

OH, YOU DON'T LOOK MĀORI

Socially assigned ethnicity

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Abstract

This paper discusses experiences of Māori who self-report that they are socially assigned as Pākehā and explores these experiences in relation to Māori identity and colonisation. Utilising Kaupapa Māori theory, methodology and methods, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 10 participants. Three interrelated themes were identified through a thematic analysis: claims of identity, challenges to identity and reinforcement of identity. The themes informed the conceptualisation of Te Haerenga Tuakiri, which illustrates the complexity of Māori identity and how it is navigated by Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā in various ways and in various contexts.

Keywords

identity, Māori, ethnicity, essentialism, skin colour, socially assigned ethnicity

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Introduction

While there are multiple conversations about Māori identity and ethnicity, there is limited exploration into socially assigned ethnicity for Māori, in particular experiences of being socially assigned as Pākehā. Socially assigned ethnicity describes how people see and assume the ethnic identity of other individuals, usually based on phenotypical characteristics such as eye colour, hair colour and texture, and skin colour. Socially assigned ethnicity has been proposed to be associated with people's health and well-being, and social experiences more broadly, in racialised societies. This paper aims to extend our understanding of socially assigned ethnicity by discussing the experiences and stories of Māori who are frequently socially assigned as Pākehā.

Socially assigned ethnicity

Although ethnicity is increasingly recognised as a self-identified construct in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is also assigned through social interactions in many circumstances. Within society, people make assumptions, often implicitly and without discussion of self-identification, culture or ancestry, about the ethnicity or race of a person before knowing how that person self-identifies (Jones et al., 2008; MacIntosh, Desai, Lewis, Jones, & Nunez-Smith, 2013; Roth, 2016; Vargas, Sanchez, & Kinlock, 2015). Roth (2016) suggests that there are multiple levels to the conceptualisation of racial/ethnic identification:

how an individual self-identifies her race, how she is perceived by others, how she believes she is perceived by others, what she checks among the limited options on the census or other surveys, her skin colour and other aspects of her racial appearance, and her racial ancestry. (p. 1310)

Socially assigned ethnicity relates to the concepts of *observed race*, *reflected race* and *phenotype* discussed by Roth (2016). Observed race is “the race that others believe you to be” (Roth, 2016, p. 1315). Reflected race illustrates how individuals believe they are categorised by others. Phenotype under Roth's (2016) framework refers to skin colour, eye colour, hair colour and texture as well as other physical features.

There has been some previous research exploring socially assigned ethnicity and its relationship with health in Aotearoa (Cormack, Harris, & Stanley, 2013; Harris, Cormack, & Stanley, 2013) and internationally (Jones et al., 2008; Vargas et al., 2015). Socially assigned ethnicity tends to produce a health advantage when people are socially assigned to the dominant ethnic group, such as Pākehā/European in Aotearoa (Cormack et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2013) or white in the United States (Jones et al., 2008; MacIntosh et al., 2013; Vargas et al., 2015). In a study by Cormack et al. (2013), individuals who both self-identified and were socially assigned as the dominant ethnic group had better socioeconomic status and less exposure to individual-level racial discrimination than those who were socially assigned as Māori. In a qualitative study, J. Reid, Cormack, and Crowe (2016) found that Māori identified advantages with being socially assigned as New Zealand European within health services, where whiteness was understood by participants as both advantageous and a protective factor. They suggested that these findings reflect the complex relationship between social assignments of indigeneity and skin colour that can result from racialisation. This can be beneficial for Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā through both access to healthcare and quality of healthcare, and conversely, be restrictive for Māori who are socially assigned as Māori.

Racism

Socially assigned ethnicity is likely to better capture people's experiences in a racialised society (Jones, 2002) and how racism shapes people's lives. Racism, therefore, is fundamental to understanding socially assigned ethnicity. Racism stems from the ideology of a hierarchy based on race and ethnicity, and revolves around perceived white superiority in many settler societies (Harris et al., 2006; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Racism is expressed through naturalised, discursive processes of marginalisation and inequity (Kearns, Moewaka-Barnes, & McCreanor, 2009) and operates by disadvantaging some individuals and collectives, while systematically advantaging others at multiple levels (Harris et al., 2006; Jones, 2000; Paradies, 2016; P. Reid & Robson, 2007; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Contemporary experiences of racism in Aotearoa stem from the ongoing, deliberate colonisation of Māori and Aotearoa, and the failure to honour the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Jackson, 1993; P. Reid & Robson, 2007).

