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| Speak Up - Kōrerotia  Unconscious Bias in New Zealand  18 December 2019 | |
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| Sally | Nau mai ki te hōtaka, ki ta tangata “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”. I’m your host, Sally Carlton, and today we’re talking “Unconscious bias in Aotearoa New Zealand.” Now this show follows on from one we did in September 2019 which was specifically looking at unconscious bias with American scholar Dr. Benjamin Reese Jr., who was visiting Christchurch at the time. He had worked for almost 50 years with institutions around this kind of idea so he had a lot of wisdom to share with us. If you’re interested in this topic, I really suggest you have a listen to the show because he was really very charismatic and had lots to share.  Some of the key points that I took away from his discussion are as follows: Unconscious bias is a tendency that we have as humans in the way that we respond to something. He also said that unconscious bias can incorporate bias towards either a person or a group and it’s based on some kind of a characteristic - we might think that might be normally something like race, disability, gender, sexuality but it can also be the small things: somebody with a beard, somebody who works in a particular way, those kinds of things.  He made it very, very clear that everybody has unconscious bias and that we tend to be biased in a positive way towards people who are the same or similar to us on some kind of level that we feel is important. So as an example, if you have a beard, maybe you feel favourably towards other people who have beards.  He made the point that’s what really important is trying to recognise your own unconscious biases and it’s not that easy to do. But challenging yourself to try and engage with this concept and then actively and continually working on managing and confronting it. That might be, for example, spending time with people who are different to yourself.  What becomes a real problem is if society is expressing unconscious bias, particularly people who are in positions of power and who have the means of spreading those biases beyond just themselves. For this reason, unconscious bias is especially problematic when it’s institutionalised in sectors where there are often large power imbalances - and this might be, for example in the health, education, employment, justice, police, media and politics sectors.  So our kōrero today is going to be building on these ideas, focusing specifically on the idea of unconscious bias in New Zealand. What is unconscious bias at both the personal level and the institutional level. And we’ve got three sectors here represented: police, health and the media. Kia ora, thank you so much for coming in today, all of you, and if you could please introduce yourselves, tell us a little bit about you and why you’re here today. |
| Hector | Kia ora, my name is Hector Matthews. I am the Executive Director of Māori and Pacific Health at the Canterbury District Health Board. I hail originally from the far north, from a little place called Ahipara. My iwi is Te Arawa but I whakapapa to all the iwi in Muriwhenua, the far north. But I’ve lived here in Canterbury for more than half my life so I guess in some respects I’m a Cantabrian except when Canterbury plays Northland. I have had a lifetime involvement in Māori communities, both up home in Northland and Auckland where I went to school, and here in Canterbury. I chaired the establishment of a kura kaupapa Māori here in Canterbury which is having it’s 30th anniversary this year and I’ve learned and tutored in mau rākau taiaha. I’m a firm believer in oranga/wellbeing, growing the use of te reo Māori and improving the health outcomes and wellbeing outcomes for our Māori and our community. |
| Sally | That sounds wonderful. |
| Hector | Kai pai. |
| Hirōne | Tena koutou, kia ora ngā tātou. So I’m Hirōne Waretini with the New Zealand Police. My current position is the District Manager for Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Services. I’ve been in Canterbury coming up four years now in this role. I’ve been in the New Zealand Police for 23 years and prior to that had spent six years for the Ministry of Justice working at the District Court at Papakura.  My role within Māori Pacific and Ethnic Services is to try and be everything to everybody in that one of the key pou of my work is to try and change mindset, help influence culture and our leadership to look at different ways of doing things to reduce some pretty shocking statistics. But also to create liaison and pathways between our frontline staff and iwi Māori and ethnic communities, and to help build the trust and confidence in those communities.  That’s my current role, it’s pretty broad and can be a little bit frightening at time. Just in terms of my own upbringing: so my mum is English and my dad was Māori, I wasn’t raised with te reo, I was raised with a bit of tikanga but my dad was beaten at school for speaking te reo during the ‘30s so he never saw the need to teach me and when he died when I was young and went to Auckland Grammar School and never learnt It’s an interesting upbringing, being raised pretty much Pākehā but having a full Māori name and looking really, really Māori. It’s just been an interesting view of the world, especially about the topic we’re going through today. |
| Sally | And just to ask a question, you now speak pretty good te reo? |
| Hirōne | I sound like I do! I’m not fluent and I need to be, but yeah, it sounds OK. My pronunciation is really good. |
