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Identity construction and reconstruction: the role of socio-historical contexts in shaping Māori women's identity

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This article discusses intergenerational transformations in personal identity for New Zealand's indigenous Māori and links these to macro-societal (political, economic and cultural) changes in New Zealand society. Data is drawn from the life stories of 35 Māori women aged 18 to 78. Women born prior to 1950 and raised in traditional Māori communities interpreted Māori identity as related to communal economics, resourcefulness and Māori spiritual beliefs. Those born after 1960, raised in urban (multi-cultural) communities struggled to form a positive sense of being Māori during their formative years and reported 'dislocation' from their Māori identities as adults. Those born after the 1970s expressed strong political views that reflected their early exposure to affirmative ideologies regarding Māori rights to equality. Marked differences in women's stories highlight the overarching influence of Māori identity politics at a collective level for personal interpretations of what it means to be Māori.

Keywords: identity; life-story model of identity; Māori identity; indigenous psychology; social identity

Introduction

The salience of Māori identity in the national media and political arena highlights the ongoing relevance of diverse Māori aspirations to New Zealand society and draws attention to the cultural, social, political and historical processes that influence identity construction over time. This paper exposes the link between these macro-societal factors and personal experiences of being Māori by demonstrating intergenerational changes in identity for 35 Māori women from three age groups or 'cohorts'. Women's life stories were collected and analysed; this paper discusses the content of those stories, specifically the self-definitions, self-descriptions and self-evaluations women associated to being Māori. Differences between cohorts on these self perceptions are linked to the sociological processes which created the formative conditions that shaped women's significant experiences and therefore what they believe about their identities. Of particular interest are the relevance of collective identities and the associated political advancement of Māori in the post-1970s period, which shaped the material and ideological contexts younger Māori women were exposed to over the course of their lives (Sissons, 1993). It is argued that these broader contextual factors are central to identity development as they shaped the

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meanings women were exposed to regarding what it means to be Māori, their access to positive Māori role models and their perceptions of the relevance of the Māori language and culture to them personally. Emphasised herein is the need to understand Māori identity as it evolves within particular ecologies and the importance of ideological and historical variations for the possibilities and dimensions of personal identity development. It is suggested that to 'really understand' Māori, and why they interpret their identities as they do, it is essential to understand how lives are shaped by socio-historical conditions. Greater appreciation of the impact of these sociological factors upon Māori identity will broaden our understandings of the factors that determine Māori cultural diversity and why contemporary Māori differ so markedly in their personal interpretations of what it means to be Māori.

Theoretical foundations

The basic theoretical frameworks selected for the study were drawn from Dan McAdams' (1980; 1988) research into how individuals construct identity within personal life stories, Strauss' (1954) research on the link between personal identity and socio-historical contexts and narrative research conducted by Schulz (1998), who explored intergenerational transformations in Native American identity.

For the purposes of the study, identity was treated as 'held' within life stories (Eakin, 1999). This approach to identity has become increasingly accepted as a valid conceptual model over the last 30 years within the social sciences (Atkinson, 1999). In a series of influential publications, key contributor to theoretical development in this area Dan McAdams (2001), has demonstrated how identity can be seen as taking the form of a personal life-story. From this perspective humans construct a personal life story as a means of reconstructing their past in a meaningful way and affirming their need to experience a sense of themselves as an enduring character over time. McAdams observed that life stories come complete with a record of significant life events as well as a sense of causal coherence (that is, an explanation of how previous events give rise to current circumstances). In this view, life phases may be considered 'chapters' in a person's evolving autobiography and therefore identity may be found in the 'contents' of their life story – in particular the self-definitions, self-descriptions and associated meanings that individuals describe when they talk about who they are and what that means as a member of society. Explanations for identity may therefore be sought in life histories by seeking references to the causal factors (such as events, experiences and role models) which gave rise to the meanings people attach to their own identities.

While McAdams has worked from a psychological perspective and focussed on how individuals construct their life stories in their own minds, others have argued that approaches to personal identity need to be supplemented by a consideration of a wider spectrum of phenomena. For example, Strauss (1959), argued that social scientists often fail to fully understand human experience because researchers study individuals as isolated entities without taking into account socio-historical conditions. In Strauss' view, because researchers typically study the course of single lives or short sequences of action carried out by individuals, the impact of socio-historical

factors upon identity are not adequately emphasised. Consequently, life stories were seen as the richest source of information because they provided an account of identity-shaping factors as well insight into the multiple environmental features that determined them. Moreover, he noted that because each generation shares similar experiences they share similar personal characteristics and tendencies. Therefore, by locating those shared commonalities (and the sources from which they derive), one may reveal the consequences of socio-historical context for identity (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). To examine the impact of socio-historical contexts on identity, he suggested researchers compare life stories of individuals from different age groups and seek commonalities and differences between groups.

