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Dual Relationships and Crossing Boundaries in Māori Social Work Practice

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Abstract
Whakawhanaungatanga is an important part of the Māori culture and is used in the engagement phase of the social work process. It is a type of relationship forming where client and worker can become *whānau,* extended family. It is criticised in some quarters as creating a dual relationship that crosses social work boundaries. Interviews were conducted with seven Māori social work practitioners with over 25 years practice experience, investigating how they dealt with potential boundary issues and the principles and processes they operate by to keep both themselves and their clients safe. The research highlights the need for workers to make plain their role in the social work relationship, the need for contracting and negotiation regarding expectations, the importance of supervision, the role of Māori customary behaviour and the need for cultural ending rituals to signify the transformation of the relationship. To implement this form of practice a Māori social worker needs; experience, an understanding of their social work process, a highly accountable practice ethic, a lived understanding of Maori cultural processes and a commitment to Māori cultural ethics.

Introduction

A potential ethical problem has been raised concerning the Indigenous practice of *whakawhanaungatanga* used by Māori social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is the process by where the client, their family, and the worker become *whānau*, extended family to one another. This process has been called into question by some white social workers who view this as a dual relationship with potential for ethical violations. If, in the social work relationship, the worker becomes as part of the client's extended family, what does this mean for the ending of a social work intervention? and how can the parties be family one day and not family the next? This article reports on research conducted with seven long term Indigenous social work practitioners on how they deal with the ethics of *whakawhanaungatanga* and describes what steps they take to keep both themselves and their clients safe.

Context

Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, and while not a homogenous group, there are certain concepts common to the many tribes. One of them is a process of engagement usually referred to as *whakawhanaungatanga*, literally "becoming extended family". It is often expected that when mature Māori meet they will seek to find a commonality in kinship in the first instance, but if a common relative cannot be identified then other forms of connection will be explored such as mutual friends, colleagues, even sporting and religious affiliations, all so we can call each other *whānau*, extended family.

Whakawhanaungatanga also takes place in the engagement phase in many social work relationships, and whether a social worker who identifies as Māori likes it or not, there is an almost inexorable movement for it to take place (English & Selby, 2015). *Whakawhanaungatanga* is "the process of identifying, maintaining, or forming past, present, and future relationships" (Walker et al., 2006, p.334), it is about building culturally responsive relationships of trust and respect to advance a *kaupapa* (agenda) (Alton-Lee, 2015) that involves reciprocal obligations (Durie, 1997). It is usually associated with *whakapapa*, a person's genealogy and familial connections, where relatives not only share in the good times, but are expected to support one another in times of trouble. However the term has also been transferred from the context of family connections to those of a collective who, through attachment by shared experience, can also expect to be supported by others who form part of that group, including colleagues, workmates and school associates (Mead, 2003).

The primary purposes of *whakawhanaungatanga* in a social work context is that if client and worker can make an extended family type connection, then it is inclined to make clients feel safe (Hollis-English, 2012). There is some mutuality in the relationship and the reciprocity that comes with it increases the ability to share power with the client (Ruwhiu, 2012).

If you can become extended family, you identify connections that enable you to work together usually leading to greater trust because of the associated cultural norms and expectations that go with that. Social workers use *whakawhanaungatanga*, looking for ways to connect through people, tribal connections, mutual ancestors, friends, family, acquaintances and places. It is seeking to leverage off these mutual relationships, searching for what we have in common.

One of the challenges with creating a relationship with a client that is spoken of in terms of becoming "family" is that it raises concerns from non-Indigenous practitioners who may see

this as an unethical position that breaches professional boundaries. If a professional relationship evolves into one where there are other components to it, such as a mutual friendship, this is termed as a dual relationship (which will be discussed later), in other words it has more than just the professional component to it. However, problems can be seen to arise because of the remaining power differential, implicit in the social worker and client relationship (Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994). It is also considered to be problematic if the social worker and client have to re-establish their professional relationship at a later date and it has become irrevocably complicated because of the dual relationship (Reamer, 2006). These potential complications mean that some workers have, as one of their principles, "once a client always a client" (Reamer, 2006, p. 115) and so erect boundaries to maintain this philosophy.

