

Counting Ourselves: A Kaupapa Māori informed approach to understanding what's best for Trans and Non-Binary people living in Aotearoa.

Non Māori thoughts, things, systems, words, pictures, spaces, structures, histories, religions, theories, governments, people, controls, actions and reactions overwhelmingly infiltrate almost every aspect of a contemporary Māori life (Smith, 1996; Durie, 1997, Gilbertson, 2002; Lee, 2005; Hokowhitu & Page, 2007; Cormack & Robson, 2010; Devadas, 2013; Hokowhitu and Devadas, 2013). Kaupapa Māori Theory asserts a political strategy towards transforming this state of affairs as the 'norm', it is staunchly for and by Māori without apology (Smith, 1996; Pihama, 2001; Pihama, 2010). Commentators argue against Kaupapa Māori theory as racist (Hope, 2006; Rata, 2013), exclusive and overly-concerned with colonial process (Eketone, 2008), however, they fail to interpret the power of self-determination implicit in Kaupapa Māori Theory (Lee, 2009, Mahuika, 2010). The cultural values that underpin its intent are intended to enable pro-social forms of mana motuhake, which is the Māori practice of being true to ourselves, whilst also being true and caring towards our community (Awekatuku, 2004; Durie, 1997).

A Kaupapa Māori informed approach offers non-Māori researchers a *hoa haere*; an allied pathway towards empowering people's lives. Being informed by Māori thinking and ways of doing requires respectful relating, it means that people working toward the shared interests of the communities they work on behalf of, do so in constructive and supportive ways. A Kaupapa Māori informed approach is committed to including Māori people, our perspectives, voices and strategies as a means to improve life outcomes for people being researched. As well, *hoa haere* approaches encourage better understanding and use of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as a way to empower through research. Kaupapa Māori approaches want *tino rangatiratanga* for Māori, because when Māori have *tino rangatiratanga* it means that governance is finally good; it nurtures wellness through diversity and helps people in their ability to feel connected to place.

When I was first approached by my friends researching toward *Counting Ourselves*, I felt really positive. It was early on in the piece when Jaimie was fleshing-out her Health Research Council funding application. Instantly, I felt that Jaimie respected me as *tangata whenua*, as a researcher, as an artist and as a person embodying intergenerational knowledge about being a gender morphing Māori person living in Aotearoa today. It has been good to get to know Kyle, Sam, Izzy, Huriana and Jack, as well as our community advisory group along the pathway too. Being part of the team helps me feel like I'm walking my talk, that I'm connecting the dots and finding ways to resolve the problems of our lifetime. To me, that's about *whakapapa*.

Working on this project helps me collaborate toward research that aligns with my kaupapa to keep myself well, and by doing so my ability to *manaaki* and nurture others who have come to live in Aotearoa. I desire to work in a collaborative manner, it's the best ways to find out ways to address problems experienced by people who get missed in the gaps. I feel that the knowledge and perspectives that I convey, which are timelessly collective, help people learn good ways to be.

It's tricky to be the person in the middle of an accountability to my own Māori community, as well as an accountability to the broader diversity of populations living in Aotearoa. However, I know that for all trans and non-binary people living in Aotearoa, there are major barriers to equitable healthcare and service provision. The evidence overwhelmingly points to a need for positive strategies forward, and I'll be a part of every team who desires to work in a reciprocal and respectful manner.

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