

**Living in the City Ain't So Bad:  
Cultural Diversity of South  
Auckland Rangatahi**

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## **Abstract**

Establishing a 'secure' Maori identity based solely on particular criteria of Maori culture (te reo Maori, tikanga, marae, etc.) continues to be problematic for some Maori. Those who are not seen as connected in this way are often defined by what they are seen as lacking, hence terms such as disconnected, distanced, detached and dissociated. Although young Maori may define themselves in terms of difference from others there is an increasing danger of some urban youth being defined as different from Maori who are 'culturally connected' and for this to be seen primarily as a negative demarcation. Although it may be the aspiration of some to have greater cultural connection, what this means for different groups and individuals may have both congruence and divergence with what are usually considered to be markers of cultural inclusion.

This thesis presents the findings from a wider research project funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand. The project objective was to gather data that can inform and contribute to existing knowledge about cultural identity of rangatahi Maori with a view to establishing a framework(s) for greater youth development and a more positive and embracing perspective of culture.

Kaupapa Maori and social constructionist framings are used to centre the focused life story interviews that were conducted with young people aged between 13-21 years, who identified as Maori and lived in the South Auckland area.

Findings suggest that conventional and experiential indicators of Maori identity as well as a strong localised identity are key factors in this exploration. Challenges for identity theorists, societal institutions and other Maori are discussed.

## Acknowledgments



*“The future of our people cannot be stereotyped by our current versions of Maoriness. Major cultural markers such as the language of our ancestors, the marae and tangihanga must be retained at all costs, but, under pressure of changing time, many more adjustments are likely. These choices are for Maori to make, they are a matter of mana...How each of us expresses our Maoritanga is the product of a variety of experiences. None of us is today what our ancestors were, and our descendents will not be like us. With aroha, knowledge, strength, commitment and politicisation our descendents will be Maori, their way...Our work as today’s version of Maori is the same as that of our tipuna: to continue our story, to strengthen it according to our times and to add the next chapter. That will be done.” (Ramsden, 1993)*

**Irihapeti Ramsden 1946 – 2003**  
**Project Mentor**

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## Introduction

This project explores the strength and diversity that is Maori identity. It is built on a rich qualitative research database and a lifetime of observations, discussions and experiences. It grapples with questions like; who is Maori; who may claim a Maori identity and on what basis; what does it mean for those who don't, won't or can't claim that identity; what power dynamics are involved; who benefits from making identity distinctions amongst Maori and; do Maori consider inclusiveness desirable and beneficial? Answers to these important questions are as contextual and complex as the questions themselves.

Rather than providing definitive answers, it is my hope that this thesis can act as an invitation to a discussion about what Maori identity means to a specific group at a specific time and place. As with any study into the nature of identity, this project will likely raise more questions than answers. This is as it should be, as the only constant when thinking about identity is that it is a dynamic process, subject to continual construction, contestation and reconstruction. Identity is determined by the mixture of any and everything that is a person.

Hall (Hall, 1996) asserts that:

...cultural identity is continually evolving. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (p394)

This is not to say that statements can not be made about identity. I hope that some useful insights might be gained from my data, which records the experiences of what are usually unheard, muted or 'low volume' voices in identity debates, urban Maori youth.

While there is a growing body of research that looks at access to conventional markers of Maori identity, such as te reo Maori, access to marae, tikanga Maori and tribal engagement – the hypothesis being the more the better – there is very little information about other expressions of Maori identity that may both challenge and complement these. Without an in-depth understanding of the diversity that exists and what the positives and potential for development are there is a danger that rangatahi Maori will be seen as lacking, a group with problems to be solved, a group to change or fix, without recourse to their own understandings. The goal of this project is first and foremost, to give volume and visibility to participants' experiences and understandings of the lives and environments of young Maori.

This project is also a response, based on my longstanding interest in issues of identity, to the ongoing debates in political, social and cultural fora that conceptualise Maori identity in various ways. My experiences as a Maori person born and bred in South Auckland and later as a researcher in a Maori research group has highlighted the fact that while Maori show collective unity in a number of ways, approaches to Maori identity are not necessarily congruent with the experiences of Maori as a diverse people.

Establishing a 'secure' Maori identity based solely on particular criteria of Maori culture (te reo Maori, tikanga, marae, etc...) continues to be problematic for some Maori. Those who are not seen as connected in this way are often defined by what they are seen as lacking, hence terms such as disconnected, distanced, detached and dissociated. Although young Maori may define themselves in terms of difference from others there is an increasing danger of some urban youth being defined as different from Maori who are 'culturally connected' and for this to be seen primarily as a negative demarcation. Although it may be the aspiration of some to have greater cultural connection, what this means for different groups and individuals may have both congruence and divergence with what are usually considered to be markers of cultural inclusion. For example, there may be ways that youth are identifying and approaching their identity and cultural connections. These may not fit the more conventional



understandings, but nevertheless have the potential to point the way for greater youth development and a more positive and embracing perspective of culture. This project describes some of the experiences, connections and identities rangatahi in South Auckland understand as important and relevant to them.

This project is also a response to more pragmatic concerns of service providers in the health, education, justice and research sectors, particularly in the South Auckland region. We know that successful interventions for young people are often based on accurate understandings of the specific characteristics that make up the ‘target’ audience. Unfortunately, a number of interventions targeted towards Maori youth (particularly those identified as ‘at risk’) are based on notions of Maori identity that the ‘target’ group may not share. In some cases this may be a crucial factor in the interventions’ success or failure. As such, service providers and youth workers in different sectors are more likely to be involved with those young people who “fall through the gaps” not only in a mainstream sense but in cultural terms as well.

## **Background information**

Before reviewing some of the local, national and international literature pertinent to Maori identity, it may be useful to provide some contextual information about Maori identity.

The New Zealand Census 2001 reported that 604,110 New Zealanders indicated they have some degree of Maori ancestry. While, 526,281 self-identified as belonging to the Maori ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). The difference is 77,829 individuals or approximately two percent of the New Zealand population. If we consider (in line with some definitions) that any person with Maori ancestry has a *right* to claim a Maori identity, it is interesting that such a large number do not self identify as Maori. This highlights the extent to which claims-making about Maori identity is subject to the continual flow of power, perception, environment and politics. The marginalised nature of Maori identity (reinforced

by a societal discourse that highlights negative stereotypes of Maori), as well as expectations of a degree of Maori cultural competence may provide some explanation into population differences between self identification and ancestry categories. A more accepting and inclusive perspective of Maori identity may make some contribution to both the societal discourse and perceptions that Maori identity involves competence in a certain set of cultural institutions and practices.

This project was based in South Auckland. South Auckland's boundaries are more symbolic in nature than material. As such, identifying as a Southsider is as much determined by social psychological and discursive decisions as it is by geography. However, much of South Auckland falls within the bounds of Manukau City (see map) and Manukau City statistics provide some useful background information.

The population of Manukau at the last New Zealand census was 283,197, 27% of which were under the age of 15. Manukau is one of the fastest growing cities in New Zealand with an 11.4% increase in population from 1996-2001, compared with 3.3% for all of New Zealand. Manukau has a greater percentage of young people and a smaller proportion of elderly people than the national average. Manukau is a city of minorities, with greater proportions of Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples than nationally and fewer Pakeha or European residents. Manukau is a place of families; residents have higher than average one and two parent families and fewer couples without children. People in Manukau are slightly less likely to have access to a telephone, the internet and private transport than other New Zealanders and spend more disposable income on housing and transportation.

The population of the Maori ethnic group\* in the Manukau region totals 44,274 or 16.5% of the whole Manukau City population. Young people (under the age of 15 years) make up

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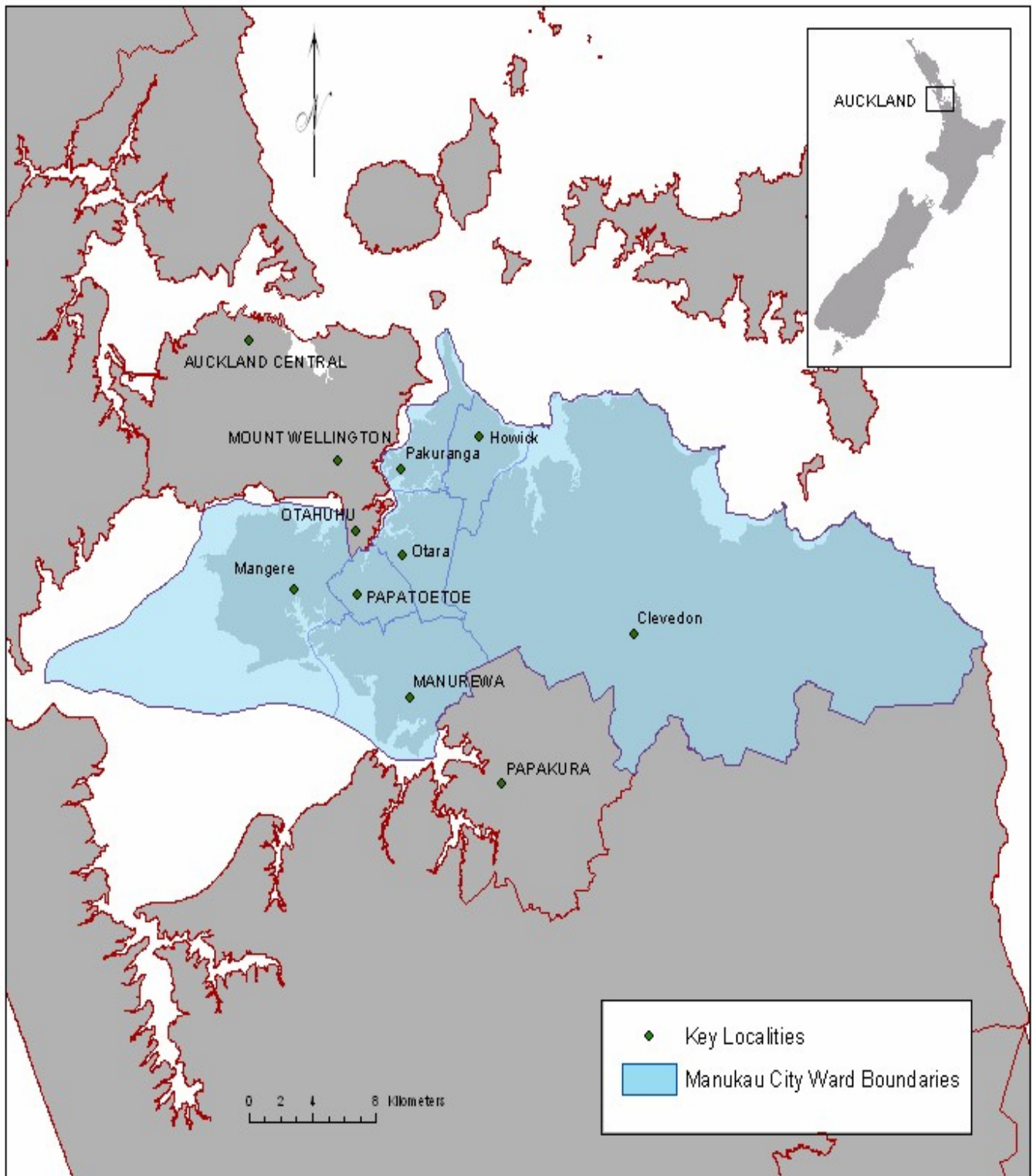
\* Maori ethnic group are those who self-identify as Maori

39.3% of Maori in Manukau. This is slightly higher than for Maori across the country which is 37.3%.

The dominant societal discourse about South Auckland is that it is a place to avoid if possible. For many, South Auckland is a place synonymous with crime, poverty, danger, delinquency and negligence. South Auckland is often perceived as a place of high need and considerable dependency on government assistance. For some, both outside and within South Auckland, young people (particularly Maori and Pacific) are seen as, if not the primary cause of these notions, key contributors.

On the other hand, South Auckland is also perceived as a place of vibrancy, energy and diversity. Young people are seen as an integral part of the vitality of the city (Manukau City Council, 2004). These apparent contradictory discourses about the value of young people in Manukau are a key feature of the social environment from which participants in this study are drawn.

## Manukau City



## **Literature**

The local, national and international literature pertinent to this discussion of Maori identity is framed in the following way. Firstly I would like to introduce some of the ways in which psychology as a discipline has conceptualised identity. These theories and studies are included to provide some useful background to the topic of identity and provide important points of difference from Maori theorising of identity that is covered subsequently. The review of Maori conceptualisations of Maori identity seeks to highlight some of the common characteristics that underpin these theories and the important ways they differ in nature from the psychology literature. The Maori literature also reveals where these theories and studies fall short of describing adequately either the features of conventional Maori identities or the diversity that is such a crucial part of Maori identity in a contemporary setting. Relevant international literature focusing on intra-ethnic dynamics of other indigenous people will also be covered briefly. These literatures then provide a necessary backdrop to theorising the current study in Kaupapa Maori and social constructionist terms.

### **Identity Theories**

The following discussion examines some key theoretical frameworks that underpin the study of human personality. While the study of human personality and the ideas of identity have different interpretations the following theories have been instrumental to the discipline of psychology and its understanding of identity. They are revised here as an acknowledged background, rather than a theoretical foundation, to my investigation of Maori identity.

#### **Trait theory**

Trait theory seeks to account for human behaviour in terms of fixed internal biological characteristics of individuals. Raymond Cattell, one of the most renowned trait researchers

surmised that personality was constituted from *source traits* and *surface traits* (Hergenhahn, 1990). Essential to this theory is the notion that through the use of specific scientific tests, the human personality can be defined by certain key aspects or traits. Source traits described 16 underlying traits that determine behaviour. These were often expressed as polar opposites (ie, reserved vs warm, shy vs socially bold, traditional vs open to change). Surface traits described correlated observations by which source traits were manifest. He also believed that source traits could be divided into *constitutional source traits*, which were genetically determined and *environmental mould traits*, which as the name suggests resulted from environmental factors.