| Jane | Kia ora tēnā koutou, ko Jane Andrews tōku ingoa. Ko Taranaki tōku maunga. Ko Waitara tōku awa. So I’m Jane Andrews, I’m from Jam TV. I grew up in Taranaki in a little town called Waitara that most people will know through the media for people being killed or a freezing works closing or something other story that reflects badly on Māori. So I often don’t say where I’m from because it’s a tough conversation to have.  I lived in Auckland for the last 25 years and I’ve been a documentary maker and I guess a journalist in that time. I tend to refer to myself as a ‘storyteller’ rather than a ‘journalist’ because I’m not really sure what a journalist is anymore, but a storyteller is someone who sheds light on those corners and those stories that perhaps aren’t so easily told.  And that led us to the wonderful idea to make two documentaries on racism in New Zealand, a very popular topic, one that I was warned I would get death threats if I went ahead with. Although I didn’t get death threats it did get pretty close; I’ve never had so much abuse, so personal from people I’ve never met. So yeah, my experience of this topic is recent, real and visceral. So I am pretty passionate about making people aware, the attitudes of everyone in Aotearoa and how it impacts the lives of people in a way that we perhaps don’t understand. |
| Sally | OK we have three guests with a huge wealth of experience here and you’ve already shared a wee bit about where you’re coming from, both professionally and personally.  Just to start us off, at the beginning I ran through a whole load of ideas that Ben Reese, in his discussion with me about unconscious bias, was talking about. It would be great to have your thoughts on some of those ideas, just to set the scene for where we’re going to be moving on from here. We’re all in agreement, I think, that unconscious bias is something that everybody holds, but any other comments you have to Ben’s ideas would be fantastic. |
| Hirōne | I think if we start from a position that there’s bias because saying ‘unconscious bias’… Sometimes when you say something is ‘unconscious,’ it’s kind of a get-out-of-jail-free card - but sometimes bias is so conscious it’s been awake for three days drinking coffee and partying, that’s how overt some bias is. So I kind of operate that everybody has some biases and some of them are pretty minor, based on upbringing and experience, and some of them are fairly extreme, based on upbringing and experience. And my view on people developing bias: for some people it’s about finding your tribe, people needing to find some identity and finding people that make them feel comfortable and you get to that situation of Group Think where you develop some common views of the world. And there’s been some pretty good studies about radicalisation, about how radicalisation starts at quite low levels, when people say the odd racist or sexist thing that you used to be able to get away with, and then someone points it out to you, and then someone else comes up, “I can’t believe they told you off for that, you can’t say anything anymore” and then you get led down this path.  I acknowledge my own biases; you can’t work in the organisation I work for but have biases towards people that have offended. You join an organisation and you become blue as opposed to whatever colour you came in the door with. |
| Sally | And I guess as Ben has said, the important thing is being able to recognise that you yourself have them and then you can begin to try and deal with that and manage it appropriately. |
| Hector | I would add to that, that to have bias is to be human. We evolved that way and a lot of our fight or flight instincts come from biases because we would not have survived as hunter gatherers if we didn’t have that. So to have bias is to be human. I think the issue now is most of us aren’t actually hunter gatherers, we’re not Neanderthals anymore wandering around in caves, we have progressed a wee bit around our thinking towards things. Our social norms have shifted and what I’m more interested in is biases that lead to harm and becoming aware of those consciously which is really challenging for all of us because we’re all human. You peel back the DNA - race is a social construct, it’s not a biological construct - we all share the same ancestry, from a DNA perspective. |
| Jane | I fully agree that we all have unconscious bias and that’s part of being human, but I do struggle with the word ‘unconscious’ because that’s a word we’ve chosen to make ourselves feel more comfortable with what we’re doing. You know… A lot of it is conscious - well, maybe not *conscious*, maybe there’s another word for it, if that’s a word that people struggle with - but we know we’re doing it, we say things out loud, we make judgements, we do things and there’s a little moment in your head sometimes where you think, “I just did that.”  So I think there’s more awareness that some of our behaviours aren’t fair, aren’t that good old Kiwi way or that spirit that we like to think aren’t as being a Kiwi. Now, I think if you’re really honest with yourself, some of the judgement calls that we make and some of those things that contribute to what we’re talking about, they aren’t unconscious, we know we’re doing it and when we see it in others we don’t correct, we don’t stand up, we don’t say, “Hang on a minute, that’s not on.” We let things go and we let things build.  I get that it’s part of human nature but I struggle with the word ‘unconscious.’ |
| Sally | The other word that Ben used a lot was ‘implicit’ bias. |
| Jane | Which is the word that we used when we did our survey with Harvard because it was a word we were more comfortable with. We didn’t want to give people that get-out-of-jail-free card, that ‘Oh well there’s nothing I can really do about it.’ Oh there’s something you can do about it, there’s a lot of things we have to face up to and actively work to change. Labelling it ‘unconscious’ is not going to help that progression. |
| Hirōne | It’s somewhat akin to the sleepwalking defence, isn’t it Jane? |
| Jane | Yes totally, absolutely, yes. |
| Sally | We might have our first break then and then we’re going to come back and really get into what is it that you guys are doing. |
