



Beyond Pākehā paralysis: Exploring the journeys and experiences of Pākehā allyship in Psychology

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Abstract

The monocultural foundation of psychology is interwoven with the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand. Not all of the mahi of decolonising psychology is the responsibility of Māori. In Aotearoa, there is currently less literature around the development of racial justice allyship and how Pākehā (as the dominant majority) can work towards honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This paper draws on interviews with three Pākehā allies who have taken actions towards greater inclusion of Māori and raising awareness of systemic injustices and racial disparities. The objective of this paper is to document the understandings shared by these 'reluctant allies', focusing on the challenges, possibilities, and suggestions for a more culturally relevant psychological education and practice for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Keywords: Pākehā; allyship; Te Tiriti o Waitangi; psychology

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Introduction

The discipline of psychology has been, and still is, intertwined with colonial power and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour around the globe (Ciofalo et al., 2022; Crossing et al., 2022). The practise of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand is no exception, with the historical and ongoing subjugation of Māori (Levy & Waitoki, 2016; Pomare et al., 2021). The work of decolonising psychology and improving the discipline's cultural safety is a considerable task, and it requires the collective effort of Pākehā (New Zealand European), tauwiwi (non-Māori) and Māori (Escott & Abraham, 2021). Racism in Aotearoa has its roots in settler colonialism (dating back to Doctrine of Discovery ideologies), and because of its enduring impacts, it cannot be resolved merely through short-term solutions and by the good intentions of individuals (Jackson, 2020).

Since dominant institutional and societal structures in Aotearoa have racist roots (Jackson, 2020; Matike Mai Aotearoa, 2016), those who benefit most from these structures have a responsibility to change them. In Aotearoa today, psychology is dominated by Pākehā academics and practitioners, and as a result, the discipline does not reflect the population and the growing mental healthcare needs of Māori and other minoritised groups (NSCBI et al., 2018). The notion of 'biculturalism', has been described as a "national ideal" (Ritchie, 1992, p.96), although rooted in inequality and cultural imperialism, does recognise the two dominant cultures in Aotearoa. Pākehā culture (about which we know surprisingly little, anthropologically speaking) is dominant by power, history and majority. Māori culture is dominant by a longer history, by legacy and by its strength of survival and the passionate commitment of its people" (Ritchie, 1992. p.6). Biculturalism is founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti) and is intentionally used in various spheres of Aotearoa society (e.g., policy and education) to prompt the Crown, Pākehā, and tauwiwi to fulfil their Te Tiriti responsibilities (Simon, 2022). Nonetheless, claims lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal (Levy, 2018; Levy et al., 2024) have evidenced breaches of Te Tiriti in the employment, training, and regulation of psychologists, highlighting the discipline's sluggish progress in upholding Te Tiriti and bicultural obligations.

Matike Mai Aotearoa (2016) envisions a balanced relationship between non-Māori and Māori as outlined in Te Tiriti. In the proposed constitutional models for Aotearoa, Pākehā (historically the

dominant "partner") are expected to establish honourable kāwanatanga (governance) and support Māori in their pursuit of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination). There is a set of values (e.g., tikanga, community, and conciliation) that informs the Matike Mai models to ensure that Pākehā (as well as other tauwiwi groups) can express a sense of belonging as we work towards achieving political and social inclusiveness. Yet, opportunities to develop an understanding of Pākehā identity and culture have been limited within the psychological discipline.

Subsequently, colour-blindness (the belief that everyone should be treated equally without acknowledging the impacts of settler colonialism and evidence of racial inequities) and positivist perspectives that prioritise generalisability, replicability, and objectivity remain embedded (Black & Huygens, 2016; Pomare et al., 2021). Contributing to this limitation is that Pākehā self-exclude from discussions about culture and identity (Black & Huygens, 2016; McKegg, 2019). In addition, national-level rhetoric such as 'we are one nation' or 'we are all New Zealanders', from some political leaders drives racial division and masks Pākehā cultural practices (Black et al., 2023). In 2024, a range of colourblind policies were introduced by the populist government that seek to diminish the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, such as the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora (Māori Health Authority), the repeal of section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act, and the introduction of a Treaty Principles Bill (Fitzmaurice-Brown, 2024). These policies were introduced to protect the inherent whiteness of dominant societal systems and do not align with the culturally safe practices of psychologists in Aotearoa who honour the articles of Te Tiriti (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2009).