The process of *whakawhanaungatanga* raise a number of interesting questions. If *whakawhanaungatanga* for a Māori social worker means identifying or forming some form of extended family connections, what happens at the end of a social work intervention? When a significant factor of the social work Planned Change Model is the termination stage (Shannon & Young, 2004), i.e., the work with the client is over and so that relationship ends, what does that mean for a worker who has created a relationship where they now consider each other as *whānau,* extended family? Can you really take part in a process where you are *whānau* one day and then, once the work is finished, declare we are not *whānau* anymore? This is particularly important when we take into consideration the expectations and understanding of the client and any confusion that they may now have about the role the worker has in their life.

Hollis-English is one of the few writers who has written about this social work paradox, she writes "the significance of the *whakawhanaungatanga* process in that once the *whānau* connection is made, it does not end when the child returns to their family, or when the professional relationship is over" (Hollis-English, 2012, p. 136), "If the process is implemented in accordance with *tikanga* [Māori custom] then the relationship between Māori social workers and *whānau* /clients will be never-ending, the only thing that changes is the *kaupapa* [purpose] of the relationship" (Hollis-English, 2012, p. 215).

Endings

The Planned Change process has been a dominant framework for good social work practice especially in New Zealand. It is based around four key components: the engagement phase,

assessment phase, intervention phase and the evaluation and termination phase (Berg-Weger, 2016; Cournoyer, 2013; Minahan & Pincus, 1977). Evaluation, sometimes referred to as reviewing, is the part of the social work process that deals with endings or termination. Termination seems an abrupt term, but does promote social work relationships as having defined endings, where services or the work of individual social workers is expected to be terminated properly (Adams et al., 2005; Reamer, 2006).

For the termination phase to be appropriate, endings need to be planned to avoid negative reactions such as "anger, frustrations and guilt" that can occur when clients are not prepared or understand the nature of the social work relationship (Gambrill, 2013, p.517). This is vital when service users may not understand what social workers do and so not be aware of the limitations and boundaries of social work roles (Higham, 2009).

Gambrill (2013) prepares a brief checklist to plan for endings right from the start of the social work relationship including that the "expectations of clients are clearly described, responsibilities of helpers are clearly described including what can be offered and what cannot" and "feelings about endings are discussed (Gambrill, 2013, p. 517). As part of the termination process she recommends that "final meetings should allow time to discuss feelings about ending, to review progress, to celebrate success and to plan next steps," (Gambrill, 2013, p. 525). The question then becomes, is *whakawhanaungatanga* an ethical approach to social work?

In the USA from the 1990's the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) included ethical standards regarding dual relationships and outlined in its revised code what counted as a transgression of boundaries.

> The social worker should not condone or engage in any dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation of, or potential harm to, the client. The social worker is responsible for setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries (NASW, 1993, p. 5).

The International Federation of social workers has a *Statement of Ethical Principles* (2004) that outlines the basic principles for its member organisations. The most relevant clauses to a discussion on *whakawhanaungatang*a are the following three clauses:

> Principle 5.3 - Social workers should act with integrity. This includes not abusing the relationship of trust with the people using their services, recognising the boundaries between personal and professional life, and not abusing their position for personal benefit or gain.

> Principle 5.5 - Social workers need to acknowledge that they are accountable for their actions to the users of their services, the people they work with, their colleagues, their employers, the professional association and to the law, and that these accountabilities may conflict.
>
> Principle 5.11 - Social workers should be prepared to state the reasons for their decisions based on ethical considerations, and be accountable for their choices and actions (International Federation of Social Workers, 2004, p. 4-5).

The New Zealand Social Work Registration Board (SWRB) also has guidelines for ethical practice, including that social workers "not exploit their relationship with clients for personal or professional gain" (SWRB, 2014, p. 4). The guidelines note that because New Zealand is a small country:

> many people live and work in small and rural communities where people are dependent on each other. It is important that, as a social worker, you keep a professional distance from clients and that there is no, or no appearance of any, advantage taken of a client. (SWRB, 2016, p. 4)

The previously mentioned dual relationships occur when a professional enters into a second role within the life of a client including friend, employer, teacher, business associate, family member, sexual partner (Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994, p. 213). The problem with dual relationships is when "a professional relationship shifts to a dual relationship the practitioner's power remains but is not checked by the rules of professional conduct" (Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994, p. 217) and it is this that can undermine the therapeutic relationship. It is interesting to note that dual relationships in this context occur when the professional relationship is added to or alters. For example you are a person's professional social worker and then you become a family member. The Māori *whakawhanaungatanga* process is that you become *whānau* and then you enter into a professional relationship.