Another key trait theorist, Hans Eysenck argued that personality could be further narrowed to two *supertraits*, again often explained as polar opposites (Eysenck, 1970, Gibson, 1981). These traits included introversion vs extroversion and emotionality (neuroticism) vs stability. Like Cattell (cited in Hergenhahn, 1990), Eysenck believed that an understanding of personality traits could enable an observer to predict behaviour in a given setting. He later added another trait, psychoticism with people being insensitive and solitary at one end and sociopathic at the other. Gibson (1981) argues that this dimension of Eysenck's theory was less researched than others.

A 5-factor model was later developed that some trait theorists agreed illustrated basic personality traits. (Pervin, 1993). Dubbed 'OCEAN' for short, the five factors included: Openness to experience; Conscientiousness; Extraversion; Agreeableness and; Neuroticism. A plethora of research has been conducted in studying this model (eg Goldberg, 1992, Wiggins, 1996) and the 'NEO Personality Inventory' was developed to measure the five factors of personality (Pervin, 1993).

The fundamental criticism of trait theory is that it implies that personality is fixed and amenable to measurement and that measurements on a scale can assist the observer in

understanding behaviour and even predicting behaviour in a given situation. Some critics of trait theory suggest that it lacks an understanding of the complexity of human identity (Gough and McFadden, 2001). Without understanding this complexity and the influence of *context* in human identity, predicting behaviour based on traits was seen as too simplistic.

### **Role theory**

Perhaps one of the commonly cited role theorists was George Herbert Mead who, unlike many of the trait theorists, postulated that an understanding of self was gained through social interaction with others (Mead, 1934). He believed that identity was made up of one's own understanding of the self projected to others ("I") and the response of others to the self ("me"). He believed that the mind was the natural joining point for the physical human form and the wider social environment and that the use of language was pivotal to this amalgamation.

Role theory therefore suggests that self identity is based on one's perceived role in any given situation or time of life. Roles entail the social learning of a limited array of recognisable behaviours and practices that allow the individual to operate smoothly and effectively in specific social niches. Individuals can typically learn to occupy multiple roles and move between them in a socially appropriate manner. This conceptualisation has also been used to explain inconsistencies in individual behaviour in terms of role conflict and has been applied practically in techniques such as role play to explore psychological difficulties and problem solving (Mead, 1934).

Role theory is often used to describe the issues of the elderly or the identity development of children. Role theory is also, as one would expect, often used to describe a whole range of issues relating to gender. Unlike trait theory, role theory does acknowledge that identity is

influenced by social interactions with others. However, similar to trait theory, role theory is primarily concerned with the identity development of individuals (Changing Minds, 2005).

### **Humanistic theory**

Humanistic theory postulates that all individuals tend to actualise their inherent potentialities. Rogers (1980) believed in a biological drive to fulfil one's potential, which is genetically predetermined. He also theorised the notion of the 'self': from experiences and through interaction with others, humans develop an awareness of 'being' and a set of stable personal characteristics. Rogers believed that, unlike other organisms, humans have a tendency for *self-actualisation*: the desire to think and act in ways that are consistent with how one sees oneself. For example, for a person who felt that they were shy, saying little in a conversation with strangers would be self actualising as it would be consistent with their view of themselves.

Thus he believed that self actualisation was socially determined. He argued that experience was the highest authority and contributed to the private perception of reality and self concept (Rogers, 1980). The theory also stipulated that, because actualising potential was genetically determined and actualising the self was socially determined, there may be both congruence and conflict between these two positions.

The other principle thinker in humanistic theory of personality was Abraham Maslow who is widely known for his "*Hierarchy of Needs*"; the notion that fundamental biological and psychological necessities are prioritised over higher order goals and wishes (Maslow, 1998). Maslow (1998) suggested that self actualisation was *episodic*. He believed that during the lifespan people have episodes when they are achieving their potentialities and hence most fully themselves. He believed that individuals differed in terms of the frequency and intensity of these episodes but that everyone had them to some degree (Maslow, 1998).



## **Social identity theory**

Social identity theory purports that how one views oneself is defined primarily from social group memberships and interactions (Gough and McFadden, 2001). More than the other theories examined so far, social identity theory takes account of the complexity and influence of context in identity development.

Social identity theory centres around three key concepts; categorisation, identification and comparison (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Categorisation recognises that, in order to better understand social environments, individuals categorise people into groups. These categories label different social groups in ways that have particular uses and meanings; for example, male, black, elderly, Muslim, student, surfer, lawyer.

Identification is the process by which an individual assumes membership to, or distance from categories. Social identity theory purports that a sense of identity is, to some degree, made up of this membership (ie, we know much about ourselves by knowing which categories we belong to). Similarly, we may also know much about ourselves by knowing something of the groups to which we do not belong. This introduces the concepts prevalent through much of the social psychology discourse: *in-groups* and *out-groups*. Quite simply the *in-group* are groups that an individual identifies with and the *out-group* are those they do not identify with.

The third important concept in social identity theory is *comparison*. As the name suggests, comparison describes the process by which individuals evaluate their groups' characteristics compared with those of others. Central to these comparisons is the tendency to make positive assessments of an in-group compared to an out-group and to exaggerate an out-group's difference from the in-group.

Crocker (1990) articulated this by suggesting that "...when confronted with a threat to their social identity, people maintain a positive social identity by identifying or creating favourable comparisons between their own group(s) and outgroup(s). Thus, individuals will discriminate against or derogate outgroup members relative to the ingroup to create favourable comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup. These comparisons result in a positive social identity, of high collective self-esteem." (p60). Other theorists (Abrams and Hogg, 1990) have suggested that, while this can be beneficial to in-group members, it may also contribute to social stereotyping, social judgement, inter-group conflict and crowd behaviour.

### **Ethnic identity and self-esteem**

Parham (1985) investigated attitudes of racial identity and self esteem to elaborate the four stages of ethnic identity development as researched by Cross (1978). The four stages include a *pre-encounter* stage where individuals view the world as, for example non-black, the *encounter* stage where a certain event occurs that makes one re-evaluate their previous framework. Most common here is for a person to have an initial experience of racism or discrimination. The *immersion-emersion* stage depicts ones active immersion into components of their ethnic identity, ie becoming pro-black and anti-white, immersing in black life style and activities. Finally the *internalisation* stage describes an eventual middle ground where an individual is comfortable being black but not so anti-white, more receptive and ideologically flexible.

Parham, used the Self Regard Scale and a Racial Identity Attitude Scale to measure correlations between these stages and individual self-esteem. He found that both *pre-encounter* and *immersion* stages correlated with low self regard. The *encounter* and *internalisation* stages correlated with high self regard. He explains that, at the *immersion* stage, commitment to things black and analyses of racism, etc... will be flavoured by anger and hostility to whites, creating guilt, insecurity and shame at their previous denial of black

identity. Individual self-esteem is higher at the internalisation and encounter stage as people come to terms with their ethnic identity as individuals.

Phinney (1995) studied the connection between the strength of ethnic identity and individual self-esteem. She defined ethnic identity as: self identification as a group member; attitudes and evaluations relative to the group and oneself as a group member; the extent of ethnic knowledge and commitment; and ones ethnic behaviours and practices.

People who have high measures of knowledge and comfort in these facets are said to have a strong or secure sense of ethnic identity and those who don't have weak or diffuse ethnic identity. Key to Phinney' findings is the notion that ethnicity, however defined must have salience to individuals (or references to people's own understanding of their ethnicity) for a secure ethnic identity to be possible. She acknowledges that the definition and structure of the different components mentioned above can vary across ethnic groups and within different ages of the same ethnic group.

“Someone may identify with a group and have generally positive feelings about it but exhibit few specific ethnic behaviours associated with it. On the other hand, someone may be involved in the language and culture of the group but have negative feelings about the group or being a member of the group.”(Phinney, 1995, p.60)

Phinney (1995)concluded that "although theoretical writing stresses the importance of ethnic identity as a factor in self esteem, findings of empirical research on the subject are inconclusive" (p70) reinforcing the idea that there are diverse forms of expression of ethnic identity. She argues that there is a strong tendency for group members to think positively about their own group, but elaborates that this happens regardless of their adherence to specific ethnic behaviours. She suggests that this may be because the negative stereotypes are not accepted or, if accepted, individuals think they do not apply to themselves. She explains

low personal self-esteem amongst those in the *pre-encounter* stage as a consequence of their greater acceptance of negative stereotypes of their ethnic group.

Carter (1991) also suggests that *pre-encounter* attitudes were related to general psychological distress as a result of denial of one's identity as black and a preoccupation with being accepted by whites.

Marcia (1966, 1980 cited in Phinney, 1995) found that commitment in the *immersion* stage can be categorised as *foreclosed* or *achieved*. A foreclosed commitment to identity is one that has not been preceded by a 'search' (ie, as a passive recipient of ethnic knowledge one may receive as a child). An *achieved* identity reflects commitment to ethnic identity that has followed a personal search and is based on one's own independent decision. Self esteem is often positively correlated with an *achieved* identity through 'search' and active decision making.

### **Ethnic identity and acculturation**

Berry (1998) is regarded as an important researcher whose work centres around the phenomenon of acculturation thereby dealing with the issues of identity at the group or collective level. Acculturation as a phenomenon then, explores identity issues of those who are not of the dominant group within a society. Defined as "culture change resulting from contact between two autonomous and independent cultural groups", Berry developed a matrix framework that categorised four modes of acculturation.

- *Integration* (sometimes referred to as biculturalism): people who have strong identification with both cultural groups and for whom relationships with both groups are important.

- *Assimilation*: those for whom maintenance of relationships, characteristics and identity of one's cultural group are not considered valuable and who identify with only the dominant group.
- *Separation*: those that identify only with their own group and not the other.
- *Marginalised* category: those that identify with neither group.

Of these modes, *marginalisation* is considered the least adaptive and *integrated* identity the most adaptive and related to better psychological outcomes. Although the acculturation model is useful in some regards it becomes difficult to see how the model might take account of the historic and contemporary complexities faced by indigenous people. Indeed, some groups of indigenous people are classed as *marginalised*, being uninterested in obtaining aspects of their own culture or that of the dominant group (Berry, 1998).

While Berry postulates assimilation as a mode of acculturation, some argue that these notions are distinct (Raza, 1997). Assimilation has at its goal the eradication of the less dominant culture and the establishment of the (superior) cultural norms of the dominant group. Acculturation however does not necessarily mean that the less dominant culture is replaced but rather is adapted to facilitate the interaction of its members, with the dominant culture.

This would imply that there may be aspects of the less dominant culture that may be retained or protected to preserve that group's perceived uniqueness and collective identity. Sometimes the less dominant group may also continue to 'own' aspects of their culture that have been adapted/changed from contact with the dominant group (i.e. new words in the language, dress, improvements in technology). This would then involve some semblance of control by the less dominant group in determining what is accepted as an authentic cultural practice. Maori women needing a skirt to conduct a karanga, wearing black to tangi and taking shoes off in a

wharehenui are all examples of cultural practices that maintain authenticity despite their adaptations from traditional forms.

In this country, the dominant group has established and instilled institutions that systematically reproduce their culture and world view and serve in group members best (Walker, 1990, Smith, 1999). Fundamental to colonial relations of the kind that characterise our shared history is the entrenchment of the dominant group as providing the 'normal' or 'ordinary' understanding of reality and the less dominant group being conceptualised as the 'other' (Sampson, 1993). Simultaneously Maori have developed mechanisms to retain their own cultural heritage in the face of colonisation through resistance warfare, struggle for land rights, language retention and cultural renaissance. It could be said that no aspects of Maori culture have remained totally unchanged since Pakeha contact (and vice versa), even those conventional markers of Maori identity. While many of the underlying meanings of certain practices have been replaced with colonial constructions (Ramsden, 1998), Maori themselves retain some degree of control over what is generally accepted as authentically Maori.

For indigenous peoples, recognising that you are conceptualised as the 'other' in your own homeland has wide reaching effects. Maori are often defined and described, by the dominant group and their institutions, in deficit terms. Maori are often described by characteristics they do not have, by what they do not achieve, the contribution they are not making and fundamentally they are defined in terms of who they are not, Pakeha. Worse still is that Maori to some degree internalise this notion of being different particularly from 'mainstream'.

As mentioned previously one of the unifying themes running through these disparate and competing frameworks is an unquestioned focus on the *individual* as the fundamental locus of concern in relation to identity. However as will be seen from the following discussions, this is not the only possibility. Maori theorising in particular tends to de-emphasise the individual

in favour of rather more holistic or environmental approaches that do not seek to separate the person from their context in attempting to understand identity.

Another underlying commonality amongst the previous theories has been the placement of many of the studies within positivist approaches using conventional empirical methods. Critiques of these approaches within the discipline of psychology argue that empirical methods do not reflect the richness and diversity that makes up identity for individuals and, to a lesser extent, groups (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, Gough and McFadden, 2001, Wetherell et al., 2001). There are however various other approaches to studying identity. I will now focus some attention on the literature pertaining to the study of identity located within social constructionist frameworks and studies that use discursive or critical methods and analytic tools.

Wetherell in her study of masculinity was entirely focused on the way men's talk constructs and reflects their social identity. The analysis looked at the broad patterns evident from the data and conceptualised these patterns as 'practical ideologies' or as 'familiar interpretive resources' (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Specific emphasis is placed on the 'self-positioning' of participants' identity as men via *imaginary positions, ordinary positions and rebellious positions*.

Imaginary positions were constructed in much the way masculinity is understood in a broader societal context. Espousing the 'macho' type of male identity that emphasised the "exalted or heroic self" features heavily in this position, yet was very rare in this study. Indeed a major criticism of hegemonic masculinity or the greater extreme of any cultural category is that it often describes an ideal state not an actual one. Hence a key characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is its 'impossibility' or 'fantastic' nature. This means that no one actually ever embodies hegemonic masculinity as a lived identity (ie, no man is ever man enough).

