

The importance of race and ethnicity: An exploration of New Zealand Pākehā, Māori, Samoan and Chinese adolescent identity

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This mixed-method study used a survey to examine the self-identifications, feelings of connectedness and diverse content of adolescents' racial-ethnic identities (REI). Using Phinney and Ong's (2007) revised multi-dimensional ethnic identity model (MEIM-R), Oyserman, Gant, & Ager's (1995) tripartite interactive model (TIM), and two open-ended response items; this study surveyed the racial-ethnic self-identifications and content of 695 Year 9 students from five multi-ethnic urban high schools in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. This age group (13-14 years old) was chosen because early adolescence is a critical time when adolescents must make sense of their place among the social groupings and racial-ethnic categories that exist in society and, more importantly for them, at school. The analysis in this study focuses on a comparison between four racial-ethnic groupings: New Zealand Pākehā, Māori, Samoan and Chinese.

Racial-ethnic identity (REI), or the significance and meaning of race and ethnicity to one's self-concept (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), represents a crucial component of adolescent development especially for indigenous and minority adolescents (Cross & Cross, 2008). Most research on the importance of race and ethnicity to identity has been conducted with adult African American populations (e.g., Sellers et al., 1998), however a growing body of work investigates how these constructs apply to diverse groups of adolescents (e.g., Houkamau & Sibley, 2010), although non-American populations, in particular, remain understudied. The present mixed method study explores REI among New Zealand Pākehā (New Zealanders of European/British ancestry, hereafter referred to as Pākehā), Māori (Indigenous), Samoan and Chinese adolescents. Participants were asked to assess five aspects of REI and to elaborate on the nuances behind these self-assessments providing a qualitative window into the perceptions and challenges of REI among a diverse group of respondents.

Use of the term "racial-ethnic identity"

Historically, race has been employed as a biological classification of humans on the basis of genetic makeup, manifest in physical traits transmitted through reproduction (e.g. eye shape and skin colour). Even though the biological meaning of race has largely been discredited, the term 'race' is still used as a label to classify people on the basis of phenotype and to guide the formation of attitudes and stereotypes about groups. The idea of race as a biological dividing line between people is still commonly held and powerful in its consequences. Thus, it is society that attaches significance to race, orders people according to race, and that, in the process of creating and maintaining racial order, makes race a powerful signifier of social status.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, has traditionally been defined in terms of characteristics such as common language, culture, and national origin (Quintana, 2007). Ethnicity can also refer to ethnic affiliation, or the "cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart

from others" (Giddens, 1997, p. 210). The variable nature of ethnicity has been captured well by Nagel (1994) who makes the point that ethnic identity is "what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is" (p. 154). This point is important because the adolescents in this study perceived their racial-ethnic identity to be a composite of their own view of self as well as the views held by others.

There is great variability in how these two social constructs are operationalized, with much complexity and definitional overlap (Cokley, 2007). Researchers have argued that regardless of the theoretical differentiations, racial and ethnic elements interact with individuals' lived experiences and should not be artificially isolated from one another and propose the use of the hybrid term 'racial-ethnic' to acknowledge the socially constructed and interlaced nature of both terms (Cross & Cross, 2008).

Moreover, many adolescents from minority ethnic and indigenous groups in New Zealand, such as Samoans, Chinese and Māori, do, literally, wear their identity on their faces every day. As a consequence, this means that they must negotiate responses to, or build internal barriers against, the multiple race-based stereotypes associated with their group that flavour everyday interactions. In New Zealand, these stereotypes are often contradictory and include references, for example, to Samoans being religious, but ultimately violent; Chinese as hardworking, but insular and; Māori as culturally rich, but morally bankrupt (Cribb, 1997; Ip & Pang, 2005; Wall, 2008). It seems conceivable that members of these

groups might conceive of themselves as both ethnic *and* racial beings, shaped by personal notions relative to their cultural beliefs, values, and behaviours, but also shaped by externally imposed notions of racially determined deficit. This complexity suggests that the roles of racial and ethnic identity are highly intertwined. To reflect this understanding, Cross and Cross' (2008) term, "racial-ethnic identity", has been adopted throughout this article.

Theoretical perspectives

A conceptual perspective often used to frame the study of REI, and the main theoretical framework underpinning this research project, was Tajfel's (1981) Social Identity Theory. According to Tajfel, the social groups to which we belong help define who we are and thus constitute an essential part of our self. One fundamental assumption of social identity theory is that people strive to maintain or increase their self-esteem. Since self-esteem rests not only on individual attributes, but also on the attributes of the groups with which one identifies, an important question is how people cope when they belong to a group that is negatively valued and discriminated against, such as a stigmatised minority or indigenous group.

How people think about their social identities and act on the basis of them depends on how they make sense of and integrate their commitment to different groups as they engage in a particular activity within a given context. From this framework, racial-ethnic identities are only one type of social identity, and the salience of REI will depend on the context, relationships, and other group identities in which one is immersed. Therefore, the salience of REI is not an either/or condition, and REI may be only one of the dimensions of one's social identity among other psychologically equivalent ones (for example, gender, social class, sexual orientation). However, whilst REI is only one of the many components that comprise a sense of self, it is the "single component [that] is consistently positively related to an individual's self esteem" (Umaña-Taylor, 2004, p. 139).

