

# “There’s no cloud of shame on me”: Māori men’s experiences of prison-based psychological rehabilitation - Part II

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Damian Terrill and Neville Robertson explore the role of bi-cultural practice in the delivery of psychological treatment within a New Zealand correctional setting.

## Abstract

*Bi-cultural practice is of paramount importance for New Zealand-based practitioners. In Part I, we presented an overview of the circumstances surrounding bi-cultural practice in the broader context of colonisation and correctional policy. We briefly reviewed some of the literature which currently informs treatment approaches within prisons. We identified an over-reliance on quantitative research and a lack of studies of Māori men’s lived experience of treatment regimes. In Part II we make a modest effort to address this lack by presenting a study of three Māori men who underwent the Special Treatment Unit – Rehabilitation Programme (STU-RP) in a New Zealand prison. Bi-cultural practice was of particular importance to these men. Amongst their many reflections, they explained how a specific bi-cultural therapy intervention played a prominent part in each of their treatment experiences, most notably in the development of a robust therapeutic alliance. We follow this up by drawing upon our collective encounters as Pākehā (New Zealand European and first generation European immigrants respectively) working in bi-cultural settings to outline some considerations which may assist other practitioners in reflecting upon and developing their own bi-cultural awareness.*

*Keywords: prison; rehabilitation; colonisation; bi-culturalism; Māori; qualitative.*

In part I, we reviewed the context surrounding bi-cultural practice in the New Zealand correctional system. We highlighted the apparent drive to quantify, measure and interpret psychotherapeutic intervention through an ostensibly Western scientific lens, and identified a clear and present need for ongoing research into bi-cultural matters. In Part II we offer further empirical insight into the field of bi-cultural inquiry by examining the perspectives and experiences of three Māori men who undertook the Special Treatment Unit – Rehabilitation Programme (STU-RP) within a New Zealand prison. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of our approach, the sensitivities which are sometimes attached to discussion about cultural justice and the intangible, sometimes ambiguous, nature of the material discussed, we recognise that our perspectives will not be met with agreement by all readers. However, it is our intention to inspire debate by contributing a much-needed person-centred discourse to scholarship in psychology which is often heavy on decontextualised statistics but light on more human narratives.

In the still-dominant drive to quantify human behaviour, we urge the critical reader to remain mindful that behind

every data point is a person, and that every person no matter how troubled, marginalised or overlooked, brings a unique contribution to understanding the complex social and cultural systems in which we are all embedded. As Bhabha and Parekh (1989) observe, a society can only develop its true public culture when its minority cultures are empowered with the confidence and public space to undertake meaningful dialogue with the dominant cultural group. We maintain that the prison system is, unfortunately, a significant setting for just such an endeavour.

## Background

The overarching objective of this discussion is to provide a detailed insight into the impact of an intensive rehabilitation programme upon three Māori inmates deemed to be at high-risk of re-offending. Participants for this study were recruited from an overall cohort of “high-risk” male offenders who had either completed, or were due to complete the STU-RP, a full-time, residential rehabilitation programme located in a low-medium security classification unit of a New Zealand prison.

Whilst each of the participants in this study are Māori, the Unit is open to men of all ethnic backgrounds. That is, the Unit is not a designated Māori Focus Unit (MFU), but it embraces certain aspects of tikanga (correct procedure, custom) such as waiata (song, chant) and karakia (incantation, prayer), displays various forms of Māori artwork and incorporates into some of its programmes specifically Māori models (e.g., Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1998)) and processes (e.g., whakawhānaungatanga (establishing relationships)). The Unit is staffed by psychologists, programme facilitators and custodial officers from a range of cultural backgrounds. The majority of the staff members are Pākehā (or Anglo/European), many of whom are overseas-born.

Established in February, 2008, the STU-RP is a mainstream rehabilitative psychological intervention. It is defined by Lammers (2009) as an intensive, group-based criminogenic rehabilitation programme delivering CBT and DBT-based treatment. According to Kilgour and Polaschek, the STU-RP “aims to address the complex offence-focussed needs of male offenders with a high risk of general and violent re-offending” (2012, p.3). The STU-RP is a full-time programme lasting nine months, with participants living and working in an environment described as a Community of Change (CoC) (Department of Corrections, 2009).