However it is not dual relationships *per se* that are unethical, they become unethical when they:

- interfere with the social worker's exercise of professional discretion
- interfere with the social worker's exercise of impartial judgment
- exploit clients, colleagues, or third parties to further the social worker's personal interests
- harm clients, colleagues, or third parties (Reamer, 2003, p. 129).

It is a recognition of the power that social workers can have over clients and their lives that there is considerable angst over dual relationships. The worry is that in the new relationship the power may remain with no longer any restraint by professional ethics (Reamer, 2006) although this assumes that personal ethics are absent. The desire is to avoid any form of harm or exploitation (Reamer, 2006).

Dual relationships can be organised into five categories: "intimate relationships, pursuit of personal benefit, how professionals respond to their own emotional and dependency needs, altruistic gestures, and responses to unanticipated circumstances" (Reamer, 2006, p. 109). Social workers need to be aware of avoiding conflicts of interest that interfere with professional discretion and impartiality; the main worry is the exploitation of a power relationship or something that may harm the client. Sawyer & Prescott (2010) go further and say that, particularly in therapeutic situations, "dual relationships (or multiple relationships) in therapy practice are identified as an ethical issue and a boundary violation" (p. 373). For many years the USA professions code of ethics stated that once a person was a client they were one in perpetuity, however, Davidson (2005) noted that other professions such as psychologists believed that with the passage of time non-therapeutic relationships are not necessarily harmful.

Is Boundary Crossing Wrong?

There is some question over whether dual relationships and crossing boundaries are inherently wrong. Crowden (2008), in their discussion on boundaries and multiple overlapping relationships in psychotherapy, draws a distinction between crossing boundaries and violating boundaries, arguing that they are not necessarily the same thing as crossing boundaries can happen in many circumstances. Crowden (2008) argues that:

> Many boundary crossings are unavoidable. For instance there are many discrete communities like those comprising members of the armed services, people with particular disabilities, people with similar religious or sexual preferences where dual and multiple overlapping relationships may even have a profound and potentially positive impact on professional life. Many rural GPs and health care professionals hold the view that the overlapping relationships in rural practice lead to positive health outcomes (Crowden, 2008, p. 15).

Medicine does seem to be a field of practice that is more comfortable with dual relationships. Rural general practitioners may deal in their professional capacity with every person in their community, including neighbours, bankers, shop keeper, church members, dramatic societies, and mechanics

and yet enjoy and value those multiple layers of relationship where participation and observation adds to their understanding of their patients (Brooks et al., 2012).

Social workers can also find that working in rural areas challenge the norms that city workers may find it easier to avoid. Meeting clients while shopping or socialising is harder to avoid when rural areas expect a friendlier interaction within its community rather than a professional, distant type of engagement (Pugh, 2007). These issues can be easily related to by Māori workers who work in smaller discrete communities even within larger urban areas where contact within cultural events is almost impossible to avoid. Some advise social workers to avoid dual relationships, particularly if there is a risk for harm or exploitation, but if it is unavoidable then they should "take steps to protect clients and [take] responsibility for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries" (Congress & McAuliffe, 2006, p. 56). However, others see professional relationship boundaries as being artificial and inflexible particularly in rural communities and with minorities (Davidson, 2005).

Crossing boundaries may be necessary in minority and oppressed groups. In the late 20th century at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic gay social workers had to deal with issues in the community as they occurred where the intensity and context of their work meant that "it's not a job, it's a way of life really in the end" (Deverell & Sharma, 2000, p. 31). They were literally dealing with matters of life and death where the major ethical issues were defined as confidentiality and discretion.

Just because boundaries are crossed, it does not mean that boundaries have been violated and that multiple relationships are unethical. Crowden believes it is ethical in fields such as psychotherapy when professionals "are aware of the nature of professional boundaries and are sensitive to an obligation to act from the virtues and regulative ideals that ensure the goals of psychotherapy (to increase autonomy and psychological wellbeing) are met" (Crowden, 2008, p. 26).

Some argue that social workers can cross boundaries and act ethically if they can,

1. Be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest.
2. Inform clients and colleagues about potential or actual conflicts of interest; explore reasonable remedies.
3. Consult colleagues and supervisors, and relevant professional literature, regulations, policies, and ethical standards (codes of ethics) to identify pertinent boundary issues and constructive options.