Nonetheless, efforts have been made by Pākehā to decolonise their psychological practice and improve the discipline's cultural safety. Pākehā psychological scholars and practitioners who began the work to decolonise practice in the field of psychology include Raymond Nairn (Past President of the New Zealand Psychological Society [NZPsS]) and Tim McCreanor, who unpacked anti-Māori discourses in media (Nairn et al., 2006); Ingrid Huygens who explored decolonisation practices for Pākehā (Huygens, 2011); and Rose Black who made certain aspects of Pākehā culture visible and encouraged Pākehā to think about themselves as cultural beings (Black & Huygens, 2016). This work has been continued and expanded upon by Pākehā psychologists and scholars in the field of allyship including those in Pākehā/tauwiwi caucus within the



National Standing Committee of Te Tiriti (Graham et al., 2021).

In racial justice literature, allies are defined as “people who recognise the unearned privilege they receive from society’s pattern of injustice and take action to change it” (Williams & Sharif, 2021, p. 1). Practicing allyship requires civil courage that involves acting against in-group social norms and societal disapproval to address injustice, driven by a moral imperative, and necessitates both awareness of injustices and the willingness to challenge them (Williams et al., 2023). Alongside Māori scholars (e.g., Jackson, 2020; Simon, 2023), Pākehā scholars in Aotearoa have contributed to the conceptualisation of allyship. For example, Mitzi Nairn and Jen Margaret outlined the ethical roles of Pākehā allies in working with Pākehā and Indigenous communities (Margaret, 2013), Heather Came has developed an anti-racism praxis in public health (Came & Griffith, 2018), and Andi Crawford and Fiona Langridge encourage critical reflection on power, paralysis, and positionality as integral components of doing Pākehā allyship (Crawford & Langridge, 2022). There are nuanced allyship concepts emerging within an Aotearoa context. These include tangata Tiriti as an identity, and the practice of engaging in kotahitanga [unity]. An overview of these nuances is provided by Tan et al. (2025).

When compared to publications in psychology on the topic of non-Pākehā culture, identity, and practice, it becomes evident that Pākehā in the discipline continue to have limited understanding of their cultural self in Aotearoa (Black & Huygens, 2016). This has implications for their bicultural and/or cross-cultural practice as an inherent requirement of cultural safety is for psychologists to reflect on their “roles as holders of power” and “cultural bias and boundedness implicit within aspects of Western psychological theory, training, and practice” (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2009, p.6). As the dominant demographic within psychology, Pākehā constitute a privileged group with considerable influence in shaping the trajectory of the discipline. The Pākehā majority can either be bystanders or take action to ensure that psychology represents, engages with, and is of greater benefit to minoritised groups. Pākehā can do more than wait for others to instigate change since such passivity perpetuates the status quo. While some Pākehā may be motivated by a desire to address intergenerational and personal “guilt” through allyship, others are driven by a commitment to social justice in addressing Māori inequities and promoting just

outcomes (Margaret, 2013). It is the goal of this research to capture the range of diverse motivations for Pākehā to engage in allyship, as we work to identify strategies to address racism in psychology.

One way to encourage the allyship movement is to document the experiences of Pākehā who have already taken up the responsibility to work with and alongside Māori to decolonise psychology in Aotearoa. In this article, we document experiences from three Pākehā psychologists who, as authors, we know have longstanding commitments in decolonising psychology and developing bicultural practices either through their roles as psychologists and/or academic staff, or through their academic publications on Pākehā allyship. We discussed the selection of participants within our wider Māori-led research group and agreed on their contributions to psychological scholarship and practice before reaching out to them. Their insights will help guide others with dominant group positionalities to draw on their structural advantages to enact changes in the discipline of psychology.

Methods

This qualitative case study explores the lived experiences and contextualised accounts of three participants who work in the psychology space as practitioners, educators and/or academics. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, University of Waikato. All authors of this paper are either academics (OS, KT & DS) or practitioners (RB) of Pākehā and tauwiwi descent involved in the Working to End Racial Oppression (WERO) project that examines the cost, operation, and solutions to racial oppression in psychology. Our approach to research is guided by a takarangi framework (Waitoki et al., 2023), where we are prompted to consider how our ontology, axiology, ethics, and epistemology align with the project values (e.g., mana orite or power sharing) and anti-racist and decolonial research goals envisioned by Matike Mai Aotearoa (2016) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

A case study design (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012) was chosen to capture the complexities, tensions and affective dynamics that can arise when Pākehā reflect on their positionality in Aotearoa and in relation to Māori (Came & Griffith, 2018; Crawford & Langridge, 2022). Participants were purposefully selected based on their commitments towards researching, publishing, practicing and/or teaching in alignment with Te Tiriti and anti-racism in



psychology. Rather than representing a random sample, each of these participants was notable in their ability to contribute in-depth, thoughtful and contextualised accounts about racism and colonisation in the discipline of psychology and in wider society.

