



THE POLITICS  
AND PRACTICE  
OF COUNTING:

ETHNICITY IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect policy advice provided by the Ministry of Health, nor represent the views of the peer reviewers or the University of Otago.

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# INTRODUCTION

While not a recent phenomenon, the counting of ethnic (or historically, 'racial') groups has become increasingly institutionalised over time in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly within governmental agencies. As in all societies, the policies and practices relating to the definition and enumeration of ethnic groups reflect specific social, economic, and political contexts and drivers. In addition, they tend to be sites of ongoing debate and contestation.

This paper is the first in a series of topic-based discussion papers considering key current and future issues in ethnicity data and the potential implications on the Māori health sector within the broader context of changing ethnicity data policies and practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It will briefly consider some of the theoretical and conceptual issues that surround the definition and enumeration of ethnic groups, with a focus on the ways in which this counting has been performed (and for what purposes) within settler societies such as Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It will also describe more recent developments in the definition and classification of ethnicity for official purposes in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including reviews of the measurement of ethnicity in official statistics and the production of official Statistical Standards. The paper will then briefly outline the collection of ethnicity data within the health sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as touching on the collection of ethnicity data in other sectors.

The paper aims to situate discussion of ethnicity data issues in the measurement and monitoring of Māori health and ethnic inequalities within the broader context of the construction of ethnic group identities and relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and to summarise existing literature and research in order to provide background for the accompanying discussion papers.

# TALKING ETHNICITY: DEFINITIONS AND DEBATES

The term ethnicity enjoys relatively common everyday usage, particularly as it relates to talk about social groups, identities, and relations. It often functions as a taken-for-granted word, although it has a complex and contested meaning that varies with setting and context. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, there has been a move over time in official statistics away from the categorisation of ethnic groups through reference to biological criteria (such as blood or descent) to approaches based on self-identification and cultural affiliation. However, commonsense usage of the term ethnicity in contemporary settings draws on a history of racialised talk and has a tendency to emphasise notions of Otherness.<sup>1</sup> As a descriptor, ethnic is often used to signify difference or deviation from the norm, as in the case of 'ethnic food' or 'ethnic festivals'.

This notion of ethnicity as something that Others, typically 'minorities' or those who are seen to be different from Us, have, also continues to be a feature of elite discourses in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Cormack 2007). As Jackson & Penrose note:

*It is always the subordinated Other who is designated as "ethnic" rather than the dominant self, inscribing not merely the existence of racialized difference but also its significance in terms of the differential relations of power that are brought to bear on the process of definition (1993: 18).*

In order to better understand both these formal and informal ways of constituting ethnicity and ethnic groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is

important to consider the broader debates around concepts of ethnicity as well as the more specific contexts within which ethnicity has been constructed.

## APPROACHING ETHNICITY

Approaches to the definition of ethnicity reflect varying theoretical positions and assumptions, and particular historical, political, and social environments. There is no one agreed-upon definition, and it is a concept that is well-debated in the literature. There is general agreement however, that ethnicity is a relatively recent term, although the concept itself is not (Hutchinson & Smith 1996). It has its origins in the Greek term *ethnos*, which is commonly translated as 'people', 'nation', or 'tribe' (Cornell & Hartmann 2007; Jenkins 2008; Smith 2004), and was used to distinguish between Greeks and various Others (Hutchinson & Smith 1996). The use of the term ethnicity has become increasingly common and institutionalised in many settings in recent decades, particularly since the 1960s (Cornell & Hartmann 2007).