4. Design a plan of action that addresses the boundary issues and protects the parties involved to the greatest extent possible.
5. Document all discussions, consultation, supervision, and other steps taken to address boundary issues.
6. Develop a strategy to monitor simple mentation of action plan (Reamer, 2003, p. 130).

Congress and McAuliffe (2006) believe that the focus on dual relationships comes from societies with a highly professionalised work force whereas cultures and countries that have a more collaborative approach are less stringent about maintaining professional boundaries. They argue that the problems with dual relationships "reflects an Anglo bias and that it does not support culturally sensitive practice" particularly in cultures where kinship or developing a personal relationship "may be a prerequisite in developing a therapeutic relationship" (Congress & McAuliffe, 2006, p. 157). O'Leary et al. (2013) explain that, in their view, some boundaries are permeable and therefore negotiable and some should be impermeable and therefore non-negotiable (O'Leary et al., 2013). However, they too are rather 'Anglo' in that from their perspective, the permeable/negotiable aspect of the social work relationship, extends to disclosure of worker's personal details, saying hello in other contexts, taking of calls and meetings outside of office hours and sharing food or drink. For example the giving of a *koha* (gift) to assist with funeral expenses of a close family member of a client could be seen as violating the social work relationship boundary, but is a normal, accepted and expected part of Māori society. Similar in level to a Westerner sending a bereavement card.

Some argue that relationship boundaries are on a continuum from rigid, to balanced, to entangled (Davidson, 2005). Entangled is when a worker meets their own needs at the expense of the client whereas a balanced approach is where workers "are authentic and caring, while maintaining clear boundaries" (Davidson, 2005, p. 519) where self-reflection, professional judgement accompanied by professional accountability including supervision are practiced (Davidson, 2005). To obtain this accountability Doel & Sharlow (2005) outline seven forms to help safeguard workers; accountability to oneself, to the employer, to other agencies, to the public, to the client, to the profession and to the law.

Whakawhanaungatanga if approached correctly does deal with many of the fore mentioned concerns, because it usually does not violate the concerns expressed by regulatory bodies. This is because relationships formed through *whakawhanaungatanga'* are not based around emotional

attachment, but around reciprocal obligations. Leland Ruwhiu's (2012) perspective is that when Māori work with someone and become '*whānau*', extended family, this is not a one-way street we are now obligated to one-another, it is not a form of manipulation, but it is in fact a mutual obligation. We have created *whānau* relationships, but they are not primarily about closeness or emotional attachment, they are about me being obligated to you because of our ancestors association. In the same vein my descendants may be obligated to your descendants because of the work we do here today.

In summary, *whakawhanaungatanga* is important because it is a vital unifying concept that is fundamental to the expression of Māori social work practice, it is a process used to engage with a social work client so that they become as a part of their extended family. However it does mean that a form of dual relationship exists and so how do Māori social workers negotiate these potential difficulties?

Method

The aim of the research project was to find out how experienced Māori social workers used the *whakawhanaungatanga* process and avoided problems with crossing social work boundaries. Amongst other questions the research participants were asked:

1. Does *whakawhanaungatanga* mean that you sometimes cross social work boundaries and how do you manage it?
2. How do you decide which boundaries to cross?
3. What happens at the end of a piece of work?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven long term social workers that were part of the Tangata Whenua Voices in social work collective (tāngata whenua being the Māori word definition of Indigenous). The group started in 2013 when a large group of experienced Māori social workers travelled to Winnipeg Canada to attend the 2nd Indigenous Voices in Social Work conference. There were so many experienced Māori social work practitioners, managers and educators there that they decided to form a group to support Māori social work practice in Aotearoa. The author became a member of the group at their first New Zealand gathering and it was from this group that seven members who were available at the next meeting were approached to take part in the research. All participants had at least 25 plus years' experience as Māori social workers and ethical approval came from the Otago University Ethics Committee in 2013. All

interviews took place in 2013-2014. Six were interviewed face to face and the seventh was interviewed over the Skype video calling application.

The research was originally conducted for the author's PhD dissertation (Eketone, 2020) and was presented there in a format that identified each of the participants and what they said. All of the participants were well-known practitioners who are leaders in the fields of Indigenous social work, where what they say lends weight because of who they are. Large tracts of the original narrative were left intact and included with their identities so that the reader could decide how much weight to assign to each comments. The seniority of those making the statements carried far more weight than an anonymous text. Then a thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the key processes and principles used and the values that underpinned them.

