

## **Māori and Pacific student experiences with every-day colonialism and racism**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Māori and Pacific student experiences with everyday colonialism and racism**

Although Māori and diverse Pacific students are underrepresented in New Zealand's university system, significant numbers of Māori and Pacific tertiary students are demonstrating high academic excellence. Following indigenous and Pacific research protocols, this paper draws from seventeen focus group interviews conducted in 2013 with ninety high-achieving Māori and Pacific students from a large university in New Zealand. Despite attaining high academic success, research participants expressed dissatisfaction in having to cope with forms of everyday colonialism and racism while pursuing their advanced educational degrees. Research findings illustrate specific ways that everyday colonialism and racism emanate in an indigenous and Pacific context. Participants explain how majority group students express surprise at Māori and Pacific achievement, attribute academic achievement to ethnic-specific equity support services, and denigrate such services that exist in order

to offset social discrimination. Additionally, participants offer input into the ways that university culture is largely Eurocentric and marginalising of indigenous and Pacific values. A conceptual map is presented that outlines how resistance to everyday colonialism and racism operates as a protective factor against adverse educational outcomes.

**Key words:** everyday racism, everyday colonialism, indigenous, higher education, Māori, Pacific, micro-aggressions.

## 1. Introduction

New Zealand is a small country with a population of roughly 4,300,000 residents (NZ Census 2013) whose indigenous Māori population arrived by way of the Cook Islands between 800 and 1,000 years ago (Underhill et al., 2001). At present, Māori represent 14.9% of an ethnically diverse population. New Zealand is also host to nearly 300,000 Pacific people (7.5% of the total population), which includes residents of Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Cook Island Maori, Niuean, Tokelauan, and other Pacific ethnicities. New Zealand Europeans, commonly referred to as Pākehā, are the country's majority ethnic group, comprising approximately 60% of the total population, while demonstrating political and economic dominance (Fleras, Spoonley, 1999).

By international standards, New Zealand's education system is high quality, though benefiting from the education system frequently transpires along racialised patterns. In 2008, 85.8% of Asian and 75.2% of Pākehā high school students met New Zealand's standardised graduation qualification, contrasting with qualification rates for Māori and Pacific students, which stood at 50.4% and 62.9%, respectively (McKinley, Hoskins, 2011: 54). E. Curtis and colleagues (2012: 8) add that 'in 2009, only 29 percent Māori versus 54 percent non-Māori students received university entrance at the completion' of high school and across universities in New Zealand, both Māori and Pacific students are underrepresented. For instance, in 2010, only 2.8% of all PhD students in New Zealand were of a Pacific ethnic background (Education Counts New Zealand 2011). Considering these disparities, it is critical that scholarship examine the challenges Māori and Pacific students face in higher education.

## 2. Every-day racism in contemporary society

Scholarship has determined that social understandings of race are constructed categories, conveying notions of group dominance and subordination, superiority and inferiority (Cornell, Hartmann, 1998; Omi, Winant, 1994). Transpiring when members of society use their assumptions about race to influence their behaviours, acts of racism are said to carry three important components. At first, one group believes itself to be superior; at second, the group which believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behaviour; and at third racism effects multiple racial or ethnic groups (Solorzano 1997: 8). Like other social phenomena, racism operates fluidly, changing over time as society alters its tolerance and intolerance for overt racist acts. In decades past, racism was more obvious, often times incorporated into state policies that mandated racial segregation (e.g. Jim Crow laws in the United States, apartheid in South Africa), obliterated culture through forced assimilation (e.g. denying indigenous Hawaiians use of their own language in state schools), and aimed to wipe out indigenous populations (e.g. forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families in Australia). In most contemporary societies, these forms of blatant, state-based racism have been outlawed or recoded through policies that discriminate along other lines, e.g. anti-immigration legislation.

Suppression of overtly racist laws along with minority group members' advances have led many in contemporary society to believe racism no longer exists or is socially insignificant (Beagan 2003). As T. van Dijk writes, within mainstream circles, overt interpersonal racism is 'considered to be exaggerated or totally out of place for the more moderate or modern [...] especially among the elites' (van Dijk 1993: 180). Instead, racism is now believed to be carried out only by fringe, extremist groups, e.g. neo-Nazis.

