Dual Cultural Identity and Tangihanga:
Conflict, Resolution, and Unexpected Outcomes

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Abstract

New Zealand has a significant number of dual-cultural whānau (families) which incorporate the identities of both Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) and Māori (indigenous peoples of New Zealand). Little attention has been paid to the bereavement processes that will inevitably impact upon the lives of these whānau/families. As part of the Tangihanga Research Programme based at The University of Waikato, a directed study was conducted with a participant whose family/whānau included two life ways: Māori and Pākehā. An open-ended narrative approach was used to explore the participant's bereavement after the death of his beloved wife. Two central themes emerged within the narrative, which related to conflict and eventual resolution. Decision-making processes and language played significant roles in the conflict experienced by the participant. Communication and compromise helped to resolve these conflicts. Unexpected outcomes included new understandings and strengthened connections between the participant and his wife's marae.

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Keywords

bereavement, identity, culture, intercultural conflict, resolution

Introduction

Death is a universal experience, yet the responses and accompanying expressions it provokes are not shared across cultures. It has been asserted that grief and its expression are vastly different, among both individuals and cultures (Kalish & Reynolds, 1981; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Neimeyer, 2001; Peveto, 2001; Strobe, Gergen, Gergen & Strobe, 1992). Research in this area has conceptualised grief as a social construction, the variations within which are relative to the differences across societies or cultures (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). Culture exerts considerable influence over responses to death and the meanings assigned to this event (Peveto, 2001). Considering bereavement and grief in this way acknowledges the myriad of ways in which it is experienced and expressed around the world. The interacting relationship between grief and culture has started to attract attention. Yet little research specifically focuses on the diversity of grief expressions across cultures (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Peveto, 2001).

In considering grief and culture in the context of New Zealand, two ethnic groups are of particular significance, Pākehā and Māori. It has been noted that Māori and Pākehā often have quite distinct ways of responding to death and grief (Dansey, 1995). The Māori world answers the rupturing of community and disruption to wellness caused by death through the process of tangihanga (Māori death ritual). Tangihanga is the traditional Māori process whereby whānau (kinship group) and community come together to grieve for the death of a loved one. Tangi (funeral) has been a persistent institution and one that has undoubtedly contributed to mourning processes in the Pākehā world. A priority within tangi proceedings is the provision of support for the whānau pani (bereaved family) (Barrett-Aranui, 1999). Furthermore, tangihanga recognises the cycle of life from birth to the return of the spirits to the after world (Te Rangi Hiroa, 1982).

There appears to be little literature that examines Pākehā responses to death and grief. However, one article describes a significant gap within Pākehā funeral grieving processes, which are often filled

by funeral directors (Catholic Worker Organisation, 2006). Dansey (1995) offers some descriptions of Pākehā death rituals and contrasts these to tangihanga. Dansey (1995) notes that Pākehā appear to distance themselves from the deceased, who are contained within closed caskets, remaining at funeral homes until interment. Dr Pita Sharples also commented upon the differences in Māori and Pākehā grieving processes in the keynote address to a New Zealand National Loss and Grief conference:

> When we need to express grief, the strength for us is in numbers, in our connections, while in other world views, the expression of grief may be another opportunity to create distance—"we'll leave them alone", "they wouldn't want to see people at this time". (Sharples, 2006, p. 3)

Although the distinctions between Māori and Pākehā responses to death and grief can be discussed generally, for many individuals and whānau/families these are experienced on a more immediate and personal level. Intermarriage between Māori and people of other ethnicities has been ongoing since the first vessels of exploration and trade encountered these isles in the 18th century (Harré, 1966). This contact was further facilitated by Māori migration to urban centres, providing opportunities for Māori and Pākehā to live and work in close proximity (Durie, 2005) and, in the case of New Zealand's military forces, fight alongside each other (Henderson, Green & Cooke, 2008). Data are not routinely collected on rates of Māori and Pākehā intermarriage. The New Zealand 2006 census noted that 42% (or approximately 237,438) of Māori also identify with European ethnic groups (Statistics New Zealand, 2007a). It is possible that some descendants of Māori and Pākehā relationships are also represented in other census groupings, such as the recently created "New Zealander" census category (Statistics New Zealand, 2007b).

