



# **Ethnic Self-prioritisation of Dual and Multi-ethnic Youth in New Zealand**

**A discussion paper prepared for Statistics New Zealand  
by Tahu Kukutai (Tahatū Consulting)**

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## 1. Dual and multi-ethnic identification in New Zealand

The globalisation of migration flows, shifting ideas about ethnicity and race, and intimate relations across ethnic boundaries have led to an increasingly complex array of ethnic identities. Worldwide, New Zealand is one of a small number of countries that explicitly allows individuals to affiliate with more than one ethnic or racial group in the national census (Kukutai and Thompson, 2007).

Since the introduction of a self-identified ethnic group question in the 1991 Census of Population and Dwellings, a growing share of the New Zealand population has identified as belonging to more than one ethnic group. In the 2006 Census 10.4 percent of the population reported belonging to at least two ethnic groups, rising to 19.7 percent among children aged under 15 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2007).

Among researchers and analysts of ethnic 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, such responses present challenges for ethnic analysis, not the least of which is how to statistically allocate dual- and multi-ethnic identified individuals. From 1991 until the 2004 *Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity* (RME hereafter), Statistics New Zealand employed a post-hoc method of prioritisation, to allocate individuals who recorded complex ethnic responses to a single ethnic group. Māori were at the top of the prioritisation schedule, followed by Pacific peoples, Asians, other non-European groups, and other European ethnicities, with 'New Zealand European' as the residual.

Following the RME, prioritisation was discontinued and replaced with two standard outputs for ethnicity data: total response data in which individuals are counted in all of their reported ethnic groups; and single and combination data, which counts people in mutually exclusive categories. Each method has particular analytical benefits and disadvantages (Callister, Didham and Potter, 2005; Didham, 2005).

An ethnic self-prioritisation measure presents another potential way of dealing with the complexities of dual ethnic and multi-ethnic data. One of the recommendations of the RME was for research to be undertaken that examines "the potential to ask people to identify their main ethnicity where they select more than one ethnic group" (Statistics New Zealand, 2004:15). Previous research undertaken by the author (2004) suggests a main ethnicity prompt delivers useful information that cannot be captured by total response or single/combination outputs.

To date a main ethnicity question has been included in several surveys, including the 1995 survey New Zealand Women: Family, Employment and Education (NZW:FEE); two surveys of middle-aged and older New Zealanders (carried out in 2008 for the Enhancing Wellbeing in an Ageing Society (EWAS) project at the University of Waikato); and the longitudinal Youth Connectedness survey (YC) of early adolescents, which began in 2006.

This paper seeks to contribute to the New Zealand literature on ethnic identification by providing an overview of responses to the ethnic group and main ethnic group questions in wave 1 of the YC survey. The primary interest is to determine whether youth who recorded more than one ethnic group could self-prioritise a main ethnic group when asked to do so. Young people are ideal subjects for such a study. The greater

prevalence of dual and multi-ethnic identification amongst younger people means a modest sized sample is likely to yield sufficient numbers for statistical analysis. From a policy perspective, it is valuable to have the insights into the identification decisions of young people, given that they will significantly influence the nation's ethnic terrain in coming years.

It is envisaged that the pattern of responses from the YC survey will provide Statistics New Zealand with information with which to assess the potential feasibility of a main ethnic classification. The conceptual meaning and feasibility of a main ethnic group classification is outside the scope of this paper.

The rest of this paper is as follows: section 2 provides a description of the methodology of the YC survey and descriptive statistics of the sample characteristics; section 3 discusses conceptual and classification issues; section 4 describes the patterns of ethnic group responses; section 5 focuses on self-prioritisation among dual and multi-ethnic youth; and section 6 provides a summary and conclusion.

## **2. Survey methodology and sample characteristics**

“Connectedness in young New Zealanders: Social connectedness, transitions, and well-being” or 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 (NZCER). 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 will be completed in 2008. The rationale for the YC survey was to collect data that enabled researchers to explore how connectedness to family, peers, school and community impacted wellbeing in early adolescents. It includes a suite of ethnicity items relating to ethnic identification, language use, cultural knowledge and community ties. The survey covered 78 schools<sup>1</sup> and, in 2006, the majority of participants were in Years 6, 8 and 10. Initially the YC team aimed for a 50/50 split between New Zealand European and Māori youth, but this was not achievable for reasons outlined in Jose and Kleeb, 2006. Wave 1 of the survey was self-administered on laptops using the SurveyPro program, and took an average of 50 minutes to complete. In subsequent waves, children were given the option of completing the survey via laptop or the Internet.

Table 1 shows the demographic and school characteristics of wave 1 participants. A more detailed description of the data and its representativeness can be found in Jose and Kleeb, 2006. The median age of participants was 12 years (with a standard deviation of 1.7), and the percentage of girls (52 percent) was slightly higher than that of boys. By comparison, the percentage of girls aged 10–14 years in the total New Zealand population (49 percent) was slightly below that of boys, according to results from the 2006 Census. Although the target age range was 10–15 years, the survey included a small number of children outside those ages ( $n = 18$ ). The skew towards the younger ages was reflected in the distribution of the school year, with almost 40 percent of participants in Years 5–7.

