

Rapua te kurahuna: an occupational perspective of internalised oppression

AlterNative
2023, Vol. 19(4) 762–770
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/11771801231206209
journals.sagepub.com/home/aln



Isla Emery-Whittington¹  and Georgina Davis²

Abstract

Internalised oppression can be tricky to recognise and hard to talk about. Described as the most devastating kind of racism, it remains poorly researched and understood. Nuanced and expansive ways of understanding internalised oppression are necessary for the work of being recognised and seeing each other as fully human. For many complex reasons, internalised oppression can be performed by targets of oppression in service of white supremacy, turning Indigenous spaces into new foci for racism via everyday occupations. This article outlines our critical examinations and steps to grapple with internalised oppression as Indigenous occupational therapists who observe how racism is transmitted in daily tasks of life. Steps include growing critical consciousness, developing a relational ethic of manaaki (to support, take care of, and give hospitality) and building community to support recognition and healing from internalised oppression. We call for the development of a critical ally workforce in solidarity with the racially targeted.

Keywords

decolonisation, internalised oppression, internalised racism, Māori, occupational therapy, Tauīwi allyship

Introduction

Paradies (2006, p. 151) defined internalised racism as “the incorporation of racist attitudes, beliefs or ideologies within an actor’s worldview” that manifests in either internalised dominance such as privilege, or internalised oppression such as self-subordination. Literature regarding the second aspect of internalised racism—internalised oppression—tends to focus on survival, acquiescence and resistance narratives (Seet, 2020). We argue that internalised oppression also includes focused, intentional actions to perpetuate and maintain colonialism by centring white supremacist ways of being as one’s own. Furthermore, we agree that internalised oppression is comprised of and intersects with multiple forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Indeed, it would be unlikely that perpetrators of dehumanisation were *only* targeting race. To that end, we understand antiracism as not solely focused on being against racism but is about naming, disrupting and ending unjust social division across a range of dehumanisations.

In occupational therapy and, latterly, occupational science, there are a growing number of calls to address racism (Ramugondo, 2018; Ryan et al., 2020), especially in the wake of police brutality and the 2020 murder of Mr George Floyd in Minnesota, USA (Lavalley & Johnson, 2020). Strategy and effort to locate and manage racism seem lukewarm, and being seen to be intolerant of racism—such as issuing statements condemning racism without

policy and procedural change—is conflated with taking action to end racism. Such apolitical performatives have attracted critique and concern from global collectives such as DisruptOT and critical allies (Kronenberg, 2021).

Contrary to mainstream narratives that New Zealand is leading the world with regard to bicultural practice, several publicly racist events have occurred in the profession before, during, and after 2020. Instead, the profession’s tolerance levels of overt racism appear stubbornly high, as evidenced by nil reporting of any public racist occurrences to the registration authority (A. Charnock, personal communication, November 11, 2022) by witnesses or targets. Consequently, there have been no examinations of racism against ethical codes, values, practice competencies, or education audits, and with that, no accountability, remediation steps, and strategies to end racism. Indeed, racist acts by occupational therapists, with minimal institutional response or professional accountability, are usual and expected.

¹SHORE & Whariki Research Centre, College of Health, Massey University, New Zealand

²Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Corresponding author:

Isla Emery-Whittington, SHORE & Whariki Research Centre, College of Health, Massey University, P.O. Box 6137, Victoria Street West, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
Email: isla@whittington.nz

In addition, racist targeting of Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) occupational therapists has at times been led by Māori occupational therapists and has recently involved new migrants to our shores. Scholarship regarding internalised racism suggests that such expressions of racism are not as atypical as they first appear; rather, colonialism is working exactly as intended (Seet, 2020). As authors from a vibrant community of Māori occupational therapists, we offer our unpacked reckonings and scholarly investigation of internalised oppression in service of white supremacy to help make sense of targeted racism across our professional spaces. The examination is discomfiting and triggering, as perhaps it should be. Beyond this, however, are resistance and healing centred in growing critical consciousness, noticing and locating internalised oppression and developing a relational ethic of *manaaki* (to support, take care of, and give hospitality).

Racism needs ending, and to end racism, we must know where it is, including and perhaps especially, when it resides within and when it is being further utilised for white supremacy. Indeed, internalised racism is the most insidious kind of racism due in part to its ability to camouflage (David et al., 2019). Occupational scientists and occupational therapists examine how everyday occupation—tasks, acts, habits, and work—shape and contribute meaningfully to health. As practitioners interested in everyday occupations, we observe that racism is expressed in and across everyday occupations, often habitually, repeatedly and over many years. Part and parcel of the machinery of colonialism is making racism—albeit denied and forgotten—seem everyday, usual and expected (Billig, 1995). Indeed, we argue that internalised racism—internalised dominance and internalised oppression—is not well hidden, if camouflaged initially, but is performed and transmitted in plain sight many times a day.