In discussions of the concept of ethnicity, theoretical approaches are sometimes grouped into two broad categories: primordialist and instrumentalist approaches. It has been suggested these two perspectives developed in response to assimilationist accounts by which it was assumed that ethnic groups, or more specifically, ethnic minority groups, would eventually assimilate into majority groups, and thereby cease to exist (Cornell & Hartmann 2007), or that ethnic identities would be supplanted by national or class identities (Spoonyley 1988):

(i) Other is used in this paper in its sociological sense to refer to "... anyone and anything deemed capable of disrupting the social fabric and integrity of its imaginary identity: strangers, foreigners, intruders and so-called racial and ethnic minorities, for example" (Cavallaro 2001: xiii). Others are generally those who are seen to be different from 'us', positioned as 'outsiders' (Billington, Hockey & Strawbridge 1998; Riggins 1997).

*The world itself would move away from ethnic and racial particularism and toward a universalist model in which the fortunes of individuals were tied to their merits and to markets (in the liberal democratic vision) or to their place in the system of production (in the socialist one) (Cornell & Hartmann 2007: 46).*

In attempts to explain the perseverance of ethnic groups, primordialist perspectives draw on assumptions of ethnicity as a natural, pre-existing reality based on tangible or concrete features, such as kinship and geographic origin, sometimes referred to as 'givens' (Norval 2001). In contrast, instrumentalist approaches "... treat ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural resource for different interest- and status- groups" (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 8), emphasising the benefits and strategic functions of ethnic group belonging.

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## PRIMORDIAL AND INSTRUMENTAL APPROACHES TO ETHNICITY

Primordialist approaches, often associated with the work of Shils (1957) and Geertz (1963), posit that "...ethnic and racial identities are fixed, fundamental, and rooted in the unchangeable circumstances of birth" (Cornell & Hartmann 2007: 51). More recent articulations of primordialism construct some of these 'givens' as being imagined, in the sense that it is the perception rather than the actuality of common origin or history, for example, that matters (Anderson 2001). Primordialism has been criticised for its failure to account for the dynamic nature of ethnic identities, although its

engagement with notions of the power of ethnic affiliations, as represented by their persistence, has been seen as a strength (Cornell & Hartmann 2007).

Instrumentalist perspectives approach ethnicity as a group resource (Hutchinson & Smith 1996). According to Cornell & Hartmann (2007), instrumentalist approaches are better understood within a broader umbrella of circumstantialism wherein ethnic groups are viewed as being produced through particular circumstances that "... heighten or reproduce the salience and/or the utility of ethnic or racial identities in the lives of individuals and groups ... Interests and utility remain, in most cases, central features of this approach (2007: 63).

Instrumentalist and circumstantialist perspectives both advance the notion that ethnicity is not static or pre-determined, but is constructed and dynamic, key points of deviation from primordialist thinking. Both approaches, however, have been criticised for the assumption that ethnic group affiliation is driven fundamentally by material interests (Hempel 2004).

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More recently, the theorisation of ethnicity has been influenced by a third perspective – social constructionism – within which concepts such as identity, 'race'<sup>2</sup> and nation are understood to be socially created and contingent. Social constructionism views knowledge as produced and subjective, and is thus anti-empiricist in its rejection of an objective, pre-existing, and universal reality (Barker 2004). Constructivist

(2) The term 'race' is enclosed in inverted commas to indicate its usage in this paper as a socio-political construct, as opposed to a valid scientific category. However, for issues of readability, the term will generally appear without inverted commas in the remainder of the document.



perspectives also understand knowledge to be historically and culturally located, created through social processes and interactions (Burr 2003; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). In addition, there is recognition of the interconnected and intersecting nature of social categories, and the role of social relations in constructing and sustaining them.