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(1) The survey has two components – one organised by the Roy McKenzie Centre; and a supplementary component undertaken through the NZCER. For the main component, 102 schools were approached, of which 67 (66 percent) consented to participate. An additional 11 schools were added through the NZCER component. The questionnaires and method of completion were the same for all participants.

**Table 1**

**Participant and School Characteristics, Wave 1**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, 2006*  
*n = 2,174*

Variables	Percent	(SD)
<b>Participant</b>		
<i>Age (years)</i>		
9	1	
10–11	36	
12–13	32	
14–15	31	
<i>Median age (years)</i>	12	(1.7)
<i>Female</i>	52	
<i>School year (level)</i>		
5	1	
6–7	36	
8–9	32	
10–11	30	
<b>School</b>		
<i>Urban/rural location</i>		
Major urban (>30,000)	61	
Other urban <sup>(1)</sup>	33	
Rural	6	
<i>Region</i>		
Wellington	41	
Wairarapa	25	
Kapiti	8	
Taranaki	13	
Other <sup>(2)</sup>	13	
<i>Gender mix</i>		
Girls only	4	
Boys only	7	
Co-educational	89	
<i>Type</i>		
Contributing	23	
Full primary	20	
Composite	4	
Intermediate	20	
Secondary: year 7–15	7	
Secondary: year 9–15	26	
<i>Decile<sup>(3)</sup></i>		
Q1	3	
Q2	4	(2.9)
Q3	7	
<i>Roll size at 2005<sup>(4)</sup></i>		
Q1	229	
Q2	347	(312)
Q3	583	

(1) Secondary urban (10,000–19,999) and minor urban (1,000–9,999). (2) Hawke's Bay and Auckland. (3) Range is from 1 to 10. (4) Range is from 63 to 1,761.

The YC survey does not have national coverage. Of the 78 schools included in the survey, two-thirds were located in Wellington and Wairarapa – the remainder of the schools were located in Kapiti, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Auckland. The latter two regions were restricted respectively to three Māori boarding schools, and three state schools with a high proportion of Pacific students. Just under two-thirds of participating schools were located in major urban areas with at least 30,000 residents, and the vast majority were co-educational. Although the number of boys' and girls' schools was comparable, the total number of boys at single-sex schools was almost double that of girls ( $n = 145$  and  $75$ , respectively). Because of efforts to over-sample Māori, participating schools were slightly skewed toward lower decile schools, with a median decile ranking of four.<sup>2</sup> The average school had a roll size of 347, with a sizeable standard deviation of 312.

### 3. Conceptual and classification issues

#### Conceptual issues

Prior to analysing the data, several points of clarification are required. The first relates to the meaning of ethnicity. There is a vast literature on the subject of ethnicity and its definition, but this paper is concerned mainly with how ethnicity is understood in the context of official statistics. The statistical standard for ethnicity defines ethnicity as, "the ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to" (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). An ethnic group is further defined as a group made up of people who have some or all of the following characteristics:

- a common proper name
- one or more elements of common culture which need not be specified, but may include religion, customs, or language
- unique community of interests, feelings and actions
- a shared sense of common origins or ancestry, and
- a common geographic origin.

Though ethnicity is intended as a measure of current affiliation with an ethnic group, analysts of ethnic data do not have access to the cognitive meanings that individuals assign to the term. For a significant number of people, ethnic group might be interpreted in terms of race, nationality, ancestry, origins or some other related concept.

The second point relates to the distinction between ethnic identity (how people think about their ethnicity) and ethnic identification (what people say about their ethnicity, see Liebler, 2004). The literature shows that identification decisions in surveys may be influenced by various contextual factors including how, where and why the question was asked. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the way in which YC survey participants identified themselves in response to questions on ethnic group and main ethnic group accurately taps their underlying ethnic identity. For the latter claim to be made, analysis of a more sophisticated multidimensional construct would be required.<sup>3</sup>

The third point relates to the distinction between individuals who have ethnically diverse backgrounds (eg, parents with different ethnic affiliations) and individuals who identify

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(2) Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities.

(3) The YC survey did include a number of items that were intended to tap different dimensions of ethnic identity (see section 6), but analysis of that data is not included in this paper.

with more than one group. There is a significant body of research from the United States (Brunnsma, 2005; Roth, 2005; Tafoya, Johnson and Hill, 2005), and New Zealand (Callister, 2004; Kukutai, 2007) that shows how young people identify themselves, or are identified by others, is not necessarily a reflection of their parental ethnicities. As Goldstein and Morning (2000:6,231) have noted in relation to the US multiracial population, the population identifying more than one race in surveys and the census will be only a subset of those with mixed racial ancestry, whether defined by genealogy or awareness. It is taken as given that the YC survey included youth who had parents with different ethnic affiliations, but who opted to identify with a single group. Conversely, youth without mixed ethnic backgrounds may have identified with several groups. The implication is that an unknown percentage of dual and multi-ethnic youth in the survey simplified their ethnic identification before reaching the main ethnic group question. If all children with diverse ethnic backgrounds had opted to identify in dual or multi-ethnic terms, the distribution of responses to the main ethnic group question might have differed.

