A "MAIN" ETHNIC GROUP?
ETHNIC SELF-PRIORITISATION AMONG NEW ZEALAND YOUTH

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Abstract

Since 1991 a growing share of the New Zealand population has reported more than one ethnic group in the census, with rates especially high among children. A key challenge arising from the collection of ethnicity data is deciding where to count people who record more than one group. In this paper we explore how a self-prioritised measure of main ethnicity may facilitate and improve the usage of multiple-ethnic data. We do so using 2006 data from wave one of the Youth Connectedness survey of early adolescents. We find that three-quarters of youth who recorded more than one ethnic group were able to choose a main group when asked to do so. Though we have reservations about using a main ethnicity measure to output ethnic data, we see promise for research that seeks to better understand identification processes and their relations with ethnic identity and inequality.

INTRODUCTION

The view that race and ethnicity are socially and politically constructed markers of difference rather than objective traits of human beings is unremarkable in the social sciences (Omi and Winant 1994). In other forums, however, the belief in the idea of distinct races endures – testament to its powerful rendering through legal, bureaucratic and "scientific" designations, racial ideologies, and everyday interactions (Callister and Didham 2009). Although the globalisation of migration flows and the removal of prescriptive identity rules and classifications have begun to challenge long-held notions that individuals belong to a single race or ethnic group, change has been slow to filter through to official statistics.

Among census-taking nations, New Zealand is one of a small number that explicitly allows for identification with multiple ethnic groups (Kukutai and Thompson 2007, Morning 2008). Since the introduction of the ethnic group question in the 1991 census, a growing share of the New Zealand population has reported belonging to more than one group. As Table 1 shows,

in 1991 just 5% of New Zealanders identified with more than one ethnic group; by 2006 this had doubled, though the increase has not been monotonic. In all years multi-ethnic identification has been especially pronounced among younger people and among Māori and Pacific peoples. The latter groups are of interest to policy makers, in part because of their comparative socio-economic disadvantage.

Table 1 More Than One Ethnic Group Reported, Census of Population and Dwellings, 1991–2006

Census year	More than one ethnicity reported					
	N			%[1]		
	Total NZ, all ages	Total NZ, 0–14	Māori, all ages	Total NZ	Total NZ, 0–14	Māori, all ages
1991	166,158	77,172	111,357	5.0	19.3	25.6
1996	536,757	181,338	249,933	15.5[2]	45.2	47.8
2001	324,090	145,194	231,555	9.0	34.2	44.0
2006	400,428	164,262	266,934	10.4	38.1	47.2

1 Percentage of people with a valid ethnic group response.
2 In 1996 an "Other European" tick-box was included, along with a sub-list that specified English, Irish, Australian, Scottish and Dutch ethnic groups. This led to an increase in the reporting of those groups. The tick-box was dropped from subsequent census questionnaires.

In New Zealand, as in other Anglo settler states (United States, Canada, Australia), ethnicity and related terms such as "race" and "indigeneity" are important variables in social research and policy. Among those who work with ethnicity data in New Zealand there is a broad consensus that allowing people to choose more than one group is desirable to best reflect the nation's ethnic milieu (Didham 2005). However, giving effect to complex ethnic identification presents a number of challenges in terms of measurement, analysis and dissemination. How should people who choose to identify with multiple groups be statistically represented? What weight should be given to statistical requirements versus individual identification decisions? What does identification with more than one group even mean? As Bhopal (2004) notes, there is no easy answer to such questions:

> The increasing acceptance of sexual unions that cross ethnic and racial boundaries is adding both richness and complexity to most societies. The way to categorise people born of such unions is unclear and the current approaches are inadequate, partly because the number of potential categories is huge. (Bhopal 2004:444)

In this paper we explore how a self-prioritised ethnicity measure may help advance the understanding of complex ethnicity data. Allowing people to choose a main ethnic group was one of several approaches for managing multiple-ethnic data identified in the 2004 *Report of the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity* (Statistics New Zealand 2004). However, with the exception of Kukutai (2004, 2008), little research has been conducted on ethnic self-prioritisation. We attempt to address this dearth by exploring whether a main ethnicity prompt delivers useful information that cannot be captured by the officially sanctioned methods.

