Social identity and differences in psychological and economic outcomes for mixed and sole-identified Māori

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ABSTRACT

Māori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand and are culturally and ethnically diverse. Previous research suggests that Māori who identify jointly as European (New Zealand's dominant group) may have improved employment outcomes, income and levels of education relative to those who identify solely as Māori. However, research exploring the broader constellation of factors linked to multiple versus sole-ethnic affiliation for Māori remains scarce. We examine differences in outcomes for Māori depending upon their single versus multiple ethnic affiliation as Māori, Māori/European, or European (but with Māori ancestry) in a national probability sample (N = 1416). Results indicated that people who identified jointly at Māori/European expressed political attitudes more aligned with Europeans. However, while Māori/Europeans may be more aligned with other Europeans in terms of support for mainstream political parties and intergroup attitudes, they remained lower on various indicators of social and economic status. In this latter regard, Māori/Europeans reported outcomes more similar to their sole-Māori counterparts.

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1. Introduction

Social identity theory (SIT) provides a foundation for understanding the implications of social inequality for collective and individual identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A basic premise of SIT is that groups in society (social classes, gender and ethnic groups) are situated within a social hierarchy in which some groups are 'higher' and others 'lower' depending upon the amount of power, prestige and influence those groups collectively hold.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that individuals strive for favourable evaluations of their own group or for a positive social identity. The more positively one's group is perceived, the greater the positive evaluations individuals can draw from in interpreting themselves. Conversely, people who belong to a low status group may be prone to a negative social identity if they internalise unfavourable appraisals within their own self-concept (Cross, 1971, 1978, 1991). Moreover, as they are likely to be perceived less positively by members of high-status groups, they may be subject to discrimination. This in itself is detrimental as it can work to exclude them from accessing quality education, employment, housing and opportunities for upward social mobility.

Here, we adopt a SIT framework to examine the ways in which Māori (the indigenous peoples of New Zealand), have individually and collectively defined themselves in relation to the dominant social group in New Zealand (New Zealanders mainly of British descent, and also referred to as New Zealand Europeans or Pākehā). Māori have been present in New

Zealand for over a thousand years (Walker, 1990) but have a more recent history of colonisation by European colonials who settled in NZ from the early 1800s (Te Puni Kokiri, 1996). Largely due to force of numbers and through a series of questionable 'agreements' with Māori, European settlers asserted political control in New Zealand from the 1870s and have maintained dominance since that time (King, 2003; Orange, 1992). Māori are now a minority ethnic group (at 14.6 percent the population as of the 2006 New Zealand census) swamped by Europeans/Pākehā (approximately 70 percent). Māori are now a disadvantaged or minority group in New Zealand.

1.1. Social identity theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) suggested that disadvantaged or lower status groups have three options for elevating their social identities (see also Brewer, 1979, 1988).

- The stigmatised or disadvantaged minority may compete with the dominant out-group directly and attempt to displace them at the top of the hierarchy.
- The stigmatised or disadvantaged minority may attempt to improve the meanings associated with group membership by asserting political independence, building group unity and pride or promoting their group more favourably in the public arena.
- Minority or stigmatised group members may try to move from their in-group into the dominant out-group by attempting to pass as/be accepted as out-group members. This may involve dissociating from the minority or stigmatised group while attempting to identify with the higher status group. This is typically attempted by emulating dominant group members, adopting their ideologies, reducing contact with in group members and forming close relationship with dominant group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1984; van Knippenberg, 1978, 1984).

The first two strategies are collectively driven, while the last strategy occurs at the individual level. Various factors are assumed to determine which strategy, if any, groups and individuals employ. Socio-historical factors promote or demote the status of different groups in society and personal motivations determine the extent to which individuals wish to switch from one group to another. According to Tajfel (1981) group permeability also needs to be considered. In the case of ethnicity, a major determinant of group permeability is physical appearance. As Saperstein (2012) observes, ethnic and racial identification is shaped by both self-identification and ascription. In this respect, marginalised minorities with mixed ethnic backgrounds who approximate the appearance of dominant group out-group members should find it easier to move into the dominant group (see also Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Tajfel's (1981) interest in the identity management strategies of low status and disadvantaged groups helps us to understand what motivates identity related choices – such as why individuals show favouritism for some aspects of their identities over others and also why minority groups engage in collective activities to represent themselves in the best possible light (Verkuyten, 2005). In relation to individual responses to negative social group identities a substantial amount of work has examined racial 'passing' and how minorities align themselves with, or distance themselves from, social groups to which they visibly belong in order to avoid the negative perceptions attached to those groups (Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Mills, 1999; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

Here we argue that Māori have engaged in all three strategies specified by SIT and we demonstrate this in relation to three distinct groups of Māori (as defined by their different ethnic affiliations). The three groups are; those who identify their ethnicity solely as Māori, those who identify their ethnicity as both Māori and European and those who identify as sole European (but also report Māori ancestry). We examine differences in political attitudes and social and economic outcomes for these three groups. We assert that while people with Māori ancestry who identify as sole European may appear similar to other Europeans in many ways, they still experience more disadvantage in various social and economic domains; hence, in terms of outcomes this group look more like other Māori, than they do like Europeans in general.

To understand how these differences might occur, we provide a brief sketch of contemporary Māori/Pākehā relations. We then discuss the collective identity management strategies and identity choices available to people with Māori ancestry.

1.2. Māori in contemporary New Zealand society

As a group Māori continue to feature prominently in most negative social statistics and remain socio-economically disadvantaged relative to Pākehā/Europeans (Kelsey, 1995; Chapple, 2000). Borell, Gregory, McCreanor, Jensen, and Barnes (2009) discussed the ways in which Pākehā advantage remains firmly established in many areas of social, economic and political life in New Zealand. Moreover, several studies indicate Māori continue to be the victims of prejudice and negative stereotypes (Bayard, Holmes & Murachver, 2001; Harris et al., 2006; McCreanor, 1993, 1997; Walker, 2002). However, the gap in positive economic and health outcomes experienced by Māori and Pākehā depends, at least partially, on how ethnicity is defined. In particular, Kukutai (2004) has observed that those of Māori descent who also report non-Māori identification experience social and economic advantage relative to those of Māori descent who identify primarily as Māori (see also see Callister, 2008; Chapple & Rea, 1998; Gould, 1996, 2000).

Despite the observable disadvantages experienced by Māori, research indicates that many Māori feel strongly positive about their ethnic identity. Houkamau (2006) reported that Māori women who were socio-politically oriented preferred