A growing body of literature, however, argues that racism still functions systematically in society, albeit more obscurely. In 1991, P. Essed described *everyday racism* as taken-for-granted, unintentional behaviours perpetrated regularly by majority group members against ethnic minorities that reify majority superiority and minority inferiority. According to P. Essed, these are 'practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as normal by the dominant group', though dominant

group members tend not to define such practices as racist (Essed 1991: 288). Behaviours exemplifying everyday racism include majority group members using patronising language with people of colour, enacting dismissive body language such as eye rolling in response to minority group members' comments, or attributing minorities' success to external factors (affirmative action policies). Ethnic minorities are often keenly aware of these seemingly subtle actions because of their frequency. B. Beagan and J. Etowa describe the regular occurrence of African Canadian women being 'followed, talked down to, treated rudely, and ignored' by white Canadians (Beagan, Etowa, 2009: 289). The power of everyday racism does not lie in any one incident, but in the cumulative effects that wear on minorities, who must employ coping strategies to offset feelings of powerlessness, anger, stress, internalised blame (Beagan, Etowa, 2009; Herbert et al., 2008; Deitch et al., 2003; Essed 1991), and physical health concerns (Wang et al., 2011; Williams et al., 1997).

D. Sue and colleagues have termed everyday racist acts *microaggressions*, defined as 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of colo[u]r because they belong to a racial minority group' (Sue et al., 2007b: 273). Like everyday racism, micro-aggressions come in diverse forms, ranging from 'subtle insults delivered through dismissive looks, gestures and tones (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) toward people of colo[u]r; often automatic or unconscious' (Sue, Constantine, 2007: 137) to environmental factors, e.g. 'when a person of colo[u]r is exposed to an office setting that unintentionally assails his or her racial identity' (Sue et al., 2007b: 273-274). Key to micro-aggressions is their ambiguity and lack of intentionality that allow perpetrators to remain oblivious of their own racism and its impacts. In turn, 'The invisible nature of racial micro-aggressions to Whites [...] lowers empathic ability, dims perceptual awareness, maintains false illusions, and lessens compassion for others' (Sue et al., 2009: 183).

P. Sue et al. (2007b) have further refined a framework that classifies micro-aggressions into three categories, the first of which is termed micro-assaults; these include actions resembling *old-fashioned* racism that communicate discriminatory intent (e.g. racial epithets). Second are micro-insults - actions that unintentionally 'convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a persons' racial heritage or identity'

(Sue et al., 2007b: 274). Last are micro-invalidations, which occur when majority group members deny that racism impacts people of colour's lives (e.g. saying an ethnic minority is overly sensitive about experiencing racism).

Most scholarly work on everyday racism and micro-aggressions has focused on ethnic minorities' experiences in the United States, including African Americans (Rusche, Brewster, 2008; Swim et al., 2003), Latino/as (Yosso et al., 2009; Solorzano 1998), and Asian Americans (Wang et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007a), though research in the field has also addressed ethnic minorities' experiences in Canada (Beagan, Etowa, 2009; Beagan 2003), Belgium (Billiet, de Witte, 2008), Sweden (Hallgren 2006), and the United Kingdom (Herbert et al., 2008). Although very little research on the topic has been conducted with indigenous peoples, R. Leah (1995) found that Aboriginal women living in southern Alberta, Canada felt dealing with everyday racism was so common that it seemed virtually inescapable, particularly when trying to secure housing and shopping in stores. D. Mellor's (2003) work with Aborigines in Australia found their experiences with everyday racism revolved around being incessant recipients of micro-assaults (racist name-calling), being ignored, avoided, talked down to, and harassed. The present study is the first of its kind to examine every-day racism with minority populations in the Pacific.

It is also important to remember that within settler states, deep colonial histories exist. In New Zealand, the country's indigenous Māori population has undergone British colonialism, dating back to the late eighteenth century. Most Pacific nations experienced colonialism in similar fashion to New Zealand over roughly the same time period, although significant differences exist (e.g. a variety of European colonial powers forcibly imposed their systems upon different Pacific nations). According to H. K. Trask (1999: 102-103), in present day society, where colonised sites have gained political independence, neo-colonial relationships emerge. H. K. Trask defines neo-colonialism as, 'the experience of oppression at a stage that is nominally identified as independent or autonomous [...] neo-colonialism refers not only to dominant colonial retentions but also to psychological injuries suffered by the colonized that continue to wound our internal and external lives' (Trask 2006: 102-103). To this end, the every-day racism and micro-aggressions that indigenous Māori stu-

dents describe experiencing in this study are termed every-day colonialism. For Pacific students, who come from a migrant background within the New Zealand context, such experiences are aligned with P. Essed's original concept of every-day racism.