Accordingly, social constructionist approaches place emphasis on the interactional nature of ethnic groups, and the contexts within which ethnic identity develops (Norval 2001). The naturalness of ethnic group formation is, therefore, brought into question. However, as Bloomaert & Verschuereen note, "... groups and group relations are usually objects of a wide consensus within the groups thus created: they are felt to be natural" (1998: 24). This point is a key assumption of social constructionist understandings of social groups and social relations, namely, that while ethnic groups are constructed or created, they are real in the sense that they govern social relations and have material impacts on the lives of individuals and collectives. The recognition within this perspective of the contextual nature of the development of identity also allows for a consideration of the role of power. According to Hall (1996) this requires us to see identities as emerging:

*... within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation) (4).*

For the social constructionist, group identities are generally conceptualised as discursively

constituted (Hall 1996; Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh & Teaiwa 2005; Meinhof & Galasinski 2005). The language used to represent ethnic and 'racial' groups, therefore, becomes an important site of investigation. While the social constructionist influence has produced perspectives of ethnicity that recognise its contingency and reject ethnicity as predetermined and static, the risks of essentialising and reifying ethnicity remain to some extent (Jenkins 2008).

Definitions of ethnicity are not always easily categorised as being of one approach, as they often draw on elements from the different approaches as well as reflect the influence of disciplinary, social, and historical contexts. For the purposes of these discussion papers, ethnicity is broadly understood within a social constructionist framework in terms of what Jenkins (2008) describes as the 'basic social anthropological model of ethnicity', that is:

- *Ethnicity is a matter of cultural differentiation – although ... identification always involves a dialectical interplay between similarity and difference.*
- *Ethnicity is centrally a matter of shared meanings – what we conventionally call 'culture' – but is also produced and reproduced during interaction.*
- *Ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the way of life of which it is an aspect, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced.*
- *Ethnicity, as an identification, is collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification*

Source: Jenkins 2008: 14

Within this model, difference is seen to be an essential component of ethnicity. According to Spoonley, in relation to ethnicity "...there needs to be some collective consciousness of difference and of being related to others who share those differences" (1988: 37). This focus on difference necessitates attention being paid to the inter-dependence of the formation of identities of Other and of Self (Hall 1996), and the ways in which difference between social collectives is produced in talk about ethnic identity.

In addition, this framework of ethnicity recognises the interactional and the dynamic nature of ethnicity (Spoonley 1988). It also acknowledges both the inscribed and ascribed facets of ethnic identification – ethnicity is about how we see ourselves, but also how we categorise others – allowing for consideration of issues of power and context.

## SITUATING ETHNICITY IN SETTLER SOCIETIES

Questions of identity and social relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including ethnicity, need to be considered within the broader context of the construction of group identities, relations and realities, particularly historic and contemporary relationships between Māori as tangata whenua and settler society. While there is a substantial body of literature dealing with the definition of ethnicity more generally, examination of the specific and particular ways in which ethnicity is constructed and operationalised in settler societies is less well canvassed. This includes, for example, reflection on the ways in which categorisation and enumeration has been employed within the contexts of imperialism and colonialism in relation to both indigenous peoples as well as to other non-dominant (numerically or in terms of power and resources) and migrant groups.

Settler societies have been described as "societies in which Europeans have settled, where their descendants have remained politically dominant over indigenous peoples, and where a heterogeneous society has developed in class, ethnic and racial terms (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis 1995: 3).

Although they differ from each other in some specific ways, settler societies are seen to share in common the dispossession and marginalisation of indigenous peoples by various means, and the practices and policies of exploitation and exclusion of other non-dominant groups within the society (Moran 2002; Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis 1995; Razack 2002). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the dispossession and marginalisation of Māori has been active and ongoing, in spite of the guarantees of the Treaty of Waitangi, international law, and the enduring resistance and assertions of sovereignty by Māori. In addition, other groups constructed as undesirable have routinely been excluded or discriminated against in the establishment and maintenance of settler society.