We begin with a discussion about multiple-ethnic identification in surveys and some ways of reporting and analysing such data. We then provide an empirical analysis of self-prioritisation using data from the first wave of Victoria University's longitudinal Youth Connectedness survey of early adolescents. Only summary data are presented as a full technical paper by

Kukutai (2008) is available on the Statistics New Zealand website. Given that young people will significantly influence the nation's ethnic terrain in coming years, it is valuable to have insights into their identification decisions. Three questions inform the following analysis:

- Can young people who identify with multiple ethnic groups choose a main ethnic group when asked to do so?
- If so, what group is prioritised?
- How does a young person's readiness to choose between his or her ethnicities vary across specific ethnic group combinations?

We conclude with some thoughts about the role that main ethnicity could play in the future in research and policy making.

MULTIPLE-ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

Patterns of ethnic identification, including how people are designated in the census, are important for various reasons. In terms of policy and planning, ethnicity data are routinely used to identify population parameters and characteristics, often in ways that influence the distribution of valued resources. Patterns of ethnic identification are also of sociological import as they "reflect and affect the surrounding social world" (Liebler 2004:702). In New Zealand (Callister 2003, Keddell 2007, Kukutai 2007) and elsewhere (Brunsma 2005, Roth 2005, Tafoya et al. 2004, Xie and Goyette 1997) there is ample evidence that the ethnic labels people choose or are designated are not simply reflections of their parental ethnicities, but are mediated by a range of factors. These may be categorised as:

- *structural* – for example, the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood, ethnic group status differences, and ethnic politics
- *personal* – for example, life-cycle stage and the ties linking individuals and their families
- *contextual* – for example, how, where and why ethnic identification was elicited (Burton et al. 2008, see also Carter et al. 2009).

The matter of defining who is multi-ethnic is not straightforward. Goldstein and Morning's (2000) research on the multiple-race population in the United States suggests at least three ways of conceptualising a multiple-ethnic population in New Zealand: by ancestry, by ethnic identification in the census, and by parental ethnicities. The disconnect between boundaries based on ancestry, parental ethnicities and self-identification varies, depending on the groups involved, the context and the time period. To illustrate this complexity, 643,977 people reported Māori ancestry in the 2006 census, but just over 80% of them (522,577) identified as Māori by ethnicity. By comparison, an estimated 7,876,568 people reported American Indian ancestry in the 2000 US census, but only 4,315,865 people (representing 55% of the American Indian descent population) racially identified as American Indian (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2004).[2]

The statistical construction of a multiple-ethnic population is only possible if people are permitted to identify as such (inputs), *and* their identification decisions are tabulated in a way that their number can be determined (outputs). Morning (2008) has noted three possible ways in which census forms allow for multi-ethnic identification: permitting the respondent to check off more than one category; offering a generic mixed-response option that, in effect,

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[2] In fact the proportion is almost certainly lower because some people who reported American Indian race would not have reported American Indian ancestry.

creates a single ethnic category (e.g. "Mestizo"); and, specifying exact combinations of interest.

In New Zealand, all three approaches have been used to document complex ethnic and racial identities. From 1874 through to 1921 inter-racial mixing was captured by the use of the "half-caste" category.[3] The vast majority of half-castes were half-caste Māori-Europeans, who were further distinguished on the basis of those who lived as Māori (i.e. in a kin-group village setting) and those who lived as Europeans. According to the 1921 census report the total number of half-caste Māori-Europeans was only about one-sixth of the number of Māori (49,635). Though the tables show half-caste Europeans (4,236) outnumbered half-caste Māori (3,116), the latter category was almost certainly underestimated. This is because many Māori with a European parent or grandparent chose not to acknowledge their mixed heritage, or were simply identified as Māori (Buck 1924).

The 1926 census introduced a new complexity by requiring respondents to quantify their heritage more precisely in terms of fractions.[4] The examples accompanying the question varied over time, but among the specific combinations named were "European-Indian quarter-caste" (1926); "1/2 Māori – 1/2 Indian" (1945); and "7/8 European + 1/8 Māori" (1981). From the mid-1980s two significant changes occurred that affected the reportage of complex identities. First, the collection of fractional data was abandoned in the 1986 census and tick-boxes for ethnic origin groups were introduced with the instruction to "tick the box or boxes that apply to you". Second, all references to origins were removed from the census questionnaire in 1991 and replaced by the term "ethnic group". The concept of ethnic group is intended to capture a person's current cultural affiliation rather than the ethnic origins of their ancestors.