### **Classification issues**

Consistent with the statistical standard (Statistics New Zealand, 2005), data has been coded from the YC survey using total response and single/combination outputs. For the majority of the analysis, the data are coded to level 1 of the Standard Classification of Ethnicity. The classification is a four-tier representation of the nation's ethnic composition, with level 1 representing the simplest form, and level 4 the most complex. Ethnic statistics disseminated to the media and on the Statistics New Zealand website are usually aggregated at level 1, which comprises six categories: European; Māori; Pacific Peoples; Asian; Middle Eastern, Latin American, African (MELAA); and other ethnicity. Māori is the only ethnic group that appears as a stand-alone category at all levels of the classification. For purposes of economy and clarity, MELAA is subsumed in the 'other ethnicity' category in this paper.

In standard ethnic analysis, the use of level 1 categories under-represents the number of dual and multi-ethnic responses, because responses that fall within the same level 1 category are only counted once (eg, a child recorded as Māori and New Zealand European would be coded as Māori and as European; but a child recorded as Samoan and Tongan would be coded once in the Pacific peoples category). Given that dual and multi-ethnic reporting is a core concern of this paper, complex ethnic responses have been preserved by using ethnic groups, where possible. However, the modest sample size and the large number of recorded groups means aggregation at level 1 is unavoidable. Where level 1 categories are used in subsequent tables, 'total responses' (where children who reported more than one group are only *counted once* in each applicable level 1 category) have been distinguished from 'all responses' (where children who reported more than one group may be counted *multiple times* in each applicable level 1 category). To ensure comparability across categories, the denominator is the total participants for whom a valid ethnic response was provided (Didham, 2005).

In summary, differences between the YC survey and the 2006 Census means comparisons between ethnic identification patterns should be treated as indicative only. First, children in the YC survey self-reported their ethnic group(s), whereas children in

the census probably had their ethnicity recorded by a third person, typically a parent.<sup>4</sup> Second, though the wording of the ethnicity question in the YC survey was the same as for the census, it 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, Māori, Tongan, New Zealand European.”

This may have provided subtle encouragement for identification with multiple groups. Third, the different modes of data collection – computer-assisted versus write-in questionnaire – might also have differentially affected ethnic identification responses (for a discussion of questionnaire mode effects, see Dillman and Christian, 2005).

#### 4. Ethnic group responses

Table 2 shows the distribution of single, dual and multiple ethnic group responses in the YC survey, as well as responses 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 percent) was double that of 10–14-year olds in the census (16 percent). The recording of three or more ethnic groups was especially pronounced in the YC survey, and the percentage that failed to record a response to the ethnic group question was lower, perhaps reflecting mode effects.

**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

Number of ethnic groups reported	YC survey		2006 Census	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
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	6	--
Not stated	35	1.6	10,899	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,174</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>305,611</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Symbol:** -- figure too small to be expressed

Table 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of the ethnicity responses recorded in both surveys. Among youth that 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. The distribution of the latter requires clarification. Of the 110 children that ticked the ‘other’ box, 87 percent ( $n = 96$ ) went on to specify a group or groups. In 15 cases, participants typed in a hyphenated, dual or multiple response, and were coded in terms of all the recorded groups. This is consistent with the statistical standard, which distinguishes multiple-worded responses that denote a single ethnic group (cited examples include ‘Fijian Indian’ and ‘Turkish Cypriot’), and responses that ought to be coded as two ethnic groups, even if they are hyphenated or linked in some way (cited examples include

(4) Though 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).

South African European, Chinese New Zealander and Tongan-Māori. See Statistics New Zealand, 2005:7).

After recoding, there were 95 youth that either checked the 'other' option and did not elaborate, or typed in a single group. Many of the responses were non-listed European, Asian or Pacific groups. About 14 percent ( $n = 15$ ) typed in 'New Zealander' or 'Kiwi'. Across the entire survey, a 'New Zealander' type response (excluding 'New Zealand Māori') was given just 21 times, either alone or in combination with some other group. This was significantly lower than the percentage of 10–14-year olds recorded as New Zealander in the 2006 Census (10.3 percent).

Turning to dual responses, a Māori-European combination was recorded by 12.5 percent of YC participants, compared with 8.6 percent 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 (ie, English, Scottish, Welsh or British,  $n = 19$ ), followed by South African ( $n = 7$ ) and Dutch ( $n = 7$ ). Among the children that recorded three ethnic groups, the most common combination was Māori in conjunction with Pacific and European ethnic groups. Only slightly fewer children recorded Māori in combination with two European ethnic groups. Of the 50 children that recorded belonging to four or five ethnic groups, almost half included at least two European groups ( $n = 23$ ).