The CoC ethos accords with the treatment philosophies of the therapeutic community which include fostering personal-responsibility, a focus on the whole person, a structured routine, a flattened hierarchy and harnessing group processes to achieve therapeutic goals (Campling, 2001; Sacks, Chaple, Sacks, McKendrick & Cleland, 2012; Ware, Frost & Hoy, 2009). The

Unit’s CoC emphasises community participation, communalism and shared decision making (Department of Corrections, n.d.). The CoC is considered central to the Unit as it encourages community participation between prisoners and staff with the intention of ‘help(ing) them (participants) learn how to live communally’ (Department of Corrections, 2009). Consequently, the CoC forms an integral part of the rehabilitative and re-integrative processes.

It is important to note, however, that the practicalities of communalism and shared decision making in a custodial environment have been actively challenged. For example, Woodward (2002, as cited in Lammers and Whitehead, 2011) observed how therapeutic communities have the potential to create confusion within a custodial setting. As a corollary, Lammers and Whitehead describe the therapeutic community of the Unit in which they are based as hierarchical. Within this format, custodial staff and therapists adopt the role of guides to change, with the community itself formulating the method of change.

The STU-RP consists of 250 hours of treatment, with participants receiving twelve-hours per week of group-based therapy which is complemented by individual treatment as necessary (Lammers, 2009). To be considered for treatment, participants must be aged twenty-years or more, have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two-years or greater and score 0.7 or above (equating to “high-risk”) on the Departmental static risk assessment tool (RoC\*RoI) (Bakker, Riley & O’Malley, 1999). They must also have at least one violent offence in their criminal history. Once accepted onto the programme, participants are divided into treatment groups of approximately ten; however, this

can change as participants can be exited from the programme at any point for breaching prison regulations (Lammers, 2009).

Treatment consists of a series of interrelated modules, many of which are modelled on the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Programme (MIRP). These include

1. Whakawhānaungatanga – Getting to know one another/Developing a working culture.
2. Offence Mapping/Inga ra o muri/ The old script.
3. Te taha hinengaro: Looking at thinking/changing thinking.
4. Te taha hinengaro/Managing feelings/Ngākau, deep seated emotions/Whatumana – particularly anger/riri and managing impulses.
5. Te taha whānau – Relationship Skills and
6. Mai ki te po ki te ao mārama: From the world of darkness to the world of light - safety planning: Putting it all together (Department of Corrections, 2006).

Inmates also had the opportunity to engage in bi-cultural therapy. This was offered on a weekly basis for a period of approximately two-hours and enabled participants to work alongside a local kaumātua (respected elder) in activities such as whakairo (carving), waiata, te reo (Māori language) and other Māori cultural practices.

Within the STU-RP, group therapy sessions are delivered in an interactive manner, with facilitators using a variety of learning activities (e.g., art, role plays and group discussions). In addition to their classroom-based activities, participants are required to complete self-directed homework tasks which are designed to elicit further

reflection and encourage the ongoing development of the skills and techniques discussed in the classroom (Lammers, 2009). Upon completion of the STU-RP, graduates participate in a post-treatment assessment and attend a maintenance group (Kilgour & Polaschek, 2012).

## Method

Having obtained ethical approval from both the Department of Corrections and the University of Waikato, the lead author held rapport building meetings with potential participants to introduce himself and explain the ethical requirements of this study. Six participants were recruited. This paper focuses upon three Māori offenders: two had completed the programme (“Jerry” and “Al”), while the third (“Jay”)<sup>1</sup> was expelled from the programme after being found in possession of a cell phone in contravention of prison regulations. They were all versatile, recidivist offenders deemed high-risk of re-offending by Departmental risk assessment tools and were serving terms of imprisonment for offending involving violence. Their ages ranged from 22 to 40.

In recognition of the cultural differences between the lead author (Pākehā) and the Māori participants, cultural supervision was sought with the Unit’s Bi-cultural Therapy Model (BTM) facilitator, a local kaumātua. The kaumātua highlighted the necessity to commence and close each interview with karakia. He expressed the need to be mindful of differences in communication styles (both verbal and non-verbal) and to remain sensitive to the intricacies of Māori protocol at all times.