Despite this, there is much to do regarding scholarly examination and theorising of the links between everyday occupations and racism. Racism shapes people because it shapes what people do, including what people feel, think, say, action, and withhold from, and in this way, racism forms different kinds of people, communities, and societies. Moreover, racism is transmitted through occupation which makes occupation not a link to racism, but *the link* to racism, and the means by which racism is transmitted between parents and children, families, friends, neighbours, and communities. Hence, racially targeted occupational therapists and scientists are in a unique—albeit difficult—position to observe, narrate, and theorise the links between occupation and internalised racism and the transmission of racism through everyday occupations.

We note that discourse about internalised oppression can sometimes seem like victim-blaming, as if the racially targeted chose the situation. Rather, colonialism and its cornerstone racism are the only food on offer in settler-colonial spaces. Furthermore, occupational therapy is not the first or last profession where internalised racism is weaponised for white supremacy. Studying internalised racism and sharing learnings is about recognising that no one deserves racialised targeting and that in choosing to

explore internalised racism, it is possible to glean the profession's unique contribution to the transformation of everyday ways of life beyond colonialism.

The next section begins with definitions of levels of racism and outlines literature exploring reasons why internalised oppression can be hard to grapple with. In addition, Indigenous critical responses are highlighted, supported by vignettes following an examination of expressions of internalised oppression as natural survival reactions to white supremacy. This article is a small contribution by Indigenous occupational therapists in locating and defusing internalised oppression through examination of the transmission of racism through everyday tasks of life.

Defining internalised oppression

Racism is a system of power and control; a constructed social hierarchy of assigned and imagined value based on human appearance that violates human relationships and is continually reproduced (Speight, 2007; Wilkerson, 2022). In New Zealand, racism benefits white supremacy, an ideology of presumed superiority of white culture (Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission, 2022) and justifies land and resource theft. However, Jackson reminds us, that racism can never morally cleanse such violence (2020). Racism is taught and learned every day and has been studied using a variety of theoretical frameworks, levels and definitions. For this paper, we refer to four levels: structural racism as described by Nazroo et al. (2020), and institutional racism, interpersonal racism and internalised racism as described by Camara Jones (2000) and further expanded by Yin Paradies (2006). Structural racism is the “circulation of ideas and representations that produce race and ethnic groups as different, but also as threatening and inferior, [and] serve to rationalise and inform an uneven distribution of resources” (Nazroo et al., 2020, p. 265). Jones' (2000) used the allegory of a flower garden to describe three levels of racism: institutional racism, interpersonal racism – also referred to as personally mediated racism – and internalised racism. They framed racism as differential attention, ascribed value, soil, seeds and flower boxes over many seasons that led to vastly different outcomes to flower and garden health (Jones, 2000). Racism at institutional level is described as “differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. Institutionalised racism is normative, sometimes legalised, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage” (Jones, 2000, p. 1212). The interpersonal racism level refers to both intentional and unintentional actions—spoken and non-verbal—that are expressed and/or withheld (Jones, 2000). Such actions and inactions can be habitual, routine, sometimes violent, direct or vicarious, pernicious, cumulative, intersecting in multiaxial and simultaneous fashion (Nadal et al., 2021).

Internalisation of oppression is about “the cultural imperialism, the domination, the structure, the normalcy of the ‘way things are’” (Speight, 2007, p. 129). Racial distress is transmitted among own communities, families and selves as a reaction to everyday racism and the subsequent feelings

of self-doubt and inferiority (Fanon, 1961) which can spiral and become a further source of animosity towards one's own (Freire, 2000). In this way, internalised oppression is both a source and a consequence of racism (James, 2022). Internalised oppression can be known and unknown, practised as an individual and collectively, with some well aware of their self-hate (David et al., 2019; Memmi, 1965). In Pyke (2010) and Seet's (2020) studies that focused on perspectives of new migrants from Asia to the USA and Australia respectively, participants shared insights into the pervasive, all-encompassing internalisation of dominant ideologies in their everyday lives. Research such as Pyke's (2010) and Seet's (2020) usefully allow for comparison of lived memory of pre-migration ways of being, alongside real-time assimilation patterns. Such positioning of research provides invaluable insights into how internalised oppression is seeded and grows over time. Conversely, the positioning of Indigenous peoples differs in that communities have survived and are surviving settler-imposed societies on ancestral lands. Hence, exposure and resistance to forced assimilation occurring for centuries across generations, signals that a variety of research styles are needed to capture both nuances of and resistance to internalised oppression. That some Indigenous ways of being are still taught and practised daily tells us much about the will to live.

Perhaps a clue to the pervasiveness of internalised oppression in settler-colonial states is everyday language, colloquialisms, and pejoratives such as Uncle Tom, sell-outs and in phrases such as *Crabs in a bucket* and *when your skinfolk ain't your kinfolk*. Similar frustration and distress are reflected in New Zealand vernacular such as *kūpapa*, meaning traitor, and *waka* (canoe) jumper, roughly meaning someone who shifts positions or sides. Colloquialisms also signal dismay, confusion, and betrayal such as *shoots self in foot*, double agent, and turncoat. Such language seems to express a deep sense that ethical standards and societal contracts have been broken, such as *sell their own grandmother*, traitor and accomplice. Despite the pervasiveness of colloquial expressions that describe and convey deep emotions about internalised oppression, studies are few and far between. Indeed, internalised oppression is the most devastating form of racism, because it is the least examined, discussed and understood (Seet, 2020; Speight, 2007).