Table 3

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

	YC survey		2006 Census	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>One ethnic group</b>				
<b>European</b>	<b>1,049</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>147,501</b>	<b>50.0</b>
New Zealand European	1,012	47.4	...	...
Other European	37	1.7	...	...
Māori	217	10.2	30,969	10.5
<b>Pacific</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>17,826</b>	<b>6.0</b>
Samoan	82	3.8	...	...
Cook Island Maori	32	1.5	...	...
Other Pacific	32	1.5	...	...
<b>Asian</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>23,406</b>	<b>7.9</b>
Chinese	16	0.8	...	...
Indian	12	0.6	...	...
Other Asian	12	0.6	...	...
Other ethnic group	40	1.9	25,152	8.5
<b>Two ethnic groups</b>				
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
<b>Three ethnic groups</b>				
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
<b>At least four ethnic groups</b>				
Four	38	1.6	1,206	0.4
Five or more	12	0.7	477	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>294,756</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Symbol:** ... not applicable

In contrast to table 3, which uses single and combination outputs, tables 4a and 4b use total count data. The purpose is to show the relative share that each broad level 1 category has when the full distribution of ethnicity responses are accounted for. The first table uses the standard total response method, so that a youth that recorded more than one ethnic group is counted in all of the reported groups, but only once within each level 1 category. Comparative figures are also provided for 10–14-year olds in the 2006 Census. In table 4b, all responses are counted, irrespective of whether they fall within the same level 1 category. As expected, given the higher overall level of dual and multi-ethnic reporting in the YC survey, the relative share of each category is higher than in the census, with the exception of Asian and 'other' ethnicities.

Comparison of tables 4a and 4b shows the proportions are not affected much by the use of different methods, with the exception of the European category, which increases from 75 percent to 83 percent when all responses are counted. This is because the reporting of two or more European ethnicities was more common than other sorts of pan-ethnic combinations. The distributions remain similar for all other groupings, irrespective of whether total or all outputs are used.

**Table 4a**

**Level 1 Ethnic Categories, Total Responses<sup>(1)</sup>, Wave 1,**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, 2006 and 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings*

Level 1 ethnic categories	YC survey		2006 Census
	Number	Percentage of total people <sup>(2)</sup>	Percentage of total people <sup>(2)</sup>
European	1,610	75.4	64.3
Māori	640	30.0	22.6
Pacific	326	15.3	10.8
Asian	96	4.5	9.5
Other	112	5.3	10.2
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>130.5</b>	<b>117.5</b>

(1) Youth that reported more than one group are *only counted once* in each applicable level 1 category.

(2) Limited to youth that gave a valid ethnic response.

**Table 4b**

**Level 1 Ethnic Categories, All Responses<sup>(1)</sup>, Wave 1**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, 2006 and 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings*

Level 1 ethnic categories	Number	Percentage of total people <sup>(2)</sup>
European	1,770	82.9
Māori	640	30.0
Pacific	382	17.9
Asian	99	4.6
Other	113	5.3
<b>All responses</b>	<b>3,004</b>	<b>140.7</b>

(1) Youth that reported more than one group may be *counted multiple times* in each applicable level 1 category. (2) Limited to youth that gave a valid ethnic response.

Previous analysis in New Zealand has shown that identification with several groups is more prevalent within some groups (eg, Māori and Pacific ethnicities) than others. This is important because the aggregation and analysis of complex ethnic data has the potential to exert a disproportionate effect across groups, as was clearly the case with the prioritisation method (see Callister, Didham and Potter, 2005).

Table 5a shows the percentage of responses within each level 1 category that were part of a dual or multi-ethnic response in the YC survey, using total responses and all responses. The recording of more than one ethnic group clearly varies across the categories. Two-thirds of Māori responses were reported in combination with some other ethnic group, compared with just under one-third of European responses. Just over half of the Asian and Pacific ethnicities recorded were in combination with some other ethnic group, although the exact figure varies, depending on whether all or total response outputs are used.

Table 5a

**Percentage of Responses in Each Level 1 Category that were Part of a Dual or Multi-ethnic Response, Total Responses<sup>(1)</sup> and All Responses<sup>(2)</sup>**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, wave 1, 2006*

Level 1 ethnic categories	Number of dual and multi-ethnic responses		Percentage of responses that were dual or multi-ethnic	
	Total responses	All responses	Total responses	All responses
European	484	558	30.1	31.5
Māori	423	423	66.1	66.1
Pacific	156	178	47.9	46.6
Asian	53	56	55.2	56.6
Other	75	75	67.0	66.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,191</b>	<b>1,290</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>46.3</b>

(1) Responses are only counted once in each applicable level 1 category. (2) Responses may be counted multiple times in each applicable level 1 category.

Table 5b is restricted to responses involving at least three groups. Because many of these responses included two groups within the same level 1 category, all responses are accounted for. Interestingly, one-third of Pacific responses were recorded in combination with at least two other groups. By comparison, Māori and European ethnicities were relatively unlikely to be reported as part of a complex ethnic repertoire, although in absolute terms the latter were the most frequently reported in third and higher order combinations.