### **3. Methodology**

Between January and April 2013, the research team conducted focus group interviews with high-achieving Māori and Pacific students at a large university in New Zealand. Research participants were selected through a purposive sampling procedure (Vaughn et al., 1996) based on the following two criteria. One, participants were identified through university records as ethnically Māori or Pacific; and two, earned a B or higher grade point average in second semester of the 2012 academic year. In all, seventeen focus groups were conducted with ninety students; 48% of the study participants identified ethnically as Māori and 52% with a Pacific background (see Table 1). This study's primary objective was to identify the key factors that contribute to Māori and Pacific students' educational success in higher education. However, throughout the study when discussing this broad topic, a significant number of participants initiated discussions on coping with racism, serving as the impetus for this article. In other words, when members of the research team asked research participants what has helped them to succeed as university students, a significant number of participants responded independently by stating that they used encounters with every-day colonialism and racism as forms of motivation – working harder to succeed in order to prove their doubters wrong.

Focus group facilitation and analyses blended culturally grounded and western research methodologies (Smith 2012; Vaioleti 2006; Ka'ili 2005). To begin with, the second, third, fourth, and fifth authors come from Tongan, Māori, Samoan and Tongan ethnic backgrounds respectively, have strong familiarity with the Auckland region, and therefore reflect the sample's demographic characteristics. The lead author is half Japanese, half Caucasian from the United States, but spent 15 years in Hawai'i conducting research with Hawaiian and Samoan communities. The focus

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Ethnicity A	Ethnicity B	Ethnicity C	Ethnicity D	Male	Female	Total
Māori				4	10	14
Māori	Cook Island			0	2	2
Māori	Native American	Pākehā	Cook Island	1	0	1
Māori	New Caledonian	Indian	Pākehā	0	1	1
Māori	Niuean	Tongan		0	1	1
Māori	Pākehā			4	9	13
Māori	Samoaan			1	2	3
Māori	Tongan	Pākehā		1	0	1
Cook Island				2	4	6
Cook Island	Pākehā			0	1	1
Fijian				0	2	2
Fiji-Indian				0	3	3
Niuean	Pākehā			0	1	1
Niuean	Samoaan			1	0	1
Pākehā	Cook Island			1	0	1
Pākehā	Māori			1	2	3
Pākehā	Samoaan			1	0	1
Samoaan				5	8	13
Samoaan	Canadian			0	1	1
Samoaan	Chinese			0	1	1
Samoaan	Māori			1	0	1
Samoaan	Māori	Pākehā	Tokelauan	1	0	1
Samoaan	Niuean			1	1	2
Samoaan	Pākehā			1	0	1
Samoaan	Tongan	Pākehā		0	1	1
Samoaan	Tokelauan	Fijian	Pākehā	0	1	1
Samoaan	Tongan			1	0	1
Tongan				3	6	9
Tongan	Pākehā			0	3	3
<b>Level of Study</b>						
Undergraduate				23	51	74
Postgraduate				7	9	16
<b>Faculty Major</b>						
Arts				10	13	23
Education				5	9	14
Business				6	3	9
Medical and Health Sciences				1	7	8
Creative Arts and Industries				0	7	7
Law				1	5	6
Engineering				2	2	4
Science				2	1	3
Double major across faculties				3	13	16
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>90</b>

Source: Authors

groups also followed procedures that minimised power inequalities between researchers and participants (e.g. encouraging participants to ask researchers questions, engaging in humour, inviting participants to analyse and disseminate research findings). With participant permission, all focus groups were audio-recorded.

Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim, predominantly by the third and fourth authors and imported into *NVivo9 Qualitative* software. The entire team contributed to an extensive content analysis to identify the most salient themes emergent from participants' voices on their educational success (Bryant, Charmaz, 2007). These themes have been identified as follows. At first, university and family role modelling and support; at second, culturally embedded learning practices; and at third, resistance to racial discrimination (see Mayeda et al., 2014 for a richer discussion on all three themes and the study's methods). Research procedures were approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee.

The following discussion draws from the broad theme on resistance to racial discrimination. As described previously, to avoid discussion on negative topics, the research team planned not to ask participants about experiences with racial discrimination as they may relate to educational success. However, in the first focus group, after being asked what helped participants to succeed as university students, a Māori participant autonomously stated that his educational motivation stemmed from wanting to prove one of his past high school teachers wrong who had told the student he would not succeed in school because he was *brown*. Through the first ten focus groups, the research team refrained from initiating discussions on every-day racism and colonialism. Still, participants continued to raise the topic themselves, stating that part of their educational success was grounded in an ability to cope with these forms of discrimination. In terms of a grounded theory approach, this theme was very much emergent (Glaser 2002). As part of the iterative research process, beginning with the eleventh focus group, the research team began asking about experiences with racial discrimination. Data in the ensuing section are drawn from these pro-

voked and unprovoked discussions on every-day colonialism and racism within the university setting.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. General remarks**

Participants did not raise examples of micro-invalidations. However, it was common for participants to discuss cases of micro-assaults, micro-insults and a category termed here, macro-exclusions. Micro-assaults and micro-insults materialised within a context of two broad domains – majority group students (namely Pākehā) showing surprise at Māori and Pacific students' academic success, and resistance to ethnic-specific equity programmes for Māori and Pacific students. Macro-exclusions occurred a bit more abstractly within the university's broader institutional structure, reflecting environmental exclusion of Māori and Pacific culture.

