

Perspectives towards Māori identity by Māori heritage language learners

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Māori identities continue to evolve and adapt as a result of social and environmental changes Māori experience. Well-known markers of Māori identity including whakapapa Māori and te reo Māori are explored within this study. A qualitative study of 19 Māori heritage language learners ranging from beginner through to advanced levels of proficiency participated in this research. Results indicated that many Māori experience racism and discrimination, and as such provides evidence for why some Māori may not choose to enhance aspects of their Māori identity, including learning te reo. Participants in the study demonstrated that Māori cultural identity development was a process requiring support from significant others. Relationships with whakapapa whānau, and others from the language community provided relief from discrimination, and enhanced a desire to be viewed as Māori. Furthermore, te reo Māori was viewed as a resource for engaging in Māori cultural environments where the language was spoken.

Keywords: Māori identity, whakapapa whānau, te reo Māori

Māori have undergone a series of dynamic changes in the reclaiming of space and identity (Smith, 1989). Who we are and who we want to become are both equally important questions for negotiating our identity (Hall, 1990; Robson & Reid, 2001). Māori identities continue to evolve with the change that Māori have experienced, and continue to experience. Since the 1960s, Māori have begun the process of “renegotiating and reclaiming the past” and *te reo* Māori has been central to this process (Smith, 1989, p. 6). Although research has been conducted on *te reo* Māori, and identity, very few studies have explored, in detail, how these two processes influence one another in a (post) colonial context. This study will explore how Māori heritage language (HL2) learners perceive Māori identity and how these perceptions may impact on Māori language learning behaviours.

With one in seven people in New Zealand identifying as Māori in 2013 (Statistics NZ, 2013), the way in which Māori view identity is of particular relevance to understanding Aotearoa as a nation. Māori identity has been labeled in numerous ways that were consistent with Western constructs of ethnic identity categorisation across various times. Post-

contact, Māori were identifiable as Māori based ‘lifestyle’. Subsequently, Māori identity was measured through blood quantum (using a fraction based system) (Pool, 1991). The current government trend of ethnic identification offers two options for measuring Māori ethnic identity. First, Māori are Māori if they have Māori ancestry, and second, if they choose to identify as Māori (Kukutai & Callister, 2009). One of these identity types can be thought of as ascribed (i.e. *whakapapa* based/having Māori heritage) and the other achieved (i.e. reaching a state where one chooses to be Māori) (Marcia, 1966; Phinney, 1989).

Given the historical context of colonisation in New Zealand (as documented in numerous Waitangi Tribunal reports) exploring Māori identities requires an understanding of the history in which contemporary Māori identities evolve. In the context of reclaiming Māori identity, Pitman (2012, p. 46) indicated:

“Defining who you are [as Māori] is important. We must reclaim the right to define ourselves because it’s that constant redefining of us by the coloniser that causes schizophrenia, confusion and separation from each other.”

Reclaiming a ‘right’ to claim a

Māori identity has been studied in detail. McIntosh explains that Māori choose to identify as Māori, the individual is engaging in the act of “claims making” (2005).

Following the concepts of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), rather than making self-proclamations of one’s preferred identity, others must agree with the identity claim that is laid. Through processes of colonisation, including the labeling and categorisation of Māori, the personal act of claiming a Māori identity can be difficult for those who believe in a set of criteria and perceive themselves to have failed to meet aspects of a set of criteria for ingroup membership.

Of Māori who claim to be ethnically Māori, 46.5% identified Māori as their sole ethnic group, this percentage fell from 52.8% in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). With 45.6% of Māori indicating that they had one other ethnic group other than Māori, these statistics highlight the increasing diversity of Māori identity profiles. Those who are interested in claiming a Māori identity may feel more or less comfortable to make a claim depending on their acquisition of a range of identity markers. Some familiar markers of Māori identity include knowledge of *whakapapa*, *mātauranga* Māori, *te reo* Māori, and visible features (including physical racially defining characteristics and in some cases *tā moko*¹ or the display of *taonga*²) (Durie, 2001; Higgins, 2004; McIntosh, 2005; Penetito, 2011). In addition to the features mentioned above, contribution to the wider group by being ‘seen’ in Māori contexts, such as marae (*kanohi kitea*) or maintaining relationships with one’s *ahi kā* (keeping the home fires burning). Māori who are investing in learning their heritage language are likely to incorporate aspects of these identity markers into their descriptions of central components of

1 Māori designed tattoos.

2 Māori adornments

Māori identity. Furthermore, Māori HL2 learners' views of identity may contribute to their personal motivation for language learning. Alternatively, language learning could be a catalyst for broadening aspects of Māori identity, including relationships.

Whakapapa as a central marker of Māori identity.

A common culturally mandated form of Māori identity is through the role of *whakapapa*³ (Durie, 2001; Lawson-Te Aho, 2010; Mead, 2003). *Whakapapa*, by definition, insinuates a set of relationships with the living and the departed, and the individual and their environment in a wider sense of the meaning. Mikaere (2010, p. 225) indicates that *whakapapa*:

“establishes that everything in the natural world shares a common ancestry. With this knowledge of interconnection comes an acute awareness of interdependence which, in turn, fosters the realisation that our survival is contingent upon the nurturing of relationships, both with one another and with the world around us.”