Table 5b

**Percentage of Each Level 1 Category Recorded with at Least Two Other Ethnic Groups, All Responses<sup>(1)</sup>**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, wave 1, 2006*

Level 1 ethnic categories	Recorded with at least two other groups	All responses for level 1 category	All responses
	Number	Number	Percent
European	242	1,770	13.7
Māori	120	640	18.8
Pacific	126	382	33.0
Asian	26	99	26.3
Other	31	113	27.4
Total	545	3,003	18.2

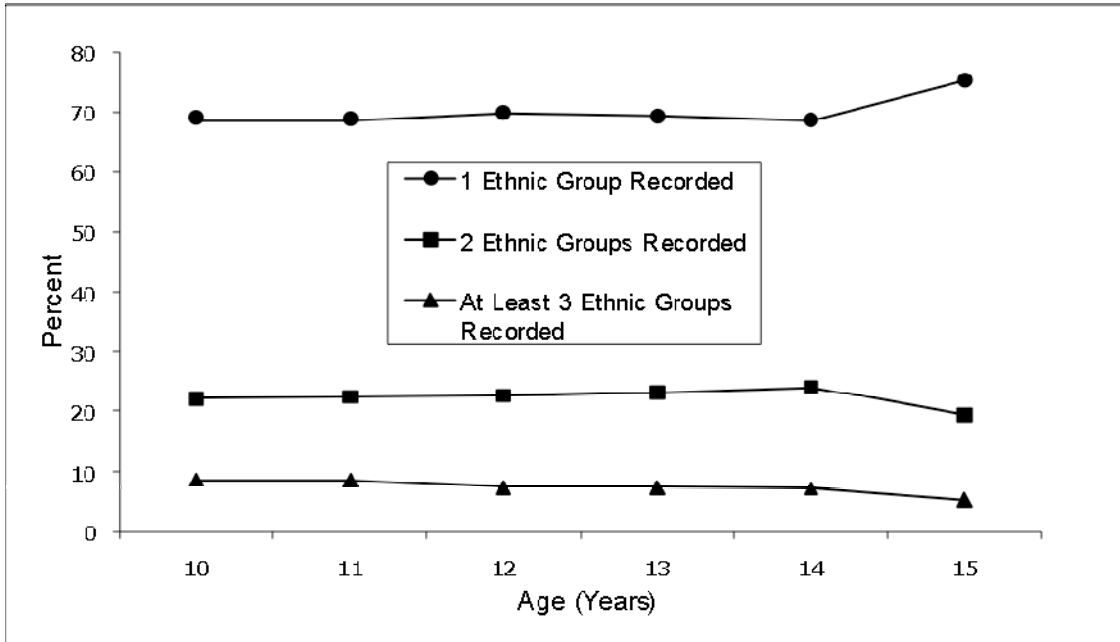
(1) Youth that reported more than one group may be counted multiple times in each applicable level 1 category.

Having traced the basic patterns of ethnic identification in the YC survey, the following figures illustrate whether these patterns varied across demographic characteristics, namely age and gender. Due to their small number, the analysis excludes youth aged 9 and 16 years ( $n = 18$ ). Figure 1 shows the number of ethnic groups reported remained fairly constant across the age groups. Fifteen-year-olds appear less likely to record dual or multiple groups, but the difference was not statistically significant. Figure 2 reveals some gender differences, with boys significantly more likely than girls to record just one ethnic group (73 versus 68 percent,  $p < .05$  level of significance). Taken together, the results suggest age and gender were not important factors for dual and multi-ethnic

reporting in the YC survey, though the ethnic selectivity of the sample precludes generalisation to the broader New Zealand population in those age groups.