Racism and related ideologies of essentialism and blood quantum restrict Māori ethnicity in intricate ways, even though ethnicity is officially based on self-identification within Aotearoa (Cormack, 2010; Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh, & Teaiwa, 2005). Blood quantum is where one's ethnic identity is determined by arbitrary measures of biology, usually fractions of blood. This, coupled with a Victorian societal view that assimilation was in the best interests of all, has resulted in a reduction of reported ethnicity as Māori over time. This quantification of indigeneity affects obligations of the state to Indigenous peoples (Bond, Brough, & Cox, 2014; Collins, 2004; Cormack, 2010; P. Reid, 1997; P. Reid & Robson, 2007; Trask, 1999). Legislation during the 1950s to the late 1970s presented various colonial definitions of what "Māori" constituted, with measurements of blood used to restrict who was "officially"

Māori, and those who were "less than half" were encouraged to enrol on the general electoral roll (Metge, 2004) under assimilationist politics (Pihama, 1993).

Given challenges to the ideologies associated with blood quantum, active resistance and re-claiming of Māori as an identity and name, official definitions based on race were increasingly recognised as problematic. The concept of ethnicity, measured by cultural affiliation and self-identification replaced racial blood quantum in line with the social realities of Māori (P. Reid, 1997). Reid (1997) also noted, "In a collective statement where different people added different lines called 'Being Māori is . . .', one contribution notes that being Māori is 'messing up the government and its statistics' [Walker, 1978]" (p. 85).

In the 1980s, official approaches to "Māori race" changed to measure ethnicity as cultural affiliation and Māori ancestry (Cormack, 2010; P. Reid, 1997).

Although blood quantum is no longer used in official ethnicity data collections, it remains common among lay public and harkens to a generational understanding within Aotearoa (Collins, 2004; Cormack, 2010). Blood quantum perpetuates ideas of authenticity and fragments Māori ethnicity into fractions. This restricts Māori identity to essentialised ideas of how much is required to be authentic. Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā are often questioned about "how much" Māori they are so others can evaluate whether they are "Māori enough" (Bevan, 2000). These essentialist discourses reiterate the contested notion of authenticity, who verifies and assigns this to whom, and the role of the "dominant" group in political and social discussions of authenticity and who is *really* Indigenous. L. Smith (2012) noted:

These debates are designed to fragment and marginalize those who speak for, or in support of indigenous issues. They frequently have the effect also of silencing and making invisible

the presence of other groups within the indigenous society like women, the urban non-status tribal person and those whose ancestry or “blood quantum” is “too white”. (p. 76)

Exploration of socially assigned ethnicity, therefore, adds a level of nuance to the conceptualisations of racism, ethnicity, blood quantum and essentialism for Māori in contemporary Aotearoa, which can expand our understanding of the relationships between identity, health and well-being for Māori, and provide alternative narratives.

Methodology and method

A Kaupapa Māori research paradigm was used to undertake semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. This involved considering cultural as well as structural issues that influence Māori lives (C. Smith, 2013) and purposefully posed critical questions about the purpose and intent of the research:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated? (L. Smith, 2012, p. 44)

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a particular emphasis on *whakawhanaungatanga*, including carrying out interviews *kanohi ki te kanohi* to build reciprocal, equitable relationships with participants. The process was guided by *manaakitanga*, and a commitment to research practice that was respectful, cautious and open (Ormond, Cram, & Carter, 2006; L. Smith, 2012).

Participants were recruited through advertisements posted at university sites and via the researcher's networks. Potential participants contacted the researcher via text, email or phone. Participants were eligible to be part

of the study if they self-identified as being of Māori ethnicity, self-reported that they are socially assigned as *Pākehā* and were a student or staff member at an Auckland university. It was critical that participants self-identified as Māori and self-reported that they were socially assigned as *Pākehā* because this ensured that the participants had autonomy over their identity and that the researcher did not socially assign anyone's ethnicity. Thirteen people contacted the researcher within three days of advertising, all of whom were contacted back by the researcher. Of those, 10 responded to the researcher's follow-up to confirm that they wished to take part in the study and met the criteria; nine of the respondents were female and one was male.