Key Findings

Amongst the findings was that, as an applied principle, *whakawhanaungatanga* is a tool of engagement to connect with a person and their *whānau* (extended family) spiritually, psychologically and physically (i.e. in physical proximity to one another). It is underpinned firstly by *whakapapa* (tribal genealogy) to enable a building of trust, but can broaden outside blood *whānau* to *whānau* joined by *kaupapa* (purpose) and *take* (issue).

These social workers identified the purpose of *whakawhanaungatanga* as being to join what are essentially two groups into one, for the worker to become *whānau* to someone so that they are part of the "support mechanism" of that individual or family. It is still professional and needs total transparency to protect both parties, but the aim is to build a significant level of trust very quickly.

It involves a degree of discernment and being aware of potential spiritual and cultural connections. From a practical standpoint it involves being prepared beforehand, researching tribal connections, places where the individual and their family had lived, religions that they and their relations adhere to or have connection to. Researching significant people and ancestors in their *whānau*. Knowing their customs and processes and being aware of how their *whānau* is expected to operate and the structure of that *whānau*.

Whakawhanaungatanga is a dominant cultural construct and it is a process most Māori are familiar with even if they don't name it as such. The client is often also looking for some form of connection to enable them to trust the worker, especially if the worker represent a Government that has been seen as a negative colonising force and so the associated norms and expectations

inherent in the process can make things easier. According to the interviewed social workers there are power implications as the relationships leveraged can be positive or negative and so workers need to be very wary and extremely clear. This means identifying clearly the role of the worker, both for the worker and the client. Clients will expect honesty, respect, and *"that you will be tika and pono"* (honourable and appropriate). If you have used whakapapa to engage creating a level of trust, you will be expected to listen, to give clients a fair go and they will expect you to be professional, know what you are doing and "share power" especially over decision making.

With *whakawhanaungatanga* there is the obligation to stay true to Māori custom; the obligation to act professionally; the obligation to contribute to strengthening the *whānau* of the client which sometimes means being the critical voice, i.e. the person who speaks 'truth' and brings transparency to negative forces such as collusion etc. The obligations also don't end when the work ends. If a genealogical connection has been established, that does not end when a piece of work ends. These relationships may continue for generations. Even though these relationships may continue in some form in the future, the nature of Māori social work means that the relationship must evolve, in fact it is problematic if it doesn't.

Māori social workers do cross traditional social work boundaries at times primarily because they see themselves as working from a different paradigm with different accountabilities than their Western colleagues. With greater accountability to *whānau* it challenges *"the synthetic separation of the personal and professional"* that pretends that social workers are somehow separate from the community they work in. Some view it as not so much crossing a boundary as bringing two worlds together. There are still boundaries, but they are managed differently, still fulfilling the spirit of the ethical standards, and are instead guided by Māori customary boundaries which are agreed upon social and cultural processes and values. This is important and it has implications for the 'termination stage' of the social work process. Not that the work never finishes, but a relationship may never finish. However, it is up to the client whether any relationship continues, but it is important that there is a *poroporoaki*, a ritual ending, that acknowledges the work done and that part of the journey with that worker is completed and so a transformation of the relationship has occurred. Because of the power dynamic it is up to the client to determine if any relationship continues in the future; it is still bound by those ethical demands. From these and other responses it is possible to set up a framework for managing boundaries.

Framework for Crossing Boundaries

From the interviews a framework can be constructed that distils the findings into guiding principles and processes for Māori social workers considering how to address crossing boundaries when working from a perspective that involves *whakawhanaungatanga.* See Table 1 for a summary of the framework. Experienced Māori social workers have used a number of guiding principles and processes to negotiate social work boundaries. Guiding principles include:

a. *Tikanga* (Māori customary behaviour)
There is an expectation first and foremost that Māori workers will adhere to Māori customary behaviour, that they will act in a way that is *tika* (correct) and *pono* (with integrity). To violate *tikanga* is to not be true to being Māori. Social workers have to be accountable for that behaviour. They constantly need to not only be self-reflective but proactive, asking themselves what is the correct way to go forward in this instance.