Whakapapa spans over time and space giving those with shared *whakapapa* a shared history and narrative (Walker, 1989). *Whakapapa* claims to identity are founded on relationships that a person has with their *whānau*⁴ or wider groupings (including *hapū*⁵ and *iwi*⁶) who equally share a common *whakapapa*. When discussing the importance placed on representations of Māori ancestors, Mead (1993) explains:

“...as individuals we have no identity except by reference to them⁷. We are beings only because they prepared the way for us, gave us a slot in a system of human relations, a place in the whakapapa lines, and membership in a whānau and in an iwi.” (p. 206)

From this view, *whakapapa* connections provide a place of belonging for those who share mutual *whakapapa* connections.

For individuals who hold secure bonds within their *whakapapa* relationships, these individuals are likely to enjoy a sense of belonging that such

3 ancestry.

4 family, including extended family

5 subtribe

6 tribe

7 'Them' in this context is referring to the ancestors

relationships provide. Traditionally, the place of *whakapapa* in Māori society was highly valued as it provided individuals with direct guidance about their role and status within a group (Mead, 2003). Brewer and Yuki (2007, p. 314) describe that:

“In cultures where ingroups are defined primarily as relational networks, well-being and self-esteem may be more closely associated with enhancement of the quality of relationships.”

Similar to the principles of relational selves (Brewer & Yuki, 2007), for Māori, the self was made meaningful through the web of interpersonal connections between *whakapapa* ties.

Findings from Te Kupenga, a study of Māori wellbeing, also indicated that 89% of Māori were able to identify their *iwi*, and 62% had been to the marae that they had *whakapapa* connections to and of those 62%, there were 34% who had visited in the past year (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). These results could be interpreted to demonstrate that a number of Māori may know how to identify their *iwi*, however, the centrality of those relationships to their identity may not be salient, particularly in instances where they are operating in mainstream settings. Reid and Robson (2001) take the position that:

“central to tangata whenua identity is whakapapa. Whakapapa is used to connect with or differentiate oneself from others. Many view hapū and iwi identity as a prerequisite to Māori identity.... However, while being identified by hapū or iwi is fundamental for some, it may be inaccessible for others” (p. 3).

Statistics New Zealand research has explored the notion of *whānau* and the centrality of both *whakapapa* *whānau* (a collective with shared ancestry) and *kaupapa* *whānau* (those with a common purpose or goal) inclusively (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). Findings indicated that four-fifths of respondents indicated that they viewed their *whānau* through *whakapapa* only, whereas the remaining participants viewed their *kaupapa*-based relationships (friends and others) as inclusive of their *whānau*. It is possible that there are a number of Māori who may rely on *kaupapa* *whānau* (of which include a Māori language speaking community) to provide the individual

with a sense of collective Māori identity.

Te reo Māori and Māori identity

Te reo Māori is commonly considered a central aspect to Māori identity and has been closely linked with the concept of personal *mana*⁸. Revered Māori language expert and advocate, Kāretu (1993, p. 226) explains:

“...for me language is essential to my mana. Without it, could I still claim to be Māori? I do not think so, for it is the language which has given me what mana I have and it is the only thing which differentiates me from anyone else.”

These sentiments have been shared with other well-known Māori leaders, exemplifying the intrinsic connection between the language and Māori identity. Dewes (1977, p. 55) notes *“Ko te pūtaka o te Māoritanga ko te reo Māori, he taonga tuku iho nā ngā tupuna”*. Underlying these positions is the idea that Māori are custodians of the culture, and *te reo* Māori is an inheritance from ancestors, and the gods (Mead, 2003).

Although some Māori speakers view *te reo* Māori as closely tied to Māori cultural ingroup membership, through processes of colonisation, many Māori do not possess the skills to engage with their culture through Māori language. Pihama (2001, p.71) indicated that ensuring the assimilation of Māori was enacted through

“the replacement of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga, or what is described as the ‘habits and usages of the Natives’ with the customs and language of the Pākehā colonists.”

There is an acknowledgement that by removing *te reo* Māori from the mouths of its native speakers, the colonial agenda was achieved more readily. The oppression of indigenous native languages has been used in numerous occasions by imperial/colonial forces (Wa Thiong'o, 1986) for cultural assimilation or inhalation (Memmi, 1965).

With merely 21.3% of Māori self-reporting that they are capable of conversing about *“a lot of everyday things in te reo Māori”*, this means

8 Mana has a variety of definitions (authority, control, influence, prestige, and power) to name a few definitions (Williams, 2010)

9 The root of the Māori culture is in the language, a gift from our ancestors

that essentially, four out of five Māori are unable to use the language on an everyday level (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Furthermore, 21.3% appears to be slightly optimistic given that Te Kupenga 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), indicated that merely 11% (50,000) Māori adults indicated that they could “*speak te reo Māori very well, or well*”. The low rate of Māori language speakers raises issues for both the health of the language, but it also raises questions about criteria for claiming Māori cultural ingroup membership based on language abilities.

If *te reo* Māori is a central marker of identity, yet four-fifths of the population do not possess such skills to meet the criteria, this leaves a number of Māori in a vicarious position. Those who are capable of speaking *te reo* Māori, have knowledge of *mātauranga* Māori and their *whakapapa* connections are defined as a small elite minority holding social and political power in some Māori settings (Penetito, 2011).

On the other hand, the small proportion of Māori language speakers means that the survival of the language falls on the shoulders of the few, which is a heavy responsibility to uphold for future generations. It is likely that some Māori language speakers would be supportive of Māori identity definitions that are inclusive of being a language speaker, as this may be believed to prompt other Māori, who are non-Māori speakers, to learn the language.