"COUNTING" COMPLEX ETHNICITY

The acknowledgement of complex ethnicity in the New Zealand census has, in some ways, been less problematic than deciding how such people ought to be statistically represented. For many decades post-enumeration rules were used to allocate people who acknowledged their mixed descent to one race group. In the early period of census data collection it was standard practice to tabulate racial mixtures in census publications because officials had a keen interest in "miscegenation" and what it supposedly represented: the rate of Māori absorption into the European population (Kukutai forthcoming). However, when comparing Māori with the general – predominantly European – population, some rule of designation was needed. Until 1921 half-castes were allocated to the Māori or European population depending on their mode of living. After 1926 a "half or more" rule was used that allocated those with half or more Māori blood into the Māori population. This was a unilateral form of prioritisation as many half-castes could demonstrably have been counted with Europeans.[5] Paradoxically, though half-caste denoted an "in-between" statistical category, the allocation of half-castes to either the Maori or European population served to solidify the notion of Māori and European

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[3] Quotation marks are used on first mention to indicate that the term is not a neutral descriptor, but are omitted in subsequent mentions, in keeping with the historical usage of the term.

[4] Though the term "race" was replaced by the language of "descent" on the 1926 census questionnaire, both terms continued to be used interchangeably up until the 1976 census.

[5] Māori with non-European heritage (e.g. Indian-Māori; Polynesian-Māori) were subject to a variety of allocation rules. From 1916 to 1951 they were allocated to the "race alien" population, regardless of the reported degree of Māori blood; from 1956 such people were subjected to the usual half or more rule, *except* when the non-European race was Polynesian. In the latter case, individuals with Māori and any degree of Polynesian descent were counted only in the Māori population from 1951 until the 1966 census.

as separate races (Kukutai forthcoming). The system of eliciting data on fractional identities, but allocating people who recorded "mixed" race or descent to a single group, continued in some form through to 1981.

Once fractions were dispensed with, new rules of allocation were needed. Between 1986 and 1991 Statistics New Zealand, as well as most government agencies and researchers, relied primarily on the prioritisation of ethnic groups in order to simplify the presentation of the data. Under this system, Māori had priority coding, followed by Pacific peoples, then Asian, other ethnic groups besides European, followed by "Other European" and, finally, New Zealand European (Allan 2001).[6] Under prioritisation, a person reporting, for example, as both Māori and Samoan was classified only as Māori. When prioritisation of ethnic (origin) responses was first introduced in 1986, multiple-ethnic group reporting was under 5%. However, as the share of the population recording diverse ethnicities grew, so too did the distorting effect of prioritisation on statistics, particularly for Pacific peoples (Didham 2005). Despite its drawbacks, prioritisation-by-proxy is still used in some areas of education and health research (for a summary of education-related research see Leather 2009; for examples of health research see Chan et al. 2008, Sundborn et al. 2008).

When undertaking its review of ethnicity in 2004, a number of outputting options were put to Statistics New Zealand. One was to report main single and multiple combinations. Other suggested methods, most of which reduce responses to a single ethnicity, were:
- publish total counts
- randomly allocate multi-ethnic people to a single ethnic category
- use a fractional ethnicity model
- develop a system that can "predict" likely main ethnic group
- let people choose their own main ethnic group.

The strengths and weaknesses of some of these systems have been explored in this journal (Callister 2004).[7] Although New Zealand is unique in having a long history of collecting multiple-race/ethnicity data, the contemporary challenges involved in dealing with such data are not uncommon. In the U.S., bureaucrats and researchers face similar issues with the introduction of multiple-race reporting in the 2000 census. One of the proposed solutions has been to predict probabilistically the main ethnicity of people who record more than one race, thereby yielding data that conforms to traditional mutually exclusive race categories (Liebler and Halpern-Manners 2008).