Racial-ethnic identity can be conceptualised as relational and enacted,

rather than a stable construct that is innate within an individual. Racial-ethnic identity is also considered as the lens through which everyday encounters are filtered and experienced, that is, REI can impact on the ways one acts in a context, and the ways one interprets the acts of others. Racial-ethnic identity is acted out in spaces (such as school), within relationships (with teachers, peers, other racial-ethnic group members or family), and in particular time periods (at high school, during adolescence, in local communities). Consequently, they are more than just stories we tell about ourselves, because they are enacted, changeable, lived out in real time and thus open to public scrutiny.

Racial-ethnic identity development in school contexts

Educational research has documented the pervasive influence of schools' racial-ethnic composition on the academic and social lives of students. Although this body of empirical work is large and contains its share of inconsistencies, studies have generally found that inter-ethnic contact in schools promotes more positive racial attitudes (Ellison & Powers, 1994) and greater inter-ethnic sociability and friendship (Johnson & Marini, 1998). These positive effects are not limited to adolescence. Interestingly, attending school with majority group members has also been found to enhance the ability of minorities to function with majority group members in social, academic, and work environments across the life course (Braddock & Henry, 1985).

Despite these beneficial outcomes, attending school with greater proportions of students from other racial-ethnic groups may also pose additional challenges to students, making it more difficult to feel a part of the school community and discouraging their engagement behaviours. Like adults, adolescents show strong in-group preferences in social interaction and the formation of friendships (Johnson & Marini, 1998). Race and ethnicity are highly salient aspects of both social and personal identity, and similarity with one's classmates along such dimensions is important in generating a sense of belonging and membership in a school.

Schools are a site where adolescents receive and begin to understand messages from society about their identity. Minority and indigenous adolescents in particular are subject to negative expectations that have profound implications for their academic performance (Weinstein, 2002). Cross-cultural data focused on a variety of minorities in a number of contexts all over the world suggest that exposure to a negative "social mirror" adversely affects academic engagement (Doucet & Suarez-Orozco, 2006, p. 168). De Vos and Suarez-Orozco (1990) have demonstrated that the cultural messages indigenous and minority students receive in school contexts are saturated with psychological disparagement and racist stereotypes. These authors argue that this experience can have profound implications for the healthy REI formation of minority and indigenous students as well as for their schooling experiences. A New Zealand study has shown that with adolescent immigrants, in particular, perceived discrimination is associated with poorer school adjustment and behavioural problems (Ward, 2009).

Educational engagement in school contexts is dependent on a number of factors: the skills, background knowledge, and resources available to students; the students' sense of themselves and how they are identified and identify as belonging to, or in, educational settings; how the educational setting makes space, and provides support, for students to engage and persist. This sense of belonging and invitation to an educational space shapes students' engagement with, and willingness to, persist in a particular educational setting. In that sense, educational engagement could be said to be a function of developing a school-based social identity or an academic identity. And yet, other important social identities such as REI do not disappear when students enter schools. An important question then revolves around how academic or school identities, necessary for educational engagement, intersect with REI to support or constrain educational engagement, persistence and achievement.

Objectives of the present study

This study adds to the body of research concerning adolescents' REI and its multiple meanings across diverse racial-ethnic groups. Participants were asked to assess the importance of REI in their lives and to comment on the subjective meanings behind their assessments by responding to two open-ended items. Specifically, the objectives of this research are: (a) To investigate and compare the REI content – in particular, levels of Commitment, Exploration, Connectedness, Awareness of Racism and Embedded Achievement – among New Zealand Pākehā, Māori, Samoan and Chinese adolescents; (b) To investigate the REI informed behaviours, beliefs, stereotype perceptions and meaning adolescents attach to their REI.

Method

Participants

This sample was part of a larger research study on adolescent REI among students attending large, multiethnic high schools in Auckland, New Zealand. This article focuses on 695 Year Nine students (aged 13-14 years) from five Auckland high schools who self-identified as Pākehā ($N=431$), Māori ($N=113$), Samoan ($N=83$) or Chinese ($N=68$).

Procedure

Invitations to participate in the study were sent out to 15 multi-ethnic Auckland schools. Five schools replied within a two-week period. These five multi-ethnic Auckland high schools were from a range of socio economic areas (decile three to nine using the 2011 Ministry of Education classifications). In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education ranks state schools into decile groupings. Decile one schools are in areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage. Areas of least socioeconomic disadvantage fall into the decile ten category. About 60% of multicultural schools are in the lowest four deciles, 6% are in the highest decile. Most of the multicultural schools are in the North Island, particularly in Auckland. The multiethnic Auckland high school involved in this study was decile nine (Ministry of Education, 2011). All Year Nine students who had

parental consent, and who themselves consented to being involved, were asked to complete the questionnaire. Teachers administered the anonymous questionnaires in their classrooms with the instructions provided by the researcher.

Measures

The 28-item questionnaire was designed to assess REI and consisted of items including racial-ethnic Self-identification, Exploration, Commitment, Connectedness, Awareness of Racism and Embedded Achievement. Additional demographic data was also collected in the survey to enable further comparisons to be made between racial-ethnic groups. In this questionnaire, the Multidimensional Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R, Phinney & Ong, 2007) is used as a composite measure of REI, alongside Oyserman et al.'s (1995) Tripartite Interactive Model (TIM).

Racial-ethnic self-identification.

The research survey began with the preamble: "Whilst we all live in New Zealand and might consider ourselves New Zealanders, every person is also a member of an ethnic group, sometimes more than one ethnic group. Some names of ethnic groups include: Samoan, Chinese, Māori, Tongan, and Pākehā." The first survey question asked the respondents "To which ethnic group/s do you belong?" The survey allowed the respondents to identify with as many racial-ethnic groups as required¹. The second survey question asked the respondents to self-prioritize: "If you belong to more than one ethnic group, which is the main ethnic group you belong to?"