Indigenous occupational therapists and colleagues are developing theories and examining links between occupation, coloniality and racism (Emery-Whittington et al., 2023; Gibson, 2020; Ramugondo, 2018). Concerns about under-theorisation, and an under-developed literature and practice of antiracism stemmed from observations that the profession tended to treat occupation as only healthy, universal and therapeutic (Angell, 2012; Hammell, 2011). We contend that an occupational perspective of racism can and must grapple with the learned, habituated expression of racist oppression through everyday deeds and activities. This requires a decolonial appreciation that Indigenous peoples are not merely producers of culture but producers of knowledge (Cooper, 2012). For instance, everyday occupations in settler states must be recognised as contentious sites of struggle. Such examinations must

ensure that transformation is built in so that there is a measurable decrease in oppression as a result of the research. These kinds of examinations would create and release the radical potential of occupation, thus contributing to foundational knowledge and therapeutic practice beyond occupational therapy and occupational science.

Typical expressions and impacts of internalised oppression

Literature about internalised oppression has focused heavily on individual-level expressions and manifestations including trauma (Seet, 2021). Expressions of internalised oppression vary depending on context but may include changing appearance, distancing or non-association with own kin groups, mental distress, physical harm, shame, competition, self-denigration, and feeling compromised (Jones, 2000). Other expressions include publicly shaming and undermining others who look stereotypically kin to self (Pyke, 2010) and complicity with white colonialist desires. Seet (2021, p. 1) reported that participants in his study "conceive of themselves as relationally dependent on the dominant racial group's appraisal of them." Where the dominant group was the centre, they and their peoples' needs, desires, and imaginations were irrelevant, and consequently, some participants could not or would not see racism as problematic, systemic or pervasive.

Of the few occupational therapy articles that have discussed internalised oppression, Beagan and colleagues (2022, p. 52) contend that internalised oppression is a survival response to "psycho-emotional harm". This article builds on that idea and posits that internalised oppression extends beyond kneejerk reactions to active assimilating of colonial ideologies informing subsequent violence directed against one's own. Internalised oppression includes – but is not limited to – the clever and agile things one must do to stay alive, remain housed, and keep employment. It feels messy: comfort, shame, convenience, and survival responses mix, coagulate, and sometimes define and separate. For example, seeking nomination as *the* Māori representative while having little to do with the Māori being represented.

Then there are situations where the oppressed prioritise colonialist views and agendas, implement white supremacist practices, attack and belittle their own and assume a lone role within colonial institutions. Setting oneself up as *the* authoritative knower requires definition and delineation from those who do not know. Necessary to the success of the framing as *the knower* is the requirement to define the not-knowers as undesirable and, in our case, dangerous radicals. This framing fits with well-known media reporting styles of "Good Māori / Bad Māori" trope (Rankine et al., 2008, p. 10). Regardless of who transmits the ideology, it is important to remember whose ideology it is and whom it serves.

The individual who speaks for the collective but is not functionally part of the collective is an example of the interplay between institutional racism and internalised oppression. Certainly, the concentrated colonial power of institutions attracts those with internalised oppression

who desire power that is usually denied, yet power and information are not shared with the collective they purport to represent. Tell-tale discourse includes phrases that placate white anxieties such as *you are not racist, you are culturally safe*, and the more insidious *you know the Treaty better than most Pākehā* (British settlers and their descendants). The effect is that white supremacy continues as before, which means that newly carved out decolonising or tikanga (correct procedure)-led and spaces, cannot remain so for long.

Certainly, supporting a white supremacist agenda within institutions and organisations is not an aberration but the status quo. Nazroo et al. (2020) described institutional racism as a sedimentation of structural racism that also normalises interpersonal racism as expressed in routine operations, budgets, and meeting agendas, for example. However, Seet (2020) noted that resisting racism is not always effective or impactful. Therefore, anyone seeking power would do well to chase roles within colonial institutions but would need to eschew the role of a resistor or worse, engage in racism themselves.

Furthermore, to support white supremacy, time needs to be spent in and among it, learning it is language, processes, habits, roles, what it values, its justifications for violence and how it reproduces throughout communities and across generations every day. Being and doing coloniality means accepting a colonially imposed self as “a human version of epistemic terra nullius” devoid of ability to produce knowledge (Cooper, 2012, p. 69). There is an ideological clash between holding, studying, and reproducing white supremacy and supporting Māori sovereignty and land back. Indeed, it would be difficult to hold a profound love for one’s own culture while serving white supremacy.