There are a number of possible reasons underlying the demand for single ethnic group data. Perhaps the weakest one is that some data users find ethnic complexity conceptually difficult to deal with and feel more comfortable when people are placed in seemingly clear-cut groups. Methodological concerns also have a role. People who affiliate with more than one group are not readily accommodated within standard statistical techniques that often require mutually exclusive categories. This problem is averted when data are collected using some form of "mixed" single category (e.g. "White and Black Caribbean" in the UK census). In the absence of such a category, data users often create mutually exclusive categories by using

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[6] Prioritising data has not been unique to New Zealand. For example, Mays et al. (2003) set out a variety of ways that US agencies have prioritised multi-race/ethnic data when it has been available.

[7] In addition to these proposed methods, there has also been some discussion on whether a measure of "cultural strength" could be developed using a range of variables (e.g. language use, tribal affiliation) collected in surveys.

single and combination ethnic categories (e.g. Māori, European, and Māori-European), some form of prioritisation, or simply omitting people who give complex responses (see Liebler and Halpern-Manners 2008).

The demand for single output ethnicity data may also arise from political concerns, such as access to resources or political representation. In the U.S. the decision to allow more than one racial group to be collected was opposed by groups concerned that it might decrease the counts of some important minority groups (Korgen 1998). The desire to maximise the size of particular groups can be particularly important where resources are at stake. In New Zealand, when schools' decile funding was still determined, in part, by enrolments of Māori and Pacific students, schools had an explicit incentive to maximise the counts of those students. In the health sector, some funding has an ethnicity weighting based on census data. For example, Services to Improve Access funding is made available to primary health organisations to reduce health inequalities by improving access to primary care services by high-need groups, particularly Māori, Pacific people and people on low incomes (Ministry of Health, no date). Maximising counts may also influence wider EEO policies because they set a baseline target for representation in public and private sector organisations.

Knowing a "main" ethnicity could be important for a range of reasons. In New Zealand we have little understanding of why people record more than one ethnic group, or what such responses are signalling. Where a historically and socially meaningful "blended" group has not arisen, it is problematic to assume people who report two or more groups have an equal sense of affiliation with all groups (implied by total response), or see it as a unique blended identity (combination response). Some people may be trying to accurately report ancestries that are complex, but their lived experiences may be primarily shaped by their affiliation, or appearance of belonging to, one group. A self-prioritised main ethnicity prompt would provide additional information with which to make more nuanced distinctions.

A main ethnicity designation could also be helpful in clarifying the relationship between ethnicity and other outcomes of interest. Because ethnic relations are often hierarchical with regard to the distribution of power, prestige and resources, it may be useful to be able to identify people who affiliate more closely with groups that have a history of disadvantage. Previous research (Chapple 2000, Kukutai 2004, forthcoming) has found that those who have a strong Māori identification seem to be more disadvantaged than those with "thinner" ties to Māori identity. Finally, there are some programmes, such as stop smoking campaigns and mental health programmes, that are tailored towards particular ethnic groups. Where appropriate, self-prioritisation data could be used to ensure that such programmes are more effectively targeted.

ETHNIC SELF-PRIORITISATION AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS

Connectedness in Young New Zealanders: Social Connectedness, Transitions, and Well-being" (the YC survey) is a three-year survey of early adolescents undertaken by the Roy McKenzie Centre at Victoria University, aided by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The first wave of data collection was taken in 2006 (n = 2,174); the second wave in 2007 (n = 1,914); and the final wave was recently completed. The rationale for the YC survey was to collect data that enabled researchers to explore how connectedness to family, peers, school and community affect wellbeing in early adolescents. It includes a suite of ethnicity items relating to ethnic identification, language use, cultural knowledge and community ties. Of the 78 schools included in the survey, two-thirds were located in Wellington and

Wairarapa; the remainder were from Kapiti, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Auckland. Initially the YC team aimed for a 50:50 split between New Zealand European and Māori youth, but this was not achievable. In wave one, the majority of participants were in Years 6, 8 and 10. A fuller description of the sample can be found in Kukutai 2008. The selective coverage of the YC survey means the findings are not nationally representative and therefore cannot be generalised to all early adolescents in New Zealand. Nevertheless, it offers a rich source with which to explore the patterns of ethnic identification and self-prioritisation in ways that are not possible in nationally representative surveys such as the census.