Interviews were undertaken during February to March 2016 and were directed, but not controlled, by a semi-structured interview schedule. Because the researcher was an insider in this space, participants asked the researcher questions about being socially assigned as *Pākehā* also. The researcher recognises this insider role of being both a staff member and a student at an Auckland university, and being socially assigned as *Pākehā* as a strength in this project as it provided a foundation for relationships and conversations to be built with the participants, as Indigenous scholars such as Webber (2009), Sunseri (2007) and Wilson (2008) have suggested previously.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, then thematically coded using NVivo11. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2014), and common themes were identified in the participants' transcripts. As part of the research and consent process, participants were asked whether they wanted to be consulted if they were directly quoted, to review their transcripts and choose their own pseudonym. Several participants chose to adjust their transcripts and quotes to further protect their anonymity.

Results

Three meta-themes were identified from the analysis: (a) claims of identity, or the processes that participants go through when they choose whether or not to “claim” their Māori identity through awareness of the contexts they are in; (b) challenges to identity, which reflect the various ways participants are questioned about their Māori identity both by others and by themselves internalising external narratives; and (c) reinforcement of identity, which centres around ways participants actively support others who experience the same challenges, and ways in which participants are supported and re-affirmed as Māori. These meta-themes as a process are cyclical and occur in multiple settings, at multiple stages, and interact with each other, with participants entering anywhere throughout the cycle. These meta-themes, and the subthemes within them, are expanded on below, drawing on excerpts from the interviews to support the discussion (see Figure 1).

Claims of identity

An overarching theme identified in participants’ talk was the implicit and explicit decision-making processes involved in claiming their

ethnic identity as Māori, correcting wrong assumptions by others and (re)affirming their Māori identity. Subthemes were identified that related to (a) participants’ awareness of the context they lived in, (b) the influence of whānau in making claims to identity and (c) perceived responsibility.

Awareness of the context: In talking about their identity, participants displayed an awareness of the racialised society in which they live and the position Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā inhabit in relation to Māori who are socially assigned as Māori. Participants recognised advantages they possessed through “fitting” into the dominant social reality and that this could contribute to their decision-making about identifying openly as Māori. One participant, Marama, talked about socially assigned ethnicity as Pākehā as a choice available to her by which she could potentially receive some associated benefits, in particular, when seeking employment. In the excerpt below, Marama discusses how looking Pākehā can make things “easier” for her, and her strategies regarding management of appearance:

Well, let’s be honest as well, it’s easier to be Pākehā and it’s easier to look Pākehā the lighter your skin is and the more you can fit

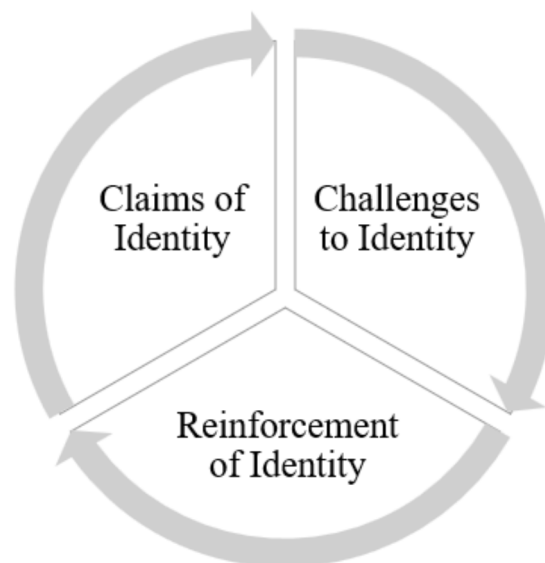


FIGURE 1 Te Haerenga Tuakiri: The Journey of Identity

in, and not just fit in, but thrive, you know all the rules. . . . I'm always really aware of the image that I present, so when I'm putting my jewellery on, you know, a pair of pearl earrings you can't get any more White Anglo-Saxon Protestant than that. . . . And I'm aware of those choices that I make if I go to a job interview. . . . Now that I think about it, when I'm going for job interviews I present myself as white and conservative. . . . I would not even think of projecting my Māori side for a second. (Marama)

Marama's implication that looking Pākehā makes things easier suggests an awareness of the racialised societies in which these interactions take place, which is also reflected in literature on health and housing and the racist inequities seen in these areas (Houkamau & Sibley, 2015).