b. Transparency
Social workers need to be transparent in the way they deal with clients and their *whānau*, they need to be honest and respectful explaining their role and the expectations clients can have of social workers.

c. *Whakapapa* (Genealogy)
Relationships are initially based on a continuum of genealogy that represents the past, present and future. If clients become as *whānau* this has potential ongoing implications and obligations because our ancestors are now engaged in this relationship. This may be hard for non-Indigenous people to understand but there is a belief by many in being held accountable by our ancestors particularly for things we do in their name. Because of this *whakawhanaungatanga* is sacred and takes place in a sacred space.

d. *Kawa* (correct processes)
Kawa is sticking to our processes and being accountable to our practice frameworks. It means being professional, not the pseudo-professional aura that creates a distance between the worker and the client. A number of research participants consider this a synthetic separation of the personal and the professional. Instead being professional means being an expert, capable and competent in their work.

e. *Tuakana – teina* (Older cousin - younger cousin)
The status we enjoy because of our professional skills is temporary and we may take the role of the elder cousin in this context. But we will continue to learn from the client and in other situations they may be the older cousin and we may be the younger cousin. We are only part of their journey, but we may have future contact so trust should be built in for the future.

f. Identity
To operate in this space we must know who we are. We must be at ease with our culture and ethnicity and have a solid grounding in our cultural values, understanding our skills and being self-reflective.

g. Emancipation
Remembering that the reason we are there is for their emancipation, whether it be from addiction, colonisation, or behaviours that aren't helpful.

h. Understanding the cost
Relationships are chosen and relationships cost and there is a cost to be borne with *whakawhanaungatanga*. There is the potential cost to the worker's immediate family, there may be a cost personally and professionally. The obligation that comes with being a protector of relationships is sometimes greater than the obligation to the job description. Traditional Māori relationships are built on a foundation of reciprocity. It is the nature then, of these forms of relationships, that one day in the future they may seek to repay a social worker for their work. This may be expressed in gratitude or paid in some kindness to future generations, (for example the author voted for a politician as repayment for a kindness shown by his aunt). Relationships are not terminated but transformed, they may continue in another sphere. However everything needs to be considered on a case by case basis.

In association with the previous principles there are a number of processes put in place by Māori social workers to manage when they may cross these boundaries. In Māori communities relationships with clients already may exist. It would be unusual, especially in smaller centres, to meet a family that a worker did not already have some form of connection with. Some may argue then that it is better for them to have another social worker, but if the trust between potential worker and client already exists, that may contribute to better overall outcomes. Also operating using *whakawhanaungatanga*, for example, becoming *whānau*, does not mean workers and clients are close, it may merely mean that they are obligated to act appropriately to one another.

The following processes and actions do have some minor cross over with the principles.

a. *Pōtae* (identifying what hat are you wearing)
It is important for the client to be aware right at the very start what *pōtae* (hat) the social worker is wearing. That they are engaging with them at that time as a professional social worker. That there may be previous *whānau* connections and obligations, but that in the context of this piece of social work they are fulfilling the requirements of the job, whether they are wearing their Government *pōtae*, their tribal *pōtae*, their Māori *pōtae* or their organisational *pōtae*. This means being transparent and managing expectations from the outset.

b. Negotiation and contracting

Right from the start it is important to negotiate mutual expectations especially in circumstances where values and processes can vary. Deciding on processes, negotiating timelines, how decisions will be made, and the role of confidentiality should all be included.

Setting up a contract allows workers to be honest, caring, loving and supportive in a way that makes it clear to the client, that documents accountabilities and defines supervision. This also provides security to the organisation by outlining accountabilities.

c. *Tikanga* (Māori customary norms)

The following of Māori cultural norms was mentioned repeatedly by experienced social workers including looking for ways to align *tikanga* and social work boundaries. Using recognised Māori processes and staying within *tikanga* boundaries invokes Māori ethical approaches and governs how people should be treated and is a way to operate safely.

d. Relying on your experience

Experience is important, being assured of your processes through considerable professional practice and the understanding and alignment of *tikanga.* Understanding the principles that inform your practice and understanding your policies and procedures. Knowing when processes are a strength and when they are not.