In addition, interviews were conducted with three staff members; two were programme facilitators, and one a custodial officer. All three were Pākehā. These interviews provided valuable insight into the delivery of treatment in the STU as well as staff-offender interactions in the everyday running of the STU. The staff interviews also provided an opportunity to clarify points raised by the offender participants. Each of the participants was interviewed face-to-face on at least one occasion for up to two-hours. Follow-up meetings were conducted as necessary.

The interview data were subjected to systematic content analysis to identify and extract those themes and patterns that most accurately described the participants’ experiences. Data were alternately expanded and compressed in a manner described by Frost (2004). As the data were accrued conceptual relationships between data sets were proposed (compression). The credibility of the relationships were then scrutinised by reflecting them back to the interviewees

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms

(offenders and staff) through the process of expansion. This procedure was repeated until no new categories were identifiable (compressed) (Frost, 2004). The analysis was conducted from the perspectives of a postmodernism and social constructionism.

## Findings: Ngā pakiwaitara nō ngā herehere (Narratives from prisoners).

While the interviews canvassed a wide range of issues related to the STU-RP and its impact on the participants, in this paper, we will focus on just one theme, the importance of bi-cultural therapy.

Māori cultural paradigms are reflected in various ways in the day-to-day practices of the Unit. For example, CoC meetings are opened and closed with karakia, te reo is used frequently in signage and everyday greetings, and waiata are incorporated into group sessions. STU-RP participants are given an opportunity to broaden their cultural knowledge through participation in specialist bi-cultural therapy modules delivered by BTM facilitators. Those who elect to do so are encouraged to explore their cultural identity. The participants spoke favourably of these aspects of the culture of the Unit; however, for two of the three, its effects were especially potent.

Jerry and Jay had previously been held in specialist Māori Focus Units. Both men spoke positively about their time in those units and saw the BTM as an opportunity to build on what they had already learnt. Jerry commented

*I thought it (Bi-cultural Therapy Module) was quite good ... yep... I come from a Māori Focus Unit before I come to this unit. So it just sort of enhanced what I already knew. You know, it extended my vocabulary and in the Māori language and yeah, yeah, I learn more about the area that I am in. Yeah.*

The importance of place and understanding local culture was reflected in a similar comment by Jay.

*It (BTM) brought back memories ... whereas, I was down Taranaki they had Taranaki protocols. Here they are Tainui protocols. Different: yeah, lot different so it was “Oh yeah, choice” you know, some more – um – skills and knowledge.*

These comments speak to the rehabilitative value of acquiring specific cultural knowledge and skills which are generally seen as outside of the scope of the dominant CBT paradigm. For example, references to understanding local kawa (protocols) remind us that a sense of place, is, for many people, an important part of health and wellbeing (Frumkin, 2003). Growing fluency in te reo gave Jerry

pride and a sense of accomplishment. In this light, BTM can be considered to be making a small but significant contribution to ameliorating some of the harms colonisation has inflicted on Māori offenders and their whanau, hapu and iwi – and to reducing the risks of these men re-offending.

Jay described how he benefited from a robust therapeutic bond with the BTM facilitator, whom he called “matua” (father, or, by extension, an esteemed older man).

*I found him available ... I enjoyed his company, his good character and he was kind. (He) came across as passionate with the fatherly role, the matua role. I loved him, loved him.*

Here, Jay expresses a connection beyond the scope of a conventional Western therapist-client therapeutic alliance: Jay “loved” matua. Matua’s availability, passion, warmth and compassion, could, from another perspective, be considered to breach some of the boundaries a Western therapist would be expected to observe (Britt & Kalders, 2007). Matua is not Jay’s father in the literal sense but his relationship with Jay provided a degree of paternal nurturing. Jay’s commentary emphasises the “who” of “treatment”. It suggests the value of person and deep personal connection over technique and presumed objectivity. In doing so, it presents a direct challenge to the “science” of CBT.