Similarly, Tāne's narrative reflects participants' understanding of the structural advantages available to Pākehā:

I'm coming into my middle age, and if I can be a middle-aged white guy, then structurally I'm already in an advantageous point in society. . . . Because I'm male, because I have Pākehā genes, and because I'm middle-aged and I'm a house owner. . . . Well, mortgage owner. So . . . I am predisposed to be structurally advantaged because of my whakapapa, because of my parents. (Tāne)

Tāne acknowledges that his position as a male in middle age who is socially assigned as Pākehā reflects advantages that both whiteness and gender can present within racialised contexts (Herbert, 2011).

Participants acknowledged that decisions about claiming identity could be strategic, often in relation to how Māori are portrayed in society, stereotyped and subject to racism (A. Moewaka-Barnes, Borell, & McCreanor, 2014; A. Moewaka-Barnes et al., 2012; Wall, 1997). Both Mariana and Moana recognise the

privileges of being socially assigned as Pākehā in the excerpts below:

There's the tricky part there in that where you want to be "Yes, proud I am Māori, and this is my culture" but at the same time quite aware that looking Pākehā there's a lot of privilege that comes with that. (Mariana)

Just people are nicer to you if you're pale. (Moana)

Participants displayed an overall understanding of the ways in which racism and privilege operated as systems within society. Manawa described her experiences of racism and understanding that her socially assigned ethnicity as Pākehā was a protective factor for her in certain situations, in particular, when conversations about equity initiatives were brought up:

We copped a lot of "you don't deserve scholarships", so especially for me wanting to go into med with the whole like "you don't need to get a high GPA" and you know, so I was very um, I guess, growing up I was very, . . . very reluctant to tell people that I'm was Māori. Like I would always play the "Barbie doll card" I guess. . . . And like I didn't tell anyone I was doing [a STEM programme], I didn't tell anyone that cos as soon as they would put two and two together it was just the whole why do you get scholarships, I work harder than you, crap . . . it made me very, um, reluctant to identify myself as Māori, to like large groups of people. I kind of just dumbed it down a lot, which like, looking back now, I should have really stood up and said more but, you know, when there's like 100 against one, it's very hard to.

In this instance, Manawa's self-preservation and control over how she identified was determined by her experiences of racism, discrimination and bullying. She described her exposure to stereotypes about perceived "Māori privilege"

in terms of lower entry criteria (“you don’t need to get a high GPA”) and scholarships (“why do you get scholarships, I work harder than you”), which have been identified by other researchers as persistent representations of Māori rights and entitlements (Meihana, 2015; A. Moewaka-Barnes et al., 2012). Her reference to the “Barbie doll card” provides a visualisation of how Manawa identified in this instance, and conveys the idea that she may see her identity as a “card” she can play to align with a hyperfeminine identity of whiteness (DuCille, 1996). Manawa’s description of her experience shows that she intrinsically understands the complexity of her positionality as socially assigned as Pākehā, and is therefore able to navigate this space to avoid or reduce exposure to experiences of racism, in particular, with large groups of people. However, she also noted that on reflection she feels like she “should have really stood up and said more”, but recognised, in saying “when there’s like 100 against one, it’s very hard to”, that given the dynamics of that situation, it was hard to stand up.

In some cases, the decision not to outwardly identify as Māori was done for self-protection and reflected an understanding of the potential to experience racism. In the excerpt below, Ngaire talks about her decisions on how to identify within certain contexts such as healthcare:

So that’s why I went down that route and actually started actively identifying as Māori because before I probably would’ve put New Zealand European and not even bothered putting Māori. Even now, and this is probably another point, I always put New Zealand European cos I, you know, I don’t want any discrimination in healthcare, just putting that out there. Haha. (Ngaire)

Perceived responsibility: Related to this awareness of their context, a sense of responsibility was a motivator for participants to identify as Māori or correct their identity when they were

assigned as Pākehā. Often this was in relation to addressing racism and through recognition of privileges associated with being socially assigned as Pākehā as discussed above (Jones et al., 2008; J. Reid et al., 2016).