The semi-structured interviews began with a biographical account of what drew the participants to psychology and what provoked their expanding awareness of racism, power and privilege. The participants discussed how the tensions within psychology led them on a lifelong journey to better understand Aotearoa history, te reo (language) Māori, te ao (worldview) Māori, and their cultural positionings. The interviews were conducted in alignment with kaupapa Māori methods (Smith, 2012), which included starting with whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building) to build rapport. We drew from the storytelling approach (Asafo & Tuiburelevu, 2021) to open a space for co-constructed dialogues, confronting whiteness, and epistemological pluralism. Instead of prioritising data extraction, we invited participants to share their biographies, perspectives, experiences, and narratives in whatever manner they chose.

Interpretative narrative analysis (Andrews, 2001) served as the key analytic tool for identifying points of interest in each case and exploring underlying meanings. Consequently, the analysis was iterative, involving a cyclical and immersive process of listening to interviews, (re)reading transcripts and academic literature, creating synopses and mind maps, collaborative brainstorming, and (re)drafting overarching stories from the cases. The authors worked through a personal and collective process that involved sharing insights and support, but also being upfront with critiques and interrogating assumptions and cultural blind spots (Waiari et al., 2021). The author who led the analysis process, is of continental European descent who came to Aotearoa as a child and grew up in a Pākehā dominated suburb. While enjoying the privileges of whiteness and having cultural familiarity within dominant society, she did experience “instances of feeling “foreign”, or feeling like “a stranger” and hence feeling different and ‘other’ to Pākehā” (Alexander & Tudor, 2024, p.309). Alongside, other intersectionalities these positionalities offered learning opportunities for critically examining issues of belonging and power (dis)advantages, all of which can be helpful for striving to retain empathy and maximum openness (James, 1902/1998) towards the diversity of human experiences.

Findings and Analysis

Helena

Helena grew up in a working-class family in a Pākehā-dominated suburb. Despite her parents’ limited formal education, they aspired for Helena and her sister to have successful careers. High grades in mathematics meant Helena initially pursued accounting and an international corporate career. However, a shift in values and personal health challenges led Helena to reassess her life path. She returned to Aotearoa and discovered a passion for psychology and research. During her studies, she encountered lecturers who taught from a systems-orientated framework, and she was further enriched by Māori mentors. The latter increased Helena’s appreciation of Aotearoa’s history and Te Tiriti with its accompanying responsibilities for tangata Tiriti. After her professional psychology training, Helena moved cities and gained a community-based practice role. Helena recalls:

And I would do lots of home visits, lots of school visits. And I would spend all my time in areas of the community that weren’t part of my community. It’s [the town Helena moved to] a really weird place. It’s so stratified. I found it so hard to settle here partly because of that.

Helena’s home visits, with predominantly Māori whānau, were a confronting reminder of the injustices beyond her own middle-class suburb. Rising global and local economic inequities are increasing geographical, racial and class divisions, which means affluent people are less likely to interact with, and gain an understanding of, minoritised people and their lives (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Since Helena had grown up in a low-income neighbourhood, she could still relate to the families she met during her home visits. Nonetheless, she was troubled, since her research observations countered her own upward life trajectory and made her aware that social mobility is a less likely outcome for Māori whānau. This tension led her to do PhD research on a health issue that disproportionately affects Māori tamariki (children) and whānau (families). The stark contrast between her world and that of the whānau was something that stayed with Helena throughout her studies, as she reflects:

So, I did find that it [PhD study] was social and emotional. Because, what I started as this little scientific PhD, turned into putting it in the context of Aotearoa and our history and what that has meant for whānau (Māori families).



Helena's PhD topic affected her deeply. Such emotions are in tension with the norms of objectivity and neutrality that characterise the westernised tradition of psychology (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Pomare et al., 2021). The risks of universalised and decontextualised psychological research can be avoided through genuine stakeholder engagement. Hence, a key starting point for Pākehā researchers who seek to work with marginalised communities as allies is to relinquish control and to reduce distance by adopting more relational and participatory methods of engagement (Martel et al., 2021). Accordingly, Helena decided that partnership with Māori was an essential starting point for her PhD even though the topic was based in westernised neuro-cognitive psychology. Helena explains:

I talked to them [Māori stakeholders] and set up a research partnership. So, a formal arrangement that grew out of personal arrangements. Through that process, I realised that I had some knowledge, but I needed more. So, for a year of my PhD, I only read Māori academic authors - as I was collecting my data. Ran it back [with the stakeholders]... That, to me, was the biggest shift because I was hearing their voices. And I was lucky enough to have spaces to explore that with people who I had relationships with.

During this phase of the PhD, one of her research partners reiterated that acknowledging guilt is a start, but that moving forward with responsibility is the key. For Helena, a clear antidote for Pākehā paralysis is, "action really helps, being able to really do something..." After her PhD, Helena continued with a post-doc on a related topic with significant impacts for Māori. This time Helena did not merely collaborate with Māori but took her engagement a step further as she explains.