Using this approach, Schulz (1998) demonstrated the link between socio-historical factors (different political and ideological regimes in American society) and how these have shaped personal interpretations of ethnic identity among Navajo women. She analysed the content of 31 narrative interviews with Navajo women to locate key themes (recurring patterns of ideas) in relation to identity. Women were divided into three different age groups: those born before 1946, those born between 1946 and 1960 and those born between 1961 and 1976. These age groups were chosen because of their relationship to changes in the United States Indian policies that women were influenced by as they grew to adulthood. She asked participants how they interpreted their own identities as Indian, Navajo and as women and how their ideas were shaped by their personal experiences. To demonstrate the link between socio-historical factors and identity, she used excerpts from life-story interviews to show how the interpretations each woman gave of being Navajo and 'Indian' differed and how those differences reflected the communities in which they were born and the different political regimes to which they were exposed.

Following this work, and drawing from the teachings of Strauss and McAdams, I collected life stories of Māori women from different age groups. The content of their life stories was then connected to the significant experiences and formative conditions to which women were exposed. By linking these ecological factors to the broader socio-historical contexts in which women were born and raised, I was able to identify intergenerational changes in Māori identity and specify how those changes may be understood as a reflection of sociological processes beyond women's own immediate control and (in some cases) their conscious awareness. I chose to focus on three key socio-historical processes in New Zealand society and examined how these shaped women's identities. These were: Māori urbanisation after the 1950s; the drive towards Māori assimilation which underpinned Government policy towards Māori until the late 1960s (including overt racism experienced by participants during that time); and the Māori political and cultural renaissance which came into effect from the 1970s.

The identities women described are presented in this paper as reflections of the link between collective identities, socio-historical contexts and personal identities. To contextualise the material, a sketch of the major historical events typically associated with Māori identity in literature around the topic is provided. This is followed by a description of the study methods, the sample and then key commonalities and differences between age cohorts. Excerpts from life stories are then used to demonstrate how socio-historical factors shaped women's identities.

Socio-historical contexts

Pre-colonial Māori society was communal and tribally based. Māori tribes occupied and cultivated ancestral (tribal) lands. Work, tools and living areas were also shared. Within Māori society, identity was determined by satisfactory fulfilment of social obligations towards biological kin through *whānau* (extended family based on shared genealogy), *hapū* (sub-tribes comprising several *whānau*) and *iwi* (tribes comprising *hapū*) (Walker, 1990, p. 63). In this regard, *whānau* obligations were central to self-definition. Further, conducting the self in a way that honoured the collective mode of operation enabled individuals to achieve social acceptance, a sense of purpose and meaning and indeed an identity within their social world (Barlow, 1991).

Māori were colonised after 1840 when the Treaty of Waitangi ('the Treaty') was signed by (some) Māori chiefs and early British settlers (Walker, 1990, p. 94). As the settler population increased, Pākehā (the name given to white settlers and their descendants), gained political power and Māori lost much of their land through war, land sales and confiscation. From the late 1860s, the Māori capacity to self-support changed due to the loss of their socio-economic base and, as a result, Māori became increasingly reliant upon paid employment by Pākehā employers and landowners (Walker, 1990).

Although Māori society had changed rapidly between 1840 and 1940, due to geographical isolation the maintenance of a distinct Māori identity was still possible for Māori up until the 1950s. Until that time, the vast majority of Māori lived in rural areas while Pākehā lived in larger New Zealand cities. This meant Māori were able to retain traditional economic practices such as communal gardening and food gathering from the sea. Moreover, since generations of Māori families lived in the same communities young Māori were socialised by their own familial role models. As such they were able to hear the Māori language spoken as part of their daily lives and receive instruction in surviving off the land using traditional food gathering, hunting and storage practices (Beaglehole & Ritchie, 1958, pp. 132–154).

Māori society changed significantly after the 1950s as New Zealand's economy grew and Māori moved to the cities to seek work (Walker, 1990, p. 94). Urbanisation occurred rapidly and by the mid-1970s only one in four Māori remained in rural areas (Walker, 1990). At that time, a common view held by New Zealanders was that Māori should assimilate to mainstream or 'New Zealand' culture and become 'One People' with Pākehā. As a reflection of this ideology, the education system did not endorse Māori culture and language and negative views around Māori people and culture were commonplace. For example, research by Beaglehole and Beaglehole conducted in 1946 reported a range of negative stereotypes attached to Māori by Pākehā, which included the view that Māori were 'slackers', dirty, lazy and dishonest. Such attitudes made urban settlement challenging for Māori who found it difficult to obtain good quality accommodation in predominantly Pākehā communities. Māori were generally channelled into semi-skilled labouring and service jobs which declined in availability from the 1970s. After this time unemployment became common among Māori and the economic and social divisions between Pākehā and Māori became entrenched (Walker, 1990).

Elsewhere I have observed that the relevance of the 160-year period up until the 1970s for understanding contemporary Māori identity is vital (Houkamau, in press). Māori traditional sources of identity construction declined as Māori became

dislocated from their tribal areas and traditional economic practices. In addition, in the cities the ability of Māori to survive relied upon their ability to acculturate to Pākehā society. In an effort to be 'successful' many young urban Māori emulated Pākehā people and culture – a process which accelerated the loss of Māori practices and values while effectively alienating Māori from their tribal relatives and role models (Walker, 1975).

