it fair to assume that there is also a parallel science of behaviour that concerned itself with social behaviour, intrapersonal phenomena, learning, and other major domains that are comparable to the Western discipline of psychology?

If we consider that there is an identifiable body of thought that we can regard as Maori science, then we are left with two major positions: 1) that there is a Maori psychology; or, 2) there is not. Let's take each in turn. A uniquely Maori psychology would exist in the context of a Maori scientific tradition within the parameters derived from scientific endeavours. Such processes of discovery would be defined by prevailing values (eg observation, explanation of the natural/social world, and necessity). Outcomes of these efforts would most likely have been refined via further experimentation, improvisation and communication (eg wananga), or perhaps more importantly, critical evaluation. As such, the process would most likely have served as a means of approximating relevant and necessary truths.

If we accept that there is an identified Maori psychology, what are the implications? First, as with other identified 'indigenous psychologies' (Adair, 1999), a Maori psychology can inform mainstream approaches to the field and serve to address the needs of communities with non-western interests (Poortinga, 1998); secondly, a Maori psychology can also address inherently ethnocentric biases in the field and inform potentially misleading research; and thirdly, a Maori psychology can inform culturally-appropriate research and practice that reflects the specific needs and interests of those communities. However, although one can attempt to distil or understand other peoples in terms of a common social-cognitive system, conceptual obstacles inherent in linguistic differences abound. In particular, problems of translating concepts not necessarily governed by traditional notions of Western logic or realism into a verbal idiom (ie much like trying to verbally describe the experience of a particularly weird dream). That is, phenomena that are neither 'seen' nor 'heard' but rather 'experienced' (e.g., wairua). In addition, Adair (1999) discusses the issues of demarcating indigenous 'psychologies' from indigenous 'contributions'. That is, discriminating indigenous psychology from 'indigenised' psychology.

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Now, let's assume the alternative idea that there is no unique Maori science of behaviour, but instead, a uniquely Maori perspective on behaviour, but not one that is subject to the conventions or rigours of an acknowledged scientific tradition (indigenous or otherwise). The value of a Maori 'non-psychology' would add value to aspects of mainstream psychology and help to generate unique approaches to solving problems, for instance, linear versus non-linear models of explanation (eg Durie, 2001). However, if we suppose that a Maori non-psychology does not share the same values of science, and is considered to not be understandable (and, by extension, not open to challenge or criticism), or even at risk of becoming 'colonised' by non-Maori researchers, then who would be the custodians or *Kaitiaki* (or gatekeepers) of this knowledge? Would a Maori non-psychology only be adequately established and understood by those on the 'inside'? Who decides? A danger with this approach is that progress would be a matter of 'mob psychology' (Chalmers, 1982), conditional on the number, faith and vocal support of its adherents - a cult of Maori science? Is there a danger of Maori psychology defining itself in opposition to established practice in an effort to create an identity with little or no acknowledgement of similarities with mainstream psychology?

In summary, having posed questions of Maori science in general, and Maori psychology in particular, as well as some possible implications with regard to the development of this knowledge, other questions beyond the scope of this communication arise: What agendas need to be advanced? Who should be responsible

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for continual development? Is this an avenue that is open to anyone? And who decides? If any overarching goal or ideal is for certain, then surely it is at the very least the enrichment of the field.

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