I think the Treaty is important to me and that being part Māori and part Pākehā . . . and stuff, all of that together is interesting to reconcile with the formation of this country and some of the legal stuff around that. So, part of being Māori for me is this political thing . . . it’s recognising and being there to say like “um, actually what about Māori?” (Ngaire)

Moana described her response to racism while on a field trip with her university class to an area with a high Māori population when other students were making racist comments about Māori and Asian peoples:

I just sat and silently seethed cos these are all like 21-year-olds, and I don’t know any of them. And one day after a really tiring day of working, I was just like “are you for fucking real? Like, really?” And one of them was like “aw, that’s not racist!” And I was like “really?” . . . the rest of the trip and the whole ride back, the rest of the van was awkwardly silent . . . they were all just shooting me dirty looks the whole time, like “we’re not racist” . . . you guys probably wouldn’t have talked like that if one of your brown friends was in the van, kinda thing is the point. . . . They assume that you’re one of them. (Moana)

This excerpt describes Moana’s initial response of staying “silent” but upset, and then the decision to speak out and the result of the speaking out, and demonstrates the complex ways in which exposure to racism affects interactions with others and one’s own well-being. This action of speaking out also reinforced the idea that Moana was not a member of their “white” group. By using her socially assigned ethnicity as Pākehā and choosing her timing, Moana

was able to disrupt the assumption of whiteness and racism, by posing the question to the racist group, which elicited their thoughts and response of claiming innocence from racism (Kannen, 2008).

Influence of whānau: A further subtheme related to claims to identity was the complexity within whānau about identity, often in relation to whānau members having different ideas about identity or identifying differently. In this sense, there was also a negotiation of identity within the whānau space regarding the claiming, autonomy and ownership of Māori identity. Within whānau, participants' Māori identities were not always affirmed by other whānau members or were subject to challenge. For example, Manawa had her "Māoriness" mocked by her cousins, which encouraged her to engage and claim further her Māori identity:

So, all my cousins always used to mock me and my sister about going to a Pākehā school—"aw, you guys don't know anything nanananana"—and I think that kinda motivated me to one-up them. I went to all the hui, all the family reunions, I went to everything I possibly could. (Manawa)

In this sense, Manawa's engagement with things Māori was also a way to strengthen her claims to being Māori. The excerpt also reflects ideas about what it means to be Māori, and what might be understood as markers of Māori identity or measures of connection to Māori culture (e.g., participation in Māori schooling, and attending hui and family reunions).

Overall, the claims of identity theme illustrates the processes that participants go through regarding awareness of the contextual factors that influence and can restrict claiming Māori identity. These processes of claiming identity also illustrate the ways in which challenges can restrict these.

Challenges to identity

The second meta-theme was challenges to identity, which occurred in multiple areas of the participants' lives. Participants reacted to these challenges in different ways depending on where the challenges originated from. Experiences of having the legitimacy and authenticity of their Māori identity questioned or challenged and being socially assigned as Pākehā, both subtly and explicitly, were recounted.

External challenges: External challenges were from both Māori and non-Māori, and the contexts within which they occurred appeared to influence how participants responded. Moana and Mariana shared experiences at school, which was a common setting discussed by participants:

Aw, I got bullied mercilessly . . . the first two schools I went to, I was in a whānau class . . . and that was all right, but we more felt bullied by the Pākehā kids at those schools. I remember going to after-school care and the people were like "no you can't speak Māori here, cos you might be saying stuff about us" and getting blamed for everything. So, when we moved . . . I wanted to go to Kura Kaupapa but we still ended up [bullied]. We were too Māori at one school and too pale at the other. (Moana)

Mariana talked about her experience of being asked to talk to the class by teachers about her Māori experiences and the questioning of her "Māoriness" by students in the class:

I'd get up and tell the class about it, and everyone's like "Aw, OK, you're Māori, but you don't look Māori. What's the percentage?" (Mariana)

This challenge to Mariana's identity related to how she was perceived to look and draws on ideas of proportions of descent (i.e., "what's the percentage?"). This use of quantifying language

was also identified in the talk of other participants, and reflects the ways in which the idea of “blood talk” has been perpetuated within current contexts. Marama discusses challenges regarding this intra-whānau identity:

When I told my mum, my adoptive mum, I was like, “Wow, I found out I’m like an eighth Māori” and she was like, “Oh, don’t be silly”. . . . What do you do with that? I am, and I wanted to, feel proud of it and explore it and embrace it and I don’t feel like I can really do any of those things really. (Marama)

For Marama coming to know her Māori whakapapa later in life, the dismissal she talks about receiving from her adoptive mother about her Māori ethnicity can be understood as the catalyst for her questioning her own identity as Māori, and illustrates the ways in which challenges can be both external and internalised and often based on essentialist interpretations of what being Māori is (Kukutai & Webber, 2017; McIntosh, 2005; L. Smith, 2012).