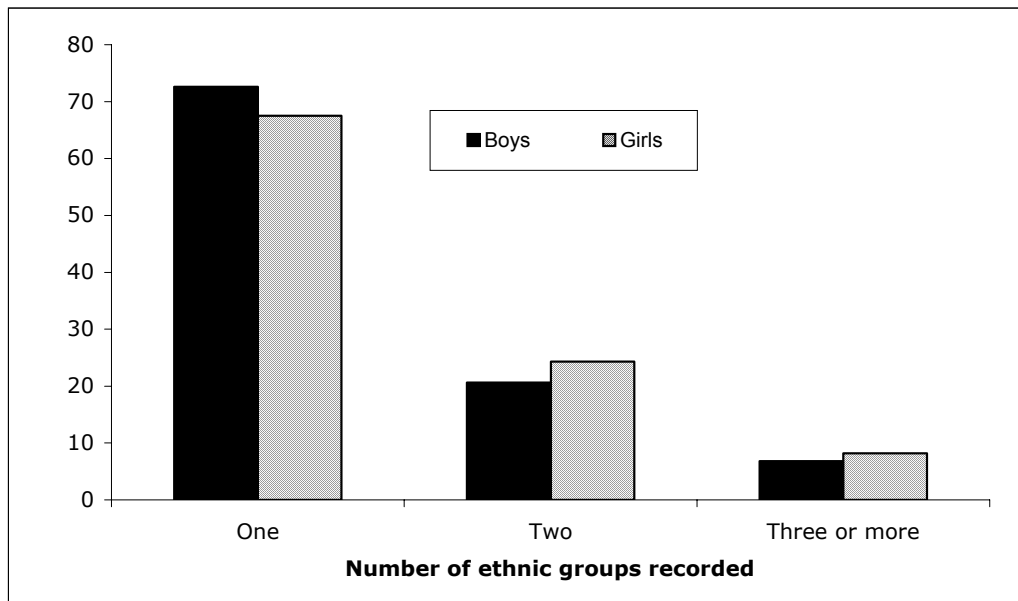
**Figure 1**

**Number of Ethnic Groups Recorded by Age**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, wave 1, 2006*



**Figure 2**

**Number of Ethnic Groups Recorded by Gender**  
*Youth Connectedness survey, wave 1, 2006*



## 5. Prioritisation among dual and multi-ethnic youth

This section considers the extent to which 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 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 that recorded at least two ethnic groups, their prioritisation responses are shown in table 7, below.

**Table 7**

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

Self-prioritisation response	Number	Percent
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
Missing	29	4.5
<b>Total people</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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. The share of participants that indicated they did not know, or did not have, a main ethnic group were fairly similar at 8.0 and 9.8 percent, respectively. Of the latter group, the majority explicitly selected the ‘no main ethnic group’ option, but included with them are a small number of dual and multi-ethnic participants ( $n = 7$ ) that selected an ‘other’ main ethnicity and wrote in multiple groups (eg, ‘Dutch, gypsies’) or a partial affiliation (eg, ‘part-Māori’).

Just under three percent explicitly indicated that their main ethnic group was situational, depending on who they were with. Unsurprisingly, very few dual and multi-ethnic youth stated that they belonged to just one group. Finally, almost five percent of dual and multi-ethnic youth did not record a response to the main ethnic group question, which is notably higher than the proportion that skipped the ethnic group question (1.6 percent). 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 among dual and multi-ethnic responses precluded detailed analysis. Given these limitations, table 8a simply shows the percentage of youth that was able to prioritise for the five largest combinations. Table 8b 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.

**Table 8a****Self-prioritisation of Youth that Reported More than One Ethnic Group, Five Largest Combinations***Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006*

Combinations	Prioritised a main ethnic group		Total number <sup>(1)</sup>
	Number	Percent	
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>393</b>

(1) Excludes not stated,  $n = 20$ .**Note:** ... not applicable

The ability to self-prioritise was highest among youth that 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 specific content of ethnic prioritisation responses is explored in table 8b.

**Table 8b****Self-prioritisation of Youth that Reported More than One Ethnic Group, Select Combinations***Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006,  $n = 474$* 

Self-prioritisation response	Number	Percent <sup>(1)</sup>
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 (45.6)
Māori	19	12.8 (10.1)
Non-Māori, non-European	49	33.1 (44.3)
	148	100.0
Three or more ethnic groups		
European	49	41.5 (36.4)
Māori	38	32.2 (29.6)
Non-Māori, non-European	31	26.3 (34.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(1) Figures in brackets represent each group's percentage of the total number of ethnic groups recorded in dual and multiple combinations.

Of the youth that identified as both Māori and European *and* self-prioritised, the majority chose European over Māori, with a difference of about 10 percentage points. Of all dual-identified Māori-European youth that gave a valid prioritisation response, just over one-third self-prioritised as Māori ( $92/254 \times 100$ ). It is worth reiterating that an unknown percentage would have simplified their ethnic identification at the ethnic group question. That is, some youth that could have potentially identified with Māori and European groups only identified as either Māori or European.

To provide a point of comparison for the distribution of prioritisation responses among dual Māori-European identified youth, it is useful to consider the pattern of responses to the main ethnicity question in the 1995 NZW:FEE survey of women aged 20–59 years. Among the 183 women that recorded Māori and European ethnic groups, 42 percent identified mainly as European, 37 percent identified mainly as Māori, and the remainder could not choose (Kukutai, 2004).<sup>5</sup> Among those who did self-prioritise, the European/Māori split was 54/46 – remarkably close to the distribution of responses in the YC survey.

Interestingly, the willingness and/or ability to self-prioritise was somewhat higher for participants that recorded three or more ethnic groups, than for those that recorded a dual combination other than European and Māori. We might expect that the ability to prioritise becomes more difficult and/or disagreeable the greater the number of ethnic groups an individual identified with. On the other hand, it may be that third or fourth ethnicities are largely ‘symbolic’ (Gans, 1979) in terms of holding meaning in everyday life, and therefore do not make choosing between ethnicities any more difficult. In terms of the content of prioritisation, choices among dual and multi-ethnic identified youth, table 8b suggests a bias toward European ethnicities. To illustrate, just over half of dual ethnic youth (other than European-Māori) that self-prioritised chose European as their main ethnic group, however European ethnic groups only comprised 45 percent of the ethnicities recorded as part of a dual response. By contrast, though ethnic groups other than European or Māori were well represented among self-prioritised dual and multi-ethnic youth, they were under-represented among prioritisation choices. Again, this might suggest that they were more likely to be recorded as peripheral ethnicities or ancestries.