Power and pain

Why, then serve white supremacy? Dangled colonial carrots might seem inducing, but the double-bind situation is that despite all attempts, the racially targeted will never be white (Pyke, 2010; Seet, 2021). Therefore, a contentment with only being adjacent to colonial power must suffice—despite any short-term gains—because adjacency to colonial power is not akin to building sovereignty and well-being for all. Indeed, being in service to colonial power conveys a sense that oppression is all human potential is capable of. If mortgage or rent payments, job position and entitlements, social acceptance and mobility did not require and depend on one’s complicity with white supremacy, would one still be complicit?

Another way of viewing expressions of internalised oppression is transmission of pain and trauma. Typically, where trauma has occurred, the target is removed from the situation, and a rāhui (a temporary prohibition) is placed around the space. Such envelopment is difficult with institutionally sourced trauma and seemingly impossible with internalised oppression given the unconscious and unrecognisable shape, as well as the constant societal denial of racism in the first place. Internalised oppression like many aspects of oppression carries societal shame, and so

finding language of colonial wounding and subsequent feelings is difficult. Along with the relatively under-examined nature of internalised oppression, the ability to understand causes, strategise to prevent further trauma, and recover, must all occur in concert and simultaneously with fresh daily racial harms.

It is possible to sense harm experienced by the choice of tone, words, and phrasing used to describe or further transmit racial trauma. Language to name and recognise the cause and scope of racial trauma stops harm from being tucked away and continuing in the background. Instead, internalised oppression can be recognised during the flow of everyday occupation once it is considered and treated as inevitable, locatable, and manageable. From there, normalising discussions about identified internalised oppression supports reconnection to our real selves.

Viewed from a biopsychosocial perspective, reactions to racism depend on whether a situation is deemed threatening or challenging (Page-Gould et al., 2008). Price (2018) explains that the neuroscience of threat is essentially a stress response triggered by the sympathetic nervous system invoking fight, flight, freeze, or fawn reactions. Following an initial release of adrenaline, cortisol will be released if a threat is sustained, and with both adrenaline and cortisol in play, the body is alert and poised for survival (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Price, 2018). When a threat is deemed over, the cortisol-inhibited cognitive functions—such as critical thinking, reasoning, and planning—also resume. In the case of internalised oppression, stress responses from exposure to racism must be understood as mechanisms for survival and ever present.

Increasing awareness of responses in the moment can bring particular attention to what is a threat and what is not. Following this, it is important to acknowledge shame, make opportunities for constructive next steps (Fernandez, 2010) and reconnect to positive aspects of culture. People who actively work against their own interests often hold strong beliefs in colonial fabrications about their culture and its value. Certainly, where only colonial myths about one’s own people exist, one is more likely to become disconnected, compromisable, and feel shame for not being enough. Therefore, we must remember who is responsible for the colonial harm in the first place, take and make opportunities to grow critical consciousness and purposefully and strategically reconnect to manaaki.

Dealing with internalised oppression

In our experience, the work of antiracism requires perpetual motion, and actions and strategy must be in reference to something, otherwise, it is hard to glean development. A reference point for gauging what is trustworthy when dealing with internalised oppression is mana motuhake (autonomy, independence, sovereignty) because mana motuhake concerns “Who we want to be, and who we choose to be, expressed in our own ways” (S. Te Ruki, personal communication, December 4, 2021). The following section describes some of the processes we

utilised in the work of deciphering and dealing with internalised oppression: growing a critical consciousness, noticing and locating internalised oppression, practicing a relational ethic of manaaki, which includes building community and strengthening identity. These sections are not sequential or staged and instead co-occur and overlap.

Growing a critical consciousness

Growing a critical consciousness is hard work with few shortcuts because it requires critical examination of colonial and racist tropes that have been accepted as real and true, perhaps for many years. It includes the practice of rejecting hegemonic discourse with deliberate centring of being Māori as the taken-for-granted solution to social transformation (G. H. Smith, 2003). Developing a critical lens supports the work of unlearning how to be colonially objectifiable, thus recentring ourselves as whole humans necessary to the ancient work of supporting and looking after Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) and her children. When mana motuhake is centred, colonial desires can be understood in appropriate context and framing, leaving space to mobilise Māori advancement and desires (Durie, 1998). The following vignette describes a moment that sparked the growth of critical consciousness for the lead author:

When I was 14, I remember an unusual conversation with Dad. It was Friday night, after Dad's weekly visit to the Cossie Club and he was his usual post-Cossie Club visit self: tipsy, talkative and looking for dinner leftovers. Sitting in the lounge, he was playing the guitar and I was complaining about a school concern, an injustice of sorts. Dad suddenly became serious and asked, "Do you love being Māori?" The change in pace from funny rambling to an intense direct question was surprising, but I sensed that this kind of question is posed only once and so I let an answer arrive in its own time. I eventually replied "Yes, but it's hard." It felt like a thousand invisible souls were listening in; making my response a public declaration. Dad beamed and exclaimed "Kia ora, kia ora (an idiomatic expression of happiness and agreement)!" I knew that prejudice and injustices will continue to concern me and realised that during the conversation, I had joined the struggle. Conversations amongst whānau (family grouping) and community were where I glimpsed the armoury and strategy of the struggle. I also understood that injustice was real and that I too must help.