The process of cultural loss slowed during the 1970s when educated Māori challenged and attempted to reverse the effects of Māori land loss, urbanisation and deculturation by advocating Māori reclaim their heritage (Poata-Smith, 1997). During this time, key Māori political figures such as Donna Awatere (1984) proposed Pākehā had tried to eliminate Māori through 'forced assimilation', which denied Māori their 'identity' and promoted the view Māori would only progress if they were 'true' to their own culture. Following this, Māori political leaders demanded that Māori cultural equality be promoted throughout Government institutions and ultimately throughout New Zealand society on the whole. Spurred on by the increased acknowledgement of the validity of Māori culture on the part of the Government, as well as the associated shifts of opinion among some Pākehā, Māori began to reclaim their Māori cultural identity by learning to speak Māori and study Māori culture and history (Webster, 1998).

This Māori 'cultural renaissance' has had continued momentum. Since the late 1980s, in response to Māori demands for equality many Government-funded initiatives meant to reduce Māori inequalities in relation to health, criminal offending and education have focussed on recognising the value of Māori cultural distinctiveness (Chapple, 2000, pp. 101–115). Māori curriculum in mainstream schools, Māori education centres and early childcare centres which specialise in imparting Māori language to children (Kohanga Reo) have also grown in popularity. Māori recently established their own political party to further their political, social and economic progress and a Māori-controlled television station started broadcasting in 2004 with its key mission to strengthen and revitalise the Māori language and culture.

Thus, overall, the last 40 years have seen massive changes in the social landscape of New Zealand and how Māori people, their history and culture are perceived. Views around what it means to be Māori have shifted accordingly. As Metge (1976; 1995) has observed, while being Māori was seen as socially backward by previous generations, having Māori cultural knowledge (for example being able to speak Māori and understand cultural protocol) has become fashionable and many young, educated Māori are focussed on teaching their children to learn the Māori language and culture. Alongside this significant cultural revitalisation, many Māori have been exposed to new socio-political concepts over the last 30 years, particularly the view that Māori are equal but different from Pākehā and other New Zealanders. This knowledge may enhance Māori identity at the personal level by helping Māori to attribute current Māori social problems to socio-historical injustices rather than Māori inadequacies (Liu, Wilson, McClure & Higgins, 1998, pp. 1021–1047). In addition, these ideologies foster a sense of personal pride among Māori as they ideologically position Māori as a 'unique' people in New Zealand – indigenous to this land and entitled to 'special' treatment as partners to the Treaty of Waitangi.

Despite these advancements, Māori continue to feature prominently in most negative social statistics (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2008). Since

these are frequently publicised in the national media, New Zealanders are subject to a bombardment of unfavourable concepts and imagery around Māori (Walker, 1996). Moreover, research shows many Pākehā are sceptical about Māori claims to compensation of Treaty breaches and, as a reflection, Māori still face considerable intolerance and racism from their Pākehā counterparts (Taylor & Wetherell, 1995, pp. 69–84).

Further complications in the understandings of Māori identity can be located within notions of group diversity. While Māori are often referred to as if they were a homogenous ‘people’, they are in fact culturally heterogeneous. As a direct reflection of urbanisation, Māori are demographically and ethnically diverse, with an estimated one in five Māori unable to name their own tribes (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). It is estimated that less than half of Māori have an adequate knowledge of their own language (Durie, 2003) and research suggests a proportion of Māori no longer see their Māori heritage and culture as a particularly significant aspect of their identities (Durie et al., 1996). Leading expert on Māori health development in New Zealand, Mason Durie (1994), has described three sub-groups of Māori, each characterised according to the extent to which they are enculturated (can engage competently with ‘traditional’ Māori culture) as opposed to deculturated (distanced from Māori cultural values and practices). In his view ‘conservative’ Māori are both ‘culturally’ and ‘socially’ Māori, understand their Māori genealogy, speak some Māori and are familiar with Māori custom. ‘Bi-cultural’ Māori identify as Māori yet are socially competent among Pākehā. A third group he referred to as ‘deculturated’ and, as a corollary, are the most marginalised. This group finds it difficult to be accepted socially and culturally among both Māori and Pākehā, know little about their Māori culture and language and are typically distanced from their own tribal and *hapū* networks. Williams (2000) extended Durie’s observations to include a group he refers to as New Zealanders of Māori descent. This group have Māori genealogy but may claim to be Pākehā or ‘Kiwi’. In his view, this group comprises around 170,000 of the New Zealand population.