The topic of the children of Māori and Pākehā intermarriage has garnered some academic discussion. Moeke-Maxwell (2003) suggested that the values, perceptions and processes of those who identify as being both Pākehā and Māori are shaped by two cultural identities which, for some, do not sit comfortably together. Theoretically, bicultural whānau/families may enjoy the resources of two cultural communities. However, the potential for conflict, tension and misunderstanding cannot be ignored. Bicultural whānau/families may be required to negotiate two sets of values, belief systems and accompanying expressions in their time of bereavement. Inevitably, failure to negotiate these aspects satisfactorily may have a significant impact upon the bereavement experiences encountered by bicultural whānau/families. Despite the relative prevalence of Māori and Pākehā bicultural whānau/families in New Zealand, there appears to be no research that examines how their identities may influence their experience of bereavement. Accordingly, limited knowledge and understanding may be available to effectively support bicultural whānau/families during their time of bereavement.

Objective
The objective of this research was to use a single case study to explore the bereavement experience of one Māori and Pākehā bicultural whānau/family to gain some understanding of how such whānau/families respond to bereavement and grief and move forward in their lives. Critical to this topic is the examination of the points of contact, difference and commonality between Māori and Pākehā cultures. The intention of this research project was to provide knowledge about choices, processes and outcomes including the negotiation of conflict, perspective, and practice.

Methodology
One participant was recruited for this research project. The participant was a male in his late 60s, who identified culturally as Pākehā. The interview focused on the participant's bereavement following the death of his wife, who was of Māori descent. The interview was conducted using an open-ended narrative approach. A semi-structured interview schedule based on five thematic areas guided the interview process. However, the participant's experiences and his preferences in expressing his ideas on these themes determined how the interview progressed. The interview was audio taped and subsequently transcribed. Based on this data, a summary report outlined the key points made in the interview, including direct quotations from the participant. A thematic approach was employed for the data analysis, to identify the emergent themes. A diverse range of themes was identified, although the focus was narrowed to the two key themes that appeared integral to the participant's narrative. These

themes were conflict and resolution. The transcript and summary report were reviewed in light of these themes and information relevant to each was coded and categorised accordingly. The findings are presented in the next section.

Results

The single case study presented in this section depicts some of the issues encountered by a bicultural whānau/family during a significant bereavement. We interviewed Graeme and recorded his experiences and reflections on the different cultural worlds he engaged in throughout his life, and specifically after the death of his wife, Georgette. The focus of this paper is Graeme's experience, perspective, and understanding of a specific event. It is not appropriate or necessary to question the actions of any parties involved, nor do we make any claims upon others who feature in the narrative. The two main themes that emerged from the participant's narrative, conflict and resolution, are the focus of this section. It begins with an outline of Graeme and Georgette's life to provide some context for the issues that are subsequently discussed. The participant specifically requested that his and his wife's real names were used in this research. Pseudonyms have been used for other individuals.

Case Study: Graeme and Georgette

Graeme identifies culturally as Pākehā. Graeme spent his childhood in a major North Island city, within a family from a strong military background. Georgette was of Māori descent and her childhood was based in the East Coast region of New Zealand's North Island. Graeme and Georgette respectively joined the New Zealand Army, which provided the context for their first meeting. Soon after this meeting, Graeme and Georgette began a relationship. Graeme contrasted the perceptions held in the 1960s of Māori/Pākehā relationships in the Army, to those in civilian life:

> It was virtually the done thing in the army, for Māori and Pākehā to be married, either a Māori man or a Pākehā man or vice versa, no one worried, yet out in "civi" street .... That was in 1963 and it was not common but in the services it was quite common. Because, we worked together, we slept together, we fought together, we trained together, we did everything together, and it did not matter who you were.

Graeme and Georgette became engaged and then married against the wishes of Graeme's mother, who tried unsuccessfully to break up the relationship. The wedding was held on Georgette's marae (tribal meeting ground and associated buildings) on the East Coast. Graeme acknowledged that in the early stages of the relationship, he lacked knowledge of Māori culture and he described differences between his and Georgette's respective cultures. Graeme established a good relationship with Georgette's whānau, particularly with Georgette's brother, Haki. Whenever Graeme attended events which were conducted in te reo Māori (Māori language), Haki would translate into English for Graeme. Graeme and Georgette had four children and Graeme supported the whānau/family through his career in the Army. Georgette eventually trained as a teacher and went on to teach te reo Māori at a nearby college.