Table 2 shows the distribution of single, dual and multiple (three or more) ethnic group responses in the YC survey, as well as for children aged 10–14 years at the time of the 2006 Census. It shows that the percentage of youth recording more than one ethnic group in the YC survey (30%) was double that of 10–14-year-olds in the census (16%). The recording of three or more ethnic groups was especially pronounced in the YC survey, but the percentage that failed to record a response to the ethnic group question was lower.

There are several reasons that may account for the higher proportion of dual and multi-ethnic reporting in the YC survey, including:
- the selectivity of participating schools and participants
- the regional concentration of the survey
- the prompt to the ethnic group question, which may have encouraged the recording of "symbolic" ethnicities (Gans 1979) alongside those with which youth held a more meaningful attachment[8]
- the way in which the YC survey was promoted and framed in the lead-up to being carried out
- self-reporting in the YC survey versus a high likelihood of proxy reporting in the census[9]
- different modes of data collection - computer-assisted in the YC survey versus a write-in questionnaire for the census (for a discussion of questionnaire mode effects, see Dillman and Christian 2005).

Table 2 Single, Dual and Multiple Ethnic Group Reporting in Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006, and 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings, Youth aged 10–14 years

	YC survey		2006 census	
Number of ethnic groups reported	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
One	1,492	68.7	244,854	80.1
Two	480	22.1	41,688	13.6
Three or more	161	7.4	8,214	2.7
Don't know	5	0.2	351	–
Not stated	35	1.6	10,899	3.6
Total	**2,174**	**100.0**	**306,006**	**100.0**

Note: "–" indicates figure is too small to be expressed.

[8] The wording of the ethnicity question in the YC survey was the same as for the census, but was preceded by the prompt: "Every person is part of an ethnic group, sometimes two or more ethnic groups. Some names of ethnic groups are: Samoan, Chinese, Maori, Tongan, New Zealand European."
[9] Although there is no way of knowing who completes an individual's census form, researchers have often worked on the assumption that children under the age of 15 years (or sometimes under 18 years) have their form completed for them by a third person, typically a parent or caregiver (Brunsma 2005, Roth 2005).

Table 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of the ethnic group responses recorded in both surveys using combination categories. If standard classification procedures are followed and data are aggregated at the highest level into broad ethnic groupings or categories, then combined pan-ethnic responses (e.g. New Zealand European and British; Samoan and Tongan) are not treated as dual or multi-ethnic.[10] Given that our key interest is in people who report more than one group, we have preserved the recording of complex ethnic group responses.

Table 3 shows that, among youth who recorded one ethnic group in the YC survey, the percentage of European, Māori and Pacific youth closely resembled the census distributions, whereas Asian and "other" ethnic groups were under-represented (see Kukutai 2008 for disaggregated data on specific groups and how "other" responses were categorised). A Māori–European combination was recorded by 12.5% of YC participants, compared with 8.6% of early adolescents in the census. However, dual identification was lower overall in the census. If we restrict the comparison to dual responses, the share of Māori–European combinations was somewhat higher in the census (25,311/41,685*100) than in the YC survey (266/480*100).

The next-most-common dual combination was for two European ethnicities – one of which was typically New Zealand European. When some other European group was recorded it was usually British (e.g. English, Scottish). Among the children who recorded three ethnic groups, the most common combination was Māori in conjunction with Pacific and European ethnic groups. Only slightly fewer youth recorded Māori in combination with two European ethnic groups. Analysis not shown here found that the reporting of more than one group also varied significantly, depending on the group. Of all youth who identified as Māori, two-thirds did so as part of a dual or multiple ethnic response. For European responses, however, less than one-third were reported as part of a combined response. There was no significant age difference in the number of ethnic groups reported, and a small gender difference, with boys more likely than girls to record just one ethnic group (73% versus 68%, $p < .05$ level of significance).

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[10] The Standard Classification of Ethnicity is a four-tier representation of the nation's ethnic composition, with level 1 representing the simplest form and level 4 the most complex (Statistics New Zealand 2005). Level 1 comprises six categories: European, Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, African (MELAA), and Other Ethnicity; for economy and clarity, MELAA is subsumed in the Other ethnicity category in this paper.