...rather than just forming a research partnership, like I did for my PhD, I actually came underneath the guidance of mana whenua [tribe with authority over a locale] and did what they thought was important. So, I was really lucky to be able to sit with kuia and kaumātua [female and male Māori elders] at the marae [tribal meeting grounds]. And, when I was worried about how I report findings or impacts on the community, I had opportunity to just kōrero [discuss]. To ask about those wider implications. So, the generosity that has been afforded to me is incredible. They were, in a western way, my research advisors or my governance group, which was amazing. Super challenging.

The guidance Helena received from mana whenua, and from being invited to the marae (tribal meeting grounds), was of primary importance to the success

of the research. Yet none of the people who offered the guidance received payment or wider recognition. Helena did have some funds to contribute to costs. Even so, as she admits "it didn't come anywhere near what it should be". The added guilt of relying on significant volunteer input from members of a marginalised group was partly what made the project 'super challenging'. In addition, engaging with stakeholders within a Māori cultural context requires Pākehā researchers to be immersed in an unfamiliar world where one is no longer the expert or in control. Helena exclaims:

Oh, my goodness! The sleepless nights that I had when I'd done something wrong! Was just amazing learning. But I do think that a high tolerance to discomfort is really important.... I never felt more Pākehā than when I was sitting on the marae.

What I learnt is, that wasn't a bad thing.

In reflecting on her own journey, Helena noted that there is no end point but rather an ongoing process of integrating learning, reflections, and understandings into her practice. Becoming more culturally competent does not mean one should discard all western knowledge or step away completely from working with Māori. Western trained Pākehā psychologists can still be useful as Helena comments:

So, it's not like you get some knowledge and can say "I've got it now", because you never have it. But at the same time, our psychology training and our models can be really helpful. I know that because whaiora (persons seeking health) tell me. So, I say, "I don't do mahi a atua (Kopua et al., 2019)," and they say, "I don't want that. I want to know what you know, and you can help me." So, process is important. But it doesn't mean that as Pākehā we can't be useful. But we have to be thoughtful the whole time.

Pākehā working on health and community issues can do useful things when they partner with Māori colleagues and communities, but there is more to being an ally than simply doing your job proficiently. While Helena was reluctant to call herself an ally, she did have clear views on what it takes to be a genuine ally,

So, when people think about being an ally they think about it in terms of their occupation. Whereas I see it as being human and living on the whenua that was stolen, and therefore what do we do to help rectify that? But to get there, there's quite a journey. I'm continually learning... It's also ensuring we pronounce te reo Māori properly, we talk about the history of Aotearoa and support Māori political causes. And we don't just do it



at work. Being an ally is working for Māori to have sovereignty and authority. Not for us saying what should happen.

Helena's account reflects that being a good ally requires personal commitment and humility in one's work and personal life. Nevertheless, this does not mean that one should undertake this journey alone. Indeed, building a comprehensive network with like-minded people and mentors is the key to staying on the path. The importance of collaboration, with a cautionary note about not leaning on Māori too much, is evident in Helena's comments:

That ability to become an ally is based around relationships. So, we need the information, but we also need people who are not just colleagues but trusted friends, people that we can have these conversations with. But also, I look back and go gosh, without knowing the burden that I then placed on people?! Because I think I may have asked Māori to help soothe my distress, which is not right, but at that time I didn't have that perspective.

In the quote above, Helena states that learning how to be a better ally is best done in the context of relationships. However, she also acknowledges the burden for Māori. This highlights the importance for non-Māori to build their own support and collegial networks to advance decolonisation and antiracist practices (Margaret, 2013).

Erleen

Erleen's ancestors came to Aotearoa from Northern Europe. She grew up in a Pākehā-dominated suburb and still lives nearby. Her working-class upbringing and being surrounded by a large extended family meant that Erleen, "was exposed to the variety and troubles that go with life." These family experiences guided Erleen towards studying psychology since she wanted to know how she could help people in similar situations. Being the only daughter with several brothers meant she spent considerable time with two Māori cousins. These connections attuned her to the different life trajectories of her Māori cousins. Erleen recounts:

As I was growing up, I began to be increasingly puzzled seeing my cousins taking different paths to me when we had been to the same primary school, and we'd grown up in the same area. One cousin in particular had mental health struggles, and I was troubled in how she was being treated. So, when I went into psychology, I was searching but I couldn't put it in words. But I can now. I was searching for something that was going to be more bicultural.