As Tamatea and Brown (2011, p.177) have noted, specific cultural possibilities are opened up when an offender comes to regard a practitioner as matua. Here, the opportunity to use te reo was one such possibility. Like Jerry, Jay reflected on the role of te reo. Being able to converse in te reo with a man he felt understood him was a transformative experience for Jay.

*...cause I love my language you know and there's nobody else I can talk to in it in there ... I could come in and it would sort of take me back into that therapeutic surroundings again, and then I'll forget I'm actually incarcerated sometimes, until I walk along by the gate "Oh hey"! 'til I see the green uniforms and it reminds me.*

It is apparent Jay experienced a deep cultural connection in the conversations he shared with matua, and that he felt a robust sense of psychological wellbeing in matua’s presence, sufficient, in fact, to allow him to forget, albeit temporarily, that he was in prison.

But while prison was not the place he wanted to be, for Jay, the Unit did at least sometimes provide a sense of community and opportunities for mastery.

*I think everybody moves in a group, there's no capital – you know. Everyone's a (community) ... That's part of being a Māori ... I lived in a (community). ... While I've been incarcerated (I began) finding my language (I)... get up and do mihi (greetings), pōwhiri (formal welcome) ... There's no cloud of shame on me.*

Jay’s reflections would suggest that his experiences of community in his upbringing enabled him to establish connections within the CoC of the Unit. They also highlight the importance of mastering te reo and of public “performance” in Jay’s development. Traditionally, notions of whakamā involve personal reticence – expressions of shame through non-verbal means, ‘to “speak” by not speaking’ (Metge & Kinloch, 2001, p.29). By being able to mihi and to play a role in powhiri, Jay has been able to move out from under the “cloud of shame” cast by his offending.

Further discussing his therapeutic interactions, Jay went on to describe how matua encouraged him to examine his thoughts, feelings and behaviours on a daily basis and learn from his insights. This appeared to be an important learning experience for Jay:

*...making sure I'm getting out of my comfort zone ... and take on other challenges or learning out of things ...*

For Jerry, an important part of bi-cultural therapy was developing self-respect, something he linked to reducing his likelihood of re-offending.

*Um, it sort of give me a sense of um, um, you know – respect for myself and um, yeah just try and respect others. If you respect yourself you tend to respect others as well. When it comes to, just yeah, um you know – if I am going to offend with someone I'm not really respecting them other people and that.*

That is, he appeared to have discovered the importance of first respecting one’s self in order to respect others. He recalled how Te Taha Hinengaro (mental focus) component of Te Whare Tapa Whā model, was particularly useful in facilitating this.

*...there was Te Taha Hinengaro - just looking at the way we think and that ... on the first module we had um, they introduced Te Whare Tapa Wha. That was like our four cornerstones. Yeah, it's like our thoughts, our spiritual wellbeing, our physical, respecting our physical self and just keeping them all in balance, because, you know, when... ones out of balance it sort of affects the person, yeah.*

Jerry described the discomfort he feels when he becomes aware of a discrepancy between his spiritual,

physical and psychological wellbeing. He observed that by focusing upon the influence of his thoughts, feelings and actions across all levels of existence he will be better able to self-regulate upon release.

In comparison to those of Jerry and Jay, Al's engagement with the BTM was notably short-lived. Al explained how the scheduling of the BTM intervention clashed with his recreation time and that he chose to go to the gym rather than attend the BTM sessions:

*I started it (Bi-cultural Therapy Model) at the beginning when I first got here, but I stopped about six-weeks into it ... the afternoon's sort of the only time you can get to go to the gym. So um I just used that same time as the BTM and I'd just rather keep fit... Some people prefer to learn Tikanga Māori, but um it's a personal thing.*

It seems unfortunate that Al found himself in a position whereby he felt he must choose between physical fitness and the psycho-physiological wellbeing that others discovered in the BTM - something which for them formulated a crucial part of their overall therapeutic experience.

## CONCLUSION

Depriving an individual of his or her freedom is a serious affair, not only for the individual, but also for the family and community to which that individual belongs. As the literature discussed in Part I shows, the imposition of a British-derived criminal justice system, along with the devastating impact of colonisation generally, have left a legacy of significant disparities. Māori have a disproportionately high level of imprisonment. Māori detainees have an elevated risk of developing psychopathology. Upon release, Māori remain at a high risk of re-conviction. These circumstances require us to consider the ways in which criminogenic rehabilitation can be delivered to Māori inmates in a way which will enrich their therapeutic experience. To do otherwise, would be to abrogate the Crown's responsibilities as embodied in Articles II and III of Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>2</sup>.