Impact of discrimination on Māori cultural identities

McIntosh (2005) suggested that Māori identities in contemporary settings vary in the centrality of cultural connectedness. Her identity model is located within a contemporary Māori-specific context and incorporates three categories: fixed, forced and fluid identities. Fixed identities include those that are described as ‘traditional’ identities, involving a set of beliefs that some Māori view as necessary in order to claim authentic group membership. Within this fixed ‘traditional’ identity, knowledge of *whakapapa*, *te reo* Māori and *mātauranga* Māori are prioritised. The fixed identity profile is perhaps highlighted in the sections above. Moving to the second identity profile, fluid

identities include those who intertwine mainstream Europeanised identities with traditional identities, whereby new fused identities are possible. The final category includes those who occupy a forced identity profile, which is characterised by deprivation and marginality. Those operating from a marginal profile are unlikely to see value in their Māori identity or in *te reo* Māori, as their view of being Māori is largely clouded by discrimination and poverty.

There continues to be a great proportion of individuals with Māori ancestry who prefer not to identify as Māori (Durie, 2005; Kukutai & Callister, 2009). Reasons for Māori choosing not to identify as Māori are likely to come from the high rates of discrimination enacted toward Māori by the dominant culture, Pākehā. Health research findings have indicated that Māori experience discrimination at rates higher than any other ethnic group in New Zealand (Harris et al., 2006).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) may help to understand why it might be advantageous for Māori to reduce the number of Māori identity markers when they are constantly operating in discriminatory environments. Social identity theory recognises that individuals are motivated by a need to see themselves favourably in comparison with other groups. For groups of lower status (which usually includes migrant and indigenous groups), positive social comparison is not necessarily achievable if they are being compared to high-status groups. Groups holding low status positions in society may attempt to “pass” as members of higher status groups in order to achieve a positive view of the self (Tajfel, 1978). However, those who attempt to ‘pass’ can experience negative psychological consequences (Phinney, 1990). Individuals who are operating from within this profile are unlikely to invest in learning *te reo* Māori.

Summary

This study will explore how some Māori HL2 learners view their identities as Māori. As this is an exploratory study, set hypothesis will not be tested. However, drawing from previous research, it is possible that Māori HL2 learners may share in a common view that *te reo*

Māori is central to Māori culture. Given the high rates of discrimination found in other studies, Māori in this study are also likely to have experienced racism and prejudice. Māori HL2 learners who have begun investing in relationships that are founded on a common understanding of the value of Māori culture and language are likely to find shelter within their *whānau whānau* of Māori HL2 learners. As *whakapapa* is one of the most commonly viewed culturally mandated forms of Māori identity pre-requisites (Lawson-Te Aho, 2010; Mead, 2003), it is likely that *whakapapa* will play a role in the process of Māori cultural identity formation and negotiation.

Method

Participants

The participants involved in this study were those from both the advanced and undergraduate groups. Participants included 11 undergraduate students from Victoria University of Wellington, with introductory to conversational levels of language proficiency with a mean age of 22 years. Advanced level learners included eight participants, who were graduates of Te Panekiretanga o te reo Māori, a programme for Māori language excellence, established to train already proficient Māori language speakers in the art of *whaikōrero* and *karanga*. Gloyne (2014, p. 306) indicates that Te Panekiretanga o te reo is a *whare* “*hei kāinga mō te matatau kia matatau kē ake ai!*”. This group had a mean age of 37.1 years.

Recruitment

Materials and procedure

The structured interview schedule was developed based on findings from the literature review and the personal observations of other Māori HL2 learners who indicated a range of possible Māori identity definitions. The interviews were designed to enable participants to freely discuss how they viewed the combination of language and identity. Interviews were recorded using an Olympus Voice-Trek V-51

10 a house “that is a home for those who are already proficient to become even *moreso*”. This translation is not that of the original author

Digital Voice Recorder. These were then transcribed, initially including stammers and stutters (in accordance with Braun and Clarke, 2006) and sent to participants for review consistent with a Kaupapa Māori guiding principle of ‘*Manaaki ki te tangata*¹¹’ and ‘*Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata*¹²’ (Smith, 1999, p. 120). Of the 19 participants, only one chose to make an addition to their transcript, however, the remaining participants chose not make changes.

Once interviews were approved, transcripts were coded using a combination of processes including thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014). An interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) (Smith, 2004) was also applied which is a qualitative research method commonly used in psychology. The IPA acknowledges that the researchers lived experiences interact with the data. Rather than assuming that the researcher is capable of being objective, the subjective nature of qualitative research is acknowledged and appreciated within this approach. NVivo software was used to manage the large quantity of interview data. The School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington provided ethical approval for this study.

Interviewees were provided with the opportunity to select a pseudonym of their choice. Names were applied in order to make the reader connect more with the text. Two participants, preferred to keep their own name rather than use a pseudonym. Individuals were interviewed in Māori centered spaces (such as Māori language tutorial rooms, or indigenous psychology rooms) or in the participants workplace due to the convenience for the interviewee. Interview locations were chosen specifically to allow the process of power-sharing between the researcher and participants to take place consistent with Kaupapa Māori principles (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

11 Translated directly as “share and host people, be generous”. In this context, the process of manaaki ensures that the mana of the participant was upheld through transparency in the research process

12 Translated as “do not trample over the mana of people”

Analysis

Each of the recordings was listened to at least three times before being imported into the NVivo software. The interviewer was fairly familiar with the transcripts prior to coding. As transcripts were analysed, sematic nodes were created. These nodes were reviewed and refined using visual maps of how these individual nodes contributed to conceptual level themes. Nodes were then grouped together into larger clusters, which became the themes of the study consistent with thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Responses from advanced- and undergraduate-level learners were initially analysed separately but, after cross-references were made, it was clear that the discussions from both the undergraduate and advanced participants overlapped. Once initial stages of coding had been completed, each of the codes was scrutinised for consistency. This was largely a difficult process, as individual nodes appeared to overlap in a number of places. In order to ensure that themes were indeed discrete from one another, and internally consistent, a group of three Māori researchers were asked to provide comment on the extent to which the themes appeared internally consistent and discrete from other themes. The researchers comments were taken into consideration, and included in the following results.