Internalisation of challenges: Challenges to identity were often internalised, and the idea of being Māori enough was present across participants’ narratives. The internalisation of ideas about authenticity and essentialist discourses was reflected in their questioning their identity as Māori. Effects from these challenges described by participants included feeling unsafe, excluded, self-excluding, changing speech and changing behaviours. Cate talked about the impact these challenges to her identity had while at university:

It was very, very clear, you had to be a certain type of Māori to be part of [Māori group] . . . and that was the first time that I felt that being Māori was, not oppressive, that’s not the word, but, it was working against me . . . it was also the first time I felt like I wasn’t Māori enough and I was failing my identity as a Māori student or a Māori female . . . that was quite a hard realisation that other

people weren’t seeing me for who I thought I was and that just made me question everything. Maybe I’m not Māori, maybe I should stop associating with being Māori, if I’m not gonna do it right, might as well not do it at all . . . that certainly was the catalyst to that disconnect. (Cate)

Cate went on further to suggest that there are ideas of what being Māori constitutes, and measuring up to this can be challenging, drawing on quantifying language (e.g., “yardstick”, “scale up”) in her narrative:

It seems to be a generalised thing, there’s this yardstick of what it means, or what it is to be Māori and you scale up where or how you act and what you do. (Cate)

Additionally, the ways in which others perceived participants influenced their feelings about being Māori enough and recognised as Māori despite self-identifying as Māori. Cate went on to say:

I lost that, not the self-identification, the what other people identified me as, and that that kinda hurt. Yeah, that I wasn’t recognised for that and it was more a case of I wasn’t Māori enough because I couldn’t speak te reo, but I could understand it. You know that kind of put me in a category of how “un-Māori” I was. (Cate)

Cate’s experience highlights how complex, context-specific identity interactions occur. Additionally, Cate recognised that her socially assigned ethnicity changes based on context, reiterating Roth’s (2016) concept of “observed race”.

Being Māori enough was discussed in various contexts. However, participants recognised the role that colonisation has in relation to these feelings of being “enough”. Participants also understood that being socially assigned

as Pākehā added to their feelings of not being Māori enough. Marie discussed this:

I don't know anyone who feels Māori enough, because no matter how good they are at te reo or how Māori they look to the outside world, whatever their whakapapa, whatever, I don't know anyone who goes "Yeah, I'm totally tūturu Māori, I feel Māori enough". And I think that's another part of it, kind of the curse that colonisation has brought on us. For me being socially ascribed as not Māori, adds to me not feeling Māori enough. (Marie)

Participants talked about their awareness of stereotypes about what it meant to be Māori, and how they might modify their behaviour to align with ideas about what an authentic Māori identity is:

When I was young, coming from kura to mainstream school, first I went hardout Māori like, yeah. (Moana)

Stereotypes were a way participants were seen as aligned with being Māori, or not being Māori enough because they did not always fulfil these stereotypical ideas of what being Māori is. Cate discussed how her academic success was seen as her turning her back on her brown identity:

Just because I was doing well for myself, I mean obviously academically, like there was people that started two years before and they're still doing their undergrads. . . . You probably know, but, in all of those instances you put them all together and it was just like I was turning my back on my identity as a brown person. (Cate)

There were numerous challenges to identity, and these were internalised by participants because of their constant exposure to authenticity and essentialist discourses. However, participants were able to draw on resources presented to them to reinforce their Māori identities.

Reinforcement of identity

The final meta-theme identified focused on how participants had their ethnicity supported by others and how they reinforced the identity of those who were going through the same challenges they had experienced.

Reinforcement from others: Reinforcement from Māori, frequently those in superior professional and academic positions, as well as within educational settings, was described as providing the participants with cultural support regarding their identity, their work and their right to be Māori. Marie discussed this in relation to her work:

I was working at Waikato Hospital and I had good relationships with the Māori health staff there and quite a few Māori patients. And they were very encouraging of me. They were like, "No, claim your Māori identity", so I guess I'm still working out what it means for me [to be Māori]. (Marie)

Workplaces were often seen as an outlet for reinforcing and affirming Māori identity, and Marie discussed this in relation to her other colleagues and patients. Tāne discussed the way working in tertiary education reinforces Māori identities and illustrated the ways in which Māori are able to navigate multiple spaces (Kukutai & Webber, 2017; T. McIntosh, 2005):

The best thing for me in that regard is coming to work in tertiary, because you saw successful, driven Māori who were living ably in both worlds. (Tāne)

Participating in this study was also seen as reinforcing, as Marama discussed:

After speaking with you, what I would like is I would like to speak my truth quietly, don't need to yell and scream and push it. I just wanna be authentic, be whole, be who I am.