Table 3 Ethnic Groups Reported in Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006, and 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings

	YC survey		2006 census	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
One ethnic group				
European	1,049	49.1	147,501	50.0
Māori	217	10.2	30,969	10.5
Pacific	146	6.8	17,826	6.0
Asian	40	2.0	23,406	7.9
Other ethnic group	40	1.9	25,152	8.5
Two ethnic groups				
European & Māori	266	12.5	25,311	8.6
European & European	60	2.8	1,587	0.5
European & Pacific	36	1.7	3,765	1.3
Māori & Pacific	25	1.2	2,970	1.0
Other dual combinations	93	4.4	8,052	2.7
Three ethnic groups				
European, Māori & Pacific	25	1.2	2,637	0.9
Two European & Māori	22	1.0	2,163	0.7
Other combinations	64	3.0	1,734	0.6
At least four ethnic groups				
Four	38	1.6	1,206	0.4
Five or more	12	0.7	477	0.2
Total	**2,134**	**100.0**	**294,756**	**100.0**

We now turn to our primary interest: whether dual and multi-ethnic youth in the YC survey were willing and/or able to self-prioritise a main ethnic group when asked to do so. The focal question asked: "If you belong to more than one ethnic group, do you have a main ethnic group? Which is the main ethnic group you belong to?" In addition to the nine categories given in the ethnic group question, the following responses were also provided: "I belong to just one ethnic group", "I have no main ethnic group", "It depends on who I am with", and "Don't know". The question did not immediately follow the ethnic group question, but followed a series of items related to how participants felt about their nominated ethnic group(s). For the 641 youth who recorded at least two ethnic groups, their prioritisation responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Ability to Self-prioritise Ethnic Group, Youth that Reported More than One Ethnic Group, Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006

Self-prioritisation response	N	%
Able to choose main ethnic group	474	74.0
No main ethnic group	63	9.8
Depends on who with	17	2.7
Don't know main ethnic group	51	8.0
Belongs to just one	7	1.1
No response stated	29	4.5
Total people	**641**	**100.0**

The key finding is that three-quarters of dual and multi-ethnic youth in the survey were able to self-prioritise a main ethnic group when prompted.[11] The share of participants who indicated they did not know, or did not have, a main ethnic group was fairly similar at 8.0% and 9.8%, respectively. In the absence of cognitive testing, the distinction between not knowing and not having is unclear. Whereas the former implies lack of knowledge or indecision, the latter suggests a more conscious rejection of having to choose. However, it may be that not knowing *and* not having a main ethnic group are simply different ways of articulating discomfort with having to choose between elements of one's ethnic identity. Non-prioritisation may also denote feeling an equal sense of belonging to two or more groups, or occupying a kind of "third space" (Bhaba 1990) where new identities or "hybridities" are forged.

Just under 3% explicitly indicated that their main ethnic group was situational, depending on who they were with. This was considerably lower than shifts in ethnic identification found in U.S. surveys (Harris and Sim 2002), but is not surprising. People who change their identification in different contexts may not necessarily be aware of this, nor respond in such a way when asked about it directly. As expected, very few dual and multi-ethnic youth stated that they belonged to just one group. Finally, almost 5% of dual and multi-ethnic youth did not record a response to the main ethnic group question, which is notably higher than the proportion who skipped the ethnic group question (1.6%). There is no way of knowing why participants did not respond to the prioritisation prompt.

Ideally it would be useful to know how prioritisation responses varied across specific ethnic group combinations. Unfortunately the modest sample size, and the predominance of Māori–European responses, precluded detailed analysis. Given these limitations, Table 5a simply shows the percentage of youth who were able to prioritise for the five largest combinations. Table 5b extends the analysis to specify *which* group was prioritised in European–Māori combinations, in other dual responses, and in three or more responses. The small numbers preclude a detailed analysis of the non-prioritised responses, such as "no main" or "don't know" for each combination.

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[11] We note that this result aligns with the results from another recent survey of New Zealand youth. The Ethnicity and Achievement Survey of Year 9 students was undertaken in 2008 by Melinda Webber as part of her doctoral dissertation research. Of the 756 youth surveyed, 227 (30%) reported more than one group, of which 183 (81%) reported a main ethnic group (M. Webber, preliminary findings from the Ethnicity and Achievement Survey, 2008, personal communication, 2009).