Results

Theme 1: The centrality of whakapapa in the journey of identity exploration; the self in connection to whakapapa

For many participants, *whakapapa* relationships were central to their Māori identity development. Individuals who were raised outside of their tribal region were able to find a connection with their Māori identity through learning more about their *whakapapa whānau* connections.

Herewini: *I would have only been about 12 at the time... that I used to write back to my kaumātua and used to learn te reo, well not so much te reo, but more whakapapa, that was the real... my whakapapa. “Who am I where am I from?” those sorts of things.* (Advanced)

Similar to the assertions of Mikaere

(2010), many participants described *whakapapa* as a means of understanding the self through a wide set of connections. Such a holistic worldview is consistent with other relationally oriented cultures (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). The ability to understand how an individual is connected through an expansive web of relationships was viewed by some participants as central to understanding one’s identity.

Hori: *[Whakapapa is] fundamental to where we come from and everything in and around us, everything has whakapapa.* (Undergraduate)

Some participants viewed *whakapapa* as a means of providing guidance for future generations. Notably, only one participant discussed having a specific *whānau* strategy, however, a number of participants discussed the importance of retaining knowledge of *whakapapa* for supporting future generations.

Riria: *[In developing our whānau strategy] we looked at the language health, our physical health, and where we’re going to. So it’s almost like the 3 W’s: whakapapa, whenua, and waiata as the devices to guide you. Faces, places, and traces, that’s kind of how I would describe the journey.* (Advanced)

Consistent with other Māori authors, health and wellbeing were viewed as intertwined with culturally significant concepts of *whakapapa*, *whenua* and *waiata* (Durie, 2001; Ngata, 2014). Furthermore, Riria’s perspective indicated that not having access to *whakapapa* relationships had detrimental effects for individuals who may have been left without a sense of belonging to a wider group.

Riria: *[Nō te whakapapa] he mōhio nō te tangata nō hea ia, nō wai ia, e haere ana ia ki hea¹³. [...] knowing where you are, knowing where you fit, belonging, and having a place. Koinā te tino raruraru o ngā mea taka ki te hē. Kore mōhio nō hea, nō wai, ay. Ērā āhuatanga¹⁴.* (Advanced)

13 [Whakapapa provides] a person with understanding about where they’re from, who they came from, and where they’re going

14 *That’s a serious issue for those who have fallen by the wayside. No knowledge of where they’re from, or who they come from. Those types of things*

Theme 2: The impact of 'others' on Māori identity development.

Theme two explores how Māori identities interact with their social environments. The choice of being categorised as Māori comes from both an individual choice, but also from others' recognition. The following subthemes describe why individuals may adopt a variety of identity positions as Māori.

Subtheme 1: Developing a Māori identity in the face of racism

Māori identity is likely to be developed in a range of social environments, some of which are discriminatory. As explored in the previous theme, *whakapapa whānau* provided some Māori with a positive group level identity. Reaching a place where Māori want to identify as Māori may be difficult for some who are coping with discrimination based on their Māori ethnic identity. Māori who are choosing to engage with their culture may do so despite the experiences of racism.

Kura: *There are a lot of times when I'm in a Pākehā situation, like sporting for instance, me and my sister [name], we're sort of the only Māori in our crew. Especially I find in older generations, not so much in our generation but there's still sort of this racist undertone. Like they don't mean to be outwardly racist, but just sort of comments like "those Maorees".* (Undergraduate)

Aotea: *I felt a lot of positive and negative vibes being a Māori in the [state organisation that I worked for]. [...] I was [working] here in Wellington through the 80s and 90s through some pretty harsh times for Māori who were um, I mean the culture wasn't represented in any way, other than [negative social] statistics.* (Undergraduate)

The impact of developing a Māori identity in a discriminatory environment may be that some individuals choose to assimilate, reduce the number of visible or behavioural markers of Māori identity in order to protect the self from discrimination. Some may choose not to participate or contribute to the collective.

Issues of authenticity are commonly barriers experienced by Māori who may have chosen to identify as Māori. The prolific extent to which Māori tend to need to justify their

identity for authenticity based reasons led to the inclusion of an 'authenticity beliefs' subscale in Houkamau and Sibley (Houkamau & Sibley, 2010) Multi-Dimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement (MMM-ICE). Many Māori may desire to be considered authentic ingroup members and achieving a level of *te reo* Māori, or strengthening *whakapapa* ties may contribute to providing justification for Māori identity claims.

With this said, there are likely to be a number of individuals who may not view being 'inauthentic' Māori as detrimental to their identity, particularly when the ingroup is not viewed as holding high social value (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). When Māori are surrounded by discrimination, distancing oneself from the people who were being discriminated against acted to protect the self, which is consistent with self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Ana: *You come from intermediate, and high school and stuff and you've been labeled plastic Māori and you don't really care about it, because Māori's not a cool thing to be anyway.* (Undergraduate)

Although some Māori have the choice of 'passing', this is not always an option for Māori with physically Māori characteristics.