|  | **MUSIC**  **Six60, ‘Kia Mau Ki Tō Ūkaipō / Don't Forget Your Roots’** |
| Sally | Nau mai, this is “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” and today we’re talking about unconscious, or as we’ve just discussed perhaps better termed, implicit bias. Unconscious bias or implicit bias can occur at both a personal and at the institutional level. If we start off thinking about the personal level - the unconscious bias we all have within ourselves. What are some stories within your experiences that show that this exists? |
| Hector | I work in health and my role gets me looking at lots of data. Health is very good at collecting data: we can measure people through the door, length of stay in hospital, medications dispensed and so on and so forth, so we have a plethora of data. So bias and inequality has been talked about in health for several decades now but one of the interesting things that’s occurred in the last decade, lots of research has been done and it’s shown that actually there is what we describe as *implicit* bias but it produces *explicit* results. So what most non-Māori are subliminally unaware of in this country is that Māori receive different health services to Pākehā. Māori get fewer prescriptions, we get fewer referrals, we get fewer surgical interventions, we get fewer treatment plans and less time with GPs. And we can measure that empirically now and over decades you can actually show that GPs are prescribing less drugs to Māori and they are giving less referrals to secondary services, and in secondary services we are getting later and longer care when we get to cancer wards or secondary services and so on. |
| Sally | As a result of not having the intervention at the beginning? |
| Hector | That’s right, yeah. So there’s this idea that Māori have poorer health and we get poorer health outcomes because it’s our own fault. We drink too much and smoke too much and so on and so forth. But actually what the data is now showing - and it’s very compelling to the clinicians - is that you are treating Māori differently simply because we are Māori. There’s always a story going on. Again, further research shows when you talk to clinicians they acknowledge that yes, bias exists but not me, it’s always everyone else.  So data is very compelling that Māori receive a different quality of service in this country, the Health Quality and Safety Commission realise it, DHBs realise it, the Ministry of Health realises. To change that, though, is very, very difficult because we live in this subliminal world where we think we’re nice people and we’re kind and we’re generous and we would never treat someone poorly - but in fact these biases are hardwired into us, you know.  Most of these docs and nurses have grown up in a world where they’ve listened to Sir Bob Jones and Don Brash talking trash about Māori and they believe that. Just like people, they watch the news and they think all Muslims are terrorists, and Brian Tāmaki says homosexual cause earthquakes, you know that homophobia is deeply embedded into our culture. People are starting to change but those biases are hardwired and people may not be clearly aware of them, but it’s happening in their practice. And when you’re well educated and articulate, you can’t claim ignorance all the time. And my challenge back to my clinicians is: if you know Māori get prescribed less, then every time you sit down to write a prescription you have to stop, think, breathe, and actually ask yourself are you treating this patient equitably to the patient that came in before that wasn’t Māori.  Those are real challenges in our health system because New Zealanders like to think that we have a very rose-coloured view of ourselves, that we’re a free, egalitarian, democratic country - and while some of that is true, we’re actually very, very ignorant of our history and the way Māori were treated and the hardwired views that we have inside our brains that have been shaped by our colonial past. |
| Hirōne | What Hector said.  When I go to the doctor, I don’t get under prescribed because interestingly, when everybody asks me what I do for a job and I say I’m in the police, that’s kind of a switch and I get really good service. |
| Sally | That’s another bias, then, coming to the fore. |
| Hirōne | So just talking from a justice perspective, right? So we know that Māori are about 15% of our population but we know our prison population - of about 10,000 prisoners or less now - Māori sit at about 51% of our prison population. So when I talk to new graduates who leave Police College, I ask, “Who was OK at maths?” and for those that were passable, I ask them to do the mathematics on that for me. How can 15% of one group of people make up 50% of your prison population? And it’s not unique to this country because you look at Australia, the indigenous Australian population actual versus prison is ridiculously high and the US, the African American or native American and so in countries that have ethnic minorities, those ethnic minorities or the subjugated group through time has tended to populate higher in prison.  But just looking at some stuff that we’ve been working on and the data that we’re operating on now: The general imprisonment rate is about 200 people per 100,000; the non-Māori rate is 105, the Māori rate is 620 per 100,000. So that’s six times more likely. We are 70% of the youth in justice facilities. 60% of women in prison are Māori. And 60% of Oranga Tamariki removals are Māori. Māori are three times more likely to be arrested, three-and-a-half times more likely to be charged, 11 times more likely to be remanded in custody, four times more likely to be convicted and six-and-a-half times more likely to be imprisoned.  I’m going to use the same sort of view that Hector’s using as well: That when Māori enter the system, their outcomes are not as good. We could bring someone from education into this as well and the same thing. Four to five years ago when Count Me In was introduced - which was an initiative aimed to get Māori and Pasifika to NCEA Level 2 - the success rate for NCEA Level 2 for New Zealand European was about 80%, the success rate for Pasifika was about 70/early 70s, for Māori it was 62% of Māori eligible got NCEA Level 2. And now we know there’s something like a $2 billion income gap between Māori and non-Māori in New Zealand.  So as Hector said, and I absolutely support him on this, data tells us the facts. And they’re irrefutable facts and that’s not unconscious, that’s hardwired. This is how it is, systemic. |