Multidimensional Ethnic Identity Measure. Informed by the developmental and social identity theories of Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980) and Tajfel (1981), the MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007) is underpinned by the belief that ethnic identity is a general phenomenon with elements or components that are common across all ethnic group members. Racial-ethnic Commitment and Exploration were assessed with the 6-item Multigroup

Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R). Because the two scales are distinct constructs, all components were assessed separately to gain greater insight into the process of ethnic identity development, a technique used with success in previous research (French, Seidman, LaRue & Aber, 2006).

The MEIM-R has demonstrated high estimates of reliability, and has been widely used in REI research. The MEIM-R has similar content to the original MEIM (Phinney, 2002), with a lower reading level. The two components of MEIM-R were assessed with a 5-point Likert response scale (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree). Separate subscale scores were created by taking an average score of the three items for ethnic Exploration and the three items for ethnic Commitment. Reliability analyses of the two subscales have shown that both scales have good reliability, with Cronbach alphas of .76 for exploration and .78 for commitment. For the combined 6-item scale, alpha was .81 (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Tripartite Interactive Model. The Tripartite Interactive Model (Oyserman et al., 1995) involved three components of REI – Connectedness, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement. Oyserman et al. (1995) proposed that adolescents who strongly endorsed all three REI components would be better equipped to succeed in school over time than those who did not. They proposed that defining oneself in terms of any one of these components alone was insufficient to maintain the focused effort that school success requires. The original TIM measure comprises four items for each of the three components, but some extra items were developed for each component for this study (three extra questions for Connectedness, one extra question for Awareness of Racism and two extra questions for Embedded Achievement).

Although brief, the TIM scales are adequately reliable (alphas from 0.58 to 0.79 across samples) (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee, 2006; Oyserman, Harrison & Bybee, 2001). Over eight months, test-retest reliability were 0.78 for Connectedness, 0.81 for Awareness of Racism, and 0.65 for Embedded Achievement (Altschul, et al., 2006).

¹ It is common in New Zealand surveys and the official census to have multiple ethnicities.

Open-ended questionnaire items.

The last items in the questionnaire were open-ended: ‘Please list two things you like about being a member of your ethnic group’ and ‘Please list two things you do not like about being a member of your ethnic group’. The items were included to gain a more nuanced understanding regarding what adolescents perceive as the benefits and/or challenges associated with their REI membership.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis. There was little missing data (less than 1%) and for each missing item the mean score was entered (Marsh, 1990). A factor model across the five scales was used to evaluate the uniqueness of the scales, both for the total sample and for each of the four ethnic groups. The various scales were assessed for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha. A multivariate analysis of variance compared the means of the five scales across the four ethnic groups. Univariate analyses of variance followed by Scheffe contrasts were used to investigate the nature of any differences.

Analysis of the open-ended questions. Sets of codes were developed

based on the open-ended item responses. Periodically, transcripts were subjected to blind coding and review by a trained colleague who separately coded a number of the responses to ensure a high degree of inter-coder reliability (Bryman, 2001). Subsequently, after several attempts at coding the qualitative data, good inter-coder reliability (86%) was attained.

The two open ended questions were analysed separately. Firstly the responses were grouped by ethnicity and as many of the identifiers as possible were removed. The written responses to the two open-ended statements were generally short making categorisation simpler. Categories were colour coded, named and continually refined as more themes emerged. Once all of the responses had been coded, the frequency of each response was noted in order to judge its significance. This was done in two ways: as a percentage of the number of participants within each age range, and as a percentage of the total number of participants.

Results

Quantitative Results

The estimates of reliability (coefficient alpha) for both the original and enhanced scales were sufficiently high to give confidence in using the total scores. As the enhanced set of items slightly increased the reliability estimates and added additional information about each of the Exploration, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement scales, they were used in all analyses. The mean scores for Connectedness and Commitment were higher than the means for Exploration, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement (refer to Table 1).

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships between Commitment, Exploration, Connectedness, Awareness of Racism, and Embedded Achievement. As can be seen from Table 2, Awareness of Racism is most unlike the other four variables, but Commitment, Exploration, Connectedness, and Embedded Achievement provide sufficient unique variance used in the following analyses. All measures were statistically significant and positively correlated (Table 3), but there is sufficient variance to indicate that the scales tap into different aspects of REI.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and estimates of reliability (alpha) for the five racial-ethnic identity scales

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Original		Enhanced	
			<i>n</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>α</i>
Commitment	3.65	0.82	3	0.78		
Exploration	3.30	0.83	3	0.75		
Connectedness	3.70	0.72	4	0.70	6	0.71
Awareness	2.63	0.72	4	0.65	5	0.69
Embedded Achievement	3.62	0.70	4	0.71	6	0.75

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the five racial-ethnic identity components

Racial-ethnic identity components	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Exploration	–				
2. Commitment	.72*	–			
3. Connectedness	.65*	.78*	–		
4. Awareness	.24*	.15*	.16*	–	
5. Embedded Achievement	.53*	.66*	.71*	.21*	–

Table 3
Factor loadings for each of the ethnic groups, and for all combined

Ethnic Groups	Pākehā	Māori	Samoan	Chinese	All
Exploration	0.63	0.84	0.80	0.74	0.77
Commitment	0.80	0.90	0.90	0.92	0.88
Connectedness	0.81	0.93	0.89	0.88	0.88
Awareness of racism	0.12	0.14	0.09	0.04	0.21
Embedded Achievement	0.71	0.81	0.73	0.83	0.78