### **4.2. Surprise at Māori and Pacific student success**

Being high-achieving students, study participants stated repeatedly how majority group students communicated surprise when learning of their high academic marks. Participants who were seen as more discernibly Māori or Pacific – because, for instance, they had darker skin complexion, dressed in a particular type of attire, and/or spoke a certain way – frequently had to endure other students' astonishment when they learned of the Māori and Pacific students' high academic standing, as illustrated by a female Tongan undergraduate participant in Medical and Health Sciences: 'They're, really shocked to see that you could achieve something'. In another focus group, a participant described how majority group students often assume that due to her ethnic background, she was not already accepted into the law programme: 'When you meet people for the first time, even students around uni and they're like: Oh what are you studying? Then you're like: Yeah, doing law and stuff. And then they immediately say: Oh first year? Are you still trying to get in? [...] It just sucks cause no matter where you go, I guess it's kind of empowering because you just wanna break the stereotype [...] and just be like: Nah bro stop thinking like that. But the majority of the time it just sucks' (Tongan undergraduate female, Arts and Law).

As this student describes, it is not only that majority group students are surprised at Māori and Pacific student success, but that they are not expected to be successful, thereby reaffirming racialised perceptions of inferiority. This particular student has learned to cope with this common micro-insult by using it as a teaching opportunity for those unknowingly committing every-day racism. However, as she intimates at the end of the quote, incessantly dealing with such discrimination leaves a kind of *wear and tear* on her morale, exhibiting what W. A. Smith, M. Hung and J. D. Franklin (2011) call *racial battle fatigue*, where ethnic minorities tire from having to cope with the persistent psychological and physiological stressors connected to every-day racism .

Students who were less visibly Māori or Pacific dealt with a different kind of micro-insult when majority group students learned of their ethnic heritage. In some cases, micro-insults happened if the Māori or Pacific student had fairer skin, in other cases, when mainstream students had not yet seen the Māori or Pacific student in person. But the every-day discriminatory message was the same, expressing a surprise that a high-achieving student could be Māori or Pacific: '[T]hey always tend to be shocked when they learn I'm Māori because they're like: You're succeeding and you have a really good academic record [...] [T]hey just jump to assume that I'm not Māori because I'm succeeding and that's just strange to me' (Māori undergraduate female, Creative Arts and Industries).

Another participant explained how majority group students' demeanour changed once they found out she was Māori, and that they subsequently labelled her as a *properly* Māori student: '[M]ainstream students, will sort of be really nice to me and then they'll all of a sudden kind of just click and be like: Wait no, she's quite properly Māori, and then they immediately sort of step back and stuff and say: Oh, I didn't realise you were so cultural [...] It's just kind of, just sad really [another participant agrees], that sort of thing is so pervasive' (Māori undergraduate female, Law).

Study participants across a range of disciplinary areas expressed similar experiences, having to cope with the repeated expectation that their ethnicity was incompatible with scholarly success. In other cases, participants' academic success was at-

tributed to assistance via preferential treatment, as some majority group students thereby invalidated Māori and Pacific students' capabilities. 'I did a Māori paper and I did quite well in it and people would say I only did well because I've got a Māori first name and last name [...] so [lecturers] obviously give me more points for them [other participants agree], which was really hurtful' (Māori undergraduate female, Medical and Health Sciences).

Though most majority group students were not said to express surprise when interacting with study participants, enough did – and did so regularly – that the experiences described above were said to be part and parcel of university life. Unfortunately, even more common and typically more insidious were micro-aggressions directed towards ethnic-specific equity programmes reserved for Māori and Pacific students.

#### **4.3. Resistance to Māori and Pacific student equity programmes**

Although not said to be extremely common, study participants stated that, on occasion, they were victims of *old-fashioned* micro-assaults. One student described an incident that occurred while she was volunteering during her university's orientation week: '[T]he person asked me where I was from, because for some reason he thought I was Indian and I said: No I'm Māori. And then he was like: But wait you don't have a Māori accent and you're not fat enough to be Māori' (Māori undergraduate female, Medical and Health Sciences).