| Sally | You’ve both been talking about Māori as a particular subgroup but you mentioned ethnic minorities in general. Have you seen in either the health or the police sector, that other ethnic minorities are over-represented as well? |
| Hector | Certainly in health, Pasifika health outcomes often reflect Māori health outcomes - and frequently they’re the same people; about 20% of all Pasifika babies are also Māori babies anyway. As Hirōne pointed out, no matter what jurisdiction you go into you see similar sorts of things and it tends to apply to the minority or the economically deprived.  In New Zealand that’s Māori and its more often Māori because we’ve been here the longest. As you get new poorer migrants coming in, you’ll see similar sorts of things. We’re the ‘other’ group… If you’ve read Edward Said’s book on Orientalism and othering, we are the ‘other.’ We weren’t the ‘other’ when Europeans first arrived but became the other. All of us hold these biases but when you’re not the dominant culture, the dominant culture - what they value becomes important and so if you value something different, you end up being shunted to the side. |
| Sally | Jane, how about from your perspective having made the documentary? |
| Jane | The othering is an interesting point because part of my research for this and for another documentary I’m working on has me really up close and personal with international students. You know, young migrants that come here with the dream of a better future - a dream that our government sells them - and then what happens when they get here is very different because… In this instance I can’t call it unconscious bias, I really can’t, that doesn’t sit well.  There are systems in place within education, and even within education for international students, that are so full of bias and disadvantages them, it’s akin to modern slavery. What happens to some of those students because of the bias of our system, because of the systems that colonialism has set up, and that hierarchy and authority and the ability to question - they have so little voice, they’re not even being seen on the stats yet, they are non-people in many respects when it comes to having a voice in our system and being heard, being looked after.  They don’t get access to our medical system, they’re on rather tricky medical insurance policies so they have no health care, they have very little legal rights. Increasingly the unions are starting to look after these people and give them a voice but that’s only the last two or three years. The way some of these kids suffer just made my hair stand on end.  Like people cannot believe, will not believe, that this is happening in New Zealand - but it is. |
| Sally | You’ve all been talking from an institutional level, if we get back to the personal level have you got particular stories that you can tell? |
| Hirōne | My son who is nine - and his mum is French, so I’m English and Māori, and his mum is French but also she’s… her whānau are Indonesian and Chinese and Vietnamese but French, New Caledonian and Kanak - so my boy just is this beautiful mix of everything - went to the dental nurse and needed a couple of cavities up the back and mum got taken aside and said, “Hey, you shouldn’t be giving him lollies and fizzy drinks.” My boy has never touched a fizzy drink in his life, he doesn’t even get juice, he gets water and he gets milk and they’re not allowed lollies or lollipops or anything like that. They have some biscuits, they have some cakes, but like most kids you know, unless you’re standing there with 24-hour surveillance getting them to brush their teeth, it’s a difficult task. But the first thing my wife got told and she looks French/Asian/European/whatever, was you’ve got to stop giving your kid fizzy. Now, I don’t know if these people give that advice to everybody that comes through that kids get cavities - but maybe my own implicit bias is every time someone tells us something like that it’s because of our surname and who we are. That’s a really quite recent example.  When I was five and I started school and my parents tried to tell the teacher what my name was, Hirōne, the teacher couldn’t pronounce it and they said we’ll just call him ‘Hir-o-nay’. So for 23 years from age five I had to change my name so everyone else could be OK and then at kind of at age 28 I made the decision, actually no that’s not how my name is pronounced, it’s a really important name.  So those would be the two at opposite ends of my life with me and my kids. Maybe just to indicate that we might not have come as far as we think we have. |