Table 4
Racial-ethnic group means for the five components

Main	n	Commitment		Exploration		Connectedness		Awareness of Racism		Embedded achievement	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ethnic											
Pākehā	431	3.35	.72	2.96	.74	3.45	.61	2.42	.69	3.42	.61
Māori	113	3.94	.79	3.68	.81	3.79	.76	2.76	.71	3.65	.77
Samoan	83	3.96	.77	3.66	.70	4.11	.71	2.71	.70	3.87	.67
Chinese	68	3.48	.75	3.10	.72	3.53	.67	2.92	.48	3.45	.76

Table 5
Indications of statistically significant Scheffe post-hoc comparisons (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .001$)

		Exploration	Commitment	Connectedness	Awareness	Embedded
Pākehā	Chinese	.19	.18	.13	.75**	.05
	Māori	.95**	.80**	.53**	.49**	.36*
	Samoan	.95**	.84**	1.05**	.42**	.72**
Chinese	Māori	.74**	.59**	.36	-.25	.26
	Samoan	.79**	.63	.83**	-.34	.59**

A maximum likelihood factor analysis indicated that there was one higher order factor that explained 56% of the total variance. The factor loadings were high (Exploration .77, Commitment .88, Connectedness .88, Embedded Achievement .78), although Awareness had a much lower loading (.21) indicating that it was the most distinct of the factors. Overall, the five variables contributed sufficiently unique variance to be used in subsequent analyses. The higher order factor pattern was similar for each of the four ethnic groups (Table 3).

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance was performed to determine if ethnic groups scored differently on the five dimensions. The Wilk's Lambda test revealed there was a statistically

significant difference between ethnic groups' scores on the five measures ($F(40,4775) = 6.73, p < .001$). The univariate anovas indicated that all five scales contributed to this overall difference: Commitment, $F(8,1099) = 1.36, p < .001$; Exploration, $F(8,1099) = 2.02, p < .001$; Connectedness $F(8,1099) = 1.95, p < .001$; Awareness of racism $F(8,1099) = 2.63, p < .001$; and Embedded Achievement $F(8,1099) = 1.78, p < .001$.

Overall, Pākehā and Chinese were more similar to each other, and Māori and Samoan students were more similar to each other, but there were differences between these two super-groups. The Māori and Samoan groups had higher means on Commitment and Exploration, and also (slightly less) on Connectedness

compared to the Pākehā and Chinese. Chinese, Māori and Samoan had higher means than Pākehā on Awareness, and there were no differences on Embedded Achievement. Racial-ethnic group means for the five scales can be seen in Table 4. Indications of statistically significant Scheffe post-hoc comparisons are shown in Table 5.

Qualitative findings

Participants were asked to respond to an open-ended survey item asking: 'Please list two things you like about being a member of your ethnic group'. From a total of 695 study participants, there were 774 separate responses to this question. A number of the respondents wrote two or three responses to the question. Analysis of the responses

Table 6
Positive factors associated with racial-ethnic identity

Main Ethnic	Belonging		Difference		Religion		Culture		Look		Language		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Pākehā	114	26.2%	164	37.8%	4	0.9%	78	17.9%	21	4.8%	54	12.4%	435
Māori	36	26.1%	31	22.4%	0	0.0%	51	36.9%	5	3.6%	15	10.9%	138
Samoan	16	13.8%	24	20.7%	3	2.6%	50	43.1%	3	2.6%	20	17.2%	116
Chinese	11	12.9%	21	24.7%	2	2.4%	41	48.3%	2	2.4%	8	9.4%	85

Table 6 Key:**Belonging** – connectedness, community, place**Difference** – status and pride associated with uniqueness**Religion** – spirituality, faith**Culture** – cultural traditions, performance, celebrations, food, dress and sport**Look** – phenotype, physicality, skin colour**Language** – a distinctive ethnic language

resulted in the emergence of 6 key themes (see Table 6).

In a sample of 431 Pākehā adolescents, 435 total responses were obtained. Thirty-eight percent of total Pākehā group responses related to feeling positive about a sense of *status and pride associated with difference*. Status and pride comments often referred to the “privilege” of being a member of the majority ethnic group, including “feeling normal”, “not being considered different...blending in” and speaking the “dominant language”. Specific responses coded under this theme also included a number of references to the benefits of not “being stereotyped” or “targeted for racism” like other groups. Comments which illustrate their beliefs about the privileges of being Pākehā include: “I am White so I get a better education and a better job”, “I get all opportunities and am not confined by my ethnicity” and “I get treated better by the authorities”. These comparative references illustrate the heightened awareness that these Pākehā adolescents perceive as the inequalities and/or overt racism other ethnic groups experience.

Self-identification as Pākehā engendered a positive *sense of belonging, community and place* according to 26% of these respondents. Implicit in a number of the responses was the inferred notion that ‘being Pākehā’ also implicitly meant ‘being a New Zealander’. This ethnic-national association is evident

in responses like, “I’m proud of being kiwi (Pākehā) because I was born in New Zealand”. Another category of interest was the often paradoxical nature of the responses coded in the *culture* category, which made reference to a sense of cultural pride in celebrating “ANZAC day”, “Christmas”, and “beating the Auzzies (sic) at sport”; whilst simultaneously claiming that they “don’t notice [their ethnic/cultural difference]”, “wouldn’t care if they were any other ethnicity as long as [they] are respected” and “don’t let it control their life”. This ambivalence about REI is not uncommon in research with majority and/or New Zealand Pākehā participants (McCreanor, 2005).