Most micro-assaults, however, were made by majority group students in reference to university support systems that Māori and Pacific students could access in part because of New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi. Developed by the British in 1840 and initially signed by only a small fraction of Māori chiefs (Mikaere 2011), the Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's principle and official document 'by which the British Crown acknowledged certain rights to the various Maori tribes who occupied the islands of New Zealand' (Stokes 1992: 176).

With regard to the Treaty itself, a Māori undergraduate male in Education reported that a Pākehā student said to him: 'The Treaty of Waitangi is stupid. Oh, why do you speak Māori. It's unfair, you get to do all this stuff. You get A's, the only rea-

son you do is because you're Māori'. In another group, participants expressed similar experiences having to absorb micro-assaults, as seen in the following exchange:

Student 1: 'They're like, It's your fault the Treaty of Waitangi, your people did this [...] Māori people screwed over the government'. (Māori undergraduate female, Creative Arts and Industries).

Student 2: 'Okay, that is racism in the law school, that is definitely the attitude toward it'. (Māori postgraduate female, Law).

Student 3: 'Welcome to our world'. (Samoan postgraduate male, Business).

In another discussion a participant added: 'A massive sigh goes out in the lecture' when support services for Māori and Pacific students are announced. In reference to some majority group students' disdain for such services, a Māori undergraduate female in Education from another group stated: 'European people are like: Well, why is it just you guys? Why isn't it us? Why can't we go? [...] Oh you guys are going to your Māori thing, you know'. And a Tongan female student in Law added that online discussion boards were a space where some majority group students demeaned Māori and Pacific students and the services they received: 'This middle-class white guy was just like: Oh I'm so angry, why is there a Pacific Island space, why not make a white man space? Why can't brown people just work as hard as we do?' And finally, when Māori and Pacific content, like that focused on the Treaty of Waitangi, were integrated into lectures with greater sensitivity by instructors, those topics could be met with backlash from majority group students, as happened in one participant's commercial law class: '[W]e were going over the Treaty, and even then it's like you [another participant] said, a lot of people were like: This isn't relevant to today's law, [...] it's something I've sort of struggled with because it was the only time that my culture came up in my class and I was really excited' (Māori undergraduate female, Business). Such statements that dismiss the Treaty of Waitangi's importance to present day New Zealand and denigrate Māori and Pacific student services convey clear sentiments of everyday colonialism and racism.

Yet the most common micro-assaults that students experienced revolved around some majority group students' assumption that Māori and Pacific students

were unqualified and only granted admission to university through affirmative action schemes or via supposed widely available ethnic-specific scholarships. As seen in the following contribution from a Māori student in the Medical and Health Sciences, this participant first explains that she was not said to be deserving of being in the academic programme, and subsequently that she was not deserving of having a job in the medical field because of her ethnic background: 'A lot of my class didn't know I was Māori, and then when they found out I was part of [an equity-based programme], I think they were kind of a little bit [...] [thinking] I wasn't as deserving of my place. I got told the only reason I got a job was because I was Māori, which is not true at all. Like, that's what everyone was saying: Oh [she] only got the job 'cause she's Māori. I worked my arse off to get that job. It kinda sucks 'cause you put so much effort in [...] If I was a bad nurse they wouldn't hire me, even if I was full Māori' (Māori undergraduate female, Medical and Health Sciences).

Research participants stated that contrary to majority group students' perceptions, they had to work harder to receive deserved recognition as strong students. And as the following student summarises, actions by majority group students are not discriminatory in an obvious sense, but the open resistance by some majority group students to ethnic-specific equity services operates covertly enough so that perpetrators of racist micro-assaults can claim behaving without bias, while simultaneously perpetuating colonial and racist stereotypes: 'I think the real root of Māori and Pacific struggle is just the stereotype itself. There are all these extra programmes that we have [...] and you can see that it helps a lot of students. But also [...] you heard people say Māori get free university. That's not good, that's obviously what the media has represented it as, and that's become a new stereotype for Māori, that Māori need this free stuff and that they are inferior by nature. People may not outright say that Māori are inferior by nature because that's just blatantly racist, but they are going to think it' (Māori undergraduate male, Arts). Clearly, the power of everyday colonialism and racism lies in its ability to covertly perpetuate notions of racialised inferiority over time, under an innocuous façade.

Despite backlash to ethnic-specific equity services, study participants overwhelmingly supported such services, as a Fijian Law student argued: 'The fact is we

deserve these programmes [...] look at the stats around here'. In other words, due to ongoing discrimination and consequent disparities, study participants did not feel equity-based programmes should be discontinued. Instead, it was said majority group students' attitudes and behaviours should change. Unfortunately, micro-assaults and micro-insults were not the only forms of every-day colonialism and racism these students reported.