| Hector | I’ve got lots of stories. I actually presented evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal last year at the Health Services Inquiry. I was asked about racism in New Zealand and I was presenting on behalf of the Crown which I was reluctant to do but I only presented on behalf of the Crown having spoken to Crown Law. Crown Law said that we won’t be disputing the inequity, we acknowledge that inequity exists, we acknowledge we knew about it and we acknowledge that we failed to do that because I said I wouldn’t present evidence on behalf of the Crown if you’re going to make me be disingenuous about what’s occurred here.  So anyway, when I was asked by the judge about that, I said I’m a 53 Māori male and I’ve experienced racism my entire life. I walk through shops and I get followed. If I get angry, security gets called. And so on and so forth. I chose in my early 20s to send my children to a kura kaupapa Māori so that they could just be Māori without all that crap that used to go on with Hirōne and I at school about leaving your Māoriness at the door or leaving it at home, you weren’t allowed to bring that to school and it was never explicit, it was always implicit.  My kids have grown up in that environment as well as the rest at Christchurch, and my mokupuna have now started at that kura and the thing I love about that is they don’t need to leave themselves at the door. They can be who they are. But the challenge around that is once they leave that safe haven, they still have to tell people how to say their names. They still have to justify the fact that they are bilingual and no-one else is and all that sort of stuff. So as Hirōne so articulately said, we believe we’ve come a long way but we have a long way to go. And we have come a long way but there is a big gap to close up here because people just won’t own the fact that we have this history that is incredibly biased. |
| Sally | You’ve all bandied around the term ‘colonialism,’ the impact that that’s still having. |
| Hector | Pākehā New Zealand doesn’t like to say the word ‘colonialism,’ we like to deny that it exists. And it’s 2019 and we’re actually still having a discussion about whether or not we should teach our history in our schools. Because I think most people know at a conscious level that if we start looking at colonisation, what we will see is some awful stuff. We will see murders, killings, raping - because that’s what we see with colonialism all around the world. We will see awful racism, bigotry, sexism, all that sort of stuff. And from my perspective, it is what it is. You can’t actually change history but you can learn history if you actually learn about it.  The troubling thing about colonialism in New Zealand is people think it’s a historical thing. Actually colonisation happens all the time. It’s current, it’s happening today, the bias in our health system, education system, justice system is recolonising all the time. While that may have improved slightly, we still have some distance to go. |
| Sally | I believe in your documentary you were moving around New Zealand, interviewing people, encouraging them to take the Harvard Project Implicit Test. |
| Jane | That’s right and actually one story from down south which we didn’t include in the documentary because we weren’t filming at the time: I was with my crew standing on a main street doing some filming and my cameraman who is Māori, has a beard and wears a cap and so somebody came past and yelled out the window, “Go back to your own effing country” to my cameraman. So we all stood around aghast and trying to process that. So a) he’s Māori but b) we’re just like, what is this country?  We can talk in generalities but the point of doing the study that we did was to get numbers around how we think we’re doing, how are we really doing - those comparisons. And one of the things that came through to us is we think we’re doing great, you know. If you ask people are we racist? Oh it’s not too bad, we’re OK, we’re not as bad as Australia. Oh we’re not South Africa. We’ve got this… I don’t know where it comes from, we’ve got this idea that actually things are going really well.  Well when things like that happen out of the blue to you, while you’re filming, you’re clearly a crew, you’re recording - it’s like, what kind of madness is that? But yeah when you look at it from a perspective of what we did - going directly asking people, getting them to do this really uncomfortable test that actually measures the reactions that are happening in your brain - before you consciously think, before you tidy up your thought process and behave and be the best person you can be. So gut instinct, in-the-moment reactions - when you start measuring those we are not doing well. We are so far from well. And people didn’t like it.  The reaction to the documentary was, “Oh, you’re stirring up all this trouble, what’s the point?” Well the point is that if we don’t stir it up and actually face it, we’re not going anywhere. We’re going to be stuck in the same hole, our kids will be dealing with the same problems. What kind of legacy is that? It astounds me how blinkered we are to what is happening in New Zealand today, every day in your communities, not somewhere else. In your street, in your schools. It’s’ not good enough, we can do better. |
| Hector | I concur. I think the big issue in New Zealand is, we’ve been sold a particular narrative about ourselves, about our country and about our history and that narrative in large chunks is untrue. And so when people confront that, you get a lot of defensiveness. People don’t like to think that we have racist tendencies. They don’t like to think we have misogynist tendencies, but men do. They don’t like to think we have all sorts of these prejudices but they are hardwired into us and most people by and large, when they confront those sorts of things get very, very defensive and it’s quite difficult to get beyond that.  The approach that I often take is to say to my colleagues… Because most of my colleagues are good people and they actually want to make a difference. When they see that, generally there’s a genuine aghast and then think what can I do to change what I’m doing. Well you’ve got to get past that defensiveness and not beat people up about it but try and shift their acknowledgement of that. Because knowledge doesn’t lead to change of behaviour, so just knowing about that won’t change people’s behaviour. They’ve got to own that behaviour and then start to strip that away and then deal with that and as a country we haven’t done that.  When we start teaching our history in our schools we might start to do it but it’s still going to take a generation to peel that back before we start to address it. |