Further elements of white settler society highlighted by Razack of particular relevance to a discussion of ethnicity include the centrality of racialised thinking, as well as the importance of settler mythologies:

*As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship.*

*A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour (2002: 1–2).*

In the establishment of Aotearoa/New Zealand as a settler society, strong symbolic and material ties to the home country – Britain – were retained. This was reflected in the systems and institutions that became dominant and the embedding and universalisation of settler ways of thinking and doing (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis 1995). These settler values were also reflected in approaches to the characterisation of the various Other social groups, including indigenous peoples. In her discussion of the policing of mixed-race identity in 19th Century British Columbia, Mawani notes:

*Racial categories and hierarchies, however, did not simply appear in settler societies like British Columbia. Rather, the European desire for distinct racial classifications meant that whites needed to constantly (re)create their own identities and superiority against the bodies of racialized Others (2002: 49).*

Within the context of imperialism, therefore, racial categorisations aided the justification and legitimisation of policies of colonisation and dispossession of indigenous peoples, as well as delineating rights and access to material and social resources (Mawani 2002; Pearson 2002).

## ETHNICITY AND INDIGENEITY

Locating discussions of ethnicity and ethnic groups within the context of settler societies in turn necessitates consideration of the relationships between ethnicity and indigeneity. The rights of Māori to identify as Māori and to be recognised as tangata whenua have been previously discussed

(see Robson & Reid 2001), as rights that are not contingent on the quantum of Māori or proportion of the population that they represent (Jackson 1999).

More broadly, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted in 2007)<sup>3</sup> recognises the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination of their identity:

### *Article 33*

*1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live.*

The definitional complexity that surrounds ethnicity is also a feature of indigenous identity politics (Levi & Dean 2003). The English language term ‘indigenous peoples’ is itself relatively recent, and is understood essentially as a colonial product (Levi & Dean 2003). In settler societies, the official definitions and approaches to classifying indigenous peoples have often served the interests of settler governments and institutions, rather than meeting indigenous rights to self-determination and free expression of indigenous identity. These categorisations have been used in varying ways at different times to contain, marginalise, exclude, assimilate, and make invisible, indigenous peoples.

In many societies, including Aotearoa/New Zealand, there is an interrelationship between indigenous and ethnic identity. However, they are not the same thing:

*An indigenous people become an ethnic group not simply by sharing such things as a group name (ethnonym), connection to a*

(3) New Zealand was one of four countries (alongside the United States, Canada, and Australia) to oppose the vote at the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. In 2010, New Zealand changed their vote to support the declaration, along with Australia (who changed their vote in 2009).

*homeland, and belief in common ancestry, culture, language, or religion, but only when such traits are consciously recognized as emblems of connectivity and are mobilized at least in part to develop a sense of political solidarity. Typically, this occurs when such groups perceive their minority or submerged status within the polities where they reside. Although today almost all indigenous peoples are ethnic groups, the converse does not hold ... Moreover, indigenous identities frequently become articulated in wider fields of symbolic and political relations of which ethnic relations are only a part (Levi & Dean 2003: 4-5).*

Ethnicity, then, is one way of representing individual and collective social identities that is open to Māori as indigenous peoples. In other words, it is one form of expression of identity that can be drawn on, alongside other modes of identification including whakapapa, and whanau, hapu, and iwi identities. It is not the same as a measure of indigenous status, nor is it a measure of whakapapa, although there is likely to be some significant overlap and descent is often suggested to be a key criterion in identifying ethnically as Māori (Kukutai 2004; Nikora 1995).

However, it is recognised that alongside the ways in which Māori individuals and collectives may choose to articulate their identities, the ethnic and indigenous labels (often categorised in terms of Māori ancestry) are also externally imposed categories, both at official levels but also in everyday interactions. The incongruities between externally-imposed and internally-determined collective identities, in parallel with indigenous peoples' experiences of categorisation, may impact on the perceived acceptability or appropriateness of ethnicity measures among

indigenous communities. However, ethnicity, if (re)claimed, offers a further inclusive measure for Māori as tangata whenua, which can have particular usefulness in relation to understanding and tracking social outcomes.