e. Accountability

Accountability occurs across a variety of sites. Accountability to your elders, to their elders and to the elders of the tribal area in which you may work, to keep you on track and ensure you follow correct processes. This isn't just for the safety of the client but also the safety of the worker. One participant spoke about how the ancestors become engaged in this process and the implications that may have for the worker as an individual. Accountability to peers, particularly Māori peers, is important as well as being accountable to your stated process. Social workers are also encouraged to be accountable to external networks, finding people who understand your process and world view. Accountability to your organisational management is also important even if it means you agree to disagree.

f. Supervision

Accountability to elders is a form of cultural supervision, but more professional cultural supervision is important even though this can often be done with peers, including internal clinical supervision.

g. Self-reflective practice

Being reflective of your practice, your principles and processes. Know what you are doing and why you are doing it.

h. Relationships are purposeful

People have joined together for a reason and so there is a relationship that is formed out of that. Therefore when that purpose ends the relationship should transform as well.

i. Poroporoaki (farewell and ending rituals)

Poroporoaki is a traditional process that transitions relationships. It acknowledges the end of a purpose or *take*, but also acknowledges the building of relationships. It is an

opportunity for the client to reflect on what has happened and express gratitude if they wish. Traditionally it recognises the change in relationship.

j. A new form of relationship develops

In the Māori community the social worker and client may see each other regularly in the community, at the *marae* (ancestral halls), funerals, school events etc. A relationship is still there, but it has changed because their need for our assistance is no longer there. In the social work context the worker may be the older cousin because of the knowledge and skills they use in that space. In other sites it creates the opportunity for the client to be the older cousin because of their knowledge, skills or relationships. Being professional means being an expert, being competent and not being better than them. Some Māori social workers acknowledge the potential for an ongoing connection because of the nature of the relationship which may continue on for generations. However, the nature of that relationship has to be correct, genuine and authentic and is one that both sides must be free to engage or not engage in. Particularly if the client is confused by the new relationship and what *pōtae* (hat) the worker is wearing. Hence the importance of negotiation in the engagement phase. Because the social worker has this connection the obligation continues and they may be called on to reciprocate again. Relationships are always there waiting to continue as there is a responsibility to respond in the future.

Table 1

Summary of Boundary Crossing Framework

Guiding principles	Processes and actions
Tikanga (Māori customary behaviour)	*Pōtae* (identifying what hat are you wearing)
Transparency	Negotiation and contracting
Whakapapa (Genealogy)	*Tikanga* (Māori customary norms)
Kawa (correct processes)	Relying on your experience
Tuakana – teina (Older cousin - younger cousin)	Accountability
Identity	Supervision
Emancipation	Self-reflective practice
Kawa (correct processes)	Relationships are purposeful
Understanding the cost	*Poroporoaki* (farewell and ending rituals)
	A new form of relationship develops

Discussion

The central worry with *whakawhanaungatanga* is that it appears to create a dual relationship and the concern with these is that, because the social worker/client relationship is one based on power, the power dynamic is no longer restrained by professional ethics (Reamer, 2006). As with all ethical discussions the primary focus is around protection for the client, protection for the worker and protection for the organisation. However, most of the objections to dual relationships are that they appear to breach organisational conduct and protocols rather than professional codes of ethics.

There are a number of issues here, the first is the distinction between what is personal and what is professional. The term "Registered Social Worker" and "Professional Social Worker" cover a broad spectrum of practice. There is a continuum from those who are almost indistinguishable from counsellors working in highly therapeutic environments where a degree of distance has to be maintained to prevent clients from getting the wrong idea about the relationship, through to those working in community development where a social worker may become totally embedded, where they are almost indistinguishable from the people they are working with. Māori social workers exist in this continuum, but also have a continuum in their own cultural world of expectation, responsibility, obligation and reciprocity.

While many social work writers are wary of any form of dual relationship, there are sectors that are more pragmatic and realistic about these forms of relationships. Medical practitioners that deal with a variety of different classes appear to be more accepting that their clients, particularly in rural areas, will interact with them outside of the medical clinic. Some social workers seems reluctant to acknowledge this, possibly because of the nature of social work, i.e. it often takes place in the home, or community, rather than a designated clinic/surgery that is always professional in nature. It may also be because of the class distinctions in much of social work where a middle-class worker in an urban setting may not want or need to interact across classes when the majority of social work clients are from the working class and underclass.