Rebellious positions relate to the ability of men to do what feels right to him rather than what is conventionally expected. Characteristics such as courage, strength and determination of the men to engage in activities others might see as effeminate (ie, cooking, knitting and crying) were key to this type of positioning.

The most common self-positioning amongst participants in this study was that of being ordinary. Depicting a position of being just ordinary and not macho men was the “principal method by which the men interviewed constructed themselves as masculine” (Wetherell and Edley, 1999,p.343). Ordinary positions highlighted that, in contrast to the heroic self there were many men who described themselves as just ordinary and not macho men. While some men try out self-exalting strategies they also have an interest in just being normal, ordinary or average.

These types of self-positioning strategies have some direct relevance to the study developed in this thesis. Also of interest to the current study are notions of ‘cultural hegemony’ as an imaginary or ideal outcome of identity construction rather an actual reflection of one’s lived experience. Both of these phenomena are examined further in the discussion section.

In relation to the way in which young people’s talk reflects their identity construction, Selman (2000), in his discursive study of two young Icelandic men and risk taking behaviour, found that cultural factors like gender and ethnicity should be taken seriously in order to understand adolescent risk-taking. Taking self-protective action in terms of risk taking was highly dependent on the young person’s ability to consider the perspectives of all those involved not just themselves and consideration of how the risks they take can affect not only themselves but also those who care about them. Together the authors claim that these two things make up the degree of personal awareness that helped them manage risk.



Social constructionist analytical frameworks have also been used to make direct comments about Maori socio-political organisation. Van Meijl (Van Meijl, 1995) argued that a frantic scramble to document and record the 'authentic' Maori way of life particularly in the later part of the nineteenth century when Maori population numbers were at their lowest and there was a belief that Maori people would die out. As a result he suggested that later deviations from the recorded authenticities supported the notion that traditional Maori society had remained unchanged since the time of 'discovery'. He challenged this using the example of socio-political organisation. He argued that the emphasis on iwi (tribal) and waka (canoe) grouping as the dominant organisational unit (rather than the whanau or hapu) was established and strengthened as a result of colonial contact.

“Maori oral tradition, as recorded in the course of the nineteenth century, suggests that Maori society was not set in cement. From their earliest histories Maori tribes have mixed and divided and migrated and formed fresh relationships. In Maori social practice, therefore, tribal concepts may have never been as delineated as they have been represented as being in twentieth century ethnography” (Van Meijl, 1995, p.4)

The emphasis of change, mixing and migration created an interesting reflection on how one might conceptualise Maori socio-political organisation today. The fact that the vast majority of Maori live in urban or semi-urban areas will further reform traditional tribal structures. Van Meijl (Van Meijl, 1995) also argued that anthropology's continuing search for 'authentic' forms of Maori socio-political organisation and culture denies the need to “seek the dynamics of change and to legitimise cultures as they are, not in some mythic, primordial purity” (Van Meijl, 1995, p.9)

The autonomy and importance of hapu and whanau as the functional social grouping in pre-colonial Maori society continues today (Metge, 1995). The dynamics of modern day whanau epitomise the diversity of contemporary Maori society while still retaining the collective essence of extended family and wider kinship.

Metge (1995) differentiated between traditional notions of whanau that are based on *whakapapa* and connected through common descent and *kaupapa* whanau that develop connections to each other via a shared topic or kaupapa. Using qualitative accounts she stressed the autonomous nature of whanau, which are able to control and utilise tikanga Maori and other practices to meet the needs and goals of the whanau at any given time or situation (p21).

“Real life whanau do not and should not be expected to conform too closely to the constructed model. Each has its own character, its own degree of integration and effectiveness, created and re-created out of the interaction between the personalities of its members and the circumstances of time and place. Members’ right to work out their own identity and tikanga must always be respected.” (Metge, 1995, p.78)

While these psychological framings are of interest and importance when theorising and researching Maori identity they are nevertheless developed from particular cultural contexts. I will now examine work by Maori theorists. It is this group from which I draw the most relevant and critical influences for this research project.

### **Maori theorising of identity**

Central to a review of Maori theorising about identity, it is useful to introduce some of the common official approaches taken to classify who is Maori. The approaches used often reflect the political imperatives of the time and those developed within an environment designed to assimilate Maori tended to focus on racial imperatives and an ability to prove a certain level of Maori blood. The *blood quantum* approach was based on the notion that culture and identity are shaped by ones biology (Moeke-Pickering, 1995). Under this definition, someone may be considered more or less Maori based on their percentage (usually over 50%) of Maori blood. Blood quantum conceptualisations continue to be a powerful indicator of Maori identity particularly in everyday society where phrases like “half-caste”, “full-blooded” and “drop of Maori blood” are still readily used.

Another common approach has been to define someone as Maori based on their being descended from a Maori ancestor. Using Maori *ancestry* as a classification system takes greater account of Maori notions of *whakapapa* (genealogy) and the corresponding constitutional rights (Reid and Robson, 1999). This approach proved popular amongst Maori as far back as the 1920s who identified and wanted to be counted as Maori but did not meet the percentage requirements for inclusion using the blood quantum standard. A further more recent approach has been *self-identification*. With the rise of ‘ethnicity’ as a concept holding more meaning in a contemporary sense than race, and a political environment accepting assimilation of Maori as unlikely, the adoption of self identification scales took prominence from the mid 1980s (Reid and Robson, 1999). Currently the New Zealand Census seeks to measure both those who claim Maori descent and those that self identify as Maori.

These classification approaches provide some context to the following discussion about Maori theorising of Maori identity. The most recent approach to defining Maori identity, that of maintaining particular *cultural markers*. This is based on the notion that a person may be considered more or less Maori not only by their ancestry but also by their engagement and participation in a range of cultural activities that generally have their origin in pre-European tribal society (Durie, 1998a).

One of the first Maori scholars to paint a powerful picture of Maori identity was Makereti. Born Margaret Pattison Thom but more commonly known as Maggie Papakura, guide to the pink and white terraces, Makereti was a rangatira woman from Whakarewarewa. Her work “Old Time Maori” (Makereti, 1986) (written in 1938 but published in 1986) stands out, written in an era of powerful Pakeha commentators on Maori life like Elsdon Best, James Cowan and others. “Old Time Maori” provides a description of Maori life during Makereti’s lifetime and what she was taught by the ‘Old Time Maori’ (whom she often refers to in the

third person). It covers topics such as social organisation, marriage, children, food, housing, fire and weapons.

Makereti was herself a woman of astounding innovation and adaptability moving easily between the Pakeha world and her people of Te Arawa, between England and New Zealand, tradition and modernity. She was nearing completion of “Old Time Maori” just before her death in 1930 and was subsequently awarded a posthumous doctorate from Cambridge University for her work “Old Time Maori”.

The fundamental building block apparent throughout Makereti’s work was the notion of whakapapa, genealogical linkages. These linkages illuminate a sense of place and belonging. Her analysis suggested that, for Maori, individual or personal identity was subordinate to the dominant social identity based on a more communal way of life.

“The Maori did not think of himself, or do anything for his own gain. He thought only of his people, and was absorbed in his whanau, just as the whanau was absorbed in the hapu, and the hapu in the Iwi” (Makereti, 1986, p.38)

While works like Makereti’s were special because of their uniqueness at the time, through the 1970-80s and the imminent explosion of the Maori renaissance, scholars like Ranginui Walker rose to prominence. His work in Novitz & Willmott (Walker, 1989) and his collection of works from the 1975-1987 (Walker, 1987) provides some useful insights into concepts of importance when considering Maori identity and are a valuable basis for his later writings, particularly that necessity of bicultural understanding, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou* (Walker, 1990).

Walker often refers to the concept of *taha Maori* to describe Maori identity and suggests that it is a social concept based on descent. He illustrated the importance of genealogical descent

or whakapapa through mythology, tradition and history whereby atua (gods), ancestors and living people were intrinsically connected.

Important in Walker's analysis is the discussion on the Maori discovery or arrival in Aotearoa. He suggests that, over time, land discovered by the founding ancestors and incorporated into the framework of connection between gods, ancestors and descendants metamorphed into a system whereby physical features of the landscape like mountains, rivers and lakes became important markers of a distinct tribal identity and helped establish strong relationships between tribes from the same canoe traditions. A key feature of this relationship was the reiteration of the deep spiritual connections between humans and their natural environment.

He encouraged broad markers of identity based on collective and environmental influences and suggested that developing mechanisms by which one may 'pin down' more specific and individualised criteria of Maoritanga are problematic, being too static and unable to account for the dynamism of human behaviour (Walker, 1989).

Another area of interest to review was the particular input of Maori women into the theorising of Maori identity congruent with the feminist movement in the early 1970s. Kathie Irwin (1992) was scathing of the idea that who has legitimacy and authenticity as a Maori woman was the most futile and least important of questions, and suggests that the identification of who is Maori is an issue in which whanau, hapu and iwi have cultural control. Maori feminism, she argued is grounded in both Maori culture and the women's movement. She critiqued the dominance of Pakeha men in the definition of traditional Maori practices and saw them as markedly different to those of Maori women. She suggested that Maori must take back and retain the power to develop tools that help define who they are; any analysis of Maori society must be based within te ao Maori and cannot overlook its tribal basis.

A potent element in much of Irwin's analysis is an understanding and recognition of who has the power to define. Who has the power to define individuals (ie, Maori women) or more importantly a collective of people is a more important question for discussion within Maori society than the issue of who maintains authenticity as Maori. She used the issue of Maori women and speaking rights on the marae as an example of the abuse of Pakeha power in the interpretation of tikanga Maori. In addition, she mentioned that how Maori men are abusing the marae process to include Pakeha men and exclude Maori women.

Rose Pere (1988) also maintained crucial theoretical space for her profound and articulate formulation of many models from a Maori perspective; primarily the 'Te Wheke' model for understanding Maori health and well-being. This model centres around looking at identity in broader terms than the individual level and encompasses other important aspects of life such as whanau (family), wairua (spirituality), hinengaro (mental wellbeing) and the natural environment. Although quite profound at the time (a context relatively entrenched in more medical and clinical models of health), concepts presented by Te Wheke and other models like Te Whare Tapa Wha, have become common place when conceptualising not only Maori health and well-being but also a Maori world-view and important aspects of a Maori identity. Pere realised the danger that an over-simplification of identity can create, as evidenced in the following quote:

“An oversimplification of the diversity of Maori institutions not only produces the errors inherent in averages, but disregards the vivacity of the Maori people themselves. The lives and institutions were far from static and consistent before the arrival of the Pakeha, and have certainly not been so since.” (p10)

### **Maori identity and cultural markers**

One of the more recent trends pertaining to Maori identity, has been to tease out those aspects of life and identity deemed to be unique to Maori people and then make some attempt to quantify the degree to which Maori individuals, and to a lesser degree Maori groupings obtain

and preserve these aspects. This approach has tended to be interested not only in measuring Maori identity through ancestry and self-identification as Maori, but also a range of cultural markers (Durie et al., 1996, Jahnke, 2002, Stevenson, 2004).

### *Te Hoe Nuku Roa*

Recent studies that seeks to provide this type of information includes studies like ‘Te Hoe Nuku Roa’ (THNR), a contemporary Maori household survey (Durie et al., 1996, Fitzgerald et al., 1997, Te Hoe Nuku Roa Research Team, 1999).

| Te Hoe Nuku Roa Framework: Ngā Pūtake, Ngā Peka, Ngā Rau                      |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Ngā Pūtake<br>Axes  | Ngā Peka<br>Subsets   | Ngā Rau<br>Focussed units of<br>inquiry   |
| Axis 1<br>Paihere tangāta<br>Human relationships                              | Individual<br>Family<br>Household<br>Whanau   | Household<br>roles and<br>relationships<br>Whanau cohesion<br>Interdependence   |
| Axis 2<br>Te Ao Māori<br>Māori cultural and identity                          | Mana ake (personal identity)<br>Taongā tuku iho (cultural heritage),<br>Ngā rawa a Rangi raua ko Papa<br>(natural resources)<br>Whakanōhangā Māori(Māori<br>institutions) | Ethnic affiliation<br>Language<br>Tikangā<br>Land<br>Fisheries<br>Forests<br>Environment<br>Marae<br>Hapū activities<br>Iwi links |
| Axis 3<br>Ngā āhuatangā noho-a-<br>tangāta<br>Socio-economic<br>circumstances | Orangā tangāta (well-being),<br>Whai tūngā (societal standing)<br>Whai huangā (economic position)   | Health<br>Education<br>Housing<br>Employment<br>Lifestyle<br>Income   |
| Axis 4<br>Ngā whakanekeneketangā<br>Change over time                          | Changing household dynamics<br>Wider interactions<br>Shift in cultural identity<br>Altered circumstances  | Mobility<br>Stability<br>Realisation of<br>aspirations<br>Vulnerability<br>Impact of external<br>factors<br>New groupings         |

**Fig 1: Te Hoe Nuku Roa Framework**

Central to THNR is a conceptual matrix that establishes and explains the indicators being measured in the study (see above). On one axis are the ‘dimensions’ of experience (Nga Putake). Nga Putake (roots) include Paihere Tangata (human relationships), Te Ao Maori

(Maori cultural identity), Nga Ahuatanga noho a tangata (Socio-economic circumstances) and Nga Whakanekeneketanga (changes over time). Stemming off Nga Putake are Nga Peka (branches) or subsets of the root dimension. For example, nga peka of the human relationship dimension include the individual, family, household, and whanau (kinship). From nga peka stem Nga Rau or the focussed units of inquiry. Again in the example of the human relationships dimension are household roles and relationships, whanau cohesion and interdependence.

The characteristics the study uses as particularly germane to Maori cultural identity include notions of; personal identity (Maori ancestry and self-identification as Maori); cultural heritage (Maori language and cultural practices); natural resources (ancestral land, fisheries and forests) and; Maori institutions (marae, hapu and iwi participation).