| Hirōne | I really agree with how we view ourselves as a nation, the idea of nationhood. When I talk to new graduates who are just starting out in their police careers, we teach them this stuff about our past, about the connection, about the effect that police have had on Māori communities for many years. We actually, we do teach our history and our executive understand the history of Māori and police. So right up to what we did with Rua Kenana in 1916 in Maungapōhatu, all the way through to the Uruweras in 2007 through Operation 8. We teach that to our executive and to our leaders but we need to foundationally teach it.  What I try to explain to our young people is that modern New Zealand, you know post-Treaty New Zealand, I call us a teenager as a nation because teenagers need to be liked. They liked to be liked and they need to be liked and they like to think that everybody likes them and they can’t stand the idea that other people don’t think they’re great and don’t like them. Some teenagers don’t care. But this idea that we’re a very clean, green, environmentally friendly pure New Zealand and that we’re just a good old fair go - anything that sits outside that narrative makes us feel bad about ourselves which then brings out this natural defensiveness to shoot the messenger.  When you sort of talk to people in those terms, as we do to our new graduates, you just hope that they’re going to get it. I’m going to say that most of the new officers coming out in the last two years that I’ve been doing this discussion with on their very first day on the job here in Canterbury, get it. |
| Sally | Well, we might have our second break. |
|  | **MUSIC**  **Tiki Taane, ‘Kei Tōku Ngākau Nei Koe / Always On My Mind’** |
| Sally | Nau mai. This is Speak Up-Kōrerotia and we’re talking unconscious bias, or implicit bias, in New Zealand. |
| Jane | It’s something that the media has a lot to answer for as well, the not challenging some of this kind of stuff. And one example of how far media have to come came after the documentary went to air, a talkback going for gold and tearing the documentary apart. How dare you, oh stirring up all this trouble, oh what’s the point, oh… Most of the callers were Pākehā. One Māori caller was brave enough to phone in and after the host had clearly established this person was Māori and the iwi they were from, he said - and I kid you not, I was in shock when I heard these words - he said, “How Māori are you?” We just stopped the car and literally stared at our radio. Like, did that actually just happen in 2019? I complained to the radio station because the caller clearly had issues with being asked to quantify how Māori he was and was trying to express that and the host carried on and said, “Like, are you a 16th, are you a 32th, what are you?” I was just so, so shocked. This is a professional broadcaster who has done research into the topic, who was prepared and knows the points he is going to be talking to - he said those things and claimed to be… “Oh you know, I know all about this Treaty, I studied it at university, I’m up on all this, I’m across it” - and then did that.  At that point I was so upset at how far media have to come. How far do we as media, giving a framework for others for what’s OK, for where the lines are? We’re not even at the start line. |
| Hector | I would concur with that. My lived experience in New Zealand is that possibly the worst offenders in this country in terms of bigotry and hate speech are the media and they perpetuate many of the stereotypes around lots of people, not just Māori. I’m sitting here at the New Zealand Broadcasting School - maybe that’s a challenge to who we teach and how we teach.  But I notice that with our new medical graduates and new nursing graduates. They are far less bigoted than the senior ones who are there, but they have no power in the system. You know, a young doc comes out, might want to implement a programme in a hospital addressing inequity, and actually they realise pretty quickly they don’t have any power to change because the system, and the people running the system are deeply embedded in their power systems.  So I won’t name any names but we all know the most popular talkback shows in this country and most of them are run by racist misogynist homophobes who keep perpetuating their ridiculous narrative. And it’s bought into by a significant chunk of our population, and they are very, very difficult to combat because they get those people to buy into their narrative.  I don’t want to sound depressing about it but it’s very difficult to combat that and I’ve learned that you can’t expend a lot of energy on trying to change someone. I used to have this little aphorism that I told my kids and they repeat it back to me now: ‘It’s pointless arguing with an idiot because you’ll always be right and they’ll never know.’ And that’s what I find by and large about the talkback crowd because they choose ignorance as a pathway. And if you’re choosing ignorance then you’re not going to allow yourself to be enlightened and have a sensible discussion or a sensible objective discussion around these sorts of things, and that narrative is controlled by probably half a dozen key talkback hosts who we all know fit that mould. |