Puawai: *I can remember when I was a child growing up in [predominantly Pākehā region] I was a Māori firstly because of my skin, because of my lips, my nose.* (Advanced)

Māori who were physically/racially distinguishable as Māori reported long-term exposure to racism and discrimination. For those who were forced into such identity positions, being a member of a wider *whakapapa* group, as well as having cultural and linguistic knowledge provided strength to assert a Māori identity in the face of discrimination.

Mahinaarangi: *[I experience racism] all the time, no, actually I was only a kid then, I came up with more racism than that, yeah a bit different. I still get it sometimes. Not here so much, Wellington's pretty good [laugh]. But I always get "[name pronounced incorrectly]", "oh I thought it would be*

one of those names". What?! But I really don't react to it, until afterwards, it's like oh fuck 'n hell. I guess my Māori identity comes from tōku ingoa, nō taku kuia taku ingoa, he ingoa hoki nō te kāinga. He ingoa whakapapa nei a Mahinaarangi¹⁵. Um, and āe, ko taku reo me ngā tikanga¹⁶. (Advanced)

As mentioned in the above quote, the characteristics of the town often had an impact on the extent to which Māori experienced racism. Wellington, in particular, is a region where Māori hold a higher level of income than other regions (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), which could be attributed to some degree in lower rates of discrimination by the participant above.

Subtheme 2: Factors that support claims to a Māori identity

Results indicated that for Māori who choose to be classed as Māori by others, there were a number of ways in which this could be achieved. As described by a number of authors (T. Kāretu, 1993; Mead, 2003; Walker, 1989), Māori identity markers commonly included knowledge of *te reo* Māori, and *whakapapa*.

Puawai: *A Māori identity is what you make of it, it's a way of life. If you want to be a Māori and call yourself a Māori then you can, however, you need to be prepared for people to call you on it, and be able to back yourself.*

Int: *What would you need to back yourself?*

Puawai: *Te reo.*

Int: *Whakapapa?*

Puawai: *Absolutely. [...] Whakapapa is important, dare I say, one of the most important things you need to have in order to have a Māori identity.* (Advanced)

Consistent with self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987), Puawai explained that although one may make a claim to an identity, the wider community must support the preferred identity. Two ways in which such a claim could be upheld is through *te reo* Māori, and through *whakapapa*. Notably, the interviewer prompted *whakapapa* as a concept for identity claims making.

¹⁵ my name, my name comes from/belongs to my grandmother, it's also a name from home. Mahinaarangi is an ancestral name
¹⁶ Yes, my language and customs

Therefore, it is not clear whether that a *whakapapa*-based identity was assumed knowledge, or whether *whakapapa* may have been an after thought. Given that Māori language learners were the target participant group, this may have promoted *te reo* as a central aspect of identity.

Similarly, the participants below demonstrate the point that claiming a Māori identity is based on others' agreement consistent with findings from research in other relational cultures (Heine & Lehman, 1999). *Te reo* Māori and knowledge of the culture provided some beginner level HL2 participants with greater capacity to gain recognition for their ingroup membership.

Ana: *If I speak te reo then it will be much more easy for me to blend straight away [...] rather than just be this one that shows up, I might have the blood but don't know any of the culture.* (Undergraduate)

Those who have experienced being outsiders within their culture noted that there was a difference between having *whakapapa* Māori and being recognised as Māori, particularly when they were not regularly in contact with their *haukāinga*¹⁷. *Te reo* Māori provided a bridge for creating greater feelings of ingroup membership.

Sam: *I guess, it's just the whole combination of factors, the cultural knowledge, te reo, that contributes to a Māori identity, but also being recognised by others, particularly being recognised by the haukāinga*¹⁸. (Undergraduate)

Being recognised as being a valued member of a cultural group by other ingroup members is possibly more testing for individuals who have experienced some form of misunderstanding about their position as Māori by others.

Sam: *I think my experiences have always been quite positive in [terms of recognition], so if you say you're Māori and you can demonstrate some of the values or connections through, Māori are generally accepting of people, perhaps that's because we're in an urban environment, I'm not sure*

¹⁷ The sense of the word here refers to the people who they share ancestral connections with who continue to participate regularly in marae affairs

¹⁸ Literally translates to 'home' (Williams, 2010). However, the participant's use of the term appears to mean the people who are involved with the daily affairs of the *marae*

if that works in other areas. But um, so, I have kind of found that people are accepting of if you say you're Māori, they respect that you have that Māori identity. (Undergraduate)

It is possible that regions vary in the extent to which they adhere to fixed definitions about who can claim ingroup membership. In some regions, Māori who may not appear visibly Māori may assert their identity based on their *whakapapa*.

For some Māori participants who had knowledge of and access to their *whakapapa* connections, being able to rely on these relationships as a foundation for their claim to a Māori identity meant that *te reo* Māori was not a necessary pre-requisite prior to learning *te reo*.

Hēni: *I could rely on having, up until that point I was definitely Māori and my mother was Māori, I could recite my genealogy back to Ranginui*¹⁹. *I could give you the paper, here we go. I didn't need to speak Māori, I didn't need to be able to do anything. I could validate being Māori solely on the basis of.* [those aspects previously mentioned] (Advanced)

Although there was a shared acknowledgement by all participants that *te reo* Māori was of significant cultural value, there was also an awareness that *te reo* Māori was not always strictly necessary in order to identify as Māori. Individuals who were not racially distinguishable as Māori, or did not have a strong grasp of *te reo* Māori were able to rely on other aspects of the self, such as behaviour and understanding of Māori cultural values, to provide themselves with a secure ingroup Māori identity.