Juxtaposed against all of these aspects of Maori experience are different indicators from which measurements can be made. Nga Waitohu (indicators) include choice, access, participation, satisfaction, information, knowledge and aspirations. For example, questions have been designed to ascertain levels of knowledge (Nga Waitohu) of certain kinship groups.

Key to the innovation of THNR, is the ability of the survey to draw correlations between different parts of the matrix. For example, correlations can be made regarding measurements of human relationships and socio-economic circumstances. Of most interest to those looking at Maori cultural identity and diversity are correlations currently being made between social and health outcomes, with measurements of participants' access to, comfort with and participation in a range of Maori cultural practices and activities.

A significant amount of work to date has focussed on particular identity categories based on participants' responses to characteristics that the study claim are particularly relevant to cultural identity (Durie et al., 1996, p.7). The seven cultural identity characteristics include:



self identification as Maori; Maori ancestry; marae participation; whanau (extended family); ancestral land; contacts with Maori people and; Maori language.

The identity categories are summarised as follows:

- Secure identity – indicates positive self-identification as Maori and includes high scores in at least four of the other six characteristics.
- Positive identity – positive self-identification as Maori and some involvement in cultural activities and medium scores in three of the other six characteristics.
- Notional identity – positive self-identification plus low scores in at least four of the other six indicators.
- Compromised identity – do not self-identify as Maori regardless of scores on all other characteristics.

While often reiterating that “...stereotypes must [therefore] be avoided if accurate reflections of real situations are to be integrated into policy”, preliminary findings suggest that, for those participants that fall within the ‘secure identity’ or the ‘positive identity’ categories, their cultural affiliations and participation in cultural activities may be a protective factor when considering health outcomes and are of importance to some educational outcomes (Durie, 1998b).

Congruent with some of the ideas in Te Hoe Nuku Roa, one of the lead investigators of the project has produced a range of frameworks incorporating Maori identity practices into the health sector (Durie, 1997, Durie, 1999, Durie, 2003). All of these models have an underlying premise, in that a key component of effective interventions for Maori across a range of areas like mental health (Durie, 1998b), health promotion (Durie, 1999) and counselling (Durie, 2003) must recognise and take account of Maori identity. Although few

would argue the common sense and evidence base of this approach, what makes up Maori identity as described in these models implies a certain way of being Maori that is likely to reflect the cultural identity of some Maori but not others. Existing in a relative vacuum of theories and frameworks that include and reflect diversity amongst Maori, many interventions, programmes and policies of a range of government organisations and NGOs (non-government organisations), incorporate these models particularly when dealing with Maori and in our case, Maori young people (see Ministry of Health, 2002). The risk here is that Maori youth, in particular those that are not deeply or actively steeped in such recognised dimensions of the culture, are often invisible. Their identity markers as Maori are therefore often misunderstood and as a result many may be doubly marginalised.

Dudley (Dudley, 1997) finds that socio-economic markers were more relevant than cultural when assessing the appropriateness of neuropsychological tests in a sample of Maori and Pakeha clients. A Maori identity/involvement sheet was used to ascertain participants' fluency in te reo Maori, whether or not participants' families spoke Maori, involvement in the Maori community and knowledge of their marae, iwi and hapu. Her research found that there was no statistically significant difference between Maori and non-Maori performance on the tests. However all participants did worse on the tests than average. She suggested this might be due to the low socio-economic status of respondents and particular aspects of the participant selection process.

Broughton (1993) in his analysis of Maori identity firstly highlights some important ways in which Maori identity has been defined previously. These methods include the blood quantum measurement and Maori ancestry. He postulates that "being Maori" entails more than an ancestral or self identification position, but rather involves a level of 'cultural' commitment (p.507). Being Maori in an acceptable and real sense then, often entails some level of competence in te reo Maori, some active engagement and commitment to one's tribe, whanau and whenua.

“...without Maori language, without prestige or mana and without land, the Maori will cease to exist. These are the important aspects for understanding what being Maori really means for Maori people today.” (p508)

One of the most pertinent pieces of literature about the contemporary diversity of Maori people examined in this thesis is by Hana O'Regan (2001). She examines and analyses the talk of several prominent Ngai Tahu \* tribal members to critique and challenge more popular notions of tribal identity and Maori culture. She suggests that some of the racial and cultural characteristics of more widely held constructs of Maori identity may be at odds with a Ngai Tahu tribal identity. In addition she claims that characterising Maori identity by current socio-economic conditions, urbanisation and the creation of pan-tribal institutions also fall short of adequately reflecting the Ngai Tahu situation. Tribal membership of Ngai Tahu is based entirely on ones descent from Ngai Tahu people as recorded in the 1848 census. As such, whakapapa (ancestry) is the key underpinning in the affirmation of Ngai Tahu identity. She rightly critiques 'northern' claims about Ngai Tahu authenticity as Maori not only because of the fair skin of some Ngai Tahu but also in terms of some conventional indicators like competence in te reo Maori and tikanga. Other conventional indicators, particularly the importance of the *tribe* as the key collective entity, are however reiterated in asserting a Ngai Tahu identity.

### **Indigenous authenticity debates internationally**

While there is an abundance of literature that describes relationships, interactions and comparisons between different ethnic groups, less exists that examines the relationships between different members of the same ethnic group. Furthermore, there is a dearth of international literature that examines the intra-ethnic dynamics faced by indigenous people and their on-going discussions amongst ourselves about what makes up an authentic or 'real' indigenous person. One such analysis has been produced by Marie Garrouette (2003), a

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\* Ngai Tahu are the dominant tribe of the South Island

Cherokee woman who highlighted several ways that Indian identity is conceptualised and discussed.

Among these descriptions are definitions of Indian identity that fall into the realms of law, biology, culture and self-identification. Colourful and vibrant examples are used to illustrate particular strengths and weaknesses of each approach. While providing interesting points about all the ways of identifying authenticity of Indian people, of particular interest to this thesis are the points raised in the cultural dimension. She stated that cultural definitions of Indian identity were 'conceptually fuzzy', and that the nature, transformation and endurance of tribal culture as a means of ascertaining indigenous authenticity was a 'slippery slope' primarily because:

“...as Indian tribes encountered changing times and circumstances, they altered the way they lived out their cultures. Yet evidence of cultural change frequently endangers a claimant’s ability to establish a meaningful Indian identity within prevailing cultural definitions. Often, an Indian who is not an unreconstructible historical relic is no Indian at all.” (p68)

She also argued that the exclusion of indigenous people from the ability to define their own cultures and identities reflected not on the ability of these people to adapt and endure but on the racial beliefs of those (usually non-Indian) who have formulated them. This is not to say that many Indian people and tribes have not been effected by these types of definitions. For some tribes, racial 'purity' and cultural uniqueness are important factors to consider when determining tribal membership.

Mudrooroo (1995) provided a personal narrative to identity issues for indigenous Australians and almost immediately highlighted his misgivings about some identity definitions.

“Indigenality includes a learnt portion, and to stress degrees of 'blood' is in effect playing the Master’s game, which is always one dealing with possession, legality, paternity and caste.” (p.13).

Rather he suggests that:

“We should exult in diversity, not try to impose one system, one ideology, one philosophy, one vision of sameness for all. It is a problem for us and all those who do not want to be part of a totality.” (p.19).

He argued that some of the most important aspects of Aboriginal identity can be framed loosely around descent, love of country, attachment to the community, visiting relatives, an awareness of the old ways and customs, and the ideas of belonging to an extended family.

### **Summary**

This literature review has sought to ground the thesis in some of the fundamental elements of identity research and theory from within psychology and related disciplines and argues that alternatives are needed to understand Maori identity. While there is much to be gained from these understandings, particularly those relating to social identity and acculturation, they fall short of incorporating important aspects of the collective as opposed to the individual and the wider contextual environment. The Maori theorising literature seeks to explore the ways in which Maori have responded and continue to contribute to our own identity construction, yet there is little recent work that investigates contemporary identity construction for Maori. The current research project seeks to contribute to the identity debate through an examination of the cultural identity markers of a particular group of young people from a specific geographical community. Key components from the literature that will inform the analysis and discussion of data include:

- Critical approaches – Rather than conceptualising identity as a fixed and constant characteristic of individuals, this thesis favours a more social constructionist framework that seeks to combine these earlier ideas with an individuals learned and lived experience and social environment.
- Cultural context of research – Power and knowledge are intimately linked so that ‘what’ is being said is influenced by ‘who’ is saying it. Much of the theorising about

Maori identity 'by Maori' is strengthened by a reclamation of the power to define ourselves.

- Conventional indicators of Maori identity – One aspect of the Maori literature on identity emphasises a range of markers that apply to particular kinds of Maori experience. These relate most strongly to an image of Maori culture that has its foundation in pre-contact times.
- Experiential indicators – Another strand of the Maori literature critiques the conventional indicators to suggest that the 'bottom-line' of who may claim a Maori identity is varied and reflective of diverse life experiences that may not relate strongly to what is traditionally regarded as Maori culture.
- Environmental adaptability – The importance of the physical environment in terms of shaping identity comes through clearly in the Maori literature. Upon discovery and settlement of Aotearoa, the new migrants adopted mountains, rivers and waterways, forests, and other important landmarks to not only serve as a physical address when encountering others but also to affirm connections between groups of people to the land and each other. This thesis seeks to highlight that this process is as alive and relevant today as it was then.

# Project Design, Methods and Analysis

## Kaupapa Maori

Kaupapa Maori Research has been described, defined, examined, contested and implemented in a number of ways (Bishop and Glynn, 1999, Smith, 1999, Moewaka Barnes, 2000, Pihama, 2001). Graham Smith (cited in Smith, 1999) contends that Kaupapa Maori research:

- is related to ‘being Maori’;
- is connected to Maori philosophy and principles;
- takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Maori, the importance of Maori language and culture and;
- is concerned with the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well-being (Smith, 1999, p.185)

Pihama (2001) asserts that Kaupapa Maori research is essentially a “decolonising project”. Moewaka Barnes (2000) believes that Kaupapa maori is based on notions of projects being Maori-led and controlled, involving Maori people and meeting the needs and aspirations of Maori communities. Bishop (1999) claims that Kaupapa Maori, amongst other things, acknowledges that:

“Knowledge is not just to enable researchers to collect data and publish an account of the new knowledge. Rather, the gaining and transmission of new knowledge in a Maori context is in order that they lives of the participants may be enhanced by the actions of the researcher.”

These *strategic directions* of Kaupapa Maori research as a decolonising project, with an emphasis on Maori control and utility-focused research activities are all congruent with the goals, methods and outcomes of this project. Yet there are reservations about Kaupapa Maori research in an *operational* sense. As Smith outlines, Kaupapa Maori research takes for

granted the importance of Maori language and culture. For some this may imply that a Kaupapa Maori project must involve Maori language fluency and a degree of Maori 'cultural competence'. Again although this would seem reasonable, what one defines as Maori culture and appropriate language for participants may vary. For some of the participants involved in the current study, a grounding of the project in te reo Maori and the notions of Maori cultural identity covered in the literature would have alienated them and created a sense of incompetence and disempowerment. As Maori researchers who proclaim the value of Kaupapa Maori, we must ensure that decolonising projects at a strategic level, do not become *re-colonising* projects at an operational level. While this project is clearly aligned to the wider strategic goals of Kaupapa Maori, the definitions of what is Maori culture are not set in concrete. Indeed the objective of the project itself is to broaden the picture of what is considered Maori culture.

### **Purpose of the project**

This thesis presents the findings from the first 12 participants in a wider project about identity and youth development funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand that extends the range of data to more young people and key informant interviews. Objectives covered in the research process relative to this thesis are in **bold**.

The aim of this project was to gather data that can inform and contribute to existing knowledge about cultural identity of rangatahi Maori with a view to establishing a framework(s) for greater youth development and a more positive and embracing perspective of culture. Specific objectives of the project were:

- **To elicit and analyse accounts of cultural identity that exist for rangatahi Maori in South Auckland.**
- **To investigate the relevance of conventional markers of cultural identity and identify any new meanings for rangatahi.**



- To gather and examine notions of Maori identity from key informants who work with or have influence over young people in an urban setting.
- To elicit reflection and further discussion on the initial findings from the steps outlined above and use the new information to inform the final analyses.
- **To use these analyses of the data to inform policy makers, service providers, whanau, hapu and iwi, schools, kapa haka, youth groups as well as the public health and Maori research communities.**
- **To disseminate the findings to Maori and other key stakeholders in an appropriate and timely manner.**

## **Method**

Focused life story interviews were conducted with young people who identified as Maori and lived in the South Auckland area. Life story interviews (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1981, Olson and Shopes, 1991, Anae, 1998) are useful for a project of this kind as they encourage a reflective narrative to be produced at the participant's pace with the researcher listening and clarifying points of discussion. Focused life story interviews means a particular emphasis can be employed around a central topic, in this case Maori identity, so that the topic and valuable contextual influences on the topic can be discussed.

Sampling of the young people was purposive to include rangatahi with diverse life experiences living in a variety of whanau situations. The sample includes seven male and five female participants from a range of ages and vocations with some participants, at the time of the interview, being one or more of the following; students, unemployed, a parent, part of the labour force, or doing volunteer work.

The South Auckland location was chosen for a number of reasons, including the high number of young Maori that live there, the diversity that exists amongst Maori within Manukau and

networks the researcher has in this community. Due to the small number of interviews included in this thesis and the relative database of information, there are not from all South Auckland suburbs. Participants included in this study were residents in the Manurewa, Mangere and Otahuhu suburbs.

Determining an age range for what constitutes 'rangatahi' for research purposes is problematic. The sample in this project includes young people between the ages of 13-21. During these years rangatahi experience dynamic change in terms of identity development (including cultural identity). Rangatahi aged between 13-17 years may have more of their experiences shaped by school and sport activities. Older participants may be influenced more by work or unemployment and other rights and experiences of adulthood (eg. voting, purchasing alcohol, welfare benefit entitlement, parenthood).