What emerges, therefore, is a picture of contemporary Māori identity as being diverse and influenced by a myriad of sometimes conflicting ideas and images around what it means to be Māori. The existence of these different beliefs and a variety of Māori ‘groups’ draws attention to the role of socio-historical processes for identity development, as these reflect a plethora of environmental factors created by changes in New Zealand’s social and political landscape. While societal factors ultimately shape identity, much identity research in recent years has been individually focussed and concerned with linking personal enculturation to social and economic factors (Durie et al., 1996). Several authors have described ‘traditional’ views of Māori identity from their own personal experience (Karetu, 1979; 1990; 1993; Pere, 1979; 1982; 1988) while others have addressed how Māori identity is constructed through relationships with family, land and culture (Clothier, 1993; Douglas, 1983; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; Penetito, 2000). In recent years others have challenged the nature of the notion of a homogenous Māori identity (Meredith, 1998; 2000) and offered important insights into the evolving nature of identity among young urban Māori (Borell, 2005). While this literature has been invaluable in terms of demonstrating the relationship between Māori institutions, culture and vitality, such research has been limited in terms of exploring the subjective interpretations of Māori identity from Māori from different age groups and how

these link to socio-historical events in New Zealand history. The study described here aims to add to understandings in this area by exploring the lives and experiences of Māori women from different age groups and analysing the link between their identities and socio-historical factors.

Method

Consistent with Strauss' prescriptions and the Māori cultural preference for the use of story-telling to express knowledge (Bishop, 1996), I asked 35 Māori women aged 18 to 78 years old to describe their Māori identity by recounting the story of their life from year to year until the time they were interviewed. I suggested they describe some of their earliest childhood memories, then school experiences, and then work experiences and/or relationships and children (if appropriate) and how they may have shaped how they felt about being Māori. Rather than explaining every event recalled, women were asked to focus on how they interpreted what it meant to be Māori and the factors (events/people/experiences) that shaped those beliefs.

Participants

According to Anastas (1999), because narrative interviews are time consuming and often touch upon issues that are difficult or uncomfortable to discuss with a stranger, rapport between the interviewee and researcher is an essential aspect of the method. With this in mind, I believed that it was more appropriate to work with women as they would be more likely to feel comfortable speaking freely about sensitive issues and experiences.

Also relevant to consider here is the traditional role of men and women in traditional Māori society. Women were barred from participating in certain activities and barred from taking up certain social roles (Fletcher, 2000). While these practices are not universal among contemporary Māori, I was concerned they would effect what older Māori men would discuss with me. While I certainly do not propose that only women should interview Māori women, the potential for data to be obscured by gender dynamics was enough to prompt me to focus solely on women for this particular study.

Women were located through the University of Auckland or an Auckland-based Māori Urban Health and Social Services organisation, which provided support for the study. Nineteen were aged between 60 and 75, eight between 35 and 60 and eight between 18 and 35. Women worked in a variety of occupations. Twenty women (including all of those over 60 years) had received education to either primary or secondary level, while 15 participants had at least some formal tertiary education (8 of these women were university students at the time of participating in the study).

Data analysis and results

For the purposes of the study, identity was treated as the answer to the question 'Who am I' (as Māori) (self-definitions) and 'What does it mean to be "me" as a Māori' (self-descriptions and evaluations) (Erikson, 1966).

The basic methodological foundation for data analysis was the grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss proposed grounded

theory in response to the conventional social science paradigm (which collects data in order to verify a pre existing theory). Rather than this approach, these authors sought to develop a theory closely based on ('grounded in') the actual lived experiences of participants. Within a grounded theory methodology, a theory is generated by exploring the data carefully, categorising all available data and synthesising many categories into a few salient constructs. Their approach was adapted and four steps in data analysis were taken. I began with a basic content analysis and followed this by using constant comparison analysis and axial coding. In the final stage I compared the life stories of women from different age cohorts to identify similarities and differences between groups.

As identity was conceptualised as being comprised of definitional, descriptive and evaluative elements (see definition above) it was these elements which served as a starting point for my data analysis. First, content analysis (Berelson, 1952) was used to identify all the descriptions, evaluations, meanings and associated behaviours women recounted they 'had' or 'did' because they were Māori. To do this I read through each transcript to locate all references (statements, paragraphs or longer vignettes) women made regarding their Māori identities.

Once all references were found I categorised each statement as being 'definitional', 'descriptive', or 'evaluative'. Definitional statements included all those in which women specified to which ethnic group they felt they belonged (for example: 'I am Māori'). Descriptive statements included those in which the participant specified the features and characteristics they believed their Māori identity carried for them personally (for example: 'Being Māori means honouring Māori culture' and 'to me, my Māori identity is about spirituality'). Evaluative statements were those in which the participant specified the value they attached to their identity as Māori (for example: 'I feel very proud to be Māori'). To ensure consistency, each transcript was treated in the same way and was read at least three times to ensure references to identity were not overlooked. In cases when women's data was not clear (or the category in which references should be included ambiguous) women were contacted for clarification. Once all statements women made about their Māori identities had been identified and categorised, I recorded them on separate sheets of paper and attached this to each woman's transcript. For ease of comparison between cases I treated these summaries as representative of women's 'identity content'.