Nurturing a critical consciousness originates in love. However, choosing to love being Māori is not blind and includes healthy critique and curiosity of Māori intelligence and agency. This kind of enquiry requires genuine questioning where there are no tricky or hidden agendas. Do you love being Māori? Do you feel the compounding love of ancestors, gods, and leaders in your life and work? Posing questions about what already exists seems initially ridiculous. However, such questioning creates a choice—a powerful conscious choice—and, in this case, choosing to love being Māori. By natural extension, by choosing to love being Māori, we also choose to love our relationship with the natural world, our ancestors and shared descendants (Emery-Whittington & Te Maro, 2018).

Challenging racism is necessary, but in a racialised society that protects perpetrators, is absolutely a risk to jobs, health, and careers. We recommend careful strategy, support and safety of proven peers and allies with platforms, resources and power along with habitual critical self-awareness. Questions such as *Am I the right person for this task?* (L. T. Smith, 2012), *How is racism permitted here?* and *What supports my continual connection to Māori knowledges and community?* have guided deep reflections among the Māori Occupational Therapy Network (the Network) and provided guardrails for healing. Welcoming critical examination into how racism is reproduced and naturalised within occupational therapy and science theories, models, and everyday professional practice is an important next step.

Noticing and locating internalised oppression

Racism must first be perceived. In advocating for an increase in awareness of internalised racism, we do not assume that internalised oppression can or must always be perceived. It is disturbing to encounter the sometimes ugly, ironic, and sad inner colonialisms yet there is also a brief respite and clarity in the moment when one can say, "I see you." We intentionally observe daily transmissions of racism via the mundane, banal, routine, and habitual tasks of life, as we are trained to as occupational therapists. Coincidentally, occupational therapy training was where we were provided with the tools to observe and analyse everyday occupation, while experiencing the routine expression of racism via staff discourse, tutorials, hallway banter, group work, and clinical placements. Training as occupational therapists was both the most dangerous and illuminating thing we had ever done.

Locating internalised oppression that resides within is also a journey of self-discovery. James Baldwin said, "a journey is called that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do with what you find, nor what it will do to you" (as cited in Peck, 2016, 03:55). It can be difficult to track when and how white supremacy got in. Identifying automatic unconscious thoughts is not easy. Yet being aware of one's own physical reactions in real-time can help, especially when a stress-threat reaction occurs. Being able to notice this and becoming aware of the thoughts one is having can then help notice, name and manage feelings arising from internalised oppression, as the second author shared below:

Whittaker's Chocolate Company recently released bilingual branding on Creamy Milk chocolate: Mirika Kirimi (Creamy Milk). When I saw the advertisement, I felt my body react: I felt hot, noticed my breathing was shallow and my heart was pumping fast. I felt angry and fearful. I remember my thoughts rushing, "What are they going to say? What is the backlash going to be? Am I going to have to defend the language . . . again? Who is going to challenge me for being Māori?" I had to use strategies of deep breathing, checking my surroundings for threats and soothing self-talk so then I saw that no one was threatening me right then and I was safe. This reaction arises

again and again, when I perceive racism coming my way and when remembering racist trauma. I want to want bilingual labelling on food, but it feels stressful, and it shouldn't.

Practicing a relational ethic of manaaki

Manaaki is an expressed value, a lived ethic, and realisation of deep and attentive care for all. A relational ethic of manaaki refers to a way of being *with* that takes deep and attentive care of self as connected to all, and all as connected to self. Practicing a relational ethic of manaaki illuminates the links and connections that are simultaneously within and among the collectives that hold us. A relational ethic of manaaki is timeless and recognises that we are simultaneously ancestors and descendants, and that today's detractors might be tomorrow's allies.

Manaaki includes restoration, which, when understood in the context of colonialism is necessarily about an "ethic of restoration" (Jackson, 2020, p. 140) and a way back to the promise of the entirety of our pre-disconnected selves. Like many societies, Māori developed sophisticated and complex ways to deal with transgressions, restore trust and relationships and prevent harm (Jackson, 2020). In the absence of agreement that racism exists, manaaki requires getting above the mass societal denial of racism and seeking spaces of healing and reconnection. For immediate connection and access to ancestral guidance, language including whakataukī (proverbs) and pūrākau (ancient stories) provide perspective to difficulties and literally give phrases to explain, connect, defend, and soothe.

Knowing oneself as a whole human and fostering a healthy sense of self-worth is central to a relational ethic of manaaki. Returning to traditional homespaces often and regularly, despite busy schedules, decentres the colonial gaze and it is grip on daily life. Colonialism severs what was once usual and routinely practised manaaki. Despite this, compounded ancestral wisdom and stories exist in the minutiae of daily life—wherever that takes place—as much as grand ceremonies and gatherings. Knowing kin connections also makes room for the identification of strengths, character traits, and roles that have been handed down and practised for centuries. Grounding in ancestral wisdom, rituals and lifeways holds healing that is timeless and time-tested and reminds us that we exist beyond colonialism (Paradies, 2020).