| Jane | One of the experts that I spoke to in Australia who has been studying racism started a university project that was very long running and very interesting and in far more depth than anything we’ve managed to get up and running here in New Zealand. Kevin said, when we were talking through how this works, how the media contributes and he said it’s really dangerous. He said that having people in power, with the ability to communicate to large numbers of people - they normalise the message and when you normalise the message, when you allow it to breathe, it grows. And I mean, we’ve seen what happens when that kind of process ends up as it did in Christchurch. You can’t sit back and say oh well, sensible people know that that’s not the way that things should be or aren’t like that or they don’t agree. But if we allow those messages to continue to grow and breathe, this is literally the process for radicalising. It does take time, it happens over a long period of time, but that doesn’t mean that we wait until the end to intervene. It doesn’t mean we wait for things to blow up quite literally before we go oh yeah, maybe that’s not ok, maybe we should look at that.  From the conversations we’re having, we’re all aware there are some messages that are really unhelpful and toxic but there is no means to question it. As I said, I laid a formal complain about this incident with Broadcasting Standards Authority and their threshold is so incredibly high for what is deemed to be hate speech or racism that I don’t know what would meet the threshold. And that’s wrong. It shouldn’t have to be the absolute worst case scenario for someone to be censored. That just doesn’t make sense to me, either.  Basically what we’re saying is use your good judgement. Well, I don’t think common sense is common anymore. |
| Hector | I think you hit on another point, too: complicity. Because of what you described, a whole bunch of - dare I say it - middle New Zealanders, regardless of their ethnicity, just kind of give up because it’s so hard to fight the good fight and so we end up being complicit in things that we know aren’t acceptable or where we want to go but it’s too hard to fight the good fight.  And you see this on lots of occasions. I remember when the Smokefree Environments Act came out and I was at Lancaster Park shortly after that was passed and there was a guy behind me who lit up a smoke and no one said anything about it. So I turned around and said, “Mate, this is smoke free” and he told me to eff off and I just said, “Well it’s smoke free.” I was the only one who actually confronted that but when I confronted him a second time, a number of other people sort of stepped in. What I learned from that is it often takes a small number of people to have the courage to not be complicit, to stand up - whether it be racist language or sexist language or behaviour, or whatever it may be. Because if you don’t, everyone else remains complicity.  I found it really intriguing earlier on in the year when Israel Folau did his stuff being homophobic - and old TJ Perenara stood up and said a few things, which I thought was tremendously admirable - but one of the things I found deeply disturbing, is because we all know that his views from that Judeo Christian heritage which says homosexuality is a sin and you’re going to go to hell for it. He learned that from his parents, his whānau and his church. I never heard a single religious leader stand up and say actually in 2019 this is not how we practice our faith. Not a single one. So the entire religious community, as far as I am aware, was complicit in his behaviour whether they believed it or not. And so those things perpetuate and we do this stuff all the time. We are complicit because we’re too scared to stand up and say when we think something is wrong.  Maybe I’m optimistic about things but there’s a middle of the bell curve: when little people stand up against something it can create momentum to shift social change. |
| Sally | I think you have to believe that, otherwise it’s a bit depressing. |
| Hector | Otherwise pack up our bongos and go home, eh. |
| Hirōne | So what gives me hope - because we’ve got a court case coming up next year that we’re really, really focused on - but I was at the hospital on the 15th… |
| Sally | 15th March. |
| Hirōne | I was there, I was looking after the hospital for two days. And you know when people heard that there was a terrorist attack in Christchurch, what did most people think until we found out the identity of the alleged offender? Including us. Including all of the police.  But what happened in the aftermath is what gave me hope. Just the humility and grace and dignity of our Muslim community in dealing with this. And there was anger and sadness and fear because they came to this country thinking it was way safer than the country they left, but just connecting to these people and their compassion and their forgiveness and their gratitude for the work that the hospital staff and the amazing surgeons and the ambulance staff and the police, and then how the nation got around them for that first few weeks. A reaction you might not have seen in other countries around the world.  That’s the bit that gives you hope that you’ve got to hold onto and then you juxtapose that, Jane, against all the stuff you found and how long it’s kind of taken, maybe, for us as a nation to revert, to go through that period where we thought we actually were a really good decent country. And for all intents and purposes, I believe this is a decent country and I believe there are many, many decent people that live here.  And it’s about how you build and create, rather than trying to continue to fight, prevent and combat - because the best way to remove something is to create a better alternative rather than trying to fight something. War on anything tends to not work, right? That was my idealism! After 23 years, it’s still there. |