Georgette's Death and Tangi

After a brief period of illness, Georgette was diagnosed with terminal cancer. As the whānau/family had some notice of Georgette's terminal prognosis, there was an opportunity to discuss with Georgette her final wishes. However, understandably, Graeme was reluctant to have this difficult conversation. Eventually, a conversation did take place, albeit briefly. Georgette requested that the whānau/family bury her in her whānau urupā (family cemetery). Graeme was unhappy with this request, as he believed it would limit his ability to visit Georgette's grave regularly. Graeme actively tried to dissuade Georgette from her decision. Despite Graeme's disapproval, however, Georgette's final wishes were accepted by him.

Georgette's condition swiftly worsened and she was admitted to hospital, where she eventually died. Georgette's entire tangi occurred within three distinct settings: the family home, the funeral home and, finally, at Georgette's marae. Graeme and his children appeared to have a central role in organising the proceedings at the family and funeral home. Graeme recalled that while the events were

occurring at these locations, Georgette's sister liaised with the marae to organise the final proceedings there. Geographic distance and time restrictions may have affected the decisions that were made for the marae-based tangi. It is common for tangi proceedings to occur over several days (Ngata, 2005), whereas Georgette's marae-based tangi would be condensed into a 24-hour period. Graeme was ill-prepared for the way in which the tangi would be enacted at the marae, which had an obvious and profound impact upon him. Graeme's experience at the marae-based tangi was the most significant point of conflict in Graeme's story.

Conflict

Graeme was not involved in organising the proceedings at Georgette's marae but, as he stated, at that point he did not want to be. Instead, this process was undertaken by Georgette's whānau in conjunction with representatives from the marae. Graeme's assumption about the parties involved in this process was that: "they would do the right thing by me." However, the "they" and "me" located in this statement actually belonged to two distinct cultural groups, Māori and Pākehā. It became evident in Graeme's descriptions of the marae-based tangi, that each cultural group had quite a different perception of what constituted the "right thing". Graeme was surprised and hurt by the realisation that the entire marae-based proceedings would be conducted in te reo Māori. For Graeme, this meant that he was unable to understand any of the ceremony, and in particular, what may have been said about Georgette. Graeme described how this affected his experience at the marae: "I was bitterly disappointed over the whole affair and I just could not wait to get home." This experience had a profound and lasting effect on Graeme and prevented him from being able to reflect back on a lovely service, as he simply did not understand it. This aspect was a pivotal point of focus within Graeme's narrative.

The role that language played in Graeme's story raises several issues. Language is central to communication. It can unify group members by reinforcing group identity or, conversely, exclude non-group members from communicating (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2007). Language can create distinct boundaries between ethnic groups (Gudykunst, 2004).Within the marae context, Graeme was thrust into the position of an outsider and excluded from understanding and participating in the event. Although this was not a unique experience for Graeme, Georgette and Haki were no longer alive to translate for him. Consequently, Graeme and his children were alone in a situation where language, as the means of communication, was unfamiliar and disorientating. When exposed to situations such as these, a common reaction is to perceive ourselves as excluded and rejected, subsequently threatening our very identity (Samovar et al., 2007).

Dual cultural relationships, such as Graeme and Georgette's, emphasise the importance of identity in inter-cultural situations. Identity influences and guides expectations of self and others and provides guidelines for our interactions with others (Samovar et al., 2007). We may have multiple identities that are called into play depending on the context we find ourselves in. These identities may be derived from personal aspects, the relationships we have with others and connections to communities such as ethnic, national or organisational (Samovar et al., 2007). Graeme and Georgette shared identities, as husband and wife, parents and as members of the New Zealand Army. Yet upon the marae, language drew a cultural boundary between Georgette and Graeme. It may be possible that Graeme perceived this boundary as a threat to his identity, and to the identity that he had shared with Georgette. The significance of Georgette's tangi to Graeme, and his role in this event, are undeniable. Graeme noted that he was given some respect and status at the marae, which indicates that his exclusion was unintentional; nonetheless, it had a powerful impact upon him. Graeme's reaction to this situation was a very common response (Samovar et al., 2007); he withdrew himself and left the marae immediately after the hākari (feast) which was held after Georgette's interment.