Sam: *I think behaving Māori is actually a lot more important in terms of perception instead of being able to speak Māori. Because [...] I'm not very good at speaking Māori, [but] because I believe in those values of manaakitanga, and whanaungatanga, and then when I go into a Māori context, such as a marae, then you get in there and you do the work, and that sort of thing. People accept you as Māori. I think even if you don't have te reo, but you still behave Māori, a lot of people will respect that.*

¹⁹ Moorefield describes Ranginui as "atua of the sky and husband of Papa-tū-ā-nuku, from which union originate all living things." (Moorefield, Te Aka online Māori-English, English-Māori dictionary, retrieved, 8 June, 2015)

(Undergraduate)

Many participants were uncomfortable with nonnegotiable definitions of Māori identity and preferred inclusivity over exclusivity. Where participants acknowledged that there are instances where Māori were unable to speak *te reo* Māori, *whakapapa* was emphasised.

Pānia: *Māori identity, hmmm. whakapapa. Whakapapa is for me one word answer. Kei roto i te toto o te tangata*²⁰. (Advanced)

Te Rina: *I'd just go whakapapa every time.* (Undergraduate)

The position of *whakapapa* allows individuals to claim a Māori identity irrespective of their language skills. Identity based on *whakapapa* also gives Māori a position of belonging within a wider *whānau* without other pre-requisites. Te Rina's view of identity was one of inclusivity. She explains why she chose *whakapapa* as being central to Māori identity over other descriptions:

Te Rina: *I don't think you have to kōrero Māori and understand it to identify as Māori, but if I come back to your feeling confident and comfortable in [Māori] spaces, then I think te reo does help, because I don't have that fear that somebody's going to come and speak to me and I'm going to look like a dickhead sitting there "playing Māori".* (Undergraduate)

The level of comfort that newly proficient Māori language speakers experienced in Māori language governed domain was a shared experience among participants.

Te Aowhītiki: *I think your avenues [open] up and you just feel a lot more comfortable doing Māori events and Māori hui rather per se, if you came in just being Māori. I'm not saying you can't just be Māori (and not a Māori speaker) and go to hui, but for me, I feel a lot more at ease and more comfortable in a Māori context where able to, if ever needed to, speak te reo and I can.* (Undergraduate)

Due to the impacts of colonisation on Māori (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, 2011), some participants indicated that it was not appropriate to suggest a Māori person was not Māori based on cultural knowledge. However, on the one hand, Māori can be categorically or ethnically Māori because of their *whakapapa*, but on the other hand, they can become more culturally Māori by learning more about their culture and language.

²⁰ in a person's blood

When comparing differing perspectives, some individuals saw the place of *te reo* Māori as more central to being able to claiming a Māori identity than others. In particular, *te reo* Māori was viewed by some as being a central mediator between the depth of cultural understanding that was achievable.

Hoani: *He whakautu i tua atu i [te reo], ko tō toto. Mehemea he toto Māori, he Māori koe. Engari, mēnā e kōrero tātou e pā ana ki te tuakiritanga he aha ngā āhukatanga e whakaatu ana ki tō tuakiritanga, māku tonu e kī atu, ki ōku ake nei wheako āe, ko tō reo. Ko tō reo, me ngā āhukatanga Māori, pērā rawa i ngā tikanga me te kawa, me te tapu²¹...* (Advanced)

Others viewed the link between *whakapapa* and *te reo* Māori as intrinsically intertwined. The participant below described that he viewed *whakapapa* as a concept as uniquely Māori. Some participants considered Māori knowledge and use of *te reo* Māori as being an obligation arising from having *whakapapa* Māori.

Timothy: *Whakapapa is Māori identity, but in my view, to strengthen your whakapapa and that, you need te reo Māori. [...] You sort of honour your whakapapa, where as you see some other iwi²², you see some non-Māori, they don't have the honour in their genealogy, that's how I see it.* (Undergraduate)

Although some of the concepts discussed above were unique to this participant, the participant acknowledges the cultural importance that Māori traditionally placed on *whakapapa* and views *te reo* Māori as an interconnected feature in need of maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

Theme 3: Differing levels of access to extended whakapapa relationships

Similar to the forced identity position described by McIntosh (2005), some participants were unable to access their *whakapapa* connections, which was a barrier to feeling justified to claim their Māori identity. As connected to the views

above, Māori participants generally preferred to view Māori identities as inclusive over exclusive. Those who had less access to relationships with their *whakapapa whānau* found ways of achieving a Māori identity through exploring *te reo* Māori and expanding their cultural knowledge and relationships with *kaupapa whānau*, which were founded within Māori culturally affirming environments. Relationships with Māori HL2 learners support Māori to develop positive Māori identities.

Despite that some Māori participants experienced high levels of interconnection with their *whakapapa whānau*, it was also acknowledged that some Māori were unable to access such relationships as readily.

Hēni: *[Whakapapa is] tied with history. Because [...] I think whakapapa is critical, but it's also marginalising to people who haven't had access to understanding um, you know where they come from, or, yeah where they come from and what sort of whakapapa they might have. I think a route via the language and cultural practice will more likely assist somebody on a whakapapa journey than the other way around. I don't think having a whakapapa journey is necessarily going to have a language and a cultural practice yeah, I think people can have whakapapa and that's where it starts and stops. Whereas I think people without it embarking on a journey of language and cultural practice is definitely a step to whakapapa. So I think it's tied in with histories, where we come from I guess yeah. So I think I prefer history [...], which is inclusive of whakapapa but not exclusive which whakapapa might be.*

For some Māori, access to family connections was not as readily available. Durie's (2006) Māori wellbeing model indicates that *whānau* are a crucial contributor to Māori wellbeing. Māori who felt isolated from their *whakapapa whānau* indicated that this lack of access left them with fewer claims to their Māori identity. This point is reified in the following excerpts.