Using my established networks with youth, mana whenua, school and broader community groups, young people were approached by the community contact, a parent, teacher, or other appropriate third party. I followed this with a brief telephone call to ascertain the participant's willingness to contribute to the study. If there was agreement, a letter was sent to the young person with an information sheet and consent form. Consent forms and information for the parents of those under the age of 16 was also sent and explained. This letter was followed a week later by a phone call to arrange a time, date and place for the interview.

Key to the data collection process was to make the research process as enjoyable for participants as possible. This included taking the young person for a meal at a place of their choosing and being able to choose whatever they wanted from the menu. It is important to remember that some participants had never been to a restaurant other than fast food takeaways and others had very rarely had unconstrained choice once there. Participants were

also given a choice of movie passes or a CD voucher (or other voucher of their choice), an acknowledgement of the crucial contribution they were making to the project.

Coupled with this was an intense commitment to keeping the research and data collection processes as flexible as possible to meet the needs and wishes of the young person rather than the researcher. This often meant that interviews: took place during or after the young person had been given a meal; were conducted in venues chosen by the participant; occurred during early afternoon or on weekends; and in most cases involved arranging transport to and from the interview location. At the wish of participants, interviews were not conducted in their own homes. Two participants wanted to be interviewed together and one participant asked to be interviewed in the presence of a non-participating friend.

Interviews began with a detailed explanation of the project. When describing the project, I was careful to consider what preconceived ideas and indicators of Maori culture might arise from participants being told that this was a project about 'Maori identity'. The project was described as a way of having a conversation and gathering information about what their lives were like as young Maori growing up and living in South Auckland. Participants were informed that this research was about all the ways people might be Maori, some of which might relate to common indicators and some might be new or different. The interview covered topics like family, school, community, friends, occupation, music, sport and other leisure activities. The aim of this approach was to elicit a range of comments on what things participants felt were important in their identity, rather than as a measurement of conventional indicators. This approach was also useful in that it enabled wider environmental and contextual influences to be recognised within which identity is constituted. Interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes, were tape recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim. Participants are given pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

## **Analysis**

Transcripts were loaded into QSR's N4 software package then coded and analysed using a range of approaches. In this project, participants identified through language the aspects of cultural identity that had implications for promoting and demoting a sense of self, and were relevant to them in their everyday understanding. Therefore, thematic analysis was used to identify and describe broad themes of importance to participants (Patton, 1990). Discursive approaches like those established by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and developed by McCreanor (1991, 1996) were particularly useful in describing patterns of talk associated with the more widely understood indicators of Maori identity. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, J., 1999) was also used to present information relevant to participants' experiential indicators of identity and to develop a comprehensive description of the ways in which language, ideas and images were being used to establish and defend various positions on the topic of cultural identity.

## Findings

In this section I present and discuss the findings from the project. The general themes that are presented seek to describe the ways in which participants' identities are shaped by:

- a) *Conventional indicators* of Maori identity
- b) Unconventional or *Experiential indicators* of Maori identity
  - i. Other *Environmental factors*
- c) The *Locality* of South Auckland

Each main theme is divided into sub-themes that describe and present various positions on the central ideas.

Although questions about Maori identity were not asked directly, a number of participants made a range of comments on this topic, reflecting the open-ended inclusiveness of the life story approach adopted. Although some of these responses covered areas that are more widely understood as accepted indicators of Maori identity, the interviews also included many unconventional and innovative markers.

### Conventional indicators

Analyses of the data on conventional indicators are presented within three broad domains; *awareness* of these indicators, the role of such characteristics in facilitating *participation* in particular cultural activities', and *impacts* on one's ability to participate. These features are discussed as well as the issues influencing differences between what participants knew and expressed and what they did.

## Awareness of Conventional Indicators

Some participants articulated very clearly what they understood to be important, recognised markers of being Maori. Some who had experienced different living or learning environments made interesting comparisons between settings they perceived as more or less Maori. These comments tended to focus on lived everyday experiences of being Maori rather than conventional understandings of Maori identity. Similarly those who felt that they had not been “brought up” immersed in things Maori but had taken a greater interest as they grew older also made some valuable comments about their time of transition.

Participants were aware that being Maori often involved knowing your tribe, having some familiarity with your tribal location, and some awareness and active engagement with one’s tribal marae. The most commonly mentioned was having some degree of fluency with te reo Maori.

“My mum said I have to do Maori and that was really it kind of, really put me off actually like being forced to do stuff. I mean I can understand cos she wanted to be more Maori but I mean I’m Maori anyway, so.” *Joe*

Here, Joe talks about his being compelled to take Maori as a subject at school. He presumes this was to satisfy his mother’s desire to “be more Maori”. Of particular interest is the use of the word “so”, to create a rhetorically shortened phrase. In other words he uses “so” to end any further question about his identity as Maori. This type of assertion about their identity as Maori was common amongst participants.

Participants had an acute awareness of the levels to which these conventional markers could be seen as converging in an authentic Maori identity.

“I went to [primary school] which is just down the road, but I sort of was in the Maori stuff, or in the Kapa Haka right through thing but I was really Pakehafied if you get it [giggles]” *Jay*

*Interviewer \* In what way? What does it mean Pakehafied?*

“I wasn’t really, like I didn’t go to Kohanga, I went to a kindy. My parents were not, they don’t really know much Maori like they’re pretty you know...” *Jay*

*Interviewer \* But they knew you were, they knew you were Maori?*

“Yeah, we knew we were Maori. We knew where we were from a marae and stuff up north and you know down the line. But then we didn’t really go past that especially like when I went to intermediate I just turned off Maori altogether I just thought it was a joke to be honest. I just thought it was a joke like Kapa Haka and Maori studies and stuff” *Jay*

In this extract, Jay explains her understanding of an ‘authentic’ or conventional Maori identity (ie, kohanga, te reo, marae) by using her own experiences which she views as a direct contrast (kindy, school). The continued use of the word “really” emphasises these contrasts. She uses the term ‘Pakehified’ to describe her distance from the markers she perceives as inherent to Maori cultural authenticity.

### **Participation in Maori Institutions and practices**

Some young people interviewed were not only aware of the things that they perceived as signifying an authentic Maori identity, but also belonged to particular Maori institutions and participated in certain cultural activities on a regular or semi-regular basis.

The Maori institutions mentioned included belonging to a kohanga reo or kura kaupapa Maori or other Maori education medium, and belonging to particular clubs like waka ama (outrigger canoeing) and some active engagement with their tribe. These extracts highlight that for many Maori medium education was seen as ‘Maori’ because of its connection to te reo Maori and kapa haka which were clearly seen as being important markers of a type of Maori environment.

*Interviewer\*...like a Maori immersion unit where you speak Maori most of the time or?*

“umm yeah I had six years Maori. I did it from form one up to form six.”  
Tui

Interviewer\* *uum okay what was that like?*

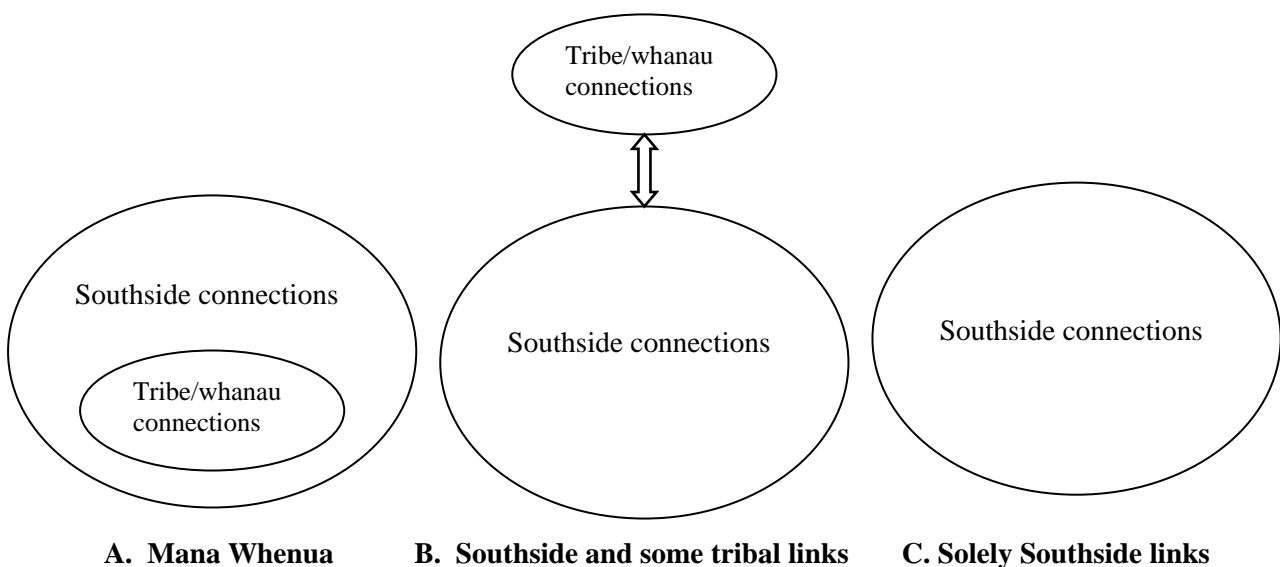
“It was cool.” *Tui*

“Yeah he’s fluent in Maori. Think me and my brothers are fluent in Maori cause that’s the only environment we were brought up, you know is Maori.”  
*Kura*

“And my brother oh he's not brother he's my cousin but he lives with us ...I think he had a large influence on me going into [whanau unit] you know how I said I was all Pakehified and stuff, and when he come and he went to [Kura kaupapa] and I was like “far I wanna go there” because I saw the Kapa Haka group. And so my thing was I was gonna go to [whanau unit] and you know do, get my reo up in third form but then I just ended up staying there cos I just loved it. You know just get attached but yeah I think he's had a big influence...he's really Maori like he grew up in Kura Kaupapa and stuff...” *Jay*

### Tribal connections

Participants connections to iwi (tribes) were key among their conventional markers of Maori identity that they drew upon and may be grouped in the following way. Firstly, as indicated some participants in the study had tribal connections to the South Auckland region. Secondly, some participants had strong connections and links within the South Auckland region but also maintained some connection with their tribe or wider whanau region outside of South Auckland. Thirdly, some participants had no active engagement with their tribe as such and connected solely within the South Auckland region. These groupings may be displayed in the following diagram.





Participants for whom South Auckland was their tribal region are described in this thesis as participants of *mana whenua* status. In the following extract, Hilton reiterates his place as *mana whenua* as distinct from other Maori in the region. He draws upon oral history to claim a specific geographical location and refers to the contestation and debate surrounding *mana whenua* status.

“What my nan said, she said that our hapu probably owns all across here. That’s our land and all the way back that way so yeah, and we know that that’s sort of ours and with all the debates going on now, you got Maori saying that its everyone’s but we know its ours.” *Hilton*

For *mana whenua* participants “going home” was actually staying within the South Auckland area.

“Yeah cos like all my friends they're like “oh yeah I'm gonna go up North for the holidays”, or “I'm gonna go down the East Coast” but me I have to stay in Auckland cos that’s where my family lives. Yeah like the only time we go out of Auckland is if we’re gonna go to a hotel or camping area yeah.” *Kura*

*Mana whenua* participants were more involved in wider tribal events with their *iwi* and were more regular visitors at their tribal *marae*. Here, *Kura* outlines a tribal event (*Tainui* games) that her family attends.

*Interviewer \* Oh what’s Tainui Idol?*

“Um its like *Iwi Idol*. We have it at the *Tainui Games* mmm.” *Kura*

*Interviewer \* What’s the Tainui games? You’re speaking to someone whose not from Tainui so I don’t know*

“Just this sports day. A family sports day, yeah to bring the family together basically.” *Kura*

*Interviewer \* How many people go to that?*

“About um. *Kura*

*Interviewer \* Heaps?*

“Yeah heaps [laughs]. We've got about 20 Maraes there or even more. I'm not sure mmm.” *Kura*

*Interviewer \* How long does that go for?*

“um three days yeah.” *Kura*

The second group, who had a range of connections within the South Auckland environment and a degree of connection with their tribe, had less regular tribal engagement than mana whenua participants, this took the form of attending tangihanga (funerals), unveilings or other specific events.

“yeah and the first time I went over there was for her (grandmothers) funeral, she got buried over there”

*Interviewer \* oh okay*

“And then we went back over for her unveiling and then we went over for a holiday. We just go over every now and then especially to watch the rugby cause we got the rugby team down there.” *Tui*

For these participants, locations were often described in ways that express their separation from South Auckland.

The third group corresponds to the participants for whom tribal connections are replaced with strong links to the South Auckland region, people and communities. In relation to other indicators, some participants expressed great pride in being Maori and an awareness of what some of the conventional indicators were, were interested in learning these or participating in cultural activities but identified a range of difficulties and barriers to their participation.

*Interviewer \* Tell me about the makeup of your families?*

“All Maoris.” *Kahu*

“All Maoris aye bro. I'm a full Maori but I don't know how to talk it. It's too boring.” *Tai*

*Interviewer \* But you don't what?*

“I don't know how to talk Maori.” *Tai*

“I only know bits and pieces aye, I know bits and pieces.” *Kahu*

*Interviewer \* But what you think? Its boring?*

“Its just hard.” *Tai*

“It’s a hard language aye.” *Kahu*

“Once I start learning it I just said no. I said I don’t want to I just said no it’s too hard.” *Tai*

“But it is a hard language man.” *Kahu*

*Interviewer \* Do you think it’s useful to know?*

“Yeah, yeah well to me it is.” *Kahu*

“Not to me because not much people speak Maori around here or anywhere.” *Tai*

*Interviewer \* Yeah so you don’t reckon...*

“I don’t know. No one speaks it, no one needs it.” *Tai*

In this powerful segment, two different perspectives are launched about learning te reo Maori. Tai clearly connects his family, being Maori and te reo Maori. He identifies his family as being “all Maoris” and himself as a “full Maori” then uses “but” to rationalise his not being able to speak Maori. Kahu adds his perceived level of competence in te reo, implying that both young men had an initial interest in learning te reo Maori. Both then talk about learning the language as being “hard” and backing off Tai’s previous assessment of te reo being “boring”. While Kahu maintains that te reo is still valuable to him regardless of his fluency, Tai disagrees that te reo is useful in his current environment.

