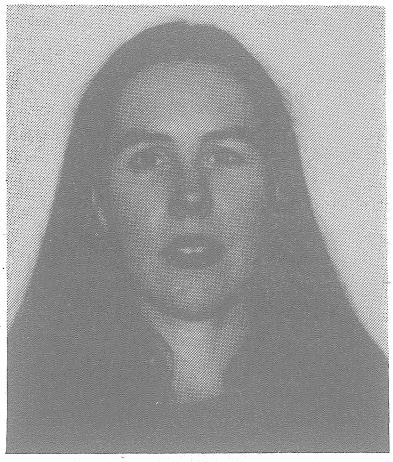
# Ethics in Maori Research[1]

**Fiona Cram**, Department of Psychology, University of Auckland



When we think about what we are doing as researchers, one of our main tasks is to acquire knowledge. For some researchers their task begins and ends there. Knowledge is viewed as cumulative, that by adding to some knowledge pool we will one day be able to put the component parts together and discover universal laws. Many researchers also assume that the knowledge they have collected is objective, value-free and apolitical.

A Maori view of knowledge is very different from this. For Maori the purpose of knowledge is to uphold the interests and the mana of the group; it serves the community. Researchers are not building up their own status; they are working for the betterment of their iwi and for Maori people in general.

*The Maori did not think of himself [sic], or anything to do with his own gain. He thought only of his people, and was absorbed in his whanau, just as the whanau was absorbed in the hapu, and the hapu in the iwi.* (Makareti, first published 1938)

Because of the strong oral tradition in Maori society knowledge was never universally available. The tapu nature of knowledge also meant that when it was entrusted to individuals it was transmitted accurately and used appropriately. This ensured the survival of the group and maintained its mana (Smith 1992).

Colonisation has not necessarily eroded this tradition. Many Maori believe "that there is a uniquely Maori way of looking at the world and learning" (Smith, 1992). However the dominance of Pakeha history and culture means that Maori forms are often seen to lack "mainstream" legitimacy. We saw this with the movement of many Maori children into Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori - Maori were challenged about the appropriateness of schooling children solely in the Maori language and how this would fit these children for life in the "Pakeha-lane".

One product of colonisation, however, has been the stream of Pakeha social scientists who have seen Maori communities as research prospects. Maori now recognise the political implications of this research. It is the scientists who have constructed the research questions, who have decided how the data is to be collected, who have decided which statistical tests to apply to the data, and, in a lot of cross-cultural research, it is Maori who are informed that they do not quite come up to scratch on what are described as universal, objective norms.

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Many Pakeha researchers have built their careers on the backs of Maori - their back to the Maori community in return. Linda Smith (1992) talks of Pakeha researchers as "willing bedfellows of assimilationist, victim-blaming policies." Is it any wonder then that Maori communities are wary and weary of Pakeha researchers, perhaps especially psychologists? Maybe this is one reason why Maori have been unwilling to enter our profession, aside from all the structural difficulties evident.

Much research about Maori is also merely descriptive, telling us what we already know yet not proposing any solutions or action that can be taken for change. We know about the low socio-economic status of Maori, the high crime and imprisonment rates, the high unemployment and low educational attainments. We now need research that informs solutions.

We must begin to ask meta-questions about research such as those proposed by Linda Smith (1992):

1 Who has helped define the research problem?

2 For whom is the study worthy and relevant? Who says so?

3 Which cultural group will be the one to gain new knowledge from this study?

4 To whom is the researcher accountable?

5 Who will gain most from this study?

These questions are similar to those now asked by granting bodies such as the Health Research Council in their assessment of Maori research proposals. This is pleasing because it means that we no longer have to rely on the internal ethics of a researcher, we have granting bodies and ethics committees who screen researchers for us.

So who should now "do" Maori research? Evelyn Stokes (1985, p9) writes, in her report to the Social Sciences Committee of the National Research Advisory Council, that

> such researchers may be Maori or Pakeha. That racial or biological origin or skin colour is less important. What is important and essential is that the researcher can operate comfortably in both cultures, is bicultural and preferably bilingual.

Naturally it will be easier for a Maori person to fulfil these criteria as biculturalism is essential for their

survival. In addition, there is a lot of debate about whether it is appropriate for Pakeha researchers to "research" Maori.

Graham Smith (1990) addresses this issue by proposing four models whereby Pakeha have been able to carry out culturally appropriate research:

1 **"Tiaki" model** (Mentor model)
Where the research process is guided and mediated by authoritative Maori people (eg Jim Ritchie and Bob Mahuta)[2]

2 **"Whangai" model** (Adoption model)
The researcher becomes one of the whanau who just happens to be doing research (eg Ann Salmond and the Stirling Whanau).

3 **"Power Sharing model"**
Where community assistance is sought by the researcher so that a research enterprise can be developed in a meaningful way.

4 **"Empowering Outcomes model"**
Where the research supplies answers and information that Maori want to know (eg Richard Benton's language research which informed concern about the survival of the Maori language).

We also have a good model for the ethical conduct of researchers in Maori communities in the work of Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991, p17). She warns us that

> the relationship between ethics and research is of vital importance, as the demand for responsibility and accountability has become inevitable. Denial of this results in distrust in the community studies, impaired or obstructed future opportunities, irreparably damaged relationships, and the questionable validity of research findings.

The most obvious example of this last point being the construction of the "great New Zealand myth" of the "Great Fleet" of canoes which supposedly journeyed to this country in 1350 AD (Stokes, 1985).

So the undertaking of Maori-centred research is demanding and it places a challenge before psychologists that many of our colleagues have been loathe to accept. Sometimes psychologists are not very interested in people let alone a resurgent and angry minority group. This is often exacerbated by an institutional structure which individualises knowledge and does not necessarily reward community involvement and social change. Yet we can no longer claim that there are no widely available models informing us about Maori research ethics. The cynic in me now wonders what our next excuse will be.

[1] Paper presented at the Bicultural Symposium organised by the National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues, at the New Zealand Psychological Society Conference, August 1993, Wellington.

[2] The examples given are taken from G Smith (1990).

**References**


Makareti (1986) *The Old-Time Maori*, New Women's Classics

Smith, Graham Hingangaroa (1990) Research issues related to Maori education. Paper presented at the NZARE *Special Interests Conference*, Education Department, University of Auckland.

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Stokes, Evelyn (1985) Maori research and development. A discussion paper prepared for the Social Sciences Committee of the National Research Advisory Council.

Te Awekotuku, Ngahuia (1991) *He tikanga whakaaro: Research ethics in the Maori Community*. Manatu Maori: Wellington

Many of these papers are available in *The issue of research and Maori*. Monograph No 9, Research Unit for Maori Education, University of Auckland, August, 1992.


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Professor Alastair V. Campbell
Director
Bioethics Research Centre
PO Box 91, Dunedin
New Zealand