Important healing spaces for the Network have been global and Indigenous collectives and affinity groups including DisruptOT within and beyond occupational therapy. The Network created safe spaces for debriefing and reflection with members and leaders, hosted experts and critical allies in healing discussions and strengthened tikanga practices. Like many Māori collectives, we prioritise reconnection to purpose thus continuing healing and wānanga. We are committed to a relational ethic of manaaki for Māori occupational therapists to connect and reconnect in the spirit of right relationship.

Call for development of a critical ally workforce

In small professions such as occupational therapy and in settler-colonial states, the work of critical allies is crucial. There is an overrepresentation of settlers and new migrants in the profession compared to Indigenous therapists, who make up 6% of the workforce (A. Charnock, personal communication, March 20, 2023). In the absence of a critical ally workforce the predictable occurs that is, Māori are expected to tackle an impossible share of the labour of educating settlers and new migrants on elemental citizenship topics including Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the legal and Māori text of the Treaty of Waitangi—not to be confused with the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi) (Tiriti), decolonisation, antiracism, and cultural safety, while experiencing denials of racism. Low numbers of Māori in the profession make it easy for settler-colonials—overrepresented in roles of power—to racially target Māori without consequence, perform calls for equity and treaty partnership with minimal critical understanding, and elevate their preferred Māori voices over Māori collectives. Tuck & Yang (2012, p. 1) remind us that in "settler moves to innocence", the voices that are marginalised are the voices that challenge settler comfort.

Another settler move to innocence in occupational therapy, as described by Tuck & Yang (2012) is language equivocation. Language tricks function to control and confuse discourse about colonisation and, by extension decolonisation. For example, "We are all colonised" slips into "None of us are settlers" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 17), and *We are all migrants here* becomes *We are all Indigenous* meaning, no one is. Equivocation removes the distinction between settler-colonial and new migrants, thus creating a supposed sameness that makes new migrants ripe and ready to be picked as functional and symbolic objects for colonial consumption. In the background is the ever-present threat of not being offered residency, employment, and career opportunities because in settler colonies, migration status and acceptability are controlled by settler-colonial structures and agents (Seet, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Such complicated double-bind arrangements are in play when new migrants encounter the colonially imposed social hierarchy of this country: either engage as themselves with tangata whenua (the Indigenous Māori peoples of New Zealand) or as the colonial machine requires them to. Building relationships with tangata whenua is influenced by Te Tiriti o Waitangi education literacy required for entry and approval to work here. In our experience, three key factors influence new migrant relationships with tangata whenua in the profession. First, privilege and critical awareness of privilege. Too often, new migrants originating from imperialising nations have related to this country as a colony, espoused a perceived backwardness of biculturalism versus multiculturalism, and regard themselves as experts in governance and management. Whereas settlers from nations with less colonial and imperial heritage have a variety of responses to this country's particular social terrain. Second, experience of racialised targeting and/or

oppression, and subsequent responses or alignment with social hierarchies of power. Third, ongoing development of critical consciousness and active engagement with antiracism practice, such as alignment with critical allies and rejecting hegemony that a colonial filter is required to relate with tangata whenua. Crucially, deep engagement with tangata whenua who have mana whenua (territorial rights, jurisdiction, authority) while working towards Matike Mai Aotearoa (a collective for constitutional transformation based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi) as a constitutional imperative becomes possible (Matike Mai Aotearoa, 2016).

From our vantage, critical allyship wields power through inclusion of recent migrants while deploying multiple strategies that prevent and stop racialised harm. We observe that the allies that work from a centre of Tiriti *not* Treaty literacy and antiracism surround themselves with like-acting mentors and collectives. Critical ally educators are word-ready and act in the moment to stop and isolate those causing racialised harm mid-lecture, while preventing further harm. Critical allies take the work of supporting the racially targeted and role modelling allyship seriously by using everyday opportunities to both learn and unlearn. Antiracism is impactfully role modeled via sometimes tough but necessary conversations as well as in documentation such as assignment guides and marking, policies, strategic and business plans, audit standards and performance reviews.

We observe that critical allies are tired and exhausted sometimes, but they know that experiencing undeserved oppression is worse. They critically reflect on all sources of racism and do not acquire inexperienced or disconnected Indigenous practitioners. They comprehend the gift that is a collective of Māori practitioners willing to support a shared kaupapa (purpose, topic) and demonstrate manaaki through good communication, reciprocity, and follow through on promises made while listening to advice given. Critical allies know the power, privilege, and levers they have at hand and never try to convince Māori that they, too, have little power. However, quiet ally support has mixed results in our experience and ultimately does not stop racialised harm. Support that is out of view of those that racially abuse sends the message ‘Someone is doing some harm to you and I will not or cannot stop it, but I will carry your stretcher to the ambulance’.