Erleen's childhood experiences made her aware that societal structures, such as the education and mental health systems, are not conducive to Māori needs and experiences. This awareness led her to seek a professional psychology programme with more Māori staff and bicultural content. Erleen's awareness of Māori culture had also been fostered by her creative father, who had developed close, respectful relationships with local Māori artists and musicians. Erleen often accompanied him when he was invited to work on collaborative projects around Aotearoa. When Erleen started her journey towards working more closely with Māori, she consulted her father. Erleen recounts:

I said "how did you manage and negotiate it?" Because again, Pākehā come stepping in? And his advice was to surround, make sure you've got good connections with people who will support you in your work. And by that he meant Māori.... So I guess that's what I did.

While Erleen started out by approaching Māori for advice and input, later in the same interview, she raised concerns about Pākehā making such requests. Expecting Māori staff to fill the gaps, is unfair given that they were not the instigator for the issues in the programme (Waitoki et al., 2023). In this context, it is important for Pākehā staff to speak up loudly and at length in support of appointing Māori staff. Erleen comments how she had to persist for over two years to hire a Māori staff member:

I wrote a document on behalf of the department. Essentially making the argument of why we needed to hire a Māori academic. I kept on presenting this each time and was always told much to my dismay "now's not the right time." And I kept thinking to myself "it's always the right time for this." But, always the argument that we're under financial pressures and da-da-da-da.

Eventually, Erleen's proposal succeeded following leadership changes, and due to being able to draw on the university's strategic documents and a Te Tiriti claim (Levy, 2018). Nonetheless, simply hiring one additional Māori staff member is only a small step, and one that carries the risk that non-Māori staff may assume that this person is there to respond to their requests for cultural support. Erleen reflected on these issues as follows:

We're really aware of that whole cultural taxation as well. So, in writing the PD [position description], we don't see this as the person who's the go to for everything Māori. They're an academic in their own right... We're really clear that the expectation is that they wouldn't go and do teaching into other people's



courses on and on. Because that's the other lecturers' responsibility, to upskill themselves and not call upon this one person to do everything.

In this situation, as a senior faculty member, Erleen set clear boundaries for the new staff member, who may have felt less empowered to do so given the hierarchical structures within a university. Especially in an institutional setting that has colonial roots, it is vital that Pākehā, who are beneficiaries of colonisation, utilise their power to protect and enhance the rights of their Māori colleagues (Pomare et al., 2021; Waiari et al., 2021).

Although Erleen did not refer to herself as an ally, her father was the first person to come to mind when Erleen was asked if she had allyship role models. Erleen responds,

Reflecting back there was my father and his advice. The really important part was accepting that I wasn't going to please everybody. Often what stops people is fear of making mistakes or being criticised. That's why people don't engage in standing up or bicultural practice. Because that fear, it stops them. I really took that on board. Okay, I'm not going to make everybody happy, and I've learnt to accept that. What I think is important, is that you have the right contacts, that you feel informed and supported.

As Erleen's account highlights, a fear of mistakes or criticism can be a major barrier to allyship. Nevertheless, her account also reflects an acceptance that criticism is part of the process, but that it is perhaps not as scary as Pākehā may fear. As Erleen explains in further detail,

And it's so important to trust that they [Māori] will also help you see your blind-spots and help you through those weaknesses as well... They had such a gentle way of telling me... I guess it was mana-enhancing [based on trust and respect] in the way that they were helping me to move forward and to learn. So, I didn't feel that fear of 'Ah! I've made a mistake' it was 'Oh yeah right, I could've done that differently'. I could learn from it rather than feeling trodden on.

It wasn't criticism.

Above Erleen recounts that the mana (power)-enhancing guidance she received from Māori about her cultural blind spots meant it was not necessary for her to react with fear (Crawford & Langridge, 2022). In the context of the trusting and respectful relationships built over time, Erleen chose not to become defensive and instead kept herself open to opportunities to learn.

Erleen's father's advice, experiences, and the connections she built with Māori over the decades have all informed her allyship efforts. Since graduating in the 1980s, Erleen has worked as a psychologist, educator, and supervisor in community settings. When she began her academic position, she admitted feeling, "*really dismayed at the lack of bicultural teaching.*" Over time, Erleen sought to build more Māori content into a professional psychology programme. Following staff departures, Erleen ended up in a position where she was able to leverage greater support. What also helped is that the university began to increase its investment in initiatives to improve its Tiriti responsiveness and to build connections with mana whenua. As a result, Erleen reflects that, "*...within the programme now we have real momentum, so it's no longer me being the one driving things, instead everybody's doing, making changes, and it's a real shared activity.*" This collective effort adds to the momentum since having more people involved generates "*...such great ideas...much better than I could think of.*" Herein, lies another characteristic of thoughtful and useful allies. They will take the initiative to do the work when no one else does, but they also know when to stand back.