In the second stage, constant comparison analysis was used. Constant comparison involves seeking recurrent patterns in the data that become categories for analytical focus. The technique was employed to identify the contextual factors that shaped women's identity content.

To find these for each definitional, descriptive or evaluative comment that the women provided, I traced back through their life stories to find the point in their lives to which they associated that content. To do this, for each statement I read through the women's life stories and found the explanation for them giving that comment. This process enabled me to locate the key experiences which shaped those self-concepts (and understandings of the world) and the key role models and significant relationships (from their families, teachers, friends, partners, colleagues, teachers) which informed participants' understandings of themselves and their particular identities. These are shown in Table 1 below.

As Table 1 shows, since women's identity content was shaped by a multitude of factors, many codes were generated. As such, in order to render the data

Table 1. Codes allocated for factors shaping identity among participants.

Code	No.*
Role models' (parents/siblings/grandparents) attitudes/behaviour	34
Family structure and relationships	20
Prevailing ideas and stereotypes about Māori by 'society'	20
Relationships with other Māori people (non-familial)	20
Experiencing racism or prejudice based upon being Māori	18
Relationships with non-Māori	15
Experiences at primary school	15
Involvement with tribal organisations	12
Relationships with their own children	10
University and other forms of education	8
Representations of Māori in the media	7
Being involved in Māori cultural groups	6
Socio-political awareness	5
Learning about Māori genealogy	5
Experiences in the workplace	5
Seeing protests or Māori political activities on television	5
Relationships with Māori colleagues at work	4
Learning to speak the Māori language	4

*Number of women who recounted that this particular factor shaped their Māori identity.

comprehensible, it was necessary to collapse groups of codes into overarching categories. Glaser and Strauss (1975) termed this process axial coding. This process required that I look closely at each factor and group this with other similar factors to form 'core categories.' After intense analysis of the categories, two key categories that subsumed all the contextual factors were identified. The first was 'Formative Conditions' which included all the influences in the immediate social environment that women experienced before they left their familial homes. This category subsumed: location born and raised, family background (ethnicity of parents), family composition (number of siblings), socio-economic position of family of origin, employment and past times of parents, the extent to which material resources were available to the individual in familial environment, daily activities as a family (including typically Māori activities and marae involvement), parental teachings (and attitude towards Māori identity, or more specifically the extent to which Māori was a significant aspect of their role models' identities). The second category was 'Significant Experiences' and included all experiences that individuals had over the course of their lives, which happened outside of their familial environments. Significant experiences were shaped by the demographic and cultural features of their communities, such as the individual's extra-familial social networks, experiences in the work-place and education system and relationships with others (friends and later partners).

In stage three of data analysis I compared the data of women from different age groups. In particular, I attended to how women's formative conditions and significant experiences were shaped by the socio-historical conditions in which they were born and came of age. This enabled me to link personal experiences with collective identity politics, government policies and economic and social factors. In

doing so, I was able to pin-point specific ways in which personal identity for each woman was a reflection of their socio-historical context.

Excerpts below are used to demonstrate how women's identities (formative conditions and significant experiences) were historically and socially determined, the way that Māori defined, evaluated and described their Māori identities, and how this reflects changes in socio-historical contexts. Throughout the discussion I provide notes on historical contexts, highlighting and emphasising the role of socio-historical factors upon individual experiences.

Māori identity construction and reconstruction: the role of socio-historical contexts

Traditionally, Māori identity cohered around shared cultural values and activities, particularly familial obligations, communal economic activities and spiritual beliefs. To a large extent these key elements of Māori society remained in place for Māori until the 1960s. Reflecting these circumstances, women over 60 associated these ideas to their Māori identities. For example:

A comfortable lifestyle didn't come easy so it was important that each child learnt how to take care of themselves and provide for their own. So I always went with my grandparents everywhere they went. Looking back I think that they must have been teaching me ... I had to learn about the bush, the tracks, the mapping of area, which houses were safe, which land was good for growing food and when was the right time to go out fishing. They taught me that from when I was just little ... about survival, and living in harmony with the environment. (Cohort 1: 1)

Older women referred frequently to aspects of Māori culture and custom that shaped their identities (particularly the Māori language, spiritual practices and involvement in communal work and social activities). Overall, they valued this part of their identities and emphasised that their experiences of Māori culture were different to younger generations because they were immersed in the 'Māori world':

Of course Māori culture was good to us. But we never thought about it because it was just the normal way to live. It was never a big deal to have a 'Māori lesson' or to learn about our culture. Our lives were just like that anyway. (Cohort 1: 4)

They also expressed concern that young Māori had lost their culture and language because they had been raised in different environments. They particularly lamented that younger Māori had 'lost' the chance to learn the practical survival skills that they had been taught by their parents and grandparents as it was these skills of independence and self sufficiency that the women associated with being 'truly Māori':

I was raised at a time when Māori still did everything for themselves and that is how I really see being Māori now. As having that wisdom, that certain skill of survival. (Cohort 1: 3)

As youths, some older women had been subject to overt racism. However, they explained that they felt positive about being Māori regardless because their families had affirmed the value of that identity. Moreover, women from Cohort 1 were typically raised to understand Māori spirituality and/or held strong religious beliefs. Having an awareness of their own humanity and the humanity of others enabled

them to challenge any negative perceptions they had encountered in their dealings with Pākehā:

We were raised at a time when it was common for Pākehā to look down on Māori. I just think Pākehā were ignorant then. I remember all that. But we had our own family and own tikanga (customs) and karakia (prayers) to protect us. (Cohort 1: 2)

Overall, the construction of identity for the women in this older group reflected their total immersion in communities that were culturally, economically and socially similar to those that existed in traditional Māori society.