Table 5a Self-prioritisation of Youth who Reported More Than One Ethnic Group, Five Largest Combinations, Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006

	Prioritised a main ethnic group		Total
Combinations	**N**	**%**	**N***
European & Māori	208	81.9	254
European & European	43	74.1	58
European & Pacific	21	67.7	31
Māori & Pacific	20	83.3	24
European, Māori & Pacific	20	80.0	25
Total	**312**	**…**	**393**

* Excludes no response stated (n = 20).
Note: "…" indicates not applicable.

Table 5b   Self-prioritisation of Youth who Reported More Than One Ethnic Group, Select Combinations, Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006

Self-prioritisation response	**N**	**%**
European & Māori		
European	114	54.8
Māori	92	44.2
Non-Māori, non-European	2	1.0
	208	100.0
Other dual combinations		
European	80	54.1
Māori	19	12.8
Non-Māori, non-European	49	33.1
	148	100.0
Three or more ethnic groups		
European	49	41.5
Māori	38	32.2
Non-Māori, non-European	31	26.3
Total	**118**	**100.0**

Note: n = 474.

The ability to self-prioritise was highest among youth who reported dual affiliations that included Māori, and lowest among European–Pacific youth. However, the small number in four of the combined categories, and the lack of statistical significance, means the results are indicative only. The willingness and/or ability to self-prioritise was somewhat higher for participants who recorded three or more ethnic groups than for those who recorded a dual combination other than European and Māori. Although one may expect that choosing a main group would be more difficult the greater the number of ethnic groups an individual identified with, it may be that third or fourth ethnicities are largely "symbolic" (Gans 1979) in terms of holding meaning in everyday life.

Table 5b shows that, of the youth who identified as both Māori and European *and* self-prioritised, the majority chose European over Māori, with a difference of about 10 percentage points. Interestingly, Kukutai (2004) found a similar pattern of self-prioritisation responses among women identified as Māori and European in the 1995 New Zealand Women: Family,

Education and Employment (NZW: FEE) survey of women aged 20–59 years. Among the 183 women who recorded Māori and European ethnic groups, 42% identified mainly as European, 37% identified mainly as Māori, and the remainder could not choose.[12] Among those who did self-prioritise, the European/Māori split was 54/46 – remarkably close to the distribution of responses in the YC survey.

Some may interpret these findings as evidence of a bias towards European ethnicities among people with both Māori and European heritage. Such an interpretation would be misleading. In the first instance, our analysis is based on self-identification rather than ancestry or parental ethnicities. As we noted earlier, these concepts are not synonymous. Previous parent–child studies suggest that some youth who identified as Māori only or European only in the YC survey would be considered multi-ethnic on the basis of their parental ethnicities (Callister 2003, Howard and Didham 2005, Kukutai 2007). All of those studies found that children with one Māori and one European parent were more likely to be designated as Māori only than as European only.[13] Historically, the pattern has been for people of Māori–European heritage to simplify their ethnic self-identification to Māori (Buck 1924, Metge 1964, Pool 1991). These complex patterns highlight the need to be clear about the conceptual basis underlying the use of concepts such as "mixed" and "multi-ethnic".

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research was undertaken with a view to exploring how ethnic self-prioritisation may help us better understand the complexity of multiple-ethnic data and its potential usage as an output method. The key finding was that almost three-quarters of youth who identified with more than one ethnic group in the YC survey were willing and able to choose a main group when asked to do so. This was in spite of the inclusion of viable alternatives which gave participants every opportunity to opt out of choosing.

Because Māori–European reports comprised the vast majority of dual ethnicity responses, we were particularly interested in which group was most often prioritised. Of the dual identified Māori–European children who could choose a main group, more chose European over Māori. This would have several implications if used as a method of outputting ethnicity data. To illustrate, if the YC pattern of prioritisation responses were applied to the 2006 census data for all ages, the Māori Ethnic Group count would be reduced from 565,329 to 395,051.[14] In the context of population-based funding, this would decrease the portion allocated to Māori, and decrease the size of the Māori population relative to Europeans. Substantively, this is

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[12] The main ethnic group question immediately followed the ethnic group question. Women who reported more than one group were asked: "Please tell me which one of these is the main ethnic group you identify with?" Possible responses included "more than one" and a combined "don't know/no".