. . . And I don't have to shout it from the rooftops, but I do wanna say it. (Marama)

Reinforcement from participants: Participants talked about how whānau looked to them for support, understanding and knowledge about their Māori whakapapa and identities. Marie described how she provided reinforcement of Māori identity for others in her family:

I went round to my uncle's place on the weekend and talked to my cousin about what I knew, and showed her our whakapapa, showed her a couple of books that I have and talked to her about that kind of thing. Um, and that was really nice, like I felt that was a really good thing for my well-being, to be able to share that with my cousin and to encourage her. (Marie)

Additionally, often participants were reinforcing others' Māori identities. Tumanako, for example, discussed this in relation to her children:

It was very important for me to name my kids Māori names, because they're white. (Tumanako)

Participants were able to recognise self-doubt in others; however, they did not explicitly make the link between the internalisation of their "not being enough" and actively supporting others who displayed this. Participants were able to draw on resources presented to them to assist others experiencing similar issues.

Discussion

Participants' narratives of being socially assigned as Pākehā demonstrated nuanced understandings of the racialised society we live in, and how this influences both identity and their perceived responsibilities in addressing racism (Bevan, 2000; Root, 1996). In line

with other research, participants acknowledged that being socially assigned as Pākehā came with advantages because the colonial systems that structure society benefit those who are classified at the top of these racial or ethnic hierarchies through racism and white privilege (Chilisa, 2012; Kwate & Meyer, 2010; J. Reid et al., 2016; P. Reid & Robson, 2007; L. Smith, 2012). The structural, unearned privileges that are disguised as meritocracy prioritise whiteness and establish inequities for others through racism (Borell, Gregory, McCreanor, Jensen, & Moewaka-Barnes, 2009; Came, 2013; Kwate & Goodman, 2014; Kwate & Meyer, 2010; P. McIntosh, 1990; H. Moewaka-Barnes, Borell, & McCreanor, 2014; P. Reid & Robson, 2007). Participants' narratives also reiterate the importance of understanding how notions of ethnicity (and race) can differ based on context, who is assigning them and how we look (Roth, 2016). Understanding how socially assigned ethnicity operates can provide insight into how societal level access is largely assigned based on whether you look like you are from the dominant social group (Jones et al., 2008; Roth, 2016).

Light-skinned advantage was identified by participants in this study, aligning with research from the United States on colourism and differential experiences related to skin colour within racial or ethnic groups (Keith & Monroe, 2016). A distinction is made here between white privilege and light-skinned advantage for Māori who are assigned as Pākehā. This acknowledges that the privilege or advantage is based on phenotypical closeness to whiteness providing access to aspects of societal advantage, for instance in employment. Additionally, it acknowledges continued exposure to colonisation and trauma. Light-skinned advantage can be accrued (Jones et al., 2008; J. Reid et al., 2016); however, colonisation, racism and white privilege still mediate Māori lives.

As identified in other research, participants were aware of this and able to use it to disrupt racism from positions that were not expected

(Bevan, 2000; Kannen, 2008). Using light-skinned advantage to address racism has the potential for people to be seen as race traitors by those who socially assigned their ethnicity to them (Bevan, 2000; Preston & Chadderton, 2012; Root, 1996). However, when participants in this study did not address racism for self-preservation and safety reasons, they felt they should have.

Racism, authenticity, essentialism and ideas of (not) being Māori enough were recurrent throughout participants' narratives. Essentialist notions of identity are often linked to authenticity in relation to colonisers' interpretations of indigeneity (L. Smith, 2012). As L. Smith (2012) noted, this approach to authenticity centres on "a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege" (p. 77). Understanding Māori identities as complex, situated and fluid also represents a rejection of colonial-settler views of a homogenised Māori identity, which can also help to disrupt coloniser claims about who counts as Māori and therefore what rights and interests Māori have.