Occupational therapy and occupational science have a unique contribution to theorising and framing racism (Johnson & Lavalley, 2021). However, there is an urgent need to value, grow, and incentivise education spaces that are organised, connected, and share responsibility in developing and caring for an antiracist global workforce. This kind of workforce would be recognisable for its humble, tireless work, standing quickly, firmly, and always with the oppressed. Certainty of strategy would be balanced with genuine curiosity to explore new ways of ‘being in relation with’ while co-occupying space, time, and kaupapa. In so doing, internalised oppression would also be recognisable, definable, and manageable across daily life occupations.

Conclusion

Racialised targeting is undeserved and contributes to internalisation of oppression, resulting in further trauma. Identifying colonial methods that weaponise internalised oppression in everyday occupation is a worthy and unique contribution to a profession concerned with the potential of humanising occupation. Holding complex, multi-layered understandings of internalised oppression requires recentring of Indigenous worldviews and values such as manaaki. By anticipating, noticing, and being in relation with manifestations of internalised oppression, it can be managed. We acknowledge the many ways that communities of antiracist praxis activate manaaki to move from being colonially occupied to Indigenously alive. Rapua te kurahuna—seek that which is hidden.

Authors’ note

Isla Emery-Whittington (Rereahu, Ngāti Kauwhata, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa) (BHSc [Occupational Therapy], MHSc) is a PhD student at SHORE and Whariki Research Centre, Massey University, New Zealand. She is a Māori woman from Ngāti Unu Ngāti Kahu hapū and trained as an occupational therapist 30 years ago. Decades of observing, experiencing, and resisting racialised targeting with real-world impact and consequence have brought her here. Isla writes to understand the racism being done, offer manaaki and mobilise strategies to end racialised harm within and beyond the profession. She believes in the distinctive healing contributions that decolonising collectives can make.

Georgina Davis (Ngā Puhī, Ngāi Tai, Ngāti Porou) (BHSc [Occupational Therapy], MHSc), is a DHSc student and lecturer at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. She is a woman and speaks from a position of experiencing the impacts of internalised racism, personally and professionally. The continuous sabotaging and purposeful attempts to dismantle Indigenous spaces is disturbing, especially after the years of decolonising them. Georgina writes with the hope to share knowledge and commonalities with others who are experiencing similar situations.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Indigenous occupational therapists and our communities, critical allies and the wider networks of support across the profession. We acknowledge those who stay and struggle against colonialism despite risk to reputation and opportunities and we acknowledge too, those that could not stay.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Isla Emery-Whittington  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9234-6986>

Glossary

kaupapa	topic, issue, plan, programme
kia ora, kia ora!	an idiomatic expression of happiness and agreement
kūpapa	traitor
manaaki	to support, take care of, give hospitality
mana motuhake	autonomy, independence, sovereignty
mana whenua	territorial rights, jurisdiction, authority
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
Matike Mai Aotearoa	a collective for constitutional transformation based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi
Mirika Kirimi	Creamy Milk; Whittaker's Chocolate Company bilingual branding on Creamy Milk chocolate
Pākehā	British settlers and their descendants
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother
pūrākau	ancient stories
rāhui	a temporary prohibition
rapua te kurahuna	seek that which is hidden
tangata whenua	the Indigenous Māori peoples of New Zealand
Te Tiriti o Waitangi; Tiriti	the legal and Māori text of the Treaty of Waitangi—not to be confused with the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi
tikanga	correct procedure; agreed law
waka	canoe
whakataukī	proverbs
whānau	family grouping