For many years many New Zealand social workers were not part of the communities they serviced being not even from the same culture or class as their clients. When the author worked in a poor suburb of New Zealand's largest city, many social workers did not live in the same locality as their clients. There was a form of white flight at 5.30 p.m. every weekday evening. Nearly all

of the white teachers, social workers, probation officers, nurses and shop keepers fled to their middleclass suburbs where they had little, if any, social contact with the community's residents.

Those working from and in the Māori community have different relationships with their clientele. You could be the same tribe or your children may go to the same schools, be in the same performing arts groups or you may see your clients/ex-clients down at the local tribal facilities. Relationships could also be pre-existing as there would be few families, in all but the most urban of settings, that a local Māori social worker wouldn't know in some capacity.

There is also a distinction between crossing social work boundaries and violating them. For example an analogy can be made with the border between USA and Mexico, a boundary much in the news. You can cross this boundary with the permission and understanding of the law of the land and the responsibilities that come with it. However, you must not violate the border, i.e. cross it without permission or break the law once you have done so. In a similar way, it is not the crossing of social work boundaries that is the problem, it is crossing ethical boundaries that is the problem. From the interviews with social workers we discussed possible frameworks to move ethically across boundaries. In any profession there can be "loose cannons" and the purpose of an ethical frameworks is to protect clients, organisations and the public when faced by worst case scenarios.

Ethical practice is vital because Māori as a client group can be a vulnerable population often open to manipulation. Having a social worker who they can regard as *whānau* may make them feel more secure and give greater confidence that their needs and views will be taken into account. However, by the same token being *whānau* can mean that they tolerate poorer practice and makes them potentially more emotionally susceptible. However, being *whānau* means that they can hold the worker to a high standard of behaviour and support. If *tikanga* (Māori cultural behaviour) is violated it can be terminal for both the relationship and the Social Worker's standing in the community as the client is at the mercy of the worker who has the power to determine what being *whānau* means in the relationship. How the client responds to the need for contracting and how they deal with what *pōtae* (hat) the worker is wearing is not covered by this research. However it is worth considering and also why negotiation and transparency are at the forefront of any relationship.

The problem may be the definition of *whānau*. In a Western nuclear context family is small, intimate, emotional and close. In a Māori context *whānau* is wider with a huge continuum of intimacy. The people we may consider *whānau* is a rational, cultural and conscious decision rather

than an emotional connection (although it may be as well). So while there can be obligations and reciprocity and warmth, many *whānau* relationships can be called acquaintances rather than the in-depth emotional attachment of who is considered family in a white person's context. In a discussion the author had with his father, his *whānau* were those he would travel the 1,000 kilometres to his tribal territory to attend their *tangihanga* (usually a three day funeral). These were all his brothers and sisters and first cousins around 50 or so including most of their partners. By the time we count children and grandchildren this is many hundreds of people. They are his *whānau* that he has obligations to even though he may not have ever have spoken to some of them.

This distinction between family and *whānau* is important. It explains why there is tension between those with a Western perspective who say "once a client, always a client" and the Māori perspective of "once a *whānau*, always a *whānau*". Obligations do not end when the work ends, a transformed relationship may continue because *whakawhanaungatanga* doesn't mean that worker and client are close, merely obligated.

Conclusion

The framework proposed to negotiate boundaries is not exhaustive. It is based on a series of qualitative interviews with seven people investigating a range of opinions. No indication has been given whether these social workers would agree with every point or whether they agree on the degree of importance of these guidelines and principles. This is not an instruction manual on how to cross borders and is not intended to be a check list to cross boundaries. These are the stories and explanations of long term experienced social workers who, at some time, stepped out knowing that if they didn't understand their processes and why they did what they did, then they were in trouble. What can be indicated is that the most strongly recommended approach to crossing boundaries include:

- The worker indicating what *pōtae* (hat) they are wearing
- The need for negotiation
- The need for supervision and accountability
- The role of tikanga (cultural ethics)
- That there should be a ritual ending to recognise the work is over and any relationship is transformed and continues in a different way

To implement this form of practice a Māori social worker needs:

- experience
- an understanding of their social work process
- a highly accountable practice ethic

- a lived understanding of Māori cultural process
- a commitment to tikanga Māori
- a high level of personal commitment that understands the costs of the approach

These identified processes and principles are intended to keep both worker and client safe. From a Western perspective social work may be a time limited interaction, but from a Māori perspective it is part of a continuum in which our ancestors, us and our descendants meet to build and maintain relationships.

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