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## REVIEW

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AGEE, Margaret, Tracey McIntosh, Philip Culbertson and Cabrini ‘Ofa Makasiale: *Pacific Identities and Well-being: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013. 330 pp., \$45.00 (paper).

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This anthology is another significant step to expanding the body of research and literature in the area of Māori and Pacific psychologies, counselling and psychotherapy. Its beginnings were in preparations for the Pacific Research Symposium: Cross-Cultural Conversations about Pacific Identities, Mental Health and Well-being (Auckland 2010) where this multi-disciplined group of practitioners, theologians, teachers and researchers sought answers to questions of why there is a high prevalence of mental disorders among the Pacific population in New Zealand? (p. 51) So while this mix of pioneer and new writers (including insider voices) draw on their own in-depth community knowledge and a range of research foci and methods, the focus on self esteem, connecting, solidarity and especially resilience bind the chapters together as a compelling challenge to deficit modelling and a call for new paradigms of connection unity and counselling education for Pacific peoples. The collection is a rich *talanoa* of other ways of knowing: approaches are refreshingly strength based (well captured in Mila-Schaaf’s words [this is] “not another NZ born identify crisis”), and show how Pacific peoples “are actively changing the way identify politics are discussed and negotiated” (p. 18). While there is some theoretical modelling, priority is given to exploring the experiences of second generation New Zealand-born who are growing up far from the Pacific homelands and contending with relatively complex cultural environments. Issues of intergenerational change and maintenance of cultural identity and heritage are examined against a questioning of what this means for our practice.

The introduction is a fine entry into the chapters especially for readers new to this discussion. The 17 chapters are arranged in four parts—identity (who am I and how do I belong), therapeutic practice, death and dying and, reflexive practice—with poems by noted poets Seri Barford, Selina Tusitala March and Tracey Tawhiao introducing each. The inclusion of poetry throughout this collection is a powerful reminder of the importance of language and words to Pacific peoples. This is explored further in the Epilogue where in a “theology of comedy” Mua-Strickland argues Pacific people’s loud laughter is a source of healing and the way “we understand tragedy, suffering and injustice”.

This education/social sciences/New Zealand-born Samoan reviewer found the Part 1 chapters of particular interest in offering frameworks for further reflection. Chapter 1 opens with Webber’s well referenced discussion aimed at gaining a better understanding of the salience of racial ethnic identity (REI) constructs and cultural

orientation. Contrary to views that REI is fixed and well defined, Webber presents this as a dynamic and interactive aspect of self-concept, as time bound and space dependent, continually renegotiated, and unpredictable. REI also helps buffer the effects of discrimination and racism on adolescents' psychological well-being, providing them with a repertoire of social identities by which they can successfully negotiate difficult situations such as being faced with negative stereotypes and unfair treatment. She presents her research carried out at multi-ethnic schools in Auckland, which explored the significance and meaning Year 9 adolescents attached to their REI. Thirty seven percent of Māori respondents and 43 percent of Pacific ones had positive feelings about their racial-ethnic group (Pakehā 38%, Chinese 48%), with Pacific students associating this strongly with culture family, language and difference, for example, "it is cool being an Islander because we are different to everyone". All groups reported having experienced, engaged in or witnessed some form of discrimination, racism or stereotyping with differences by ethnic group. Webber's conclusion is that REI matters for individuals and for groups, and, just as REI groups must affirm and reaffirm their boundaries in order for these boundaries to retain social relevance, individual group members must also affirm and reaffirm their REI in order for this to be a feature of any social situation in which they are participants (p. 43) The Pacific challenge was to negotiate their positive feelings of REI membership with the race based stereotypes they encountered which were constructed on notions of cultural and social deficit.

In Chapter 2 Mila-Schaaf adds another level of understanding in the identity and cultural orientation spectrum drawing on interviews with 14 successful New Zealand-born, second generation professionals. Her starting point is findings from the New Zealand National Youth Study that "feeling accepted by your own ethnic group and by others is statistically associated with advantageous mental health outcomes for youth". Pride in identity is a significant resilience factor as these participants challenge and in many cases transform their work environments. At the same time, they often found themselves operating outside the bounds of what was culturally acceptable. Mila-Schaaf presents a number of questions which stay in the mind and warrant further study, for example, "how do we imagine ourselves as Pacific people and therefore who gets to belong", and as attributed to Said, "new relationships are not inherited but created".

Part 1 concludes with chapters by Brown-Pulu and Agee and Culbertson which highlight identity challenges and enablers Pacific youth face as a result of the often continuous movement of parents and kin between the homeland and New Zealand. Prominence is given to the importance of parents and increasingly of grandparents in this scenario.

A Part 3 highlight was Seiuli's discussion of *meaalofa* 'gift' as a therapeutic approach in counselling with Pacific clients, especially as *meaalofa* are more often classed in terms of reciprocal obligations and expectations. Seiuli offers *meaalofa* as a methodological approach, as a cultural process, as reaffirming of ancestry and divine beginnings, and whose properties of connectedness (relationships) anchor Samoan and Pacific people within their cultural imperative while they negotiate and locate themselves within a Western environment. Counselling then, is "handing the gift of

helping from one person to another”. In unpacking the *fa’a Samoa* values underpinning the *mealofa* (p. 121), Seiuli also demonstrates the total inability of English to capture the full nuances of Pacific conceptual understandings. This is reiterated in the Chapter 8 discussion on the values and spirituality in trauma counselling.

Part 3 chapters on death and dying are largely drawn from Waikato University’s Tangi Research Programme on the public and ritualised performance of grief and mourning. Chapter 13’s excellent discussion by Moeke-Maxwell and colleagues about carrying out research ethically with Māori who are dying resonates with much wider issues of researching in sacred spaces and researching with *mana*. A verse penned during this process, resonates with the experiences of psychiatric survivors (Chapter 16) that:

I stepped inside this space  
 With you, *rangatira*,  
 How long had you been waiting  
 To *korero*?  
 I listened (p. 217)

This rich *talanoa* highlights the value of the group discussions/partnerships being mentored by this pioneer group and the new knowledge being constructed in these engagements. This chapter, and others not discussed in this review, have started to move beyond the practice of treating Pacific peoples as a homogenous group.