

Diversity, inclusion, hate speech, and minority communities

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Kauri Tearaura (Ngāti Mahuta, Tainui, and Cook Islands) shares his personal story before expanding on the harm that is done by hate speech, especially to minority communities, such as the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics community (SOGIESC). He suggests that a way forward might be found in diversity, inclusion, and allyship.

Ko Taupiri te maunga,	Taupiri is the mountain,
Ko Waikato te awa,	Waikato is the river,
Ko Tainui te waka,	Tainui is the ancestral vessel,
Ko Tūrangawaewae te marae,	Tūrangawaewae is the sacred meeting place,
Ko Ngāti Mahuta te hapū,	Ngāti Mahuta is the clan,
Ko Waikato te iwi.	Waikato is the nation.

I recite the pepeha¹ of the Waikato peoples. This descent comes to me from my father. We descend from Tāwhiao, the second Māori king, through his elder son to his second wife Rangiaho, Pokaia Tāwhiao. On my mother's side, I descend from the Māori peoples of Tongareva (Penrhyn) and Avarau (Palmerston) in 'Avaiki Nui (the Cook Islands).

Identifying as a member of the rainbow communities, I recognise that this places me at an intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Being brown, Māori, Pasifika, and queer has given me a unique perspective on life.

Belonging to Generation Z, and born in the 21st century, I have had access to digital technology for most of my life. My parents bought two of the first 3G-capable mobile phones after the 3G mobile data network was introduced in Aotearoa New Zealand. The internet has always been present. Thus, I consider myself a “digital native”. Together with an innate curiosity, my access to digital technology and the world wide web has brought the world to my fingertips.

1 Te reo Māori is glossed at the end of this article.

This level of convenience presents both opportunities and challenges. Opportunities for learning and sharing, and challenges in verifying what is being learnt and shared. I admit that, at many points in my life, I have been prey to the unsophisticated misinformation and the remorseless disinformation that exists on the internet, causing great harm especially for marginalised communities. As artificial intelligence and machine learning gain in popularity, there is a potential for misinformation and disinformation to cause greater harm unless we take action.

Free speech and diversity

Being that Māori represent just 17.4% of the New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand, 2022), they are a minority. Thus, their indigeneity remains a unique aspect of their collective identity and I acknowledge my whakapapa Māori through my pepeha at the beginning of this article.

Diversity is the key to combatting conflict and misinformation (Mallet, 2021). In a related manner, I argue also that—alongside principles of allyship and inclusion—it has a vital role to play in countering hate speech. Wong (2022) refers to the rise of false and misleading information as an “infodemic”. In a recent survey of more than 2,000 New Zealanders (Classification Office, 2021), 61% believed that false or misleading information has had “a fair bit” to “a lot” of influence on their views about minority groups such as religious, ethnic, and diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) communities. In addition, 84% of respondents agreed that action must be taken to combat misinformation and, in this article, hate speech is understood as a manifestation of misinformation and disinformation.

To understand and address the issue at hand, we must consider the following questions: What is the context in which New Zealanders are granted the right to free speech? How is hate speech experienced, and what are the conditions that generate it? How can we take action?

New Zealand has international commitments and statutory obligations to free speech. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reads: “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and

impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations, 1948). New Zealand was one of 48 countries that voted in favour of the UDHR, which was ratified on 10 December 1948. In 1990, New Zealand’s legislature put it more plainly: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form” (New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, s 14). While the UDHR is not legally binding, the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act is explicit in granting protection for freedom of expression, or free speech. I find it difficult to imagine that the United Nations, in 1948—or even the New Zealand legislature in 1990—could predict the circumstances we face today, where the right to free speech is used as licence to generate and perpetuate hate speech on such a large scale.

Hate speech and hate crime

Hate speech is on the rise and many minority groups find themselves repeatedly victimised (United Nations, 2022). One such group is the diverse SOGIESC communities. Tweedie (as cited in Daalder, 2022) contends that recent attacks on these communities, such as the suspicious circumstances in which the RainbowYOUTH drop-in centre in Tauranga was burnt down, and the vandalism of a church painted pink in Greymouth, were “built on the back of transphobic sentiment still being widespread and somewhat acceptable”. Indeed, I consider these physical demonstrations as extremist actions, which occur as a result of hate speech that has been left unchecked.