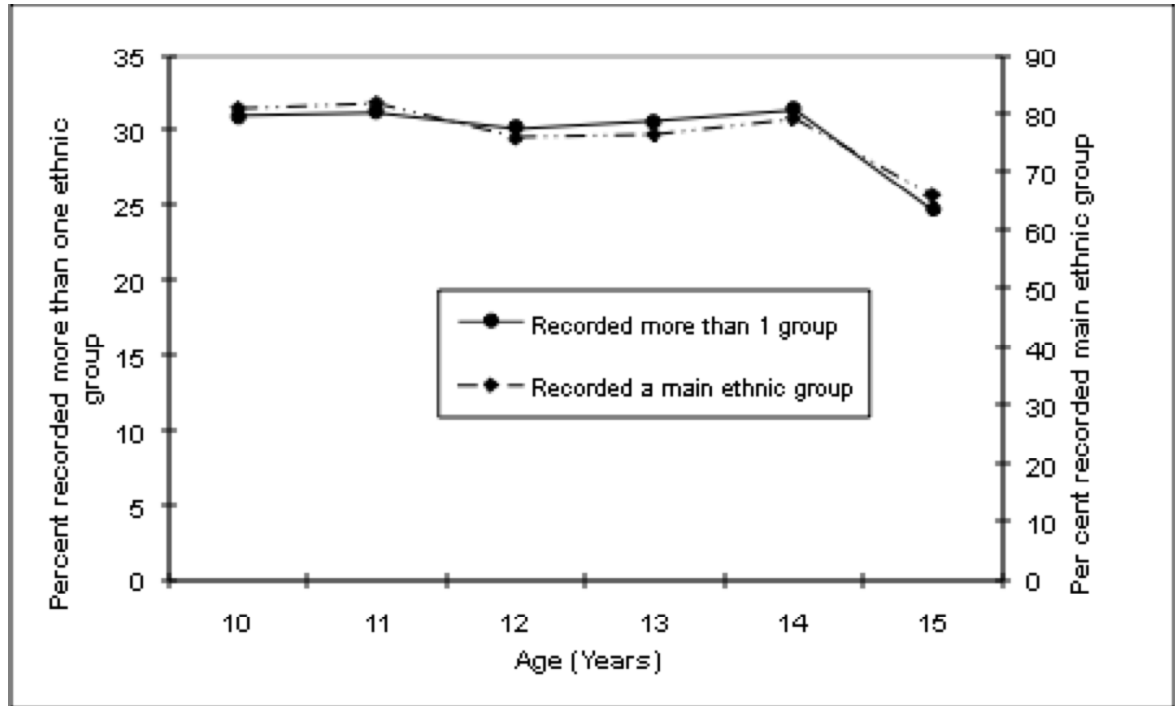
Finally, figures 3 and 4 show how self-prioritisation responses varied by age and sex. Self-prioritisation by age follows a similar pattern to dual and multiple ethnic identification, with a similar percentage of each age group reporting a main ethnic group (between 75 and 80 percent), until a decline at 15 years (66 percent), though the differences are not statistically significant. Figure 4 shows a slight gender reversal – girls were more likely than boys to record dual or multi-ethnic responses, but boys (79.7 percent) were slightly more likely to self-prioritise than girls (76 percent). Again, however, the difference was not statistically significant.

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(5) 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”.