Graeme's experience at the marae depicts a site of intercultural conflict that occurred within this particular bereavement event. Intercultural conflict can occur when the values, expectations, or processes of two distinct cultures are perceived to be incompatible (Samovar et al., 2007). Cultural misunderstandings can occur when there is a lack of knowledge of the culture and needs of those concerned (Peveto, 2001). Furthermore, Ting-Toomy (1988) asserts that conflict can be defined as a

negotiation process within which the situated identities of the parties are threatened or questioned. Aspects of the marae-based tangi hurt Graeme, but he did not perceive this to be due to a lack of respect for him personally. Accordingly, it appears that the values, expectations, and/or processes that occurred within this location were incompatible with those familiar to Graeme.

Resolution

In considering the conflict that arose within Graeme's narrative, an important question remains. Were there any potential means by which a resolution could be found despite the intercultural conflict encountered? Graeme answers this question in his retelling of Georgette's unveiling ceremony, which was held to commemorate the anniversary of her death. Graeme played a central role in the organisation of this event, and he employed several processes that are considered key to negotiating intercultural conflict. These included collaboration, compromise, and continued engagement with the "other" culture (Samovar et al., 2007). In his planning, Graeme collaborated with his children and representatives from Georgette's marae. Graeme appointed a Māori minister to conduct the unveiling who was proficient in performing ceremonies in English and te reo Māori. People with bicultural skills are commonly used to connect two different cultural groups (Yum, 1988). The facilitation of the unveiling ceremony by this particular minister created a compromise that made concessions for both cultural groups involved. Feedback from the unveiling suggested that the ceremony satisfied the needs of both Māori and Pākehā at the marae. Graeme noted that although some aspects did not proceed as planned, these did not detract from what was generally a positive experience. The way in which Georgette's unveiling ceremony was organised and enacted provided an important resolution to the conflict experienced by Graeme at the tangi ceremony. Graeme spoke fondly of the unveiling event and it was apparent that it had quite a positive impact upon him.

Unexpected Outcomes

The resolution that Georgette's unveiling ceremony provided for Graeme also led to some quite unexpected outcomes. These included the development of new understandings and a significant decision for Graeme. Graeme initially disagreed with Georgette's decision to be buried at her whānau urupā. However, this decision subsequently forged a link between Graeme, his whānau/family, and the marae. This has enabled Graeme to establish relationships with people at Georgette's marae, which has furthered his understanding of Māori culture, and also assisted Graeme to take a different view of Georgette's final wishes. Graeme now finds great comfort in the thought that Georgette is buried with her whānau all around her, so that he could say, "I'm totally at peace with it." Initially, Graeme wanted Georgette to be buried in a nearby public cemetery. However, Graeme now describes this public cemetery as "a lonely place; you can stand looking at someone's headstone and not know anyone around you." Graeme initially preferred the public cemetery because he would be able to visit it regularly. However, Graeme was explicit that although he may only visit the whānau urupā a few times a year, each visit will have great meaning and value for him. Graeme looks forward to these visits and he likens his excitement to the feeling of departing on a holiday. Somewhat unexpectedly, this has informed Graeme's own final wishes to be cremated and his ashes placed with Georgette's headstone. Graeme's children are very happy with this decision.

Conclusion

Bicultural whānau/families negotiate differences in perspective and practice within their lives together. Such negotiations are no less significant in the critical process of bereavement that will inevitably be experienced by bicultural whānau/families. The case study presented in this paper provides knowledge about the potential for intercultural conflict but also the creation of resolution. Graeme's experience provided an example of intercultural conflict and perceived threats to the individual and relational identities that were manifested in his bereavement. However, communication, compromise and continued engagement provided resolution and created new pathways to participation and understanding. These also led to outcomes that were unexpected but welcomed nonetheless. There are aspects that are not accounted for within this case study which include the perspectives of other whānau/family members. These aspects may have increased the complexity of this story, and helped to provide a broader understanding of the issues and processes that arose. However, Graeme's experience

stands on its own merit and we are honoured by his sharing of an intimate and emotive story. This study provides but one contribution to a topic that requires much further investigation and discussion.

Acknowledgements

Glossary

hākari	feast
Māori	the indigenous peoples of New Zealand
marae	tribal meeting ground and associated buildings
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
tangi	funeral; mourning
tangihanga	Māori death ritual; funeral
te reo Māori	Māori language
whānau	kinship group; community
whānau pani	bereaved family
whānau urupā	family cemetery

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