Through colonialism, conceptualisations of Māori ethnicity are also linked to racialisation and skin colour. In a contemporary sense, these conceptualisations fail to consider forced colonial histories or Indigenous understandings of identity and diminish Māori identity to exclusionary limited interpretations (O'Regan, 2001; L. Smith, 2012). The continued colonial restrictions of identifying and "defining indigenous identities in terms of cultural authenticity or blood quantum" (Bell, 2014, p. 117), as apparent in this study, perpetuates inaccurate understandings of how Indigenous peoples identify themselves (L. Smith, 2012). Bell (2014) further noted that within colonial, (un)settler societies, the dominant groups do not experience essentialism: "Dominant peoples . . . grant themselves the privilege of internal diversity and flexibility—their culture is 'normal', they

are individuals, barely collectives at all—allowing them to largely escape the problematics of essentialism that modern western theories have imposed upon others" (p. 117).

Participants' narratives about blood quantum, phenotypical markers and te reo usage exhibit challenges to their authenticity based on essentialism, as has been discussed by other scholars (O'Regan, 2001; Moeke-Maxwell, 2005). These characteristics, however, have become understood as markers of Māori identity through reinforced colonial discourses that attempt to restrict Māori and Indigenous access to their resources and power (Jackson, 2016; O'Regan, 2001; Trask, 1999).

The re-naming and re-shaping of Māori identity through colonial discourses was evident in the internalisation of ideas of "enoughness" among participants. Wall (1997) discussed portrayals of Māori identity through colonial re-branding as what counts as a "quintessential Māori" (p. 41). Notions of fixed Māori identity reiterate the discourses regarding enoughness, specifically being Māori enough, that often restrict Māori from accessing their ethnicity and identity (T. McIntosh, 2005).

Wall (1997) elaborated that through the re-formation of Māori identity, the essence of Māori is subjugated in place of "resistance to, but within, the hegemonic confines of stereotypical colonial romanticisations of the Māori 'race'" (p. 41), a concept hooks (1992) relates to within her literature on Black re-presentations. The idea of an essentialist Māori identity raises issues for Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā (T. McIntosh, 2005; Wall, 1997), as evidenced in this study. The internalisation of being Māori enough often made the participants question their right to their own whakapapa, despite being aware of the colonial contexts that influenced Māori ethnicity.

The reinforcement of Māori identities that the participants provided to others who had undergone the same challenges provided a mechanism for re-claiming. Reinforcement illustrated in participants' kōrero provided

a powerful discourse of pride, strength and resiliency, despite the (colonial) challenges participants experience. Whānau were an outlet of reinforcement; whānau would look to participants to support their identity. This is evident in wider Indigenous narratives. For example, Morris (2013) stated that her identity was reinforced by both whānau and other Native peoples telling her, “You are more Native than you’ll ever know. Don’t let them tell you any different!” (p. 57). Herbert (2011) noted that for the participants of her study, reinforcement was from Māori sportspeople.

Conclusion

There is a complex navigation of identity for the participants of this study. They have intricate relationships with the nuances of Māori ethnicity for Māori who are socially assigned as Pākehā and are active in engaging in this space. Despite challenges and doubt, participants still identify as Māori even when they have the option of maintaining socially assigned ethnicity as Pākehā, illustrating the power and progressive nature of Māori identity. This is a counternarrative to the homogenising of Māori throughout colonial discourses, and reflects the ways in which participants are actively engaged with the complexity of their Māori identity.

There is an intricate relationship between the influences of colonisation and cultural, social and personal understandings of Māori ethnicity. Socially assigned ethnicity exhibits challenges to authenticity and can provide a “light-skinned advantage” in a racialised society. Despite the multiple layers to Māori identity, participants are still active in their identity process and do so in ways that attempt to deconstruct racism and reinforce Māori identities as variable and authentic.

Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
hui	gathering, meetings
kairangahau	researcher
kanohi ki te kanohi	face to face
kaupapa	purpose
Kaupapa Māori	Māori epistemology
kōrero	speak, talk, discuss; discussion
Kura Kaupapa	Māori immersion school
manaakitanga	respect; hospitality, kindness; mutual trust, respect and concern
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Te Haerenga Tuakiri	The Journey of Identity
te reo (Māori)	Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 proposing alliance with the Crown
tūturu	real, true, actual, authentic
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestry, connection
whakawhanaungatanga	kinship, links, ties; facilitating a more open relationship then mere researcher and researched; network of interactive links
whānau	family

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