Another acknowledged indicator was karakia. However, very few participants mentioned having karakia before meals or other occasions as something their family did on a regular basis. Some mentioned that having karakia before meals has caused them embarrassment when eating out. Most mentioned karakia as reserved only for special occasions or events where many Maori were present.

One participant mentioned the use of karakia to Tangaroa before going on the water for waka ama.

### **Impacts**

While many participants were clear in what they understood as indicators of Maori identity, their ability to access these indicators at the level they desired was for most a complex process fraught with barriers and tension. A number of influences external to the individual impacted in various ways on these tensions.

#### *Parents*

Most participants mentioned having had at some point a discussion with their parents about learning Maori language and tikanga at school. Most indicated that their parents were enthusiastic about their children having access to what was denied to many of them as students, and some even forced their children into these courses and activities. As one might expect, the participants who felt they had been forced had more negative responses towards some aspects of Maori culture than other students.

Some participants also commented on the pressure they felt in having to meet their parents' and teachers' expectations on them. Those who showed promise were particularly conscious of needing to succeed academically, in sport and in things Maori.

#### *School*

Participants included young people from both Maori medium and mainstream systems, current and past pupils. All participants commented on the availability and delivery of Maori culture through school. For many this exposure has been their primary or sole source of information and access to some of the institutions and practices that are aligned with the conventional indicators of Maori identity.

For some rangatahi engagement with Maori culture at school has been problematic including like learning te reo Maori and tikanga. Some of the issues that have impacted on the participants decisions to take Maori at school are outlined below.

In all of the schools that participants had attended or were still attending, learning te reo Maori, being in the whanau unit or bilingual unit and participating in kapa haka had been combined. For many participants this created an “all-or-nothing” situation and prevented them from accessing any of the individual components separately. For example, participants who wanted to learn Maori language also had to participate in kapa haka. If not, they were unable to take Maori as a subject. Similarly if a participant felt that the discipline required to be in the whanau unit was too great a commitment for them, they were unable to be in the kapa haka or take Maori as a subject. Thus many participants, unable to access the level of participation they desired, chose not to be involved in developing their understanding of Maori culture at school.

*Interviewer \* So were you never sort of um, tempted to take Maori?*

“I wanted to take Maori, but I didn’t want to be in the kapahaka. Oh I like it, I just didn’t want to, take off ah my shirt, and wear ah the piupiu and that.” *Kingi*

*Interviewer \* Um and so there’s no way to take Maori without doing kapahaka?*

“I don’t think so at [school], you have to be in the kapahaka to take the Maori.” *Kingi*

On the other hand for those participants who had learnt te reo Maori from a young age (eg, from kohanga) and considered themselves fluent speakers of te reo, pursuing subjects other than Maori meant that the whanau unit was no longer the best learning environment for them.

*Interviewer \* Would you still be in the kura even if you didn’t take Maori?*

“I won't be in the Kura cos all you do in the Kura is Maori when you get to 6th form and 7th yeah. Just a waste of time being in the Kura if you're not gonna take Maori.” *Kura*

There was a perceived opportunity cost to learning Maori at school and all that that involved. This cost was usually the availability of other subjects and academic interests, school sporting involvement, extra curricula activities and family commitments.

Another important relationship was the tension between engagement of Maori culture at school and being an accelerant or advanced student. This was exacerbated for accelerant students for whom engaging in Maori culture and their extension class became a either/or situation, with some choosing to forgo learning Maori and being in the whanau unit to pursue their academic studies intensively and vice versa. One student was able to pursue both avenues simultaneously due to ongoing parental intervention.

Further issues arise within Maori medium education strategies. Participants had varying views and experiences with total immersion Maori units and bilingual divisions within mainstream schools and kura kaupapa Maori.

Many participants were extremely positive about Maori medium education and those currently in a whanau unit expressed deep pride in their school as a result. Although it might be argued that this pride was for the whanau unit and not directed at the school generally, this was not a distinction clearly made by the participants. Even though some participants in mainstream system expressed the view that they liked school and enjoyed aspects of it, the sense of being proud of one's school was not as evident. (These data cannot be interpreted as signalling either better attendance or academic achievement).

Some participants reported that other people had spoken to them about the reputation of Maori medium at particular schools. More often than not these comments were negative and

portrayed Maori medium as delivering lower quality education and having fewer resources. There was also a claim that students within such settings engaged in risky behaviour earlier than other students and were involved in things Maori at the expense of other subjects and activities.

Some of these worries about involvement in a whanau unit being a risk or a gamble were neutralised for some when the student was actually placed in a whanau unit. Fears that the student may “go off the rails” from being in a whanau unit, did not reflect the common experience.

However, some of the pre-conceived ideas about Maori medium did have some traction. Participants were clear that, in their experience, Maori medium education units were under-resourced both in terms of material resources and personnel.

“Cos [whanau unit] is pretty much relaxed and stuff. All their classes even their science class is without a lab it's in the marae. I think that's a bit stink because they just tell the kids oh yeah complete this and after that do this. And they just, we watch them like when I'm doing when I've got no class or something I sit there and I watch them and they just sit there.” *Jay*

*Interviewer \* So they do science without no without?*

“Without no lab. They've never been in a lab before.” *Jay*

Concerns about the high level of investment in things Maori to the degree that it was prioritised above other subjects, activities and interests was also reflective of some participants experience in Maori medium.

“...because sometimes when we get in trouble because we went to class.”  
*Jay*

*Interviewer \* Instead of going to kapahaka?*

“Yeah. And there's one girl that got moved back aye into the second row (kapa haka group) cos she actually went to her class.” *Jay*

Several participants stated that there was a strong emphasis on the discipline required to be in the whanau unit. Discipline in this instance was not implied to mean punishment or control but rather a commitment to the solidarity of the group over the desires of the individual. For a few participants this was a difficult thing to accept and influenced their decision to pursue school through the mainstream system. For others discipline included taking pride in their school uniform, looking smart and tidy and showing respect for fellow students and school staff.

The positive comments made about Maori medium were generally made by students within this system and tended to focus on the support and comfort of the learning environment. Many stated that the whanau unit was a safe and comfortable place, that it belonged to them, everyone knew each other and there was a greater sense of familiarity between students and staff.

“Oh I like Maori schools because yeah, just the whanau environment, yeah mmm.” *Kura*

*Interviewer \* What does that mean, you know?*

“Well like um cos, the Kura they stick together. Its like a real strong bond. But with the mainstream the teachers they probably won't even know your name aye. You just have to keep on telling them, but the Kura teachers every single teacher knows your name, even the office lady. She knows where you live your number yeah but as with the mainstream you have to keep on telling the teacher yeah.” *Kura*

Some also commented that being in the whanau unit had had positive spin-offs for their families as well. These included a much greater engagement between families and the school, which in some cases had sparked interest in other family members to learn Maori language, customs and history.

Some students commented that there was greater staff continuity within Maori medium than in the mainstream. Those who had come through the mainstream system also mentioned the high turnover in Maori subject teachers throughout their high school years.



## Experiential indicators

In addition to the various comments made about some of the more common understandings of what it means to be Maori, participants also made a range of comments about their lived experience as Maori young people. Here they are discussed as experiential indicators.

Many participants talked about a sense of being Maori that to a large degree involved real and perceived material deprivation. Some commented that being part of a Maori household involved buying 'budget' items including food, grocery items and clothing. A few participants argued that a Maori environment was for them, often rough, life was hard and resources were scarce.

In this extract Tui talks about the differences between being brought up in her mother's household (which she describes as a "real" Maori home) to living her Pakeha step father.

"umm well being brought up in a rough environment and then taken into a civilized one was quite different. I had to learn, had to learn a lot a new things. He (step father) was teaching me like his ways." *Tui*

*Interviewer \* What do you mean a rough environment? What's that mean?*

"Like been brought up in a real Maori home just being..." *Tui*

*Interviewer \* What sort of differences that you remember?*

umm the dressing...umm the eating I have to learn how to eat three meals a day. When I was with my other family I have to eat when ever I wanted to and stuff and mainly eat junk food and I started eating yeah properly, or you know...yeah at the table not walking around down the street with your plate." *Tui*

*Interviewer \* Yeah okay*

"And umm I learned how to do food shopping but when I was with my mum I learnt how umm shop budgetly. When I was with him we will buy like the expensive stuff like the good quality stuff and I just got used to that." *Tui*

This environment was often chaotic as signalled in comments made about the absence of routine around taking meals together, dressing appropriately and a lack of family outings or

events. Some participants accounted for such situations in terms of their family's material and financial resources but some also made particular reference to what they saw as a self-serving parenting style, which put the interests of the parent(s) above those of the children. Tui again talks here of the similar childhood circumstances of herself and her step father, the differing parenting styles and subsequent outcomes.

“But umm yeah, he was telling me the way he was brought up. It was sort of similar to our way but, to my way but it was like his mother sacrificed everything just for them whereas the way I was brought up my mother more or less cared about herself [laughs]. Yeah sacrificed us to save herself [laughs].” *Tui*

These participants said that their experience of growing up involved few rules and boundaries and that they were left pretty much to themselves. They often saw their up bringing as common but less than ideal and often expressed a desire to have been brought up in a ‘normal’ family.

When talking about South Auckland some participants mentioned an ability to survive and carry on in spite of having scarce material resources. There were comments about “making do with what you had” even if it wasn't the best.

“Nobody really cares about how expensive you know as long as you got a bag even if it's like got a broken zip or something like that you still take it to school.” *Tui*

Indeed one of the participants who highlighted that he was not ‘poor’ felt this was another point of contestation to his identity as Maori. Here Hilton describes the same strategy – not displaying his wealth – to cope with contestations to his identity in both Maori and non-Maori contexts. By playing down his wealth in the Maori context he maintains his identity without having to “act” Pakeha while still perceiving his difference from other Maori. Within the non-Maori context of his school he feels more accepted because wealth is more common, yet he and other Maori students don't “show off” their money which he claims is a Pakeha trait.

“Like my Mum’s whanau cos they're all white. You couldn't tell they're Maori so they act their Pakeha side and they act real sophisticated than the Maoris. The Maoris are more slum so everyone knew that because my dad owned a shop, so they knew that we had money, so. Everyone treated me like that so then when I went to this school everyone’s the same...” *Hilton*

*Interviewer \* So do you think that’s really kind of common that when you’re Maori they should hide the fact that they have money?*

“Normally every Maori do. Like nearly every Maori at my school they don’t show off like the Pakeha and say “oh we’re rich we got money”. We keep it to ourselves and we act normally whereas other people they express that they’ve got money and they show off about it...Like there was one boy at my school he was half Maori and half Pakeha and he’s like one of the top ten richest in New Zealand so he acted like his Pakeha side and told everyone about it.” *Hilton*

Although many mentioned that clothing ‘labels’ were important to them and they sought to have them when possible, many said that most often they would have to make do with what was available and/or affordable.

A few participants also stated that gatherings with extended family were rare but valued. However such occasions were often tainted by heavy use of alcohol, fighting and a parting on bad terms undermining the desire for further contact.

“Family wise. Oh nah nothing wrong with my family wise aye, its just that they all moved over to Australia and stuff they're all spread around there. And our family have a lot problems they have a lot of arguments when they're all together you know drinking... blah blah [imitating] “what the hell”... swearing hard out end up bloody fights happen and kicking everywhere then they don’t talk to each other. That’s one bad thing about our family but..” *Kahu*

Some participants stated that as children they were often ashamed to be Maori as they associated being Maori with failure at school and Maori students as being naughty and getting in trouble.

In addition to this, some of these participants also described what they thought a Pakeha environment was like which unsurprisingly contrasted directly with experience of Maori environments. Being brought up in a Pakeha environment was being brought up civilised. It meant having self sacrificing parents who worked hard and were role models and it meant doing things together as a family. Some participants expressed total surprise when they learned that some Pakeha families were one parent families and also had few financial resources. Many participants also commented that a Pakeha environment was most often located in towns and big cities as opposed to rural locations and that Pakeha environments were less friendly and embracing.

“Oh yeah I’ve stayed like a, me and my sister went down there for a few weeks, and my brother and my other sister went down there for a few weeks at a different time, and we just stayed at my mum’s sisters houses, like a different sister for a few days.” *Kingi*

*Interviewer \* Oh yeah, what was that like?*

“It was pretty different, cause they’re not that friendly.” *Kingi*

This participant whose mother is Pakeha had a low opinion of his Pakeha aunts based on the experience of occasional visits.

## **Other Environmental Factors**

### **Sports**

Many of the participants interviewed were physically active and enjoyed a wide range of sports and recreation activities. Some of the males in particular, stated strongly that their sport was an important part of who they were.

*Interviewer \* Oh yeah and what do you do there, just play sport? Do they like give you information or anything like that?*

“Nah cos it’s just a sport. It’s basically just sports but that’s what we want to do. We either play Xbox or PS 2...We’ve got that and we play badminton, oh table tennis I mean if we want, and then we hire, we’ve got the gym so we can play badminton, volleyball...” *Kahu*

“It’s free for us too. *Tai*

“Anything basketball, netball, indoor touch.” *Kahu*

“I just take my ball out and just shoot around, shoot free-throws just by myself I make sure that no one is with me, so I can just chill and I mean that’s where I’ve always gone, um whenever I’ve found out that someone’s passed away or something bad has happened to me I’d go down there and I’d just, I kind of like, just lose my mind and nothing else...than just shooting and trying to get the next one in or using a new crossover so yeah.” *Joe*

While basketball was high among the sports of interest with males, waka ama, rugby, netball and boxing were mentioned by the young women.