## ETHNICITY AND RACE

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the concept and usage of the term ethnicity has developed from a history of talking about race, an idea which in itself has shifted markedly. The notion of race, as it has been deployed in the English language, developed over time from being in reference to descent or genealogy into the idea of race as 'species or sub-species' (Jackson & Penrose 1993: 4; Jordan 2000). In the 19th Century, the influence of Social Darwinism saw the concept of race as 'species' become accompanied by judgments about relative superiority and inferiority of racial groupings (Jackson & Penrose 1993: 4).

The notion that race is a scientifically valid way of classifying human populations in a biological sense has largely been discredited. Race has become increasingly conceptualised, especially within social science disciplines, as a social construction, that operates as a primary way of "... of conceptualizing and organizing social worlds ..." (Barker 1990: 61) in ways that have significant material impacts. However, the term race has retained currency, particularly within some academic disciplines, in reference to immutable, biological categories, and also continues to be popular in everyday and elite discourses (Cormack 2007).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, race remains a term that is used interchangeably with the term ethnicity, and contemporary understandings and usage remain heavily influenced by this history of racialised talk about social groups and identities.

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## EXAMPLES OF THE OFFICIAL USE OF THE TERM RACE

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, race is referred to in several pieces of legislation. The Human Rights Act 1993 includes 'race' as one of the grounds under which discrimination is prohibited (along with 'skin colour', 'ethnic or national origins' and other categories). While the term is not defined for the purposes of the Act, it is possible that its usage reflects international human rights terminology as much as any particular local context. 'Ethnic or national origins' are noted to include 'your place/country of birth, your nationality and citizenship'. Reference is also made to race in other legislation, including the Employment Relations Act 2000 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1986.

A further example of the continued saliency of the term race in official discourse is in relation to the Review of Targeted Programmes undertaken by the Government in 2004/05. The goal of the Review was, according to its Terms of Reference, to determine that government policies and programmes were on the "... basis of need, not on the basis of race" (Mallard 2004). However, the Review was in fact concerned with ethnicity.

## OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS OF ETHNICITY

Within Aotearoa/New Zealand, there are varying definitions of ethnicity in play, demonstrating a range of approaches to the conceptualisation of ethnicity. Statistics New Zealand has responsibility for the definition of ethnicity in regard to official statistics, and has produced an official definition outlined in the 2005 Statistical Standard for Ethnicity (the development of which is discussed in further detail in the following section):

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Ethnicity is the ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to. Ethnicity is a measure of cultural affiliation, as opposed to race, ancestry, nationality or citizenship. Ethnicity is self-perceived and people can affiliate with more than one ethnic group.

An ethnic group is 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

Source: Statistics New Zealand 2005

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The key elements of this approach to ethnicity are its emphasis on perceived cultural affiliation and belonging, and the acknowledgement of multiple ethnic identities. The definition is based on the work of Anthony D. Smith (1986), a theorist whose writing has focused primarily on the relationship between ethnic groups and the nation. The criteria included in the Statistics New Zealand definition are drawn from six features Smith identifies as being expressed by 'ethnies':

- *a common proper name, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community;*
- *a myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnies a sense of fictive kinship, what Horowitz terms a 'super-family' (Horowitz, 1985: ch.2);*
- *shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;*
- *one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;*
- *a link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnies, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;*
- *a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnies's population (A.D. Smith, 1986: ch. 2, cited in Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 6–7).*

According to Smith, these components "... afford a working definition of ethnicity, one which enables us to delimit the field from the adjacent ones of class and religious communities, and

from territorial polities." (1986: 30). In this sense then, although Smith incorporates reference to a 'homeland', the distinction is clearly made between ethnic groups and national or territorial groups. Statistics New Zealand notes this distinction in the lead in to their definition. The Statistics New Zealand definition does not include specific reference to 'shared historical memories' as in Smith's definition, although it is possible that this is seen to be incorporated within the characteristic of a 'shared sense of common origins'.