By the 1970s, many of the communities in which women from Cohort 1 were raised were unable to support young Māori, who moved to the cities in increasing numbers. By the mid-1970s, the majority of young Māori were living in urban communities, striving to establish themselves economically and socially among Pākehā. Due to negative stereotypes many Māori parents tried to distance their children from their Māori identity and culture. Some women reported following their parents' role modelling and attitudes in this respect:

My parents kind of believed that Pākehā were better ... so, you know, after being brought up in that and hearing that sort of thing you can't help but think that it's true because everybody in your immediate environment is saying it. So after a while it just shut me down, and I began to focus on becoming a good Māori – which I suppose, meant a brown Pākehā. (Cohort 2: 5)

Comments from women in this group suggested that their parents attempted to distance their children from negative stereotypes around Māori people:

I guess my parents didn't want us to be associated with anything negative. It was not that we were ashamed of being Māori. It was just that they didn't want to lump anything bad onto us. They wanted us to do well, and doing well was not associated with being Māori ... So, I believe that, from where I'm sitting, it seems to be for my parents, the whole 'I'm proud to be Māori' thing wasn't easy for them. It is a lot easier for us today, but things were a lot different for them. (Cohort 2: 1)

The influence of prevailing ideas and stereotypes about Māori by 'society', their perceived racist treatment, and the attitudes of women's parents shaped the way that women in the middle cohort interpreted their Māori identities profoundly. Many reported knowing very little about Māori culture and history and having negative views, experiences and a sense of shame around being Māori as children and young adults:

The only thing I really remember was thinking that all the Māoris [sic] were living in the poorer place... graffiti, dirty, violence ... and poor. I think, absolutely I didn't want to be associated with that ... I remember an instance where I used to pick up a girlfriend on the way to school and I was not allowed inside the house unless it was winter and raining. If it was I was only allowed in the little front door, I wasn't allowed anywhere else and ... they put the old couch in the doorway so, if I came in I sat there while the new couch was over there, and there was like this invisible line that I wasn't allowed to cross. It wasn't until years later that I realised that that was so racist ... I mean I was so dirty to them. They didn't want to have a Māori in their house. (Cohort 2: 3)

Reflecting these sentiments, some women from Cohort 2 said they had tried to distance themselves from their Māori identities when they were growing up and some recalled trying to 'pass' (or be accepted) as Pākehā, or pretend they were not Māori:

I couldn't accept myself being Māori because we were teased at school so I used to hang out with Pākehā. The Māori children at school those days they were really scruffy and you know we used to get teased a lot. And then you had all these well-dressed Pākehā so I used to just model them. I found it really hard like to feel good about being Māori like the work place and Māori are always being put down ... in certain circles you are the only Māori around and you hear a lot of people putting down Māori and it's horrible ... so you can see why I just kind of ignored the fact that I was Māori for much of my life. (Cohort 2: 1)

Although women in this group were generally positive about their identities at the time they were interviewed several reported feeling 'unsettled' with their Māori identities because they had been denied their culture and cultural pride as children and young adults:

Yes I find it very hard. I look back and I had a lot of pain and grief associated with my past. It makes me so angry now when I think on how much I missed out on with my Māori side. I didn't even know any better either, which makes it worse. I think that I missed out on so much because I wasn't connected to my Māori identity. All I was taught about being Māori was negative and I didn't have any other way to think about it ... (Cohort 2: 3)

The construction of identity for women in the middle group was different to the older women in several important ways.

While both Cohort 1 and 2 were raised at a time when being Māori was not socially valued in New Zealand, women from Cohort 2 found that their parents did not counteract negative perceptions of Māori identity at home effectively. In some cases women reported their parents endorsed negative views of Māori 'by society' and, as a corollary, this made it very hard for women to accept being Māori themselves. Many of these women recounted feeling negative about being Māori for much of their lives, that they de-emphasised their Māori identities up until their twenties and tended to believe negative stereotypes about Māori people.