#### **4.4. Macro-exclusions in a Eurocentric system**

As noted previously, D. Sue and colleagues (2007b) argue that micro-aggressions can manifest in broader environmental form. To this end, everyday colonialism and racism exist through the widespread absence of Māori and Pacific culture in university curricula or narrowly defined representations that reify existing stereotypes. It is critical to highlight that curricula is developed and disseminated by university instructors and administrators who have greater power than students, and that Eurocentric curricula epitomises the concept of every-day racism in that students consume curricula on an every-day basis. As a form of racism that happens systemically within the university structure through marginalisation of Māori and Pacific cultures, we have termed this form of institutionalised every-day racism, macro-exclusions, which manifest in three forms.

First, with few exceptions, university curricula content was said to be largely Eurocentric. As a Māori social work student said: 'If we're to be honest, uni is more white dominated. It's white mainstream'. Participants stated that most instructors make minimal effort to integrate Māori and Pacific issues into their lectures. One participant explained that her disciplinary area of study 'forever has been dominated by white, Protestant thought' (Māori postgraduate, Arts). In other cases students lamented the difficulty in balancing a complete lack of Māori and Pacific content with occasional, tokenistic content that relied on a deficit model (DePouw 2012; Thaman 2003), pathologising Māori and Pacific culture. For example, a Māori law student expressed concern that Māori content was disappearing from a key law course, bothering her because Māori are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Yet in that same focus group another Māori female, also in law, explained: 'See with Law, it's

always, yes there is a disparity but [...] we're criminalised, we're labelled as the criminals'. This is the constructed reality occurring in indigenous students' own homeland.

The second way in which Māori and Pacific students have been excluded on an every-day, macro level within the university is through individualised and competitive pedagogy that is unaligned with Māori and Pacific cultural mores. Participants noticed that the typical teacher-student relationship at the university was distant and indifferent, with too many instructors fixated on research rather than nurturing student development. Focus group participants argued that for Māori and Pacific students, a more culturally-grounded and effective learning environment would involve stronger mentorship through collective learning approaches. It was suggested instructors 'build that relationship within [...] smaller groups rather than big lecture theatres' in order to validate students' efforts, rather than remain isolated in their offices (Samoan undergraduate female, Education). To this end, participants recognised their need to adapt in a Eurocentric competitive, individualised learning environment: 'The reality of it is, we're actually in a two-dimensional game. We've got minorities, and dare I say it not being racist, but it's a white man's system. So it's actually challenging ourselves to beat that. And I think for me, that's what it's always been about' (Samoan male postgraduate student, Business).

The final way that Māori and Pacific students felt excluded on a macro level was through a lack of visible role models across the university. Of course, there are Māori and Pacific academic and professional staff on campus, and participants emphasised their importance, serving as critical role models. However, these role models were noticeably under-represented across the university, especially absent in certain disciplines. As a Māori undergraduate in Creative Arts and Industries stated: 'There is no Māori woman, no [female] leaders or whatever'. In a different focus group, a Māori undergraduate Arts student critiqued her discipline's Eurocentric curricula and articulated her desire to increase the representation of Māori teaching staff: 'I'd like to become a lecturer and perhaps introduce more indigenous voices into the department [...] because there's no papers on Māori literature and there's only one on Pacific that's taught every second year, so it'd be good to change that'.

The macro-exclusions presented in this section set the stage for the interpersonal forms of every-day colonialism and racism described earlier. By normalising a Eurocentric educational curricula, presenting Māori and Pacific topics predominantly within the context of social problems, encouraging competitive, individualised learning styles, and having a disproportionately low number of Māori and Pacific staff, one can see why some majority group students enact racialised micro-aggressions – the university centre privileges Eurocentric culture. In turn, anything that threatens white privilege (e.g. ethnic-specific equity support systems, curricula addressing the Treaty of Waitangi) is attacked, and Māori and Pacific students who succeed on majority group students' alleged turf are viewed as surprising exceptions to the norm. Hence, as described in previous work emanating from this study (Mayeda et al., 2014), culturally embedded learning practices, family and university role modelling, and resistance to every-day colonialism and racism are factors that enhance Māori and Pacific educational success, serving as protective factors that buffer minority students from the adverse effects of every-day colonialism and racism (e.g. feelings of isolation, poor class engagement and attendance, lower pass rates, and premature dropout) – (see Figure 1).