References

- Angell, A. M. (2012). Occupation-centered analysis of social difference: Contributions to a socially responsive occupational science. *Journal of Occupational Science, 21*(2), 104–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2012.711230>
- Beagan, B. L., Sibbald, K. R., Bizzeth, S. R., & Pride, T. M. (2022). Systemic racism in Canadian occupational therapy: A qualitative study with therapists. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 89*(1), 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084174211066676>
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage.
- Cooper, G. (2012). Kaupapa Māori research: Epistemic wilderness as freedom? *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 47*(2), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.447305664039225>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*, 1241–1299. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- David, E. J. R., Schroeder, T. M., & Fernandez, J. (2019). Internalized racism: A systematic review of the psychological literature on racism's most insidious consequence. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(4), 1057–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12350>
- Durie, M. (1998). *Te mana, te kawanatanga*. Oxford University Press.
- Emery-Whittington, I., Leite, J. Jr., & Ivlev, S. (2023). Antiracism as means and ends. In M. Ahmed-Landeryou (Ed.), *Antiracist occupational therapy: Unsettling the status quo* (pp. 119–136). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Emery-Whittington, I., & Te Maro, B. (2018). Decolonising occupation: Causing social change to help our ancestors rest and our descendants thrive. *New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy, 65*(1), 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.779745338782955>
- Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Fernandez, R. (2010). Me and my nose. In J. Marsh, R. Mendoza-Denton, & J. A. Smith (Eds.), *Are we born racist? New insights from neuroscience and positive psychology* (pp. 125–129). Beacon Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gibson, C. (2020). When the river runs dry: Leadership, decolonisation and healing in occupational therapy. *New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy, 67*(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.162982618221927>
- Hammell, K. W. (2011). Resisting theoretical imperialism in the disciplines of occupational science and occupational therapy. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74*(1), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.4276/030802211X12947686093602>
- Hill Collins, P., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press.
- Jackson, M. (2020). Where to next? Decolonisation and the stories in the land. In B. Elkington, M. Jackson, R. Kiddle, O. A. Mercier, M. Ross, J. Smeaton, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Imagining decolonisation* (pp. 133–155). Bridget Williams Books.
- James, D. (2022). An initial framework for the study of internalized racism and health: Internalized racism as a racism-induced identity threat response. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 16*(11), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12712>
- Johnson, K. R., & Lavalley, R. (2021). From racialized think-pieces toward anti-racist praxis in our science, education, and practice. *Journal of Occupational Science, 28*(3), 404–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1847598>
- Jones, C. P. (2000). Levels of racism: A theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. *American Journal of Public Health, 90*(8), 1212–1215. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.90.8.1212>
- Kronenberg, F. (2021). Commentary on JOS Editorial Board's anti-racism pledge. *Journal of Occupational Science, 28*(3), 398–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1827483>
- Lavalley, R., & Johnson, K. R. (2020). Occupation, injustice, and anti-Black racism in the United States of America. *Journal of Occupational Science, 29*(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1810111>
- Matike Mai Aotearoa. (2016). *The report of Matike Mai Aotearoa—The independent working group on constitutional transformation*.
- Memmi, A. (1965). *The colonizer and the colonized*. Beacon Press.
- Nadal, K. L., King, R., Sissoko, D. R. G., Floyd, N., & Hines, D. (2021). The legacies of systemic and internalized oppression: Experiences of microaggressions, imposter phenomenon, and stereotype threat on historically marginalized groups. *New Ideas in Psychology, 63*, Article 100895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2021.100895>
- Nazroo, J. Y., Bhui, K. S., & Rhodes, J. (2020). Where next for understanding race/ethnic inequalities in severe mental illness? Structural, interpersonal and institutional racism. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 42*(2), 262–276. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13001>
- Page-Gould, E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). With a little help from my cross-group friend: Reducing anxiety in intergroup contexts through cross-group friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1080–1094. <https://psycnet-apa-org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1080>
- Paradies, Y. C. (2006). Defining, conceptualizing and characterizing racism in health research. *Critical Public Health, 16*(2), 143–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581590600828881>

- Paradies, Y. C. (2020). Unsettling truths: Modernity, (de-)coloniality and Indigenous futures. *Postcolonial Studies*, 23(4), 438–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1809069>
- Peck, R. (Director). (2016). *I am not your Negro* [Film]. Velvet Film.
- Price, M. (2018). Change through curiosity in the insight approach to conflict. *Revista de Mediación*, 11(1), 1–7. <https://tinyurl.com/mvh6uuzw>
- Pyke, K. D. (2010). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives*, 53(4), 551–572. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2010.53.4.551>
- Ramugondo, R. (2018). Healing work: Intersections for decoloniality. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 74(2), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14473828.2018.1523981>
- Rankine, J. M., Nairn, R., Barnes, A. M., Gregory, A., Kaiwai, H., Borell, B., & McCreanor, T. (2008). *Media and te Tiriti o Waitangi 2007*. Kupu Taea: Media & Te Tiriti Project. <https://www.trc.org.nz/media-and-te-tiriti-o-waitangi-2007>
- Ryan, A., Gilroy, J., & Gibson, C. (2020). #Changethedate: Advocacy as an on-line and decolonising occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 27(3), 405–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1759448>
- Seet, A. Z. (2020). Surviving the survival narrative part 1: Internalised racism and the limits of resistance. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 12(2–3), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.751970839227968>
- Seet, A. Z. (2021). Serving the White nation: Bringing internalised racism within a sociological understanding. *Journal of Sociology*, 57(2), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319882087>
- Smith, G. H. (2003). *Kaupapa Māori theory: Theorizing Indigenous transformation of education and schooling* [Paper presentation]. Kaupapa Māori Symposium, New Zealand Association for Research in Education / Australian Association for Research in Education Joint Conference, Auckland, New Zealand. <https://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2003/pih03342.pdf>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Speight, S. L. (2007). Internalized racism: One more piece of the puzzle. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(1), 126–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006295119>
- Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission. (2022). *Maranga mai! The dynamics and impacts of white supremacy, racism, and colonisation upon tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand*. <https://tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/maranga-mai>
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40. <https://tinyurl.com/4r4mftf6>
- Wilkerson, I. (2022, April 4). *The problem with Jon Stewart* [Podcast]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKw6k4_fUFs