Sam: *I've always found it difficult to have an iwi identity because we were always a bit disconnected from the iwi. I mean, we live 10 minutes away from our marae, but we only went*

back for hui²³ or tangi²⁴ or that sort of thing. So we did grow up a little bit disconnected from our iwi identity, so I think I'm focusing on my Māori identity, but I do think eventually I do want to go back and live in [home town] and I think that will be the point where I strengthen that iwi identity. (Undergraduate)

Hēni: *[My associate] struggled with his whakapapa, having been raised outside of his traditional boundaries, so he really sought the language, and that's facilitated his re-routing back to various hapū and that for him.* (Advanced)

The barriers that Māori experience may be a result of physical access to their *marae*, but also for Māori raised geographically close to their *tūrangawaewae*²⁵, there may be issues related to internal *whānau* histories that prevent younger generations from gaining access.

Being engaged with a Māori HL2 community that values *whakapapa* relationships may prompt Māori HL2 learners to invest more in re-engaging with their *whakapapa* relationships at a later date than if they were surrounded by a social ingroup that did not value such concepts.

Bubbles: *Kāore e kore ka mea atu au, he Māori ahau²⁶. I love the language, I love the culture, yeah I pretty much love everything about it. [...] a big part [of Māori identity] is having your whānau, your iwi, ērā momo mea²⁷, you know... my parents aren't really for that. The only time we ever go to a marae, [is when] someone dies, and that's it. They don't really push us to get to know our whānau. So koinei te take kāore au i te tino²⁸...* (Undergraduate)

Further on in the discussion with Bubbles she noted that "[having access to extended whānau/whakapapa relations has] never been a problem for me until

²³ gatherings

²⁴ grief ceremonies

²⁵ A place where individuals can claim belonging through *whakapapa* ties

²⁶ There's no doubt I would say to others I am Māori

²⁷ those types of things

²⁸ that's the reason I don't really... (The participant fades off here, however, it can be assumed perhaps she meant the she didn't feel as strongly comfortable saying that she had a strong Māori identity without having secure *whakapapa* relationships)

²¹ An answer other than the language is your blood. If you have Māori blood, you are Māori. However, if we are talking about identity, the types of things that identify your identity, then I would still have to say, from my own experiences, it is the language. The language, and the aspects of the Māori culture, for instance, the protocols, and customs, those things sacred

²² The use of the term 'iwi' here could be referring to groups of people or cultures

like now.” Similar to Yashima’s (2009) research, individuals who become fully immersed in the learning of a second language tend to adopt cultural values of the target language group. Being surrounded by Māori language speakers who may view cultural concepts, such as *whakapapa*, in high regard, may make Māori HL2 learners own *whakapapa* relationships more salient than before they had become immersed in a Māori HL2 community.

Ana: *Now that I’m learning te reo and I can see, along with the language I’m learning the culture and how my whānau and my whakapapa and all that sort of stuff you feel much more alright. [...] Now I feel like, not only do I have this blood in me but I’m learning about what it means and I also want to help, it develops, learning te reo Māori here at university has developed my confidence in that area, [...] it shows me what’s out there and it sort of reveals, you know, it brings out of the shadows the Māori identity, that I didn’t really know. And the more I learn about it, the more I discuss it with people and you know, what karakias mean, and why we do certain things, and why there’s tapu this, and like you know, I felt much more confident learning te reo.*

The quote above perhaps illustrates that there are a number of overlapping elements between identity markers that are relevant for Māori HL2 learners. *Whakapapa*, *te reo* Māori and the support systems that are developed within each of these culturally affirming groups may act to promote the desire to accentuate aspects of the self that promote a Māori identity.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how Māori identities are negotiated in contemporary times, particularly, through the experiences of Māori HL2 learners. Results indicated that many Māori may be exploring their identity through a variety of avenues, of which relationships play a central role. The act of claiming a Māori identity appears to interact with the wider social group and community. Consistent with other research, findings from this study demonstrated that Māori are constantly negotiating their identity position, often in situations clouded by discrimination. Having a support

network, and sense of belonging provides some Māori with resources that are needed in order to cope with being Māori in discriminatory societies. Furthermore, feeling good about being Māori within Māori contexts may enhance individuals feelings of belonging which in turn have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

Building on findings from other Māori researchers (Borell, 2005; Rata, 2012), Māori who have become disaffiliated from their *iwi* relationships through processes of colonisation, are likely to seek other avenues to achieve a positive collective Māori identity. While Māori in Borell’s study (which included Māori youth in South Auckland) preferred to make salient their geographical location of residence (South-sider identity), and more-so their ethnic identity, Māori HL2 learners in this study chose to invest in relationships with other learners of *te reo* Māori to enhance their collective identity as Māori.

Findings indicated that *te reo* Māori acted as a tool for building relationships within their HL2 *kaupapa whānau*. The ability to create relationships is central for cultures that value interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1990). Furthermore, being surrounded by other Māori who were culturally affirming of Māori cultural values, including the value of *whakapapa* relationships, promoted the culture and language as something that was worth investing in. Relationships with both the *kaupapa whānau* and *whakapapa whānau* may be especially important for Māori who are seeking affirmation of their Māori cultural identity.

This research suggests that while there are multiple identity positions that Māori occupy prior to engaging in *te reo* Māori acquisition, there is a tendency towards relational values as they progress in their language studies. Māori cultural values traditionally favour personalised relational collectivism (Durie, 2001) over individualism or depersonalised group collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007).