Ada

Ada is a Pākehā New Zealander with ancestry from the UK. She grew up in a mostly white rural community. In her adult life, she often moved across Aotearoa and to some places with high Māori populations. Ada started the interview by saying, "Yeah, I'm not sure that I think myself as ally. But I guess I have become that. So, the journey is a long one." Ada's journey towards understanding social justice and racism, began when she participated in a 1971 research project on apartheid in South African and Rugby tours to Aotearoa. Conducting in-person interviews within very divided communities was intense, but it helped Ada to realise "the power of asking questions." Following this, Ada became involved in a national not-for-profit organisation addressing poverty and injustices overseas. This network gave Ada access to a range of development discussions and connections with similar social justice groups. There was considerable momentum, but it was mostly Pākehā-led and focused on other places. These efforts did receive challenges from Māori leaders, such as Titewhai Harawira, for their exclusively overseas orientation. Even though Ada walked over the Auckland harbour bridge during the pivotal 1975 Māori land march, she admits that she had thought little about racism in Aotearoa. By the mid-1980s, Ada along with community partners



started to run Pākehā-tauīwi Treaty workshops with mixed results. Ada explains.

Racism in South Africa seems easier because it is removed from us. But starting to talk about racism in Aotearoa was really hard work... We probably put people off more than we brought them on board. The pedagogy at this time was quite confrontational. The anti-racism movement wasn't a kind movement. It wasn't actually about let's look after each other.

Interestingly the quote above reflects that, when Pakeha did finally focus their antiracism efforts within the Aotearoa context, they did not always manage to do so in a mana-enhancing manner. Alongside her antiracism activism, Ada was also furthering her studies and had the privilege of being mentored by leading Māori academics. During this time, Ada was exposed to culturally informed ways of engaging in research which was of more benefit to Māori communities.

I kinda had no idea about how to go about setting up research relationships with Māori. No idea about the way Māori had been abused through research. Like being asked to give the voice but denied any reciprocity of voice.

The research Ada was involved with provided an example of how to do engaged research grounded in te ao Māori within a Pākehā institutional setting that involved reciprocity with the communities that the research was drawn from (Martel et al., 2021). As the team collated cohesive Māori stories, Ada realised that impacting all of these Māori accounts was an “unnamed cultural other”. From that point on, Ada began to explore the Pākehā stories that had been largely overlooked due to being an ubiquitous and unquestioned norm (Black & Huygens, 2016). For Ada, it became clear what she needed to confront in order to work more effectively alongside Māori.

It seems that we continue to position Māori without positioning ourselves. I firmly believe that we have to know who we are in the picture. To be clear about my place and the relationships. And what my people bring or have done. What we need to undo if you ever can? At last, I managed to figure out the extreme guilt I felt about, you know, the stories of how Māori have been treated, the land wars. I can now process it. So I've been able to shift from guilt. But I took a long time.

Critical reflecting on her own positionality and privileges helped Ada to eventually move past guilt and towards decolonial practice. Yet this journey has not been “straightforward or easy”. Ada was sustained by engaging with others, which meant she

always had colleagues to discuss ideas with, and she made lasting friendships that provided support so she could remain open to continual learning. One of things non-Māori can find challenging to grapple with is the language used to identify positionality, as Ada explains.

I mean, they are all kind of artificial constructs - tangata Tiriti and tangata whenua. Because you have Māori who are both, and Pākehā who are both. Yeah, not so much those specific words. So tangata Tiriti is kind of more of a political statement than an identity. It's definitely saying I'm part of the collective. It's all of us who are in the Crown partner side of Tiriti.

While positionalities are expressed through abstract human constructs, they do matter. The point is to understand the collective histories behind these constructs and how these can also translate into collective responsibilities (Matike Mai Aotearoa, 2016). As Ada signals above, there can be both differences and overlaps between the various positionings within Aotearoa. No single group exists in isolation from the other. Reflecting on this relationality is a useful starting point for greater understanding and accountability (Margaret, 2013). This relationality is further reflected in how Ada conducts Tiriti workshops with tauīwi.

When we do workshops, I say I am Pākehā. And for newer migrant communities, I say there are layers. I consciously talk about being Pākehā. But then we need to talk about how we are also tangata Tiriti in that bigger grouping. Because you and I are both here under The Crown...How do I as the kind of early-comer Pākehā look after you as a newer immigrant in our sphere? As tangata Tiriti how do we then work with all of our diversity in this sphere of Tiriti relationships?

An over-riding thread in Ada's account is that her long journey towards understanding and decolonial practice was not just a solitary pursuit but occurred through relationships with others across a range of groups and contexts. Reaching out to others takes effort and can mean leaving one's comfort zone, however, in the connections and relationships there is enormous richness.