### **Social Lives**

In addition to leading very active sports and school lives, participants also enjoyed active social lives. Some participants stated that their parents, concerned with safety, maintained tight limits and expectations about when and with whom they could socialise. Although a few of the younger participants found their parents’ control oppressive, most saw this as reasonable and in their best interests.

Social outings included shopping at malls, going out for dinner with family or friends, going to the movies, playing species and listening to music. Spending time with similar age siblings and cousins was common and mentioned as the most important part of some participants’ social circle.

### **Partying**

While most participants mentioned having attended a party at some time during their lives, a few participants mentioned partying often. Many of the participants involved in school kapa haka groups mentioned group parties as a common aspect of their participation. These often involved celebrations or commiserations after kapa haka competitions. Some of these

participants mentioned their parents' concern at this while trying to balance quite intense peer pressure to participate.

*Interviewer \* Yeah and there's definitely a party after those performances aye?*

Yeah and that's something that some people are really like pretty concerned about like cos if they're in the roopu it's like "oh I'll get shit if I don't go to the party so I'll sneak out" *Jay*

*Interviewer \* True so you get shit from the other members the young people?*

Yeah it's like "why weren't you there?" And we get pretty much a lot of shit if we don't go. Oh it's pressure you know it happens all the time but..." *Jay*

*Interviewer \* Is there pressure when you get there?*

"To drink yes, especially to drink. There's like, there's an expectation man there but do drugs there's a lot of pressure..." *Jay*

Going to parties was, of course, not limited to participants involved in kapa haka. Others talked about going out to parties, clubs and bars and that drinking was something they enjoyed.

*Interviewer \* What sort of things are important to you?*

"My friends, and my family, and um, I like to drink and that. *Kingi*

*Interviewer \* You like to what?*

"Drink and that...I can't that of anything else that's important...Money." *Kingi*

*Interviewer \* Why do you think that drinking's important to you?*

"I don't know I just like getting a buzz...yeah." *Kingi*

## **IT, Computing and Kazaa**

Most participants had access to computers and the internet either at home, school or through their friends. For most this involved downloading songs, music videos and other products from the internet (mostly through file sharing software like Kazaa), creating their own CDs

and participating in chat rooms. Knowledge of computers varied amongst participants and one participant currently had friends that they had meet over the internet.

One of the chat rooms mentioned often by participants was the MSN group “*Kapa haka whanau*”. Like all chat rooms this is a forum where members discuss issues pertinent to them in relative anonymity. Many of the kapa haka participants were members of *kapa haka whanau* and accessed the site often, particularly after high school kapa haka competitions. Discussion tended to be an informal debriefing about the outcomes of competitions, the merits (or otherwise) of the judging, information about up and coming events, and so on. Many of the participants accessing kapa haka whanau described the comments made as more negative than positive but informative nonetheless. Although some participants were encouraged by school staff to ignore negative comments made about their kapa haka group or school, many felt that the comments made them more determined to win future competitions.

A few participants mentioned that their parents had to limit or cut off their access to the internet because of their constant downloading and the costs involved. One participant also mentioned that he often called the “Phone Café”, a free telephone chat line.

Churches of one form or another were mentioned occasionally, particularly among some of the younger female participants. Destiny Church in particular was mentioned by some participants as important to them through their attendance of services and involvement in youth group activities.

### **Future Aspirations**

Participants’ aspirations for the future were varied and, as one might expect, highly contextual. The one participant interviewed who had a child said that the care of his baby

was foremost in his aspirations for the future. Some participants nearing the end of their time in secondary school had aspirations for university and tech courses.

“I wanna go to Waikato University. I wanna study law and I think that’s good cos it’s got high expectations you’ve got to have a high grade it’s like um 120 credits. And I think that’s really good because then I’ll really want to strive to get that because I really want to go there I think it’s good.” *Jay*

“I want to go to university. Since I’ve been little aye I’ve been wanting to work with kids like first I wanted to be a social worker but now I want to be a paediatrician aye. Yeah I wanna work with kids, I love kids yeah.” *Ana*

Some of the unemployed participants had aspirations for employment or training opportunities. Some of the established sportspeople interviewed aspired to excellence in their sport at regional and national levels and others had a passion for coaching.

## **Locality**

Participants were asked about their views on living in South Auckland, commonly known as Southside. Most participants had very positive feelings about living in south Auckland and expressed this on multiple levels. Although residential transience of participants was common, movement was generally within South Auckland. Most participants had spent their whole lives living in South Auckland.

When asked to elaborate on the experience of living in South Auckland participants tended to focus on connections to two general domains, the physical environment and the people in South Auckland. Underpinning such talk was the notion that South Auckland was home and they had a strong sense of belonging to and familiarity with the area.

“Umm probably umm proud to be Maori and yeah like growing up in South Auckland coz that’s only place I’ve ever grown up in. Just South Auckland.” *Aroha*



This sense of connection created meaning and status for most participants despite an embedded awareness and understanding of the negative perception others often associated with South Auckland and its people.

“...like um I just like the environment aye. Its like people think we live in the Bronx but then again I reckon its pretty cool aye cos you've got people living close to you and you know them basically.” *Kura*

Participants were clear in their awareness that most outsiders saw South Auckland in a negative light and articulated this perception in numerous ways and with interesting insights. Many expressed the view that South Auckland was seen as a ‘tough’ place where violence, crime and poverty were part of the profile. Participants, when talking about this perception of their home, would often engage in ‘pre-emptive positioning’ whereby they would call up a negative image, phrase or attitude about South Auckland and then use hedging words such as ‘but’, ‘like’ or ‘just’. This allowed them to, not only distance themselves from the negative comment that preceded it, but to also naturalise the comments that followed.

*Interviewer \* So what do you think about being about Southside. Does that mean anything or?*

“It is being home really...Just like when someone says “Southside” its like, I'm not a gang Southside its just like Southside is my home.” *Ana*

“South Auckland yeah, its like real home. It's like classed as the worse area but I reckon it's like the best area.” *Kingi*

Some participants mentioned that they were aware of or had had an experience of violence in their community. Although few had been victims of violence personally, some had seen or heard domestic incidents, had an experience of bullying or may have witnessed violent attacks. These attacks were generally school clashes with students from schools outside their suburb.

Many expressed views of comfort and safety in their own neighbourhoods where “knowing everybody” and being recognised as “local” were important protective factors.

Representations of Southside identity were also highly contextual, so that when interacting with an audience unfamiliar to South Auckland representing 'Southside' was an identity that conveyed meaning. For local settings participants' identity was refined to a suburban level using common terms like "Rewa hard" (Manurewa) or "I represent Mangere" (Mangere). Some also articulated an even tighter focus to those that understood their specific suburban environment, identifying with a particular set of streets within their suburb. While most participants maintained a strong pride in being from south Auckland to those from outside, many also had powerful suburban and street identities depending on the context.

"yeah I've always lived in Manurewa and Clendon, not Manurewa...Oh I've stayed in [street] I've stayed here for like..." *Kahu*

*Interviewer \* What do you mean what do you mean Clendon is not Manurewa?*

"Cos its not Manurewa this is Clendon, we're the capital." *Kahu*

"Clendon and Manurewa is separate." *Tai*

These multi-layered neighbourhood identities did have linkages with participants sense of safety in South Auckland. While many participants mentioned that they felt safe in South Auckland, being recognised as local was important in determining the degree to which some felt this safety (ie, there was greater safety in home streets than elsewhere).

### **Nesian Style**

For many participants an integral part of living Southside involved important and meaningful connections to Pacific communities and Pacific young people in particular.

I don't know like it has a different, it's different from any other place I reckon. Like I've been to like North Harbour and Auckland Central and places like that and it's, it's just really different. It's hard to sort of like put it into words but like, it's just a big melting pot kind of thing. There's a lot of different people from different ways. You learn different people's culture

and they kind of co-exist in the same place which is really cool...so yeah that's what I like about it the most. It's just really, its just, it wouldn't seem that it would work but it does. Like you have all these different cultures like Tongan, Samoan, Maori and you think that it wouldn't you know work out but it actually works out really well. And I think that's how I've grown up to be who I am yeah, so yeah just hanging around those places." *Joe*

For some participants of Maori and Pacific descent, these linkages were direct. There was pride in all their family connections and they participated in Pacific events to varying degrees. Some tensions arose over cultural authenticity often at the level of playground teasing and usually successfully resolved.

*Interviewer \* So do you ever get hassled about being part Maori or part Samoan from one of those groups*

"Oh I used to when I was in primary from the islanders aye. They're like "oh nah you're not Samoan" yeah but it's all good now." *Manu*

*Interviewer \* Why do you think they said that?*

"I don't know probably because I didn't understand it. Cos the boys would say stuff in Samoan behind my back but I never knew what it meant so I didn't care." *Manu*

Many participants valued a connection to Pacific people through their friendships with other young people. While many noted that they had friends from a range of cultural backgrounds, Pacific friends were the most prominent after Maori. A few participants maintained connections with Pacific people through their church and other religious affiliations.

There was also a common desire to learn more about Pacific people, their languages and culture.

*Interviewer \* And what was it like being in the Samoan group?*

"I thought it was cool. I still think that it would be awesome to be in those groups like next year I was thinking about joining the Cook Islands group as well you know." *Jay*

*Interviewer \* But you are not Cook Islands are you?*

"Nah, I'm just half caste Maori. Then I thought it was really good like um finding out about different cultures and shit, cos like my sister she's sort of

grown up in a Cook Island home because she used to go to church in Otara”  
*Jay*

While such pragmatic links to Pacific people were frequently mentioned by participants, there were also social connections to Pacific people. Some participants said that they shared a particular affinity with their Pacific friends that centred on their similar family backgrounds, schooling, and real or perceived social standing.

*Interviewer \* So what high school did you go to after Otahuhu Intermediate?*

*“Otahuhu college” \* Tui*

*Interviewer \* uum okay what was that like?*

*“It was cool...cause everybody there is the same...Like it was just like being at home being there. All the kids that were there, because everybody like most of the ones that went there, their backgrounds are all the same.”  
Tui*

A few participants mentioned differences between Maori and Pacific people, for example that Pacific people were generally more modest than Maori and often had a more positive reputation. Because of negative perceptions of Maori, some participants pursued an interest in learning about Pacific cultures rather than Maori. One participant acted definitively in this regard.

*“...when I was in form 2, I was in the Cook Island group, the Samoan and the Tongan group but I wasn’t in the Maori group. I was like “shit, I don’t want to be in the Maori group” Jay*

## **Gangs**

Many participants mentioned gangs during their interviews. Some had had a personal experience of either being in a gang themselves or having family members who were in gangs. Some participants said that they had had some kind of affiliation with either the

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\* Otahuhu College – South Auckland school with one of the biggest PI populations

'Bloods' or the 'Crips' at some point in their life. For many of these participants their involvement in a gang never went further than verbally saying they supported the gang and/or wore clothing of a certain colour.

An interesting feature that emerged from the discussion around gangs was that although many participants highlighted the 'Bloods' and 'Crips' as having African American origins, their affiliation or preference for one of these gangs centred mainly on connections that members of their immediate family or community had to either the Black Power gang or the Mongrel Mob. For example, many participants associated their familial or community connections to the Mongrel Mob with their preference for the 'Bloods'; both gangs promote the colour red and blue signifies the Black Power gang and the Crips.

*Interviewer \* So how do you pick one? Just what your mates are into?*

"Yeah in your family. See it's cos of the um Mongrel Mob and Black Power too. Black is blue, Black Power's blue and Mongrel Mob's are red see and it goes like that. Crips are, Crips are blue and Bloods are red. So it goes by that too. It's just what my family were too. They're red so I just went red." *Kahu*

Despite having a preference for a certain gang and having a low level of involvement in a gang, many participants stated that it was a stage they went through and believed that many young 'wanna be' gangsters in their community would also grow out of it.

For others, gang members were just a normal part of their family and community.

"So umm, cause we've got family members in there but you know we don't walk around and prance it off and stuff like that, we just." *Tui*

*Interviewer \* Got family members in the Black Power?*

"Yeah down at the pad. Like if we see them around on the streets around [street] we don't like acknowledge them as being Black Power. They're just normal." *Tui*

*Interviewers: Just friends and whanau?*

“Neighbours and stuff just normal neighbours to us. But I think if you see them like in [suburb] or something people stare and stuff cos they’ve got their patches on. They’re just normal people.” *Tui*

## Discussion

### Conventional indicators

The participants' talk has allowed us to see how the conventional indicators of Maori identity play out in everyday life for these young people. It highlights a process of constant negotiation, benefit and burden, tension and responsibility, affirmation and partiality.

Participants drew on a range of discourses that referred to conventional indicators of Maori culture in ways that meaningfully embody and usefully elaborate the existing understandings. Their claim to Maori identity in this study was based initially on their self-identification as Maori. For some, in addition to this, Maori identity was reflected in wider familial connections, knowledge of their iwi and tribal location, level of competency in te reo Maori and kapa haka, attending kohanga reo and kura kaupapa or being in whanau units at mainstream high schools.

Although many participants had high levels of knowledge and awareness of 'things Maori' their participation in many of these institutions and activities varied widely. For example, some participants understood that Maori language was an important part of 'being' Maori and of itself quite valuable, yet their level of use was low, as was their expressed desire to learn more. Others found kapa haka interesting to watch and were supportive of their school group, yet they did not participate themselves.

For most participants school was the most important site in terms of accessing aspects of conventional Maori culture. The three aspects mentioned most often were being in Maori

medium (either a kura kaupapa, bilingual unit, whanau unit or pastoral care), taking Maori as a school subject and being involved in or supporting their school kapa haka group.

Several tensions were highlighted that limit some young peoples' participation in Maori culture at school. There was little flexibility for students who wanted to access only selective aspects of Maori culture and some students felt that this 'all or nothing' situation was at odds with their wider aspirations and development. Although the current regime is presumably justified in terms of the need to learn language in its broader cultural context, if we believe that learning te reo Maori and being involved in kapa haka, etc... are important components of being Maori, then it would make sense to present as many options as possible and maintain a level of flexibility that includes as many students as possible.

