



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**

Indigenous Sexual & Reproductive Justice in Aotearoa

Australasian Sexual & Reproductive Health Conference - ASRH 2025



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I have no disclosures of interest



Kei te mihi ahau ki te whenua, Tarndanya. Tēnā koe.

Kei te mihi ahau ki ngā tangata whenua, Kaurua, tēnā koutou.

Kei te mihi ahau ki tō koutou rangatira, e ngā kaumātua, e ngā mātua, e ngā tangata Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander, tēnā koutou katoa.

Acknowledgements to the land we are here on today, Tarndanya. Greetings.

Acknowledgements to the original custodians of this land we are here today, the Kaurua people. Greetings. To your leaders, your elders, your mothers and fathers, and the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island people here today, greetings to you all.



E karanga ana ahau!

Calling from Aotearoa to Tarndanya



I acknowledge the lands, mountains, and rivers that you reside on, and your gods and ancestors who locate you to these areas in ways that go beyond common understandings of time and space.

To introduce myself, and the people and places I am from:

Ko Ngatokimatawhaorua te waka
Ko Hokianga nui a Kupe te moana.
Ko ōku maunga karangaranga ko Rakautapu
me Te Ramaroa
Ko Te Rarawa me Ngāpuhi ōku iwi
Ko Ngai Tupoto, Ngati Korokoro, Ngati
Wharara, Te Pouka ōku hapū
Nō Motukaraka me Pakanae ahau
Ko Jade Le Grice tōku ingoa
He Māori ahau.



Māori (Indigenous) Sexual & Reproductive Justice





Māori & Reproduction: Cultural Value

- Māori cultural values, mātauranga that underpin sexuality & reproduction
 - Understandings of tapu (sacredness) & noa (ordinariness) protect that which is sacred – sexual organs, sexual activity, conception, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, and the status of children - the many facets and phases of a reproductive journey
 - Preserving and protecting the next generation, through family networks, roles and responsibilities of mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, uncles, elder siblings/cousins, and younger siblings/cousins, ensuring whakapapa is strong and healthy into the future.

*He aha te mea o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!
What is the greatest thing in this world? It is people, it is people, it
is people (Māori whakatauki, proverb)*



Māori & Reproductive Justice

- Reproductive justice
 - Developed in USA by Black feminists in the 1960s.
 - Merges concerns around sexual and reproductive health and human rights.
 - Considers how sexual and reproductive behaviour is shaped and constrained by social forces such as colonisation, heterosexism, poverty, racism, sexism (Ross, 2017).
- Intersectional marginalisation that informs Māori reproductive inequities
 - Discourses of Māori sexual promiscuity, hyper-femininity & hyper-masculinity (Smith & Le Grice, 2023).
 - Māori sexual & reproductive knowledges overtaken by early Christian colonising discourses (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007).
 - Many Māori are whakama (experience shame) regarding discussions about sexuality (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007).
 - Māori constructed as ‘at risk’, ‘over-represented’ with higher numbers of ‘unwanted’ and ‘unintended’ pregnancies compared to Pākehā (non-Māori) (Green, 2011).
 - Cultural deficit analyses: Inequities are naturalised and the history of colonisation in causation is obscured (Reid, 2004).



Māori & Reproductive Justice: Cross cutting issues

- Exploring cross cutting issues across a range of domains, while still holding space for nuanced issues, and complexity
 - Sexual health and prevention campaigns for STIs
 - Sexual health, testing and treatment of STIs
 - Prevention & treatment of HIV
 - Contraception education & the prevention of pregnancy & STIs
 - Abortion, medical and surgical
 - Sexuality education
 - Healthy relationships education
 - Sexual violence prevention
 - Therapeutic approaches to working with victims and perpetrators of sexual violence
 - Assisted reproductive technologies
 - Antenatal education
 - Pregnancy & birthcare
 - Foetal medicine
 - Lactation
 - Therapeutic approaches to infertility, pregnancy loss, trauma in childbirth, postnatal mental health, family violence

Sexuality education

Tupaea, M. & Le Grice, J. (2024) Mana Tamaiti: Un/binding Gender, Sexuality & Reproductive Autonomy with Mātauranga Māori and Intergenerational Dialogue, in Pasley, A., Gannon, S. & Osgood, J. (Eds). *Gender Un/bound: Traversing Educational Possibilities*. Routledge. Book ISBN 9781032715520



Māori & Sexuality education: Pedagogy

- The growth of online media has seen understandings of relationships that reinforce Western social pressures
- Relationships, sex, and sexuality are portrayed in ways that reinforce sexism, racism, and heterosexism prevalent in our society
- Online contexts provide an importance site of intervention
- Creating accessible content informed by mātauranga (Māori knowledge) and tikanga Māori (Māori practices) provides young Māori with a window into Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing sexuality



becomingsexualbeings.org

Māori & Sexuality education: Mātauranga

- There are ongoing struggles to legitimate mātauranga (Māori knowledge) Māori in science (Painting et al. 2023), sexuality education (Le Grice & Braun, 2018) and solutions for ending sexual violence (Le Grice et al., 2022).
- For Māori, understandings of tapu, mana (esteem) and mauri (life force) inform how we interact with one another in intimate relationships (Dobbs, 2019), our understanding of ourselves, and the world around us.
- Sexual violence is an anathema to tikanga and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge & practice), regarded as mahi tūkino (the work of evil; Te Wiata et al., 2022).
- Our website shares and unpacks key concepts in Māori and English languages, and their relevance to young Māori in the context of sexual relationships. We also share pūrakau, (traditional stories) containing key insights into Māori relationship ethics (tikanga).