Ada has many years of experience of working with Māori in contributing the bicultural development of NZPsS. Part of the allyship learning is for Ada to be “in the back and doing the background work, instead of expecting... to sit at the table and be served”. Ada reflects on how everyone has a role to play in a marae and likened allyship to the necessity of doing one's work in the kitchen. Doing allyship requires Pākehā to provide useful and provide practical support,



including “to get your hands in, get them dirty”. Determining when to step forward and when to step back is an ongoing process that is also dependent on the situation and the relationship/s you are in (Margaret, 2013). Taking credit for the mahi does not necessarily require one to lead, as the emphasis on allyship is to undertake the work while remaining accountable to Indigenous peoples for the outcomes (Crawford & Langridge, 2022).

The fear of making mistakes can be a barrier for Pākehā in doing the right things—a phenomenon referred to as Pākehā paralysis (Crawford & Langridge, 2022). Ada illustrates the importance of examining historical and cultural stereotypes affecting Māori so that these do not become barriers to engagement. She has also heard Pākehā describe their Māori colleagues as “scary” due to the latter’s tendency to question their intentions, integrity, or hold them accountable. She challenges the assumption that Māori are intimidating which hinders Pākehā from forming meaningful relationships with Māori and embarking on the path to decolonising psychology.

Well, I think Māori become ‘scary’ the way they are positioned in the media. We’ve been conditioned through various means outside of our control to consider, Māori men are dangerous or groups of Māori as gangs. But you know, the values that Māori hold within their culture of manaakitanga (hospitality) and wairuatanga (spirituality), and all of those beautiful values... And, sometimes Māori may make statements like we want our lands back. But actually, they are incredibly respectful. And will go through due process, either, to protect the land or they are respectful if they cannot get the land back. And given how it was taken from them! We have to examine this, like, what experience have most Pākehā ever had with Māori being scary to them?

You know, almost none.

When asked about platforms available for Pākehā in psychology to develop an understanding of allyship roles, Ada recommended the Pākehā/Tauīwi Caucus as part of the NSCBI, which she is a member of. It offers a space for “Pākehā to talk to [each other], and what are the issues for us in doing this work, like really important stuff... [and exploring] how we get Pākehā to do the work around being good allies and becoming biculturally ourselves.” Over the years, the Caucus has organised gatherings for Pākehā and Tauīwi psychologists at conferences and online forums for Pākehā/Tauīwi to explore the implications of Te Tiriti in their practice (NSCBI, 2022). Ada reflected on the difficulty of sustaining

allyship, noting that “it’s really hard maintain the energy [of the Pākehā caucus] to keep those things, when they are completely voluntary” and highlighted the importance of tuakana-teina (two-way learning through mentorship) in creating pathways for younger generations of Pākehā to understand Pākehā allyship, including through wānanga (focused forums or meetings) (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020) to learn, discuss, and identify solutions amongst each other.

Discussion

Attempting to practice as a Pākehā ally takes considerable time, patience, and humility. All three cases emphasised that it is important to let go of one’s position as an expert and allow Māori to lead and communicate their priorities. The dominance of neoliberalism and hyper-individualism in contemporary mainstream psychology is a considerable barrier to this approach and decolonisation more broadly (Levy & Waitoki, 2016; Pomare et al., 2021; Waitoki et al., 2023). The discipline often perpetuates the status quo and is largely silent on the widening economic, social and cultural inequities (Ciofalo et al., 2022; Hodgetts et al., 2020). Mainstream psychology, as a global ‘hyperscience’ (Teo, 2020), has its uses. Still, a major issue is how it imposes westernised knowledge about individuals on the rest of the world. The current context means that allyship is no easy task, and all three participants have had to embark on a journey to ensure they could develop a relevant and ethical knowledge base for their practice.

Our findings show that key actions for Pākehā doing allyship are to: 1) listen to Māori on their terms, 2) find ways to be constructive, and 3) maintain a receptive stance towards non-dominant worldviews. Central to these actions is the need for Pākehā to critically reflect on what Crawford and Langridge (2022) termed the 3Ps: 1) power (mechanisms that establish and maintain oppression, such as racism), 2) paralysis (inaction due to fear and fragility in the face of criticism), and 3) positionality (reflecting on context and insider/outsider positions). The participants all demonstrated the capacity to reflect on their mistakes and blind spots. The reflexivity component can be achieved by doing one’s own homework of understanding oneself as a cultural bearer (Black & Huygens, 2016) and considering the privilege that Pākehā obtain as an ethnic majority and settlers in Aotearoa (e.g., recognising their own culture as whiteness is embedded in most Aotearoa institutions) (Margaret, 2013; McKegg, 2019). The ability to reflect on beliefs and practices, including



those differing from their own, is also central to culturally safe service and care (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2009), as it enables the examination, negotiation, and alteration of power imbalances to provide equitable service delivery.