The findings highlight a range of important issues about whanau units. Indeed many participants both in and out of Maori medium had lots to say about them. While some issues may be school-specific, some common ideas emerge.

Firstly, being in a whanau unit requires a huge commitment on the part of the student and their family. As mentioned previously students in Maori medium must take Maori as a school subject, thus limiting the range of other 'option' courses available to them. Some whanau unit students see this as an opportunity cost to being in the unit, particularly those senior students with a high degree of fluency in te reo Maori.

Whanau unit students are also expected to participate in the kapa haka group, usually as performers (or in some cases tutors), but also as supporters especially in those groups with large membership. Kapa haka activities are generally regular with periods of intense activity usually surrounding competitions and festivals (Kaiwai and Zemke-White, 2004). For some, these intensive periods of kapa haka subsume all other activities including school studies, work obligations and family commitments.



Such is the time and resource commitment students dedicate to the whanau unit that participation in other school activities and to a lesser degree wider community activities is affected. Social interaction for whanau unit students is often limited to whanau unit members and activities. In some cases an association emerges between specific cultural activities (ie, kapa haka) and risky social situations and behaviour. This association needs to be taken seriously especially as many students feel compelled that participation in one means participation in the other.

Maori medium education also appears to suit best, those students who are academically average. Those with significant academic potential often chose between developing their academic pursuits or entering the whanau unit. Rarely were accelerant students able to negotiate both. Even then, it is often left to the least powerful party, the student, to negotiate this interface with little reported support from either the school or the whanau unit.

In many high schools, whanau unit students make up only a small proportion of the school's Maori students. As such, Maori students in the mainstream have various things to say about their whanau unit counterparts. Some felt that whanau unit students receive 'special' treatment, that they were spoilt and that they often assume an air of arrogance and superiority towards others. As many whanau units are responsible for their students' development at school, so too do they manage minor disciplinary matters. Some participants felt that whanau unit students 'get off light' with little or no perceived consequences for disciplinary breaches. Although it is unlikely that whanau unit students are exempt from any consequences of inappropriate behaviour, the perception that these students are treated differently was powerful. Integral to this is the strong advocacy and support role many whanau units play on behalf of their students, particularly when dealing with the mainstream system. What may be emerging is a level of protection or buffer for whanau unit students that is not available to mainstream students and one some mainstream students are beginning to resent.

Another way of understanding this is instead of seeing only Maori medium students 'privilege', it highlights a sense of vulnerability on the part of Maori students in the mainstream. Rather than focussing on their difference with other students in the mainstream, this vulnerability makes these students look inward to what Maori medium students are seen as being provided with. For some schools, the focus on the provision of Maori medium is set up to meet the *school's* obligations rather than the needs and aspirations of all the Maori students in the school.

For students who choose to be in the whanau unit and who, along with their families, are able to make the commitment expected, their experience of the whanau unit and of their school generally is overwhelmingly positive. Many of these participants describe a pride in the unit and their school that was not as evident in participants whose experience has been through the mainstream system. This sense of pride in the unit may be attributable to the feelings of comfort, intimacy and support that many whanau unit students mentioned. Feelings of safety and comfort at school were again not as evident in the talk of those students studying through the mainstream system. Many of the reasons mentioned above influence whether or not a student will choose to be in the whanau unit. If we accept that the reasons *not* to be in the whanau unit are valid and reasonable then we must also ask what accountability schools and the education system have to create and nurture that sense of safety and support for Maori students in the mainstream. I have devoted considerable space to the analysis of the ambivalences and tensions that surround Maori medium education because it is so important to the development of Maori identities around the more conventional and recognised markers of Maori culture, for the young urban participants in this project.

Maori medium have also been instrumental in creating and nurturing a greater presence, visibility and involvement of Maori parents and families in many South Auckland schools. It is not uncommon for whanau unit activities to attract huge numbers of the local Maori

community. No other school activity seems to achieve this level of Maori support, all the more outstanding for the overwhelmingly negative experiences many of these families have of their own time in these institutions. This indicates not only the wide support that Maori medium education enjoy but it also serves as a symbolic re-affirmation of the positive experience many of the students are expressing.

### **Experiential indicators**

As explained above, the difference between what was understood as part of Maori culture and actual participation in these activities was substantial for some participants. Rather than viewing this as something lacking in participants, it is important to discuss the many other ways that participants identified as being Maori, both directly and indirectly. This section looks at other factors that are important to this group of young people and provides further insight into the many influences that shaped who they are and how they see their world.

Despite coming from a range of familial and socio-economic backgrounds, living within material and financial scarcity was a common underlying feature. Living with material disadvantage was such an ordinary fact of life for many that it was not often mentioned directly. Rather there are notions of efficiency, utility and non-waste which speak of a wider context of a materially stretched community. Indeed it is interesting to note that affluence was another site of contestation to an authentic Maori identity.

Family types and specific parenting styles also come under scrutiny from some participants, reiterating certain representations of Maori. While these narratives and analyses provide a strongly negative account of the experiences of some young Maori, it is important that they are read beyond a victim blaming discourse. Most of these experiences are contextualised within a profound societal racism that expects Maori development to proceed within what McIntosh (2004) refers to as conditions of scarcity and marginality in which the term 'Maori'

is added as a derogatory prefix to societal institutions such as ‘family’, ‘parenting’, ‘home’ and ‘environment’. For example, some participants describe adverse family circumstances not as correlated to poverty or living in a single-parent household or their family having little support but primarily because their family is Maori.

What emerges is a perception that the family experiences of some participants contrast with an overwhelmingly strong and entrenched belief in the ideal nuclear family; two self-sacrificing parents who have the material and social resources to make healthy decisions for their children and structured family routines, processes and practices. While there were participants in the study whose family life closely approached this image, those who didn’t were acutely aware of what they felt they lacked and saw the ‘ideal family’ as a non-Maori entity.

## **Gangs**

Despite the common view that gang affiliations in South Auckland mirror those found in the USA, this study suggests that gang ties are a little closer to home than most would think. Family (or locality) associations with the more commonly known gangs, Black Power and the Mongrel Mob, had greater bearing over gang preferences, if any, amongst the young people than any overseas influence. Gang involvement for most young people in this study was periodic and not a consistently important part of their lives over time.

## **Southside pride**

Representations of South Auckland as a place of poverty, unemployment, crime and hardship have developed over the last four decades into a powerful and sustained discourse. These representations occupy an important space in the understanding many participants have of a place they call home. Other studies looking at identity and representation have found a

tendency for young people in this position to disassociate themselves from that which is deemed negative (Howarth, 2002). However, all participants in this study have used sophisticated mechanisms, like pre-emptive positioning and the use of alternative representational resources to not only acknowledge the power of such representations but also to control, contest and re-define this stigma into a narrative of pride, survival and unity. This not only indicates the power representation has on the development of identity, but more importantly points to the complex and sophisticated ways the negative images are contested and rejected and positive alternatives created to defend a social identity and increase self-confidence and respect. In this regard, participants employed a range of words, statements and concepts that naturalised the more positive feelings they had for South Auckland. What emerges is an powerful depiction that living in South Auckland was something they are proud of. Southside, as South Auckland is commonly known amongst participants is a place where diversity and unity co-exist, where difference and culture are not only tolerated, but celebrated.

This was not universal however and some participants internalised some of the negative perceptions made about South Auckland and Maori. Interestingly, the young people who did not feel positively about living in South Auckland were older young people (ie, in the last years of school) and who were the most recent residents, having moved there within the last two years.

The local environment plays a significant role in a sense of belonging and identity (Makereti, 1986, Walker, 1989, Durie, 2004). While living Southside conveyed a certain set of connections and meanings to participants, it is but one part of a complex picture. When trying to define a South Auckland identity for someone from outside the area, using terms like Southside conveyed images and meanings to that person. When explaining their Southside identity to someone from within South Auckland or with a good understanding of the communities in South Auckland, a more suburban identity emerges. Terms such as “Rewa

hard” or “Mangere represent” start to convey a more specific set of connections. Again, in depth knowledge of the specific suburbs enabled participants to go into more specific neighbourhood and even street locations that conveyed the greatest sense of family, safety and familiarity. Thus participants are constantly negotiating their Southside identity by calling on a wide range of general and more specific connections and experiences, dependent on the particular situation and audience.

In addition to the prevailing representations about South Auckland and those that live and come from there, young Maori are also aware of the powerful concepts associated with having a strong Maori identity, what that entails, who has it, who doesn't and why. Indeed, the access, or lack of access to certain conventional indicators of Maori identity and what this lack may mean in terms of their authenticity as Maori, play heavily on the minds of some participants. The idea that urban Maori in general and urban young people in particular are somehow lost as Maori and don't possess the connections to land and community that exist in the tribal heartlands, denies the reality for many Maori living in cities as evidenced by this study. What is highlighted here are strong and meaningful associations to the local land, environment and community that appear to engender the same feelings of security, belonging and connection that some may claim as the sole domain of Maori in tribal communities. Rather than defining urban Maori or Maori in general in terms of the degree to which they possess the more conventional markers of Maori identity, affirmation and support of these very real connections can only contribute to more positive and inclusive perspectives of what is a strong Maori identity.

## **We Rock the Polynesians**

This study suggests that many Maori young people in South Auckland may have real and strong connections with Pacific people. Maori and Pacific young people in this community share many things. Firstly, some share whakapapa connections, having parents from different

ethnic groups. Many Maori and Pacific young people are physically similar, have similar body types and tend to have common styles of dress. In this study Maori and Pacific people live in the same place, have similar experiences of school and community. Many have comparable family situations, and most have an understanding of the shared historical and ancestral connections between their respective cultures. Many also share similar financial and material conditions, common experiences of racism and discrimination, and negative societal stereotypes of poverty, crime and violence. Some may also share a sense of being urban and somewhat “out of place” within more traditional cultural models.

This is not to say that Maori and Pacific young people think they are the *same*, only that an *affinity* exists in this community – perhaps like no where else in the world – that is impossible to ignore. Rather, it should at least be acknowledged, and taken into account when conceptualising youth development in this community. Also, a strong affinity between Maori and Pacific youth takes *nothing* away from the immense sense of pride most Maori and Pacific youth feel for their own cultures. Instead this affinity *adds* to their identity and seems to play directly into what for many is a key component of their identity as Southsiders.

It is possible that some Maori and Pacific adults may view this affinity as an alarming trend and something to be discouraged. Some may feel threatened that this affinity signifies some kind of dilution of the essential markers of their respective ethnic identities. Additionally, dominant discourses that continually reiterate Maori and Pacific failure and inferiority, and the subsequent attitudes that we develop towards each other as a result, must also play a huge part in some feeling that greater Maori and Pacific unity is not an appropriate solution. Although these points are important and bear some reflection, adults that view an affinity between Maori and Pacific people solely as negative, must consider what impact this may have on the young people who take strength, confidence and belonging from these connections.

## Conclusion

The young people who contributed to this research are sophisticated and experienced negotiators of their identity. Experienced in that 'being Maori' and the issue of identity per se is something that is very real to these young people and something they have given thought to prior to this study. Sophisticated in terms of the discursive and narrative tools employed to create positive identity markers while also reflecting a wider societal context of marginality.

Throughout this thesis conventional indicators of Maori identity are used to describe many of the taken-for-granted markers of what it means to be Maori. While these markers are important to some, particularly those for whom South Auckland is their tribal area, and seen as valuable taonga that belong to us, they are not necessarily relevant to the everyday lives and environments of some young Maori. The importance of these markers seems to be reinforced in schools, where status is given to students more involved in specific cultural activities and institutions, but where there are increasing difficulties in providing the same sense of security and positive reinforcement for Maori students in the mainstream.

Complementing, contrasting or contradicting these conventional understandings are negative stereotypes, statistics and representations of Maori around notions of poverty, violence and dysfunctional parenting and families. Over the course of time, and through continual reinforcement from wider society these experiential indicators in themselves become markers of Maori identity. Wider societal racism against Maori as played out for example in the media and social statistics, are not only powerful in the force of negative images they create (the internalisation of which is apparent in some of these findings) but also in the deficiency of positive images of Maori; yet, all participants in this study were eager to describe their pride in being Maori.



In this study, some of the positive images about being Maori come from a heightened sense of connection with the local environment. Similar to the experiential indicators, negative representations of South Auckland as a place of crime and deprivation were evident. Unlike the experiential indicators though, participants seemed to exert a greater sense of control, confidence and agency in not only challenging this discourse but also in constructing positive counter images based on a shared sense of the Southside collective. This distinctive Southside identity was an important part of who these young people feel they are. Living Southside conveyed a wide array of meanings and connections, which for most in this study, was a source of collective strength and pride and individual self confidence and belonging. Just as our tipuna in coming to Aotearoa, would have constructed their identity in different ways in relation to their changing environments, so too today, identity for young people was shaped by both the local and wider settings.

This challenges the way we conceptualise identity and the way we seek to address Maori well being. Continuing to conceptualise identity through a fixed, essentialised and individualistic lens will miss the bigger picture. If being Maori is only about conventional indicators we must ask ourselves what it means to those who don't "have" these identity markers? Identity then risks becoming constructed around what is 'lacking', in terms of these markers and in terms of how Maori as a population are portrayed.

The challenge is also in the role that existing environments (ie, media, social statistics, societal discourse) play in establishing and perpetuating negative stereotypes of Maori identity. Ironically, health promotion and other approaches may also at times reinforce this by targeting and framing interventions that represent Maori as a population in 'need' (ie, needing better parenting, healthier lifestyles, youth at risk).

This study suggests that action is needed that builds on and reinforces all the positive markers of identity that young Maori display, not just the conventional indicators. To acknowledge, encompass and strengthen the broad range of identities evident in young Maori today will contribute to a more embracing and inclusionary perspective of culture and identity with implications for both research and praxis.

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