In a sample of 113 Māori adolescents, 138 total responses were obtained. Thirty-seven percent of the responses referred to the adolescents feeling positive about the *culture* of their REI group, including participating in kapahaka (Māori performance/dance), cultural traditions and “our history, achievements, stories and language”. Self-categorising as Māori produced a positive *sense of belonging, community and place* for 26% of these Māori adolescents, including having a deep pride in being, “traditional tangata whenua (people of the land)”. Membership and affinity with the Māori racial-ethnic group was positively influenced by “family”, “friends”, and “living in our own country”. One

respondent stated that being Māori “gives me a sense of belonging to someone/something”. Reference to feelings of *pride and status* in identifying as Māori were reported in 22% of the responses. Respondents made reference to Māori being a “generous people”, “unique”, “strong and brave” and “respectful”. A number of other illustrative responses from this category are, “[I like] being a *proper* New Zealander”, and “it’s just cool being a Māori”.

In a sample of 83 Samoan adolescents, 116 total responses were obtained. A significant number of the responses (43%) alluded to Samoan REI membership being positively associated with culture, for example, traditional Samoan “traditions and beliefs”, religion, food, performances and celebrations like the annual Auckland Polyfest and Pasifika Festival where “my culture is widely celebrated”. Like the Māori cohort, participants appear positive about their ability to participate in demonstrable activities to convey their REI group membership. A number of the responses (21%) also spoke to the *difference and pride* associated with being Samoan, including “how we are brought up” and a “strong emphasis on the importance of family”. In addition, 17% of the responses made reference to the importance of Samoan language, stating “I love the way we speak”, “it’s cool talking in Samoan” and “we get to communicate in our own *language*”.

Table 7
Negative factors associated with racial-ethnic identity

Main Ethnic	Racism		Low Exp		Look		Culture		High Exp		Total
Pākehā	131	61.2%	3	1.4%	29	13.6%	40	18.7%	11	5.1%	214
Māori	41	62.1%	6	9.1%	7	10.6%	11	16.7%	1	1.5%	66
Samoan	11	39.3%	2	7.1%	1	3.6%	14	50.0%	0	0.0%	28
Chinese	25	54.4%	1	2.2%	5	10.8%	9	19.6%	6	13.0%	46

Table 8 Key:

Racism – discrimination, marginalisation, stereotyping, difference

Low Exp – low expectations about academic ability

Look – phenotype, physicality, skin colour

Culture – religious or cultural practices restricting, embarrassing or absent

High Exp – overly high expectations about academic ability

In a sample of 68 Chinese adolescents, 85 responses were obtained. Nearly half (48%) of the responses linked positive REI membership to Chinese *culture*, most notably the popularity of, and traditional activities associated with, Chinese food. Reference was also made to Chinese cultural expectations regarding academic success, that is, Chinese culture being “well focused on education” and “intellectual ability”. A number of respondents stated that they liked that “people think I am smart and good at Maths”, and “my parents encourage me to be successful”. Finally, like all of the other cohorts, the Chinese respondents felt positively about their *difference from others*, with 25% of responses making statements like, “we have our very own culture that is very different from other cultures”, “I love the rich history and heritage and background of my ethnic group” and “I can say something in my own language that most people can't understand in New Zealand”.

Participants were also asked to respond to an open-ended survey item asking: ‘What are the negative things about being a member of your racial-ethnic group?’ From a total of 695 study participants, there were 354 responses to this question. Analysis of the responses resulted in the emergence of five key themes (see Table 7).

A total of 695 adolescents were asked to list things they didn't like about being a member of their racial-ethnic group. In three of the four groups (Pākehā, Māori and Chinese) approximately 50% of the group

recorded a response. In the Samoan group only 34% responded. It can only be assumed that the remaining students in each cohort had nothing negative to say about being a member of their ethnic group.

The most significant finding from an analysis of the participant responses was the discrimination, racism and stereotyping members from all four key groups reported they experienced, engaged in or witnessed. Considering the effects perceptions of racism and discrimination can have on adolescents, it is important to differentiate between the kinds of stereotypes, and the racist and/or discriminatory encounters each group experience. Interestingly, alongside their own experiences with racism, a number of the Pākehā responses also suggested that their racial-ethnic groups reputation was premised on ‘being racist’, and this undesirable status had a negative influence on self-identification as Pākehā. Compare this with the other three racial-ethnic groups in this study who reported being targets of racism as the most negative factor associated with their racial-ethnic group membership.

In a sample of 431 Pākehā adolescents, 214 responses were obtained. An overwhelmingly large (61%) number of the responses referred to *racism and discrimination* as a factor negatively associated with being Pākehā. A number of respondents referred to experiences of racism, which were mostly based on skin colour, including “being teased for being White”, and “being mocked for being the only White boy in my class”

There was the perception that people were “weaker if they are White” and that Pākehā people “can't be very gangster”. Those who do enact their social attachment to American rap culture are being “*wiggers* – White n”. Respondents reported feeling shame about “the bad things my ethnic group has done in the past”, adding that “we have done terrible things” that “don't make me proud”. A number of Pākehā respondents reported resenting having to contend with the ever-present stereotype that Pākehā were all racist or “the people who insult other ethnicities”, adding that they did not like “what people associate with us because we are White e.g. we are racist”.