Although Smith represents key elements of ethnicity such as common origin as 'imagined' (rather than actual), his definition has at times received criticism for appearing to essentially embody primordialist assumptions (Norval 2001). In relation to the present discussion, it remains open to some debate the extent to which this definition has applicability and resonance in Aotearoa/New Zealand in relation to the specific relations between indigenous peoples and settler society.

While there is an official definition of ethnicity, some governmental and non-governmental agencies have separate definitions. Most notably, the Office of Ethnic Affairs employs a definition of ethnicity that emphasises distinction from the majority group or groups:

*Ethnicity is a broad concept of group affiliation based on elements of race, language, religion, customs, heritage and tradition as well as geographic, tribal or national identity. For administrative reasons, the scope of the Office of Ethnic Affairs primarily concerns people who identify with ethnic groups originating from Asia, Africa, Continental Europe, the Middle East and Central and South America; and includes*

*refugees and migrants as well as people born in New Zealand who identify with these ethnic groups. In this sense, 'ethnic' is used to refer to people whose ethnicity is different from the majority of people in New Zealand, and from Māori or Pacific people (Office of Ethnic Affairs 2005).*

This reflects in large part the jurisdiction of the Office.<sup>4</sup> The New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils has a similar definition:

*"Ethnic" means pertaining to or relating to any segment of the population within New Zealand society sharing fundamental cultural values, customs, beliefs, languages, traditions and characteristics, that are different from those of the larger society (2008).*

The term 'ethnic' and associated terms, such as 'ethnic origin', are also employed in policy and legislation, but not always with accompanying definitions. As noted above, several pieces of legislation make reference to 'ethnic or national origins' (as prohibited grounds for discrimination), which includes 'your place/country of birth, your nationality and citizenship'. In this sense, ethnicity, geographic origin, nationality and citizenship, become somewhat conflated.

The use of this more specific and relational definition of ethnicity outlined above has a specific logic behind it. It does, however, leave the majority group unnamed in ethnic terms. This, alongside the non-definition of the term in various other legislative and policy contexts, has the potential to contribute more broadly to conceptual confusion over the term ethnicity and its application in both official and everyday contexts.

This brief discussion of conceptual and definitional issues with relation to ethnicity and ethnic groups provides a backdrop for the more specific consideration of the policies and practices of official enumeration of ethnic groups in Aotearoa/ New Zealand, in both historical and contemporary settings.

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(4) The Office notes that there are separate agencies (Te Puni Kokiri and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs) with responsibilities for Maori and Pacific peoples.

# COUNTING FOR OFFICIAL PURPOSES

There are varying drivers for the categorisation and collection of data on ethnic groups in official statistics in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As alluded to in the preceding section, ethnic and like classifications have served particular functions in imperial and colonial endeavours in this country. In addition, they have been used in specific ways in relation to indigenous peoples, often to their disadvantage.

Official ethnic statistics in Aotearoa/New Zealand have tended to have been collected to meet certain state objectives or purposes (Brown 1984; Thorns & Sedgewick 1997) or in the interests of the majority group rather than other groups with less access to power, resource and voice (Department of Statistics 1988). For example, the categories employed in early official statistics demonstrate the interests of those in power at the time to define and count, and as such reflect their preferences, values, and priorities.

Population censuses are one of the most consistent and important mechanisms for generating official statistics, and have been central in (re)producing social realities through the categorisation of identity:

*The rise of colonialism, based on the denial that the colonized had political rights, required a clear demarcation between the settlers and the indigenes. The “Others” had to be collectively identified ... The categorization of identities became part and parcel of legitimating narratives of the national, colonial, and “New World” state (Kertzer & Arel 2002: 3).*

In the domestic context, official approaches to ethnic enumeration were historically within the context of policies that were concerned with the assimilation and later, integration, of ethnic groups on the one hand (Spoonley 1988; Brown 1983), and with the monitoring and exclusion of those particular ethnic groups that were considered ‘undesirable’ on the other (Pearson 1990).