[13] Kukutai's study (2007) used data from the NZW:FEE in which mothers reported their child's ethnicity. Callister (2003) and Howard and Didham (2005) used census data, which makes it impossible to know who reported the child's ethnicity, though it is highly unlikely that most children (0–14 years) would be given the opportunity to self-identify in this particular collection. In addition, in the census data we do not know whether the parents chose only one ethnic group for themselves when their own ancestry may have been more complex. Therefore census-based studies on the transmission of ethnicity to children give us only partial information, and more detailed ethnographic studies are needed to understand the transmission of ethnicity between generations.

[14] The number of people who reported more than one ethnic group including Māori was 266,934, of whom 119,803 would be counted as European, 96,656 as Māori, 2,165 as some other non-Māori, non-European grouping, and the remainder would be unable to be allocated to a single group (i.e. did not prioritise). The number who identified as mainly Māori would then be added to the number of single-ethnic Māori (n = 298,395).

similar to the effect the old system of prioritisation-by-proxy had on non-Māori groups, notably Pacific peoples, but which continues to be used in some areas of health and education research. As an output method, self-prioritised data would result in the loss of information that may be important in research and policy making. However, arguably this is what currently occurs with total count data in which multiple-ethnic identification is "hidden". There is also the matter of how to allocate those who cannot or will not choose a main ethnic group. In the YC survey about one-fifth of the youth who reported more than one group either did not know, or did not have, a main ethnic group. Not being able to choose is a valid response that would need to be accounted for conceptually and statistically.

The potentially significant effects that self-prioritisation would have on ethnic group counts may have political implications. For example, some people may feel that a main ethnicity measure is a tool designed to reduce the count of Māori. As Kukutai and Didham (2009) note elsewhere in this issue, ethnicity and ethnic groups are created and sustained through inter-group processes that, at times, involve competitive struggles for political power and material resources. However, it is for methodological and substantive (rather than political) reasons that we do not think it appropriate to use self-prioritisation as a data reduction tool in isolation from other outputting options.

Our analysis has focused on the implications of a main ethnicity prompt for outputting purposes, but it also raises the question of how to deal with ethnic complexity at the input stage. When filling in paper or computer surveys we do not know what people intend their response to mean. For example, some youth who checked the Māori and New Zealand European boxes in the YC survey may see both groups as reasonably distinct. In such cases, self-prioritisation could signal the group with which youth felt a stronger connection or affiliation. Others recording the same two groups may see their response as denoting a blended group distinct from either Māori or European. Whether this group is MāoriEuropean or EuropeanMāori might be showing up in the self-prioritisation data. In-depth qualitative research would be needed to understand how complex ethnicity is being constructed for adolescents.

Although self-prioritisation is unlikely to receive wide support as a method for reducing the complexity of multiple-ethnic data, it could have some important uses for expanding complexity. For example, previous analysis of main ethnicity data has shown important socio-economic and demographic differences between people who identified as both Māori and European but self-prioritised as Māori versus European (Kukutai 2004). Given the empirical relationship that has consistently been demonstrated between ethnicity and socio-economic disadvantage in New Zealand, the information delivered by a main ethnic group question may be valuable for better specifying the association between ethnicity and socio-economic outcomes that a good deal of policy research is concerned with.

The limited scope of this paper means that its chief contribution has been to describe ethnic identification patterns rather than to identify the factors underlying response patterns, or to explain what responses to a main ethnic group question may mean. Fortunately, the inclusion of the main ethnicity prompt in all waves of the YC study, along with a raft of questions relating to different kinds of ethnic attachment, means these questions can be pursued within the period of adolescence. Understanding how ethnicity may change over an individual's life cycle would not only require longitudinal data from birth to death but also regular questioning about ethnic affiliation. Future research that attempts to better specify the relationship between ethnic identification, ethnic identity and attachment, and stratification

will be valuable for advancing the understanding of ethnic identification dynamics and the purposes for which ethnic data can best be used.

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