The experiences of these women can be juxtaposed with the youngest cohort, whose formative years were heavily influenced by Māori political activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Due to the rapid political changes in New Zealand society throughout this period, these women were much more likely than Māori women born only a few years earlier to have been socialised to be proud to be Māori and learn about Māori culture, history and language. On the whole they reported having very positive views of their Māori identities as children and recalled learning about Māori language and culture from a young age. Several reported involvement in local urban-based marae. For example:

For the first four years of my life I was immersed in Māori – you had to listen to it, it was the only form of language that was spoken so, you know, you fully immersed in it and being Māori ... so I suppose you could say I definitely know who I was and I have always felt very comfortable with that side of myself – whereas I knew who I was and where we fitted into things as a Māori person. (Cohort 3: 1)

Although these younger women had been raised by Māori parents who spoke English at home, many women in this age group had attended schools that were based upon Māori pedagogy and had been involved in Māori cultural groups from a young age. As a result, while their parents had struggled to feel positive about their own Māori identities, as children and young adults these women reported generally positive views of being Māori:

I was brought up very Māori... you know Māori culture. I can say I have only had positive feelings about that. Yes, I mean we were very lucky. So, yeah, for me I see my own identity as a good thing. (Cohort 3: 4)

Women in this group had been exposed to political education through the media and school and as such they were relatively well-informed about the Treaty of Waitangi and the obligations of Pākehā towards Māori. In acknowledging this, several referred explicitly to Māori political activism of the 1970s and how that had changed the way that society saw Māori people. For example:

You see, what happened is that Māori have gone out there and claimed their rights ... we have made others listen to us and respect our culture. New Zealanders have to accept everyone, you know, I mean, in our country there's the Treaty issue as well, you know, it's like that black and white partnership. (Cohort 3: 4)

Women's knowledge of Māori history, combined with their own positive views of being Māori, meant that this group tended to be quite critical of stereotypes held against Māori by 'society' and refuted negative views attached to Māori people.

I really think Pākehā need to catch up ... they need to learn about the Treaty ... they need to be educated in the basics of Māori culture ... The Treaty is an actual living document which Pākehā are ignorant about ... I mean I get sick of their underhand comments and I think for me ... like I said, I am proud to be a Māori woman. I don't buy into any of their ignorant beliefs ... Māori and Pākehā have an equal share in this country. Pākehā have to meet us half way. (Cohort 3:4)

Reflecting the multicultural demographic women were exposed to during their formative years, women commented on ethnic diversity in New Zealand as being relevant to how they personally interpreted being Māori. Women in this group had partners, parents, friends and work colleagues who were Pākehā (or non-Māori) and, therefore several of them observed that elevating their 'Māoriness' over other cultures was inconsistent with the reality of their lives. Several noted that although they were proud to be Māori, that they would not use that pride to denigrate other cultures. In their view, all people should be accepted equally:

I really like the diversity of our society you know. Like you can be Māori, Pākehā or whatever and that is O.K. We are all equal, well supposed to be. (Cohort 3: 2)

This acknowledgement of ethnic diversity reflected women's social networks and women had learnt how to manage their identities in different situations. In reference to this, women described how they changed how they expressed themselves as Māori according to social contexts.

Overall, women of this generation were raised at time when ideologies around Māori people promoted the view that Māori were equal but different from Pākehā. This meant women learnt to value being Māori from a young age, were politically conscious and aware of Māori history and were confident in asserting Māori rights while emphasising Pākehā responsibilities. Unlike women in the cohort before them, women in this cohort were very proud of their own Māori heritage and confident in claiming that being Māori was a valuable and positive identity in New Zealand society.

In summary, several key differences between the three cohorts of participants were found. The oldest cohort were the most enculturated (in that they were the most connected with and familiar with traditional Māori society and culture), and had exposure to competent Māori role models who endorsed the value of being Māori in

their formative years. As such, they expressed positive ideas and a sense of security around being Māori. The middle group struggled considerably as they learn to accept, value and express their Māori identities because they had been raised in urban environments and faced negative concepts associated with being Māori within their familial and extra-familial environments. The youngest participants were raised in multicultural environments and were able to operate effectively within both Māori and Pākehā society. Due to socio-political education and the concomitant belief system that Māori and Pākehā are equal but different they appeared comfortable affirming Māori political and cultural equality even in the face of perceived Pākehā prejudice.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has explored individual perspectives of what it means to be Māori and related those to familial circumstances and historical periods in which individuals were raised. This has enabled insight into unique interpretations of identity not widely articulated in Māori identity research and promoted reflection upon the formative conditions, personal experiences, important events and relationships that shape identity formation.