| Jane | One thing I would say that we found when making these docos was we talked to a lot of kids - when I say ‘kids,’ I find that that’s probably an unconscious bias of some kind there - they’re young people and somebody reminded me very early on not to look at young people as grownups in waiting, they have a lot to contribute and to actually open my eyes, open my ears, and hear them. Hear them as people, not as kids, as people. And they blew me away.  When I finished talking to some of these young people, these wonderful, wonderful Kiwis, they were so inspirational, so open-minded, so loving, caring and capable of building a better New Zealand. If I could have sacked everybody in a position of power and replaced them with these young people I would have because I just look at them and think they’re so much better than us. Their eyes are open, their hearts are open, they are truly, truly visionary and we’re in their way. Us and our oldschool ways and our narrow-mindedness and our bigotry and our systems, we’re in their way, and we need to get out of the way. And the sooner we do that, the better. |
| Hector | I absolutely agree and we were like that once. I can remember being that guy opposed to the Springbok tour and wanting to stop whaling - so you get an idea of my age at this stage - and so happy with Moutoa Gardens and Bastion Point and so on. So we were like that at one stage. The challenge for us as a society, and probably lots of societies, is to keep that idealism and that passion and allow them the space to achieve what they want to achieve and I think collectively generations aren’t particularly good at that. |
| Hirōne | I agree with your point about listening to young people and getting out of the way but it’s a really interesting discussion point when you consider this against tikanga. |
| Jane | I know. |
| Hirōne | Tikanga is steeped in whakapapa and tradition and hundreds and thousands of years old and at what point do we get out of the way for our young people but do so in the framework of tikanga Māori or te ao Māori? We like to say that we want to take the te ao Māori view. It’s going to be an interesting discussion for us as a nation moving forward from 2019. I’ve got no answer to that by the way, just so we’re clear. I just think it’s a really interesting discussion to have. |
| Hector | I actually think that’s a really good discussion too because one of the things that I’ve noticed, having taken my kids through a kura kaupapa Māori and realising that most of the rangitahi that I’ve dealt with in my lifetime know more about tikanga than people of my generation or people older and that much of what we describe as tikanga Māori today is actually the product of European colonisation and is in itself steeped in misogyny and all forms of bias. So that’s a really challenging discussion for Māori - we are not exempt from those biases ourselves - and there’s a whole lot of stuff that happens that we describe as tikanga, is actually just another form of colonialism, wanting to keep some people in power. That said, what I would say about tikanga is our tupuna weren’t stupid. When we discovered steel chisels we decided to start carving our whare with steel chisels - and tikanga changed. So this idea that tikanga Māori starts and stops on the 6th of February 1840 is stupid and we need to have those conversations.  Tikanga can change and as Māori we should not fear having those discussions and facing up to that change, but I do appreciate that it’s hard. |
| Hirōne | But it’s a discussion that we must have, we Māori must have, not on the… |
| Hector | Not others. |
| Hirōne | …basis that any external influence. |
| Sally | That seems like a fantastic place to stop, we’ll have to have another show on tikanga Māori. That was a really amazing, slightly depressing, discussion but a bit of hope there at the end which was nice. |
| Hector | Hope is a wonderful thing; optimism is a force multiplier, as Colin Powell said. |
| Hirōne | And listen, don’t be depressed, you know, because again, what other country in the world would have had the same response after 15 March than this country? We’re actually trying to pull the plaster off and have a really grown up discussion about this and when you’ve got a Chief Executive of an organisation that is most likely is representative of bias towards Māori, being the police - when our Chief Executive or our Commissioner has said publicly that bias exists within our organisation and he’s doing something to actively combat it, those are the things you’ve kind of got to hold onto even when a couple of months down the track something might happen that makes you smack your head again and, “Oh, is this how far we’ve really come?” So don’t lose hope. |
| Hector | Kia ora. |
| Jane | I would say that one of the things that worried about my documentary about racism is that I thought it would be depressing. And I won’t lie, there were moments where I just thought, this is not good. But there was so much hope and willingness to have the conversation from so many different people all over the country. So that says to me yes it’s a hard decision, yes to actually talk about the issues is depressing, but the bright light is we’re doing it. It’s not going to fix itself overnight, - it took a long time to get to where we are today - there’s no magic wand. I do get it’s a hard conversation. But that’s the only way to make them go away, the only way to actually get to a better place is to do this now so that our kids get a better shot. Surely we can give them that gift. We can have these hard conversations, look at how we can be better and give them a gift of a better Aotearoa. |
| Hector | Kia ora, I concur. |
| Jane | Any kind of institutional change, it’s so painful but you’re doing it. |
| Hector | And I stand by the fact that most of the people I work with are good people and are becoming cognisant of it. They might be frustrated with the slow pace of change but they actually want to improve. No one who works in health gets up in the morning to say, “Oh how many Māori can I muck around today?” They don’t want to do that and they’re horrified that that’s occurring so they want to make change. |
| Jane | That wasn’t happening ten years ago, probably wasn’t happening five years ago. |
| Hector | You’re right. So we are making progress. |
| Sally | Speak Up - Kōrerotia. |
|  | **MUSIC**  **Bic Runga, ‘Haere Mai Rā / Sway’** |