With respect to diverse SOGIESC communities, there have been examples where the right to freedom of discrimination has been weighed against the right to freedom of expression. Bennachie (2009) details the Living Word case, which saw a Wellington-based human rights action group take a complaint to the Classification Office against two videos that dehumanised LGBT people, and people living with HIV/AIDS, as inferior to others based on their sexuality or HIV status. The Film and Literature Board of Review ordered the videos be classified as objectionable. In the video distributor’s appeal, the High Court treated freedom of discrimination as prevailing over freedom of expression, but when the case reached the Court of Appeal, all earlier decisions were reversed. While the content was ultimately not deemed objectionable, or hate speech, I suggest that this example gives us a glimpse of what may occur when we use

our legal and social freedoms to redefine the parameters in which we hold conversation—first, on whether speech is considered hateful and, second, whether the speech in question has the potential to incite violence.

Hate speech is often a precursor to hate crime. An anxious or fearful person with loosely held radical beliefs might become the victim of bullying because of these beliefs. This experience can leave the person feeling ostracised and gives them reason to strengthen their beliefs. These beliefs incite them to fear and target communities that are different from themselves. Their verbal attacks can escalate into physical harm to people and property.

In the US, McDevitt et al. (2002) studied hate crime and described four types: *thrill-seeking* (i.e., the perpetrator believes that they will be lauded for their assault); *defensive* (i.e., the perpetrator justifies their assault as necessary in order to defend a community to which they belong); *retaliatory* (i.e., the perpetrator believes that their assault is due revenge for a prior assault against them); and *mission offensive* (i.e., the perpetrator believes that they are engaged in a total war against members of a rival community). These themes all exist on the same premise—that the perpetrator believes they have the assent of their society to commit their hateful acts. Thus, society has a collective responsibility to recognise, prevent, address, and eliminate hate speech.

Combating hate speech

Any action against hate speech needs to be taken with leadership from the victimised communities, and I use the term “leadership” in its broadest sense. In situations of redress, we know that members of victimised communities often have an additional task of managing their emotions where members of unaffected communities do not (Evans & Moore, 2015). This is known as emotional labour. It is invaluable that non-members of victimised communities play their part in addressing hate speech. Listening to and following alongside victimised communities is crucial. This is known as “allyship”. Just as young members of diverse SOGIESC communities require accurate and positive representation in media to be inspired by what they can become (Zafar & Ellis, 2022), wider society requires visibility of allies who choose to stand with victimised communities.

The wider approach to addressing hate speech should be founded on principles of diversity. Even while the UDHR was being drafted in the late 1940s, the representative of China, Dr Peng Chung Chang, suggested that it should “reflect more than simply Western ideas” (United Nations, n.d.). I echo this sentiment. I believe that all design should incorporate genuine input from the most diverse groups of people. This ensures the greatest reception and impact (Clarkson et al., 2003). McDevitt and Levin (2008) suggest that “many hate crimes are perpetrated by young people who do not yet have a profound commitment to bigotry and therefore may be dissuaded from repeating their offence” (p.19). While earlier intervention is ideal, hate speech is often a precursor to hate crime, and it is for this reason I believe that it must be addressed before it devolves into more malevolent action.

Hangartner et al. (2021) conclude that, of humour, warnings of consequences, and empathy, the latter was most effective in reducing online hate speech. Thus, intervention at this point may require the employment of empathy rather than condemnation. Victims of hate crime often want three things following the offence: a statement from community leaders denouncing the act and the beliefs that led to it; that law enforcers take the act seriously; and that communities value the victims and declare opposition to the hostility expressed by the perpetrator (McDevitt & Levin, 2002). These actions also give us a strong foundation from which to begin our remedial measures once hate speech has been communicated.

Left unchecked, hate speech has the potential to cause grave harm. We must support victimised communities and the avenues through which they can take action. While it is impossible to legislate against all ways in which freedom of expression can be exercised, we can redefine how we hold courageous conversations about hate speech and where we draw the line. As the internet constitutes a favourable environment for radicalising, particularly young people, we must ensure that our response to hate speech is not only remedial but also preventative.

Minority groups such as diverse SOGIESC communities are already vulnerable to negative outcomes. A recent survey indicated that almost two-thirds of young members of diverse SOGIESC communities in New Zealand have contemplated suicide in the 12 months prior (Earley, 2022). For them, hate speech has the potential to be a literal nail in the coffin. Therefore, we must

rally our allies to support diverse SOGIESC communities and other minority groups in recognising the circumstances where hate speech has the potential to take root and spread. I see this as an important step in creating a society that celebrates diversity and fosters inclusion.

Glossary

pepeha lineage
whakapapa Māori Māori genealogy

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