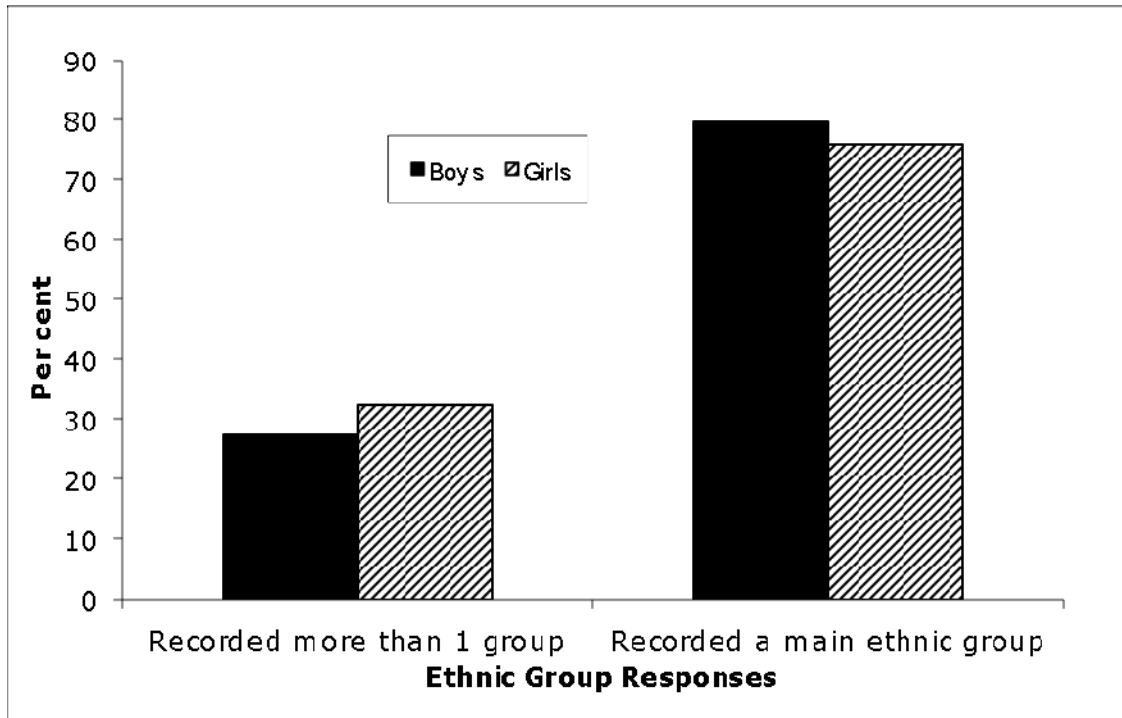
Figure 3

**Proportion of Youth that Recorded More than One Ethnic Group and that Recorded a Main Ethnic Group by Age**  
*Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006*



**Figure 4**

**Proportion of Youth that Recorded More than One Ethnic Group and that Recorded a Main Ethnic Group by Gender**  
*Wave 1, Youth Connectedness survey, 2006*



## 6. Summary and conclusion

The motivation for this paper was to explore the ethnic self-prioritisation decisions of youth in the YC survey. In so doing it goes part way towards fulfilling the recommendation of the 2004 *Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity* that further research be undertaken on a main ethnicity classification. 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.

Though it should be straightforward to identify dual and multi-ethnic youth in any survey – simply anyone that indicated more than one group – processes of aggregation can yield varied results. If standard classification procedures are followed and data are aggregated at the highest level into broad ethnic groupings, then combined pan-ethnic responses (eg, New Zealand European and British) are not treated as dual or multi-ethnic. This is problematic if the focal interest is to understand the self-prioritisation decisions of individuals who identify with more than one group. I have tried to address this problem by referring to ethnic groups, however the sample size more often requires that groups be aggregated into level 1 categories. In most cases, I have used outputs that are inclusive and exclusive of combined pan-ethnic responses.

With regards to general ethnic identification patterns, wave 1 of the YC survey produced some interesting results, namely:

- A higher proportion of participants reported dual and multi-ethnic responses, compared with early adolescents in the 2006 Census
- the extent of dual and multi-ethnic reporting varied across groups – at the highest end, about two-thirds of Māori responses were recorded as part of a combined response, compared with less than one-third for Europeans
- pan-ethnic European responses were the second-largest dual combination in the YC survey
- a relatively high percentage of Pacific and ‘other’ ethnic groups were recorded as part of a complex ethnic repertoire (eg, 3+ groups)
- there was no significant difference in the recording of dual or multiple ethnicities by age, but girls were more likely than boys to report more than one group.

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 alongside those with which youth held a more meaningful attachment); and the way in which the YC survey was promoted and framed in the lead-up to it being carried out.

The main finding with respect to self-prioritisation was that three-quarters of dual and multi-ethnic identified youths were willing and able to prioritise a main ethnic group when prompted. Though participants were given every opportunity to express an affiliation with several ethnic groups, and nearly one-third chose to do so – the notion of belonging primarily to one group appeared to resonate with most of them. That being said, it is important to acknowledge that almost one-fifth of dual and multi-ethnic youth indicated that they either did not know, or did not have, a main ethnic group.

In the absence of cognitive testing, the distinction between not knowing and not having is not obvious. Whereas the former implies lack of knowledge or indecision, the latter suggests a more conscious rejection of having to choose. However, it might 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 might also denote feeling an equal sense of belonging to multiple groups, or occupying a kind of ‘third space’ that combines elements of all recorded groups.

Finally, for those youth that prioritised a main ethnic group, European ethnicities tended to predominate. Among dual-identified Māori-European youth with a valid prioritisation response, just over one-third chose Māori as their main ethnic group. This closely resembled the distribution of responses to the main ethnic group question among dual-identified Māori-European women in the NZW:FEE survey taken a decade earlier. When interpreting the self-prioritisation responses in both surveys, it is helpful to recall that an unknown percentage of participants would have simplified their ethnic identification before reaching the main ethnic group question.

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 might mean. However, one of the questions that arise from the pattern of self-prioritisation responses is whether identification with a main ethnic group denotes a stronger attachment to the prioritised group.

The inclusion of the internationally-recognised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure or MEIM (Phinney, 1992) in the YC survey makes it possible to pursue this question. The MEIM is an aggregate of scores across a range of items that measure two components of ethnic identity: ethnic identity search (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an affective component). Taking Māori as an example, it would be possible to examine whether there was significant variation in the MEIM scores of youth that identified exclusively as Māori, compared with dual Māori-Europeans that self-prioritised as Māori rather than European. Future research that attempts to better specify the relationship between ethnic identification and ethnic identity 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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