The path to enduring change is a delicate one, fraught with complexity. The first steps along it must be taken tentatively, guided by a willingness to learn and founded in a determination to understanding. Surely there can be

<sup>2</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this article, a more complete discussion of the implications of Te Tiriti for the criminal justice system is needed. Such a discussion would raise questions about the meaning of Article I (the so-called kawanatanga clause) and the implied limits on the Crown's power in relation to tangata whenua. See *Ngapuhi Speaks: He Wakaputanga of te Rangatiratanga o Nui Tireni and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Independent Report on the Ngapuhi Nui Tonu Claim* (2012: Te Kawariki & Network Waitangi Whangarei.)

no better opportunity to learn about the rehabilitation of imprisoned Māori than from Māori detainees themselves. Jerry, Al and Jay provided unique perspectives of some of the cultural factors affecting rehabilitative treatment. They brought their experiences to life through their detailed disclosures of the intricacies, complications, learning opportunities and emotional upheavals which intersected and interceded one another to characterise prison life for them at the time.

It is apparent that cultural identity was of central importance to all three men. Here identity was achieved in part through performance: for example, te reo, waiata, mihi and powhiri. It was also achieved through relationship: for example, Jay's close relationship with matua and the priority he placed on learning the kawa of the tangata whenua when he was transferred to a prison in a different rohe). Jerry and Jay found in Te Whare Tapa Whā model, something far more profound than a simple paradigm for self-monitoring. Supported by the advances made in terms of their language, their enhanced connections with the land and the comfort of robust therapeutic bonds, Jerry, Al and Jay discovered a means of understanding self-identity that was sensitive enough to nurture the subtleties of their cultural persona, yet broad enough to develop their overall social schema.

In particular, this research has highlighted the value of the BTM. Each of the participants had engaged with it to varying degrees and all reported positively on their experiences. The consistently upbeat nature of this feedback would suggest that the BTM holds considerable value for the STU-RP participants: the greater one's exposure to BTM, the more relevant it became. Moreover, the sense of security and support established (through matua) in the delivery of the BTM had a notable impact on the psychological wellbeing of the participants (Jay in particular). It is unfortunate that alternative timetabling arrangements could not have been made to enable Al to experience the benefits of completing the BTM in addition to those associated with physical fitness. It is disconcerting to observe how a rehabilitation programme participant found himself in a position where he had to sacrifice the holistic benefits of physical, spiritual, psychological and familial wellbeing (Durie, 1998) associated with the BTM, for the opportunity to engage in physical recreation. Future criminogenic interventions may wish to consider the timetabling of their activities so that their participants may engage in the full remit of activities and interventions.

The culturally-specific insights identified as salient by Jerry, Al and Jay shed light upon the fragmented, isolated manner in which they perceive their existence in the social world.

The resultant existential naivety perpetuates a continuously revolving vicious cycle of isolation, offending and imprisonment. For Jerry, Al and Jay offending behaviours can be perceived as intimately connected to an existential crisis anchored in the loss of cultural identity. Seen in this light, interventions which address cultural needs, such as a BTM, are likely to be particularly efficacious. To further advance the health outcomes of Māori it is critical for the progress gained in matters of bi-cultural understanding to be allied with equal opportunities in the wider public forum.