Related to Brewer and Chen’s (2007) relational self-construal, Heine and Lehman (Heine & Lehman, 1999) indicated that in collectivist cultures (i.e. those cultures that prioritise personalised relationships) feeling good about oneself

has less to do with “an individual’s personal feelings and self-evaluations” and “more to do with the feelings and evaluations of others” (p. 916). For Māori who are seeking ingroup belongingness, feeling positive about their Māori identity largely relies on the agreement and support of significant others instead of self-proclamations of ingroup membership.

Challenges: Discrimination as a barrier to accentuating a Māori identity

For some Māori who have experienced repeated exposure to racism and discrimination, it may be a long process before they even want to consider being identified as Māori. Living in an oppressive society has an influence on how indigenous people feel about claiming their identity and, for some, it is simpler just to dis-identify and assimilate into the mainstream (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). Given the fact that many Māori identify as being both Māori and Pākehā (Kukutai & Callister, 2009), those who can ‘pass’ as Pākehā may choose to do so to avoid discrimination (Tajfel, 1987).

Māori who participated in this study had all made the first step to learn *te reo* Māori, and some had achieved very high/near native levels of Māori language fluency. Therefore the identity positions of this group perhaps do not reflect Māori who have not begun engaging with their heritage language or do not have high levels of access to aspects of Māori culture. Despite these limitations, the collective experiences of this group provide perspectives that are not currently widely articulated in psychology literature.

Challenges: Essentialist/ Authenticity beliefs

Authenticity beliefs tended to be both implicitly and explicitly referred to within the results of this study. Authenticity beliefs tend to act to restrict the number of Māori who feel comfortable claiming a Māori identity, as claiming an ‘authentic’ identity requires the individual to meet a set of pre-defined criteria. These results were consistent with observations from Vedder and Virta (2005) whose research indicated that when a culture views the language as

central to its identity, the language gains importance as a qualifying factor for ingroup membership.

Durie (2001, p.83) acknowledges that “*mana tangata refers to the authority which comes from communities and their people... Collective responsibility, rather than individual brilliance is the norm.*” As a cultural group, it is necessary to take collective responsibility to ensure that all members feel that they have the right to being Māori. Māori within this study were largely supportive of definitions that are inclusive of varying realities as opposed to viewing Māori identities as strict.

A *marae* is able to gain *mana* as a result of extending hospitality, and also by “*maintaining a noticeably high level of activity at the marae*” (Department, n.d) as expressed in multiple *whakataukī*, including, for instance, “*he tangata takahi manuhiri, he marae puehu, he whare pungawerewere*”²⁹. A *marae puehu* can be interpreted as a *marae* at which only dust remains (ie without people or interactions), which is a disadvantage to the *haukāinga* on a number of levels. In contemporary contexts, if Māori do not feel that they are able to confidently engage with a space that they have ancestral connections to, due to perceived cultural or linguistic inexperience or inadequacies, such spaces are endangered of being “*marae puehu*”. The outcome of such disconnection could result in negative wellbeing (through a loss of *mana*) for both parties

Furthermore, Māori who view either *te reo* Māori or close relationships with *whakapapa* connections as strict criteria for ingroup membership, but do not have such language skills or access to relationships, may experience detrimental health and wellbeing outcomes. Māori generally already experience discrimination at a rate higher than any other ethnic group in the country, which Māori are indigenous to. For Māori who experience marginalisation in the mainstream, feeling that they are unable to participate in Māori contexts due to processes of colonisation may only enhance such experiences of marginalisation.

The difficulty that Māori language

²⁹ A *marae* that does not adequately host its guests is likely to become dusty, a house for spiders

speaking communities have is that authenticity beliefs that linked knowledge of *te reo* Māori with being Māori were entrenched since the 1920s after Māori began speaking English in homes (Kāretu, 1991). Authenticity beliefs appear to act as a threat to future generations who may not see the language or culture as worth investing in (King, 2007). From a behavioural perspective, authenticity beliefs use negative reinforcement as a warning to Māori who are non-Māori speakers of the danger of linguistic or cultural assimilation.

There are a number of challenges that lie ahead. From the perspective of linguistic survival, Māori language needs more language speakers and also, Māori need to feel comfortable identifying as Māori without cultural or linguistic pre-requisites given New Zealand’s colonial history. There appears to be a two-pronged approach that is necessary. Māori language speakers appear to hold the power position in Māori dominant environments, therefore, due to the position of power, it is necessary that they are welcoming of non-Māori speakers in such environments. On the other hand, non-Māori speakers must accept that Māori language speaking domains need to be protected in order for the goal of language revitalisation to be achieved, and as such, it must be agreed that there will be times that this group are unable to understand what is being said in Māori language speaking spaces.

Although this study does not assume to generalise the experiences of Māori HL2 learners for other indigenous populations, there are perhaps similarities that could be drawn from this research. Indigenous languages globally are under threat (Fishman, 1996; Simons & Lewis, 2013). For cultures who view language as a central marker of ingroup identity, it is necessary to understand how identity may enhance language learner motivations.

Conclusion

This study confirmed that Māori identities are dynamic and continue to evolve throughout various life phases. Māori who are engaging with their culture through heritage language learning develop a set of relationships with the others who are culturally affirming. For Māori language to survive and thrive,

it is important that we understand how current language learners are encouraged to sustain their language behaviours. Positive affirmation for their identity as Māori is likely to come from environments that are supportive of a range of Māori identity profiles inclusive of those with perhaps little knowledge of the culture and or language.

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