Mātauranga

Our website shares findings from our research. This may be helpful for rangatahi, whānau, the people you support in your mahi. Whether you are a tohunga of all things mātauranga, a seasoned sexuality educator, or a learner - we hope you learn something new!

Māori & Sexuality education: Discourse & storytelling

- Contemporary realities of Māori youth are complex, shaped by the impacts of colonisation and intersecting vectors of oppression.
- The marginalisation of Māori ways of being, doing, and knowing opens a space for racialised understandings of Māori girls and boys to make sense of themselves, their choices, identities, pathways and futures.
- We share rangatahi pūrakau (stories) based on stories shared by our research participants, alongside a set of enquiry questions.
- We make visible the challenges that young Māori encounter, pathways to make sense of the social context that shapes them, and how they can overcome them.
- In context with the mātauranga (Māori knowledge) we have shared, we want to support rangatahi to come back to who they are and shake off the conditioning of racism, sexism, and misogyny.



Rangatahi pūrakau

We have created pūrakau from some of the rangatahi interviews to illuminate challenges that can arise in a journey to becoming a sexual being, and how rangatahi move beyond that. We have included enquiry questions that can support you to reflect on how these pūrakau might relate to you and your world.



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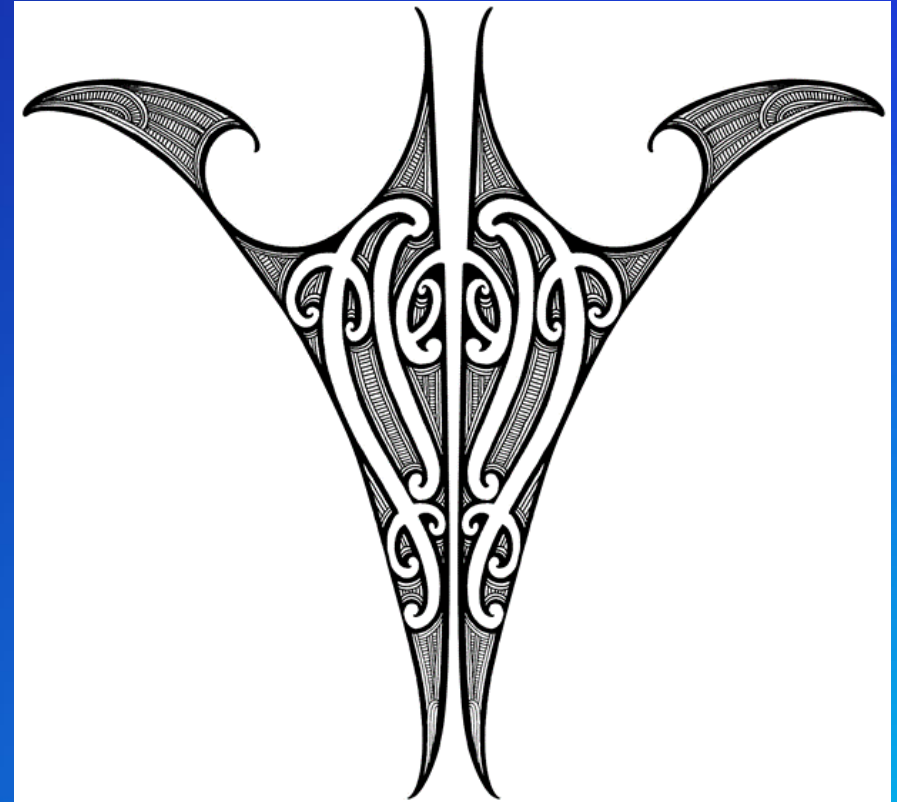
Abortion

Le Grice, J. & Braun, V. (2017). Indigenous (Māori) perspectives on abortion, *Feminism & Psychology*, 27(2), 144-162.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353517701491>



Māori & abortion: Discourse & knowledge

- Dominant representations of traditional Māori reproductive practice indicate disapproval of abortion (Turia, 2007; Rimene, Hassan, & Broughton, 1998; Manihera & Turnbull, 1990).
- Yet, historical accounts of Māori practices of abortion tell a more complex story.
 - Abortion was not linguistically distinguished from miscarriage (T. Smith, 2012).
 - Known and accepted methods for causing a loss of conception (Palmer, 2002; T. Smith, 2012; Tangohau, 2003).