Alongside the difficulty of dissociating themselves from perceived historical acts of racism, a number of Pākehā respondents also referred to their dislike of present-day *racism* enacted by in-group (other Pākehā) members, stating that “people in my ethnic group are racist”, “we are obnoxious towards other cultures - *not like us*” and “we are usually the ones being racist”. One respondent exclaimed, “Other people always think we are racist towards Māori. But I'm not”. Some of the Pākehā responses (19%) also suggested a sense of frustration associated with not being able to clearly articulate the distinct cultural attributes of their racial-ethnic group. Comments illustrating this negative aspect of group membership include “being Pākehā is quite boring and normal”, and “it's just not as interesting as other groups – there is not that much culture or cultural

activities". These quotes demonstrate that Pākehā culture is perceived as either the default culture, invisible or completely nonexistent. Evident in the data is a clear wish by some Pākehā respondents to better understand and discern the invisible, taken-for-granted, seemingly cultureless, Pākehā culture. Thus, the issue may actually be less complex than imagined, in that it is not that Pākehā have no culture, but that these students appear to have no cultural self-awareness.

In a sample of 113 Māori adolescents, 66 total responses were obtained. A large number (62%) of the responses referred to the negative impact "mockery" (this term was mentioned in 25% of the total responses across all five schools) or negative *stereotyping/racism* had on their self-concept as Māori. Māori respondents were acutely aware of the unwarranted generalisations and stereotypical constructions of Māori people and culture in the mainstream media and in their own local communities, including the school community. The respondents' references to stereotypes imply a proposed link between being Māori and "gangs", "violence" and "crime". Of particular concern, given the school age of the participants, is the perceived notion that Māori are "not very smart", "dumb" and unlikely to "pass school and [subsequently] drop out". Māori students' REI and academic development could be affected profoundly by experiences of real or perceived discrimination, resulting in low school engagement and achievement.

In a sample of 83 Samoan adolescents, 28 total responses were obtained. A number (39%) of responses alluded to their perceived experiences of *discrimination*. The respondents reported that the expectations on them as Samoans to "act like gangsters", be "dumb" or "FOBs – fresh off the boat" (a reference to their supposed limited knowledge of English language and/or a pronounced Samoan accent). Respondents felt that these expectations perpetuated negative stereotypes, misrepresented their cultural realities, and undermined their sense of positive Samoan identity. Half of the total 28 responses referred to particular

aspects of Samoan culture and rigid family expectations as a negative factor, including comments about "old traditions", the "strictness of the culture" and "family, family, family – I am not allowed to spend time with my friends".

In a sample of 68 Chinese adolescents, 46 responses were obtained. Over half (54%) of the responses linked negative feelings about REI membership to experiences of *discrimination, racism and stereotyping*. The participant comments reflect common negative societal stereotypes including, "being dissed (*mocked*) about driving", "the pollution in China", and "eating cats and dogs". These negative stereotypes have the power to seriously destabilise the Chinese adolescents' feelings of security and belonging regarding their racial-ethnic and national identities. Positive stereotypes, also known as model-minority stereotypes (Wong & Halgin, 2006), were also noted as a negative aspect in that they were still viewed as an incorrect perception of all Chinese people. Although the content of the stereotype is positive, respondents perceived the intent as less positive, stating "I don't like how people always stereotype Asians as smart" and "people assume we are good at maths and always think we are nerdy". Chinese students are likely to experience anxiety when trying to uphold the expectations of these model minority stereotypes, and can also encounter conflict with their peers, both those of different races and those in their own racial group.

A fifth of the total responses (20%) also indicated that intra-group *expectations* concerning Chinese cultural and language maintenance, can be a negative aspect of Chinese group membership and leads to the adolescents feeling like they "can't practise English" and are "not as free as others" because their "parents are more strict". Students also referred to being pressured into "thinking too much about studies" and feeling frustrated with "what people expect of us". In combination with the normative adolescent desire to establish a strong sense of individual identity and sense of belonging at school, factors like these could lead to a resistance towards positive Chinese REI development during adolescence.

Discussion

This study explored the levels and meanings of racial-ethnic identity in adolescents from four different racial-ethnic groups. Participants overall levels of REI indicate that they view their racial-ethnic group membership as important aspects of their identities. In addition, a close examination of the adolescents' positive and negative understandings about REI group membership, have provided us with insights into the self-perceptions and race-based encounters that facilitate adolescents' REI development. In line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) this study supports the notion that racial-ethnic group membership defines who individuals are, how they belong and what they are trying to achieve in multi-ethnic school contexts in New Zealand.

Pākehā and Chinese. The Pākehā and Chinese participants in this study had the lowest scores for both Commitment and Exploration. This suggests that Pākehā and Chinese adolescents are less likely to see their racial-ethnic group membership as an important part of who they are, nor feel the need to find out more information about their racial-ethnic group. The low Commitment and Exploration scores for the Pākehā participants were expected given the ambiguous nature of this large racial-ethnic grouping and the perceived lack of collective understanding regarding membership, common traditions, and history (McCreanor, 2005). It is possible that the only thing these participants have in common is their sense of Commitment to the national identity component of this label, their historical origins in wider Europe, and the fair colour of their skin. The low Commitment score could also signify the lack of clarity around the collective meaning of the Pākehā label and this grouping 'owning' this label. The low Exploration score suggests a perceived lack of distinct cultural traditions and activities that might be representative of the Pākehā collective. Racial-ethnic identity Exploration is unlikely without a level of REI Commitment.