Doing allyship is a skill needs to be developed, given that those who belong to dominant groups often find it difficult to hear criticism, and for whom even constructive critique can destabilise their sense of self, reality and truth (Crawford & Langridge, 2022; McKegg, 2019). Being confronted with different worldviews and values requires dominant group members to realise that “the unspoken norms, often perceived as universal truths, may not be universal and may oppress, subordinate, and silence the voices of others” (Applebaum, 1996, p. 79). Nonetheless, the discomfort Pākehā may feel when in unfamiliar cultural settings or when they are being challenged is also an opportunity – since these ‘cracks’ in Pākehā certainty can open spaces for reflection, connection and change (Margaret, 2013; McKegg, 2019).

Although the participants interviewed for the present research fulfilled the role of an ally, they were reluctant to call themselves allies, which is perhaps not surprising given the term has come under considerable critique (Margaret, 2013). The widespread use of the term ally, especially in the US, has led some scholars to argue that the term risks losing meaning. According to (Bourke, 2020, p. 180), “allyship has become a performance that all too often is disconnected from action.” A key concern is that when dominant group members merely perform allyship the act is reduced to an individual identity expression. Similarly, Sumerau et al. (2021) claim that people in privileged groups can draw on the moral status of being an ally to gain kudos and to further distance themselves from the challenging and uncomfortable work of examining privileges and addressing racial oppression. Performance allyship may become more about symbolic positioning, which often leads to inaction and potentially aggravates oppression. In this paper, we take note of these valid critiques. At the same time, we take the position that there can be value in the role of being a (reluctant) ally if this is done with awareness, sincerity and humility.

We also note that much care is needed to avoid pitfalls. For example, when allies become over-identified as the ones who can make everything happen, the allyship risks being reduced to self-serving performances (Bourke, 2020; Margaret, 2013). Hence, knowing when to stand back and allow others to act is just as important as taking action. One helpful strategy is to centre the purpose

rather than the actor. All participants highlighted the importance of having good contacts with, and support from, Māori. Even so, Māori input for research or for acquiring knowledge about te ao Māori is not something that can be expected or demanded by Pākehā. Indeed, one should avoid adding to the burden of cultural labour often placed on Māori in professional settings (Waitoki et al., 2023). Instead, time, effort, and commitment must be invested to educate oneself and develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with Māori (Crawford & Langridge, 2022; Margaret, 2013). Meaningful relationships must exist first before there can be any sharing of advice and support.

Allyship is a choice for Pākehā and that is part of the invisible privilege. It is an unearned privilege for Pākehā to avoid interrogating the foundations of monocultural psychology that closely align with the westernised ways of knowing, unlike Māori and minoritised groups who must confront and resist the assimilative impact of Eurocentric knowledge (Pomare et al., 2021). Psychology students, scholars, and practitioners from Indigenous and minoritised groups cannot afford to remain passive and accept the status quo. They must navigate the tension between institutional (often predominantly white) norms and the values and expectations of their own upbringing, whānau, and communities. Being aware of the costs and mechanisms of white privilege and being willing to take action—despite the potential discomfort of stepping outside one’s comfort zone or the risk of jeopardising one’s career for expressing unpopular opinions—are some ways that our participants perform allyship and advance the discipline’s responsibility to uphold Te Tiriti.

While all participants have acknowledged the importance of independently exploring and understanding their Pākehā identity, their relationship with Māori, and the practices of upholding Te Tiriti, this journey does not need to be undertaken alone. An earlier study in Aotearoa (Tan et al., 2025) found a correlation between psychologists and students who exhibited allyship—such as recognising their role in perpetuating racism, educating themselves about racism, and actively challenging racist policies—and positive attitudes towards integrating taha (aspects) Māori into psychology and a deeper understanding of the operation of racism. Yet, these topics are seldom addressed in psychology training, which raises concerns about the discipline’s readiness to develop a culturally safe workforce (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2009) and to effectively engage with service users who experience racial trauma



(Williams & Sharif, 2021). Psychology bodies (e.g., the New Zealand Psychologists Board), psychology departments, and workplaces can actively create platforms for Pākehā to connect and explore allyship roles and opportunities, particularly in addressing the timely challenges in the discipline, such as breaches of Te Tiriti (Levy, 2018) and the forthcoming apology to Māori from the collective psychology bodies (Anstiss, 2023).

Conclusion

The time and effort required for the journey towards genuine allyship can seem daunting. Nevertheless, as the three participants have shown, their allyship has opened opportunities for learning and deep connections. Embracing proactive approaches is essential for fostering more ethical and effective practices. As the three cases have shown, the efforts and (re)discovery of collective strength frees up possibilities for bridging differences and understandings of what can bind or separate us. The ongoing journey of 'doing allyship' as an ethical practice in psychology is a hopeful orientation for ensuring a discipline that is more clearly aligned with a Te Tiriti vision of how we might all live well in Aotearoa.

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