Artist: Rawiri Horne
Gifted by Waikaremoana Waitoki

Māori & abortion: Colonising discourse, knowledge & health practice

- Existing research about Māori engagement with abortion, written by Pākehā (European) psychiatrists. Claims about Māori and abortion drew from colonising, oppressive understandings about Māori aligned with notions of Māori ‘savagery’ (Le Grice & Braun, 2017).
 - Assumed patriarchal gender relations, and negative and vengeful subject positions for women (e.g. Hunton, 1977).
 - Suggested abortion was *widely practiced* among Māori due to “savagery” (e.g. Hunton, 1977) .
 - Suggested abortion was *not practiced* due to “superstition” (e.g. Gluckman, 1973, 1981).
- Discourse informed the pathologisation & criminalisation of Māori women who sought abortion as reproductive healthcare
- Discourse aligned with wider national narratives of missionaries “saving” Māori through British colonisation and assumption of rule (Pool, 2015) through the construction of Māori cultural ‘deficits’

Māori & abortion: Māori discourse, knowledge & health practice

- The deliberate loss of conception (abortion) is not anathema to Māori knowledges, ways of being and patterns of practice
- Māori are diverse in their understanding and engagement with mātauranga Māori, with implications for their perspectives on abortion
 - Christian influences, focus on protecting the new life (although often framed as personal choice)
 - Māori women's rangatiratanga, understood as women's self determination in the context of her unique circumstances, hopes, dreams and aspirations
 - Focus and prioritisation of whānau, and care for one another (whangai, and/or support for the individual woman)
- The practice of whenua ki te whenua (returning pregnancy tissue/placenta to ancestral lands) nurtures connections between atua, tangata and whenua, providing kai atawhai (sheltering and protection) in these domains.

Infertility & assisted reproduction

Le Grice, J., Lindsay Latimer, C., Manchi, M., Bitossi, N., Urale, P. (2024). Māori and Pacific Experiences of Infertility, Access to Information & Pathways to Care. Fertility New Zealand, The University of Auckland.

<https://www.fertilitynz.org.nz/news/fertility-nz-research-shows-maori-and-pacific-people-face-barriers-to-treatment>

Māori & Pacific infertility discourse & knowledge

- Māori and Pacific people in New Zealand have higher overall reproductive rates than European people (Khawaja et al., 2000; Urale et al., 2019) that obscures the possibility of Māori and Pacific infertility (Foaese, 2018; Glover et al., 2008; Reynolds & Smith, 2012).
- The sociocultural norm of having many children within Māori and Pacific communities created challenges for those experiencing infertility, reaching out and access support, creating intense pressures on their couple relationships (Le Grice et al., 2023).
- The absence of culturally resonant wrap around support across key pressure points in a journey of infertility - traversing pregnancy loss (miscarriage, still birth), seeking eligibility for public funding, and going through the process of medicalised treatments - created intense (and life-threatening) psychosocial impacts (Le Grice et al., 2023).



Artist: Riona Kipa, Tokipa design

Māori & Pacific infertility knowledge & health practice

- Māori and Pacific men and women are less likely to seek medical help for infertility (Righart et al., 2021).
- Challenges with medicalised language, power hierarchy of a doctor and patient relationship, and a gap in the provision of culturally and spiritually resonant information (Le Grice et al., 2023).
- Public funding for fertility treatment is contingent on a Body Mass Index of 40 (men) or 32 (women), disadvantaging Māori and Pacific people who have high BMIs (Parker & Le Grice, 2022).
- In some healthcare interactions, Māori and Pacific people report being turned away from further diagnostic testing, later finding out about serious undiagnosed health issues that have caused infertility (Le Grice et al., 2023; Parker & Le Grice, 2022).
- For many Māori and Pacific participants excluded from public funding for fertility treatment, this represents the end of the road on their journey seeking access to fertility services (Le Grice et al., 2023).



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Indigenous Sexual & Reproductive Justice



Indigenous Sexual & Reproductive Justice through Indigenous-led Research: Cross cutting themes

Social norms & assumptions

- Unravelling how social social forces such as colonisation, poverty, racism, sexism shape and constrain Māori sexual and reproductive lives, decisions, opportunities and aspirations

Knowledge

- Unravelling whether knowledge produced 'about' Indigenous people is accurate, and creating space for Indigenous knowledge to be developed in this space

Health Practice

- Unravelling how discourse might shape inequitable health practices, and working to correct that

Pedagogy

- Working to understand how we can educate our communities for healthy, safe, ethical, and happy sexual, reproductive, and family lives

Indigenous Sexual & Reproductive Justice:

**What is your
role in
supporting
Indigenous self-
determination in
your area/s of
practice?**

- In what ways can Indigenous knowledge, innovation, and creativity enrich various approaches to sexual and reproductive health?
 - Sexual health and prevention campaigns for STIs
 - Sexual health, testing and treatment of STIs
 - Prevention & treatment of HIV
 - Contraception education & the prevention of pregnancy & STIs
 - Abortion, medical and surgical
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