The low Commitment and Exploration scores for the Chinese participants were unexpected. It was assumed that because members of this

minority group tend to mix in their own racial-ethnic circles (Ip & Pang, 2005), that they would have a strong sense of collective Commitment to membership and a wish to uphold and/or explore aspects of their cultural identity in their new country of settlement as a means of retaining Chinese REI. However, a further examination of the research reveals that psychological changes, including alterations in individuals' attitudes towards their racial-ethnic identities, are common in immigrant groups during the acculturation process (Ward, 2008).

The Connectedness scores for the Pākehā and Chinese participants were the lowest of the four groups. This indicates that REI is less salient for these adolescents and they feel less positive about group membership. A positive sense of belonging to one's REI group is needed before members are able to enact REI and/or engage in relevant in-group behaviour. Whilst the Pākehā participants' low levels of racial-ethnic Connectedness is consistent with a trend among White participants in existing international (Frankenburg, 2001) and national (McCreanor, 2005) research, the low Connectedness score for the Chinese cohort was, again, unexpected. One possible explanation is their very high Awareness of Racism score.

The Chinese cohort had the highest Awareness of Racism score and this suggests that experiences with discrimination and racism influence their perceptions of self as Chinese racial-ethnic group members. The results of this study align with similar results found in a New Zealand study (Dunstan, Boyd and Crichton, 2004) that Asians were more likely to report discrimination than immigrants from other regions. Possible reasons include their visible minority status and the high media profile of their group's perceived impact on New Zealand society, especially in the mainstream media (see Coddington, 2006). Whilst the sheer level of racism they encounter is a concern, Oyserman et al. (1995) stipulate that this could paradoxically act as a buffer against the potential negative impact of discrimination on academic performance.

The Pākehā Awareness of Racism score suggests that whilst this group

was aware of racism, they were less aware than the other three REI groups measured. This is a concern given Oyserman et al's (1995) premise that REI Awareness of Racism may be helpful in buffering the impact of racist encounters. In multi-ethnic school contexts, it is highly likely that these Pākehā students might have race-based encounters with students of other racial-ethnic groups that cause them to reflect on their own REI. An increased awareness of racism would help them to maintain persistence in the face any implicit or explicit negative expectations and/or overt discrimination.

Finally, the low level of Embedded Achievement was unexpected for both the Pākehā and Chinese cohorts given the higher levels of success both groups experience in the school system compared to Māori and Samoan students. There are several theories that could account for this unexpected result including Pākehā students' lack of consideration for the racialised nature of society and schooling opportunities (Zirkel, 2002), often termed 'colour-blindness'. It is entirely possible that because Pākehā students do not have to articulate the constructs of their REI often, they have not previously considered whether one's REI impacts success and/or achievement at school. Similarly, the Chinese cohort's low score was also surprising given the ever-present 'model minority' stereotype perpetuated in Western society promoting Chinese as more academically able than other racial-ethnic groups. Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) propose that the 'model minority' stereotype can have one of two effects: an increased sense of pride and connection because the stereotype implies Chinese people work hard, or a focus on the way being labelled a 'model minority' seems to denigrate their own personal efforts by turning success into a group trait.

Māori and Samoan. The mean Commitment and Exploration scores of the Māori and Samoan participants were significantly higher than those of the Chinese and Pākehā participants. This indicates that Māori and Samoan students feel a greater certainty of belonging to their racial-ethnic group and involve themselves more often in

finding out about their racial-ethnic group collective history, traditions and cultural activities.

The mean Connectedness and Embedded Achievement scores of the Māori and Samoan participants were also significantly higher than those of the Chinese and Pākehā participants. The Connectedness scores were expected given the cultural and political renaissance for Māori (Webber, 2008), and the strong in-group maintenance of many cultural, religious and traditional practices in New Zealand-based Samoan communities (Anae, 1998). Given that particular racial-ethnic in-group behaviours and actions can express REI, the high Connectedness scores reinforce Oyserman et al.'s (1995) contention that feeling like you belong motivates one to become involved in culturally relevant ethnic behaviours.

The high Awareness of Racism score was also expected given the media misrepresentations of these groups, and the omnipresent stereotypes that adolescents in these groups must contend with. Steele (2004) calls this phenomenon 'stereotype threat' and state that race-based discrimination can negatively impact the performance, motivation, and learning of students who have to contend with it. However, there is also strong evidence that discrimination experiences may be useful predictors of racial-ethnic Exploration in adolescence (Pahl & Way, 2006), and that these same race-based encounters might also prompt individuals to identify more strongly with their racial-ethnic group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999).

Whilst it was expected that their Connectedness and Awareness of Racism scores would be high given the salience of REI for these groups in their multi-ethnic urban school contexts, their high Embedded Achievement scores were a surprise. Māori and Samoan students are over-represented in the 'long tail of underachievement' in the New Zealand education system and consistently less successful academically (Ministry of Education, 2007). Māori and Samoan New Zealanders are also over-represented in the lower socio-economic profile and perform poorer in comparison to non-Māori in a range of educational, health and income

indicators (Dorovolomo, Koya, Phan, Veramu, & Nabobo-Baba, 2008). It is an important finding that there is a positive correlation between their REI and ability to be successful academically. Māori and Samoan students have a long history of being stereotyped as less academically able than their Pākehā peers.

It is clear that REI matters. Adolescent REI development is part of a wider social process and just as a racial-ethnic group must affirm and reaffirm its boundaries (or be reminded by others of what they are) in order for such boundaries to retain social relevance, individual group members must also affirm and reaffirm their REI (or have it reaffirmed by outsiders) in order for it to be a feature of any social situation in which they are participants. Often it is assumed, if only as a simplification, that REI is fixed over time and that racial-ethnic boundaries are well defined, but in reality REI salience is time, place and space dependent.