## 5. Discussion

A Niuean undergraduate participant in Education described a time when he was on campus, about to catch the bus when a pair of police officers pulled up next to him, questioned where he was from and what he was doing on university grounds. After telling the officers he was from Otara (a lower-income suburb), one of the officers asked: 'You're from Otara and you're studying?' The student's ensuing response demonstrates how every-day racism is pervasive, grounded in power inequalities and has lasting effects on victims, while also showcasing a particular strength: 'Stuff like that just pisses you off, especially with people in authority, they run around with all these stereotypes – Pacific Islanders shouldn't be in school, Māoris shouldn't be getting an education [...] When I was sitting on the bus, I was so angry on the way home, like you know, I'm gonna kill you with my success aye. I'm gonna kill you with my grades. I'm gonna kill you with my degree. I don't want to

kill them [group laughter]. Yeah it's just stuff like that, it motivates me, motivates you to do better'.

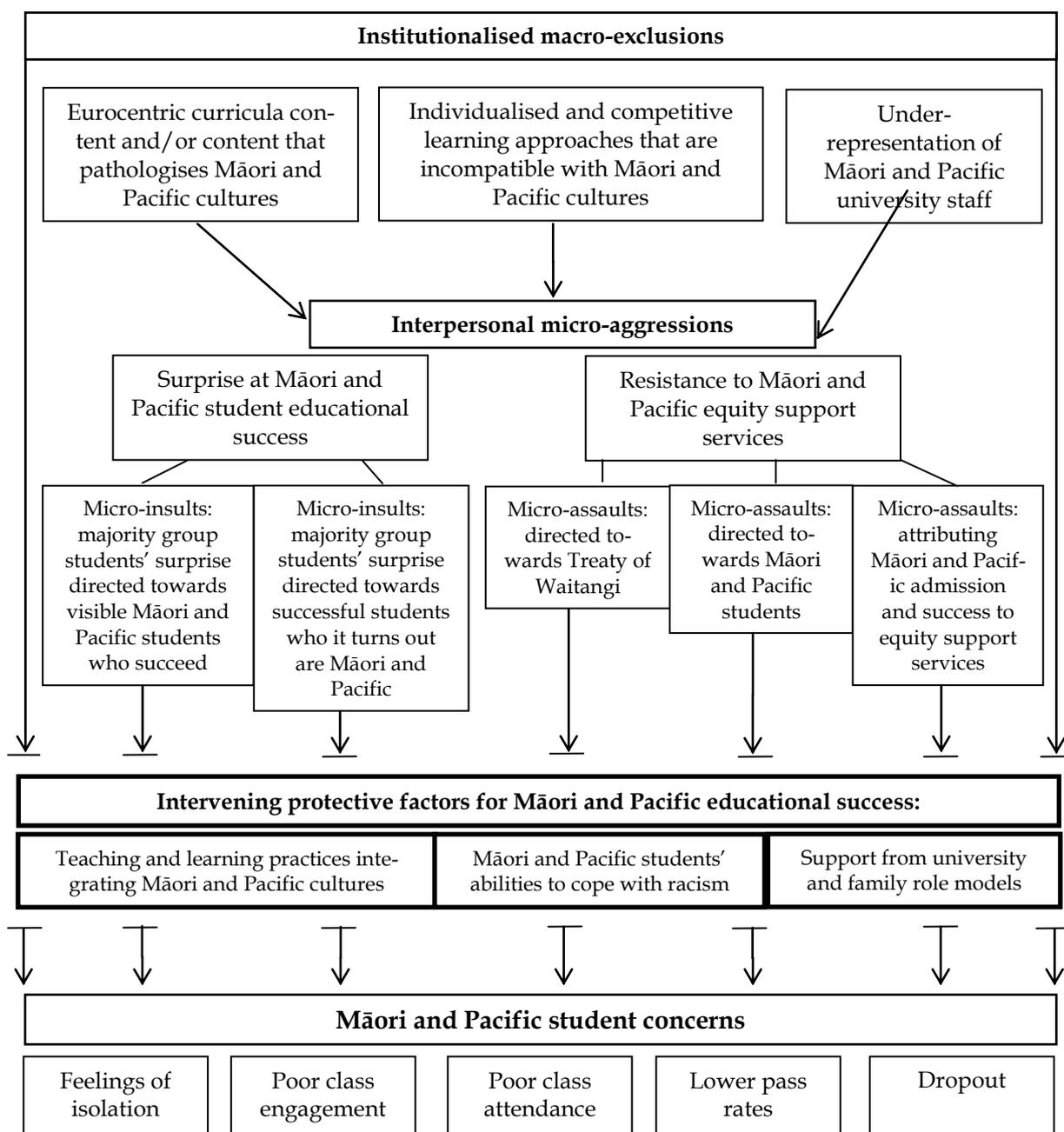


Figure 1: Conceptual scheme: every-day colonialism and racism with Māori and Pacific students

Source: Authors

As noted previously, this study's primary objective was to identify which factors assist in high-achieving Māori and Pacific students' academic success. Out of the

study, however, emerged a story on students' abilities to deflect and fight back against different forms of every-day colonialism and racism that they endured in institutional and interpersonal settings.