The composition of the sample may have shaped the results discussed below. Four issues are important to acknowledge in this respect. As a starting point as only women participated in the research, the findings are not applicable to Māori men. In addition, as all the women in this study lived in Auckland, the data reflects the perceptions and experiences of Māori women who live in or near the Auckland area – and therefore may not represent the views of rural dwelling Māori. Importantly also, it needs to be noted that a third of the sample comprised women who were in tertiary education, or had completed tertiary education. This is disproportionate to the Māori population as a whole. In addition, nearly half of the women interviewed in this study were over 60 years old which is not representative of the Māori population. Elderly Māori are a very small percentage of the Māori population (according to the 2006 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings just fewer than five in 30 people of Māori ethnicity are aged 65 and older). Younger women who lacked social support and education were therefore not included in this study – an important omission given that the majority of Māori women are under the age of 40 years old and Māori women comprise the lowest socio-economic group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). In saying this, many women interviewed spoke of times in their lives when they were lacking social support and in poorer economic circumstances and as such, many other ‘identities’ were described during the course of their narratives. While a similar study carried out with a rural dwelling population may yield different results, the 2006 New Zealand census found most Māori (over 87%) actually live in the Auckland area and surrounding regions (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). While the small sample size and limited nature restricts the ability to generalise the findings to wider groups of Māori (and Māori men) the paper effectively calls attention to several issues.

The commonalities and differences in women’s life stories show how collective identities profoundly effect personal interpretations and affirm importance of socio-historical contexts for individual perceptions of identity. Moreover the research

highlights how Māori identity has adapted as a function of the ideological and historical contexts.

Of particular significance to note are the commonalities between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 in terms of how they evaluated their identities. Due to their formative conditions and significant experiences, women from these two groups reported feeling positive about their Māori identities from a young age. Cohort 1 reported feeling positive about being Māori all their lives because they were 'secluded' in Māori communities, had access to positive Māori role models and held Māori spiritual beliefs, which counteracted any negative beliefs about Māori to which they were exposed. Similarly, Cohort 3 reported feeling positive about being Māori because they had been exposed to socio-political and cultural education which enabled them to see Māori culture as important and valuable and Māori people as 'equal but different' from Pākehā. Women from Cohort 2, however, were less able to refute negative views of Māori as a group. Because they had been raised within a socio-historical climate that failed to endorse Māori rights and culture, this undermined a positive sense of being Māori for them personally. Moreover, women from this group were not as 'protected' from racism by role models in their familial environment.

Women recalled that their parents tried to help them 'fit into' Pākehā society by encouraging them to affiliate with Pākehā culture and avoid any negative stereotypes around Māori. Women observed that while the intention of Māori parents of that era was not to denigrate things Māori, some learnt to view Māori culture and people negatively and therefore struggled to form a positive Māori identity as children and young adults. As they grew older, however, these women were exposed to more positive views of Māori people and culture and their ideas began to change. They grew to realise that their negative views of Māori culture were a reflection of the time in which they were born – and many began to reclaim their Māori identities and learn more about Māori history and culture as they matured. This pattern not only demonstrates the adaptive and creative nature of Māori society and identity but emphasises the importance of positive ideologies around Māori 'as a people' for the personal identities of Māori.

While exposure to positive stereotypes about Māori in the media and through education is clearly important for Māori it is also vital to keep in mind that Māori families ultimately shape Māori personal identities. As the life stories of women from each cohort demonstrated, role models (particularly familial), who model and express favourable ideas about being Māori, are the key to shaping a positive sense of identity for young Māori. Although this seems obvious for all ethnic groups, having close relationships with people who endorse being Māori may be extra important for Māori as they need help 'filtering out' negative stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant culture. As noted earlier, there is still evidence of widespread racism against Māori. Therefore, a specific intervention for Māori may aim to equip Māori parents with techniques for teaching their children positive ideas about Māori identity, as well as specific skills and strategies for understanding and dealing with discrimination, should it be encountered. Interventions that teach Māori how to understand stereotypes held against Māori, distancing themselves from those stereotypes personally, and dealing with them constructively as they are encountered would be also be beneficial.

Finally, in this study women described their identities as reflective of what was valued, possible and practical for them to express within the social networks in which they lived. The findings of this research, therefore, indicate the need to see identity as a personalised social construction, formed by social contexts and shaped by socio-historical conditions. The conceptualisation of Māori identity in this way enables us to view the various Māori 'groups' as reflective of the adaptive and creative nature of Māori society. As living environments have changed, Māori identities have adapted to 'fit in' with their contexts. In some cases Māori want and need to express themselves in ways that are consistent with traditional Māori culture. Other Māori may choose to express themselves differently, reflecting the practical realities of their lives. Such a view challenges current treatments of Māori identity which measure 'it' (Māori identity) as a set of cultural features individuals 'have' (such as the ability to speak Māori). This also highlights the need to develop models of Māori identity which account for the social origins of identity, including formative conditions and significant experiences, as well as the variable salience of Māori identity across situations and over time.

Further research with a wider group of Māori men and women, particularly younger Māori, could focus on exploring the ways in which this group construct adaptive identities that reflect their personal social contexts. It is particularly important in contemporary New Zealand to understand how young Māori adapt to, and operate effectively in, multicultural contexts at a time when Māori continue to experience poor socio-economic conditions while being exposed to affirmative ideologies regarding Māori rights to equality. Insight into how young Māori reconcile Māori distinctiveness alongside the argument for Māori political rights and the reality of New Zealand's multicultural environment would shed light not only on how Māori may move forward as a people, but also how identity and socio-historical context are inextricably linked.

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