This study shows that REI in its broadest sense is comprised of three key components – race, ethnicity and culture - which interact together to give adolescents a sense of individual, and collective, identity. The first component is race, and although the term race is no longer useful as a biological construct, we cannot avoid the fact that socially constructed perceptions of race, and consequently racism, are an everyday occurrence for some members of society. The idea of race “is the most extreme form of difference that humans can assert about another human being or group, as one of its components is the belief that differences are permanent” (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 22). As such, notions of race essentialised and stereotyped the adolescents in this study, their social statuses, their social behaviours, and their social ranking. Race continues to play an important role in determining how individuals construct their racial-ethnic identities.

The second component is ethnicity, which is associated with the issues of boundary-making, boundary-maintenance, and membership. For the adolescents, ethnic boundaries determined who was a member of their racial-ethnic group, and who was not, by the use of criteria such as language, knowledge of descent

and participation in cultural activities. Therefore, racial-ethnic identities are largely dependent on one’s knowledge, or mastery of, component three – culture. Culture dictates the appropriate and inappropriate content of a particular ethnicity and designates the language, religion, belief system, art, music, dress and traditions that constitute ethnic group membership. These elements of culture are part of a “toolkit” (Swidler, 1986, p. 273) used to create the meaning and way of life seen to be unique to particular ethnic groups. Thus, culture can be seen as the substance of ethnicity.

Primarily, the adolescents’ REI was negotiated, defined and produced through their social interactions with others, most importantly their family and peers. It is within these interactions they learnt about their culture – the acts, languages, stories and customs associated with being a member of their racial-ethnic group. However, their REI was also influenced by external racial, social, economic, and political messages that shaped the feasibility and attractiveness of certain identity choices for them. These three components influenced the construction of REI, and the meanings the adolescents attached to it. The first was their sense of connectedness and belonging to their racial-ethnic group. Across both studies the adolescents reported the importance of knowing where you come from and knowing what connects you to others as a member of a racial-ethnic group. One of the important ways that the adolescents constructed that positive sense of connectedness to their racial-ethnic group was through socialisation messages from their families and peers, and participation in racial-ethnic group cultural activities.

The use of the study questionnaire showed that the search for the meaning of one’s REI is complex, characterised by a sense of Commitment, a desire for racial-ethnic Exploration as a means of acquiring culture, and a sense of group Connectedness – inside and outside of school contexts. The adolescents’ responses illustrated that their families are often the most potent source of information in the process of REI exploration and the acquisition of one’s cultural knowledge. However, this study confirms previous theoretical

postulations, that by adolescence, individuals are also influenced by their interactions with their peers (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2001) and their experience of racism and racial-ethnic stereotypes (Altschul et al., 2006).

Racial-ethnic identity, as articulated by these research participants, is important for three reasons: race and/or ethnicity is at the core of the discrimination they experience; a positive REI can buffer them from the negative effects of perceiving racial discrimination; and their REI is affected by perceptions of racial discrimination. That is, although their racial-ethnic identities are in a constant state of flux, they are also of great consequence to the students overall sense of identity.

Further investigation is needed to assess similarities and differences in REI and underlying ideological meanings across specific racial-ethnic groups. For adolescents who feel that race and ethnicity are not important to their self-definition, future qualitative research might explore how race and ethnicity interact with other components of their identities, such as religion and sexual orientation. Given the variation in racial and ethnic language used within participants’ explanations of REI, future work might explore how adolescents define and utilise these terms in everyday contexts.

This study focussed solely on the experiences of Year Nine students. Although sample selection was predicated on Erikson’s (1968) argument that identity formation is a central task of adolescence, future studies should examine longitudinally the development of racial-ethnic identity and the influence of the school context on that development. For example, it is quite probable that the experiences of these same adolescents in Year Seven (aged 10-11 years) and Year 12 (aged 15-16 years) would vary from what they reported in Year Nine. Consequently, the use of longitudinal designs would allow for greater understanding of the influences on adolescent racial-ethnic identity development in multi-ethnic school contexts, across time. Finally, the development of school-based initiatives for diversity awareness and education about issues of race, ethnicity and racism that are sensitive to a range of

racial-ethnic engagement for diverse adolescents will be critical in this increasingly multiethnic society.

Conclusion

Adolescents, who attend multi-ethnic urban high schools, will undoubtedly have encounters where they consciously have to negotiate, or even endure, race-based experiences of invisibility, differentiated expectations, stereotyping, hostility, or even abuse. However, these experiences may be a necessary and crucial, albeit unpleasant, aspect of healthy REI development. The findings of this study propose that discerning the significance of one's REI involves two simultaneously occurring and conscious tensions – rebelling against communally prescribed, and socially ascribed racial-ethnic identities, at the same time as nurturing a sense of belonging, pride and positive membership in one's REI.

This study has made several contributions to the field. Firstly, it has found that the hypothesised differences in identity exploration and commitment between racial-ethnic minority and majority groups are not always found. For example, this study has shown that in some circumstances, adolescents from marginalised racial-ethnic groups have higher educational achievement aspirations than their majority peers, despite stereotypes positing them as less likely to achieve academically. Second, this study has found strong positive relationships between identity Exploration and identity Commitment on the one hand and Embedded Achievement on the other. Third, this study has found that racism plays an important role in the lives of all adolescents – both those from minority and majority backgrounds – but the ways in which they experience racism differs.

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