In many ways, the findings from this study resonate with prior research on micro-aggressions conducted with highly successful students of colour. B. Beagan's (2003) research with medical students in Canada from a variety of ethnic backgrounds demonstrates many of the same themes emergent in the present study. In both studies, the high-achieving students of colour experienced immediate status degradation at the hands of majority group members who would make uninformed and disrespectful assumptions. Also in both studies, the high-achieving students of colour discussed how racialised micro-aggressions were ubiquitous, influencing students to dwell on their victimisation to the extent that it became extremely tiresome.

The contextual difference in the present study lies in its focus with indigenous and diverse Pacific students in a Pacific context. For indigenous students, their general exclusion exposes the different ways that their culture is erased or distorted in their own homeland. This is not to suggest that everyday colonialism and racism are more or less harsh for indigenous students than students from other minority groups, but there is an important contextual difference. To this end it is critical for universities with indigenous students that administrators monitor the ways that indigenous rights are handled in lectures and broader systems. This study, for example, revealed how the Treaty of Waitangi and attendant equity support systems have been identified as sites of opposition by some majority group students, leading to a range of concerns for Māori students and their Pacific peers – feeling isolated on campus, disconnected from lectures, not passing courses, and dropping out. Notably, B. M. J. Brayboy's (2004) work with American Indian students attending elite universities in the United States found some of these same themes. In experiencing consistent racism at the hands of majority group students, Native students felt isolated and took measured efforts to make themselves less visible on campus. Thus, it would benefit university administrations to provide training for instructors on integrating more indigenous and ethnic minority curricula into lecture content, and also how to deliver such content in ways that bolster indigenous and minority students' ethnic

identities, and build majority group students' understanding of and support for minority issues. In fact, it is the majority group students whose attitudes and behaviours must shift, such that they recognise their systemic privilege and desist from viewing themselves as racialised victims (Cabrera 2014).

Returning to this study's original aim, it would also benefit universities to implement programmes that reinforce indigenous and other ethnic minority students' educational strengths. As shown in Figure 1, the forms of every-day colonialism and racism inflicted upon Māori and Pacific students are institutional, interpersonal and emanate in multiple forms (see also Yosso et al., 2009: 672-673 for a discussion on institutional micro-aggressions). For the ninety high-achieving Māori and Pacific students in this study, there were a number of factors said to assist in their educational success, including holding a strong, positive cultural identity. Prior research with indigenous peoples (Walters, Simoni, 2002) has identified positive ethnic identity as an intervening cultural buffer that helps offset adverse forms of cultural trauma inflicted upon indigenous peoples. Of course, as individuals, participants in this study were talented and hard working. But from a systems standpoint, many participants in this study also experienced exceptional circumstances within a university setting that countered Eurocentric norms. These exceptions included Māori, Pacific and even non-Māori or Pacific staff who took extra time and effort to mentor the participants, who engaged with their cultures in positive ways, who showed interest in students' families, and who forged creative interdependent teaching methods that did not foster cutthroat individualised competition.

These are the types of intervening protective factors that must be centralised in universities located in neo-colonial settings. As the present study shows, depriving indigenous and other minority students of such support maintains a Eurocentric status quo, thereby facilitating majority group students' campus privilege and their ability to enact racialised, colonial micro-aggressions.

## **6. Conclusion and study limitations**

Perhaps because the present study's original aim did not entail a focused investigation into micro-aggressions, study participants did not report experiencing

micro-invalidations. This does not mean Māori and Pacific students did not experience them. Rather, it is possible the research team did not probe participants sufficiently to uncover that particular form of discrimination. Furthermore, the present study in many ways homogenises a very ethnically diverse group of students, and although the sample is predominantly female, a significant number of males participated in the study. The research team attempted in a number of focus groups to identify differences in perspective by way of ethnicity and sex, but with respect to the topics under study, participants expressed unified opinions.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study is the first of its kind on everyday colonialism and racism with populations in the Pacific. This study also expands the theoretical framework on every-day racism and micro-aggressions within a university context by illustrating how macro-forces (e.g. macro-exclusions) interact with interpersonal discrimination to adversely impact indigenous and Pacific students. Still, as the ninety participants in this study show, ethnic minority students can and do succeed in the face of persistent discrimination. It is up to university administrations and academic staff to alter their curricula and systems so that indigenous and Pacific students can prosper without the burden of fending off systemic discrimination.

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