Through deep, reflective conversations, this research has generated insights not usually available in conventional Western correctional research which tends to value detachment, objectivity and non-transparent measurement over engagement with participants. We believe that research such as ours has a vital role to play in the evaluation of prison and other correctional programmes. Although very little has been written around the experiences of imprisoned Māori, particularly those undergoing intensive rehabilitative therapy, the weight of academic literature (Friendship, Blud, Erikson & Travers, 2002; Friendship, Blud, Erikson, Travers, & Thornton, 2003; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; McGuire, 2002; Polaschek, Wilson, Townsend & Daly, 2005) supports the view that prison-based CBT-styled interventions are effective in reducing recidivism. However, our research raises an interesting question: if these three men do indeed go on and live non-offending lives, to what extent can that positive outcome be attributed to the CBT programme and to what extent can it be attributed to the BTM – or to other experiences within the Unit? This is not a trivial question. Unless we understand much more

about the lived experience of inmates undergoing treatment programmes, we may make incorrect attributions about the effectiveness of our interventions. We may waste time and effort on things which don't make a difference – or are counter-productive – for at least some participants. We may fail to maximise those aspects of our programmes that really do make a difference. By throwing light on the lived experience of programme participants, qualitative research has an important role to play in criminal justice research.

None of this will come as a surprise to readers familiar with the literature on programme evaluation. Over the last 40 years, programme evaluation has moved a long way from an unquestioned hypothetical-deductive paradigm borrowed from the tradition of agricultural field trials (Patton 1978). That paradigm relied almost exclusively on quantitative measures, experimental or quasi-experimental designs and statistical analyses (e.g., Posavac & Carey, 1980). It was a paradigm concerned only with the assessment of outcomes.

Modern evaluation, on the other hand, emphasizes multiple methods, engaging with stakeholders (including programme participants), and, in particular, the importance of studying programme processes – along with programme outcomes (American Evaluation Association, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lunt, Davidson & McKegg, 2003). The folly of studying only programme outcomes and ignoring programme processes is now well-understood. Without studying programme processes, including participants' experiences, the programme remains what Patton has called a "black box" (1978, p.129). We cannot see what goes on inside and simply assume that what we think is happening is in fact the case. (See

Patton (1986, pp142-144) for an interesting example of the black box in criminal justice research). Qualitative research has a vital role in unlocking the black box.

Despite the much-needed depth of insight and richness of detail offered by qualitative research it continues to be marginalised in criminal justice research. Accordingly, the primary objective of this paper was to document Māori men's perspectives of rehabilitation within the context of a New Zealand prison-based Special Treatment Unit Rehabilitation Programme and consider some of the implications for how therapy is delivered to them.

The study raises interesting issues about the conduct of research across cultural difference. The cultural gap between the interviewer, a non-Māori British immigrant, and the Māori participants is palpable. The inherent cultural dissonance may have engendered an undercurrent of estrangement, distancing the offender participants and interviewer in unspoken scepticism, or given the perils of colonisation, an air of hierarchically-driven mistrust. Conversely, approaching the interview process as an outsider, untainted by the biases of familiarity, may have carried some important benefits. It provided the offender participants with an opportunity to speak candidly (without fear of redress) to an external person; someone not only detached from the penal system, but from their wider socio-cultural network. Whichever way one views this difference, it is important to understand the enormous contribution made by the cultural supervisor. Cultural supervision provided much-needed insights into the practicalities associated with the interview process, and guidance as to the general spirit in which the process needed to be

framed. We strongly recommend such supervision to other non-Māori researchers who may be contemplating similar research.

An obvious limitation of this research is the small number of participants. It would be unwise to attribute these findings to broader groups. The findings are offered as tentative explanations: they require further research in order to assess how widely they are shared (and among who).

The richness of the overall data could have been enhanced by the inclusion of naturalistic observations as these would have enabled the interviewer to witness some of the events described by the participants and facilitators. Although a great deal of data was obtained through one-to-one interviews the collection of these additional data would have enabled more effective triangulation of the information acquired. Therefore, their inclusion in future projects of this nature is recommended. Such triangulation is well-recognised as best-practice in evaluation research.

In conclusion, the rehabilitation of offenders remains a fascinating, complex area of academic enquiry which is continually evolving to reflect the equally dynamic, broader cultural zeitgeist which encompasses it. It is hoped that this research will offer an insight into some of the challenges facing those individuals who are engaged in the rehabilitation of Māori offenders. In particular, it reminds us of the limitations of some mainstream therapies which tend to be overly individualistic in focus and pay little attention to the cultural context in which offenders live their lives. It also points to the importance of providing a milieu in which offenders can strengthen their engagement with Te Ao Māori and ensure that they develop a positive identity as Māori so that “There’s no cloud of shame on me”.

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