In more recent times, the official purposes of collecting ethnicity data have been articulated in terms of understanding the make-up of ethnic groups, informing service development, and monitoring social status and outcomes (Statistics New Zealand 1997). This rationale is further outlined in the Statistics New Zealand Report on the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity (RME) (discussed more fully later), within which several key purposes for ethnicity data are identified:

- to monitor and report changes and disparities in outcomes among ethnic groups over time
- to monitor the changing ethnic diversity of New Zealand’s population at national, regional and local levels, so that appropriate services may be delivered
- to estimate future trends through population estimates and projections for Māori, European, Pacific and Asian populations
- to monitor the demographic, social and economic progress of, and outcomes for, ethnic groups



- to evaluate the impact of central and local government policies on the economic and social well-being of ethnic groups
- to model the impacts and costs of policy changes, and to forecast expenditure on services for particular groups
- to assist in the delivery of services in a culturally appropriate way and to plan social services which meet the special needs of ethnic groups, and
- to identify significant communities of interest for liaison and development purposes.

Source: Statistics New Zealand 2004

It is clear that as the purposes for which ethnicity statistics have been collected and used have changed over time, so too have the policies and practices involved. This section describes how ethnicity (and like concepts) have been measured in official statistics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with a particular focus on the Population Census as a primary and significant source of ethnic statistics.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE POPULATION CENSUS

### ‘Half-castes’ and ‘full-bloods’

The first population census undertaken in colonial Aotearoa/New Zealand was conducted in 1851 and was carried out every three years following this until 1874 (although some data had been collected periodically by the Colonial Office prior to this). However, this early Census excluded Māori, who were enumerated separately from the settler population (Statistics New Zealand 2006). A census of the Māori population was undertaken in 1857–58. The 1867 Franchise Act, under

which provisions were made for separate Māori representation in Parliament, required information on Māori to be collected in the Census. A further Census of Māori was not undertaken until 1874, and then again in 1878, with five-yearly censuses undertaken from 1881 (Statistics New Zealand 2006). The 1906 Census of Natives, while limited in its range of questions, differentiated between “... Māori still living as members of tribes and those who lived in ‘European’ communities as individual families” (Statistics New Zealand 2006). This differentiation on the basis of ‘mode of living’ was employed to categorise individuals with both Māori and European descent into either the Māori or the European group:

*If they lived as Europeans in European settlements they were counted in the European population. Persons of greater than half Māori descent were classified as Māori and allocated to the Māori population regardless of their mode of living (Brown 1984: 160).*

The emphasis on mode of living and the categorisation of ‘half-castes’ reflected an interest in the assimilation of the Māori population (Brown 1983: 4; Kukutai 2003).

In relation to information on social collectives or groupings more broadly, early censuses of settler populations included questions on country of birth (Thorns & Sedgewick 1997). A question on race was included in the 1916 Population Census:

*(b). Race. (If not of European race, write “Māori,” “Chinese,” “Hindu,” “Javanese,” “Negro,” “Polynesian,” &c., or “Māori half-caste,” “Chinese half-caste,” &c., as the case may be.) (Statistics Office 1916).*

This example of early official classificatory practice, with its references to proportions of descent (e.g. 'half-caste'), reveals the biological approach to race that was characteristic of the time.

The 1926 Census included a question that asked about blood quantum (full-blood or half-blood) for Māori individuals. From this Census onwards, mode of living was no longer a consideration in allocating individuals to the Māori or European population. All 'half-bloods' were categorised as Māori, with those reporting less than 'half-Māori' blood classified as European.

In the 1926 Census, information was also elicited on other populations of interest, referred to as 'race aliens'. Brown notes the racialised discourse that accompanied the discussion of so-called 'race aliens', quoting from the Race Aliens volume of the 1926 Census:

*The importance of racial purity has long been a consideration of immigration legislation. The view has been taken that the coalescence of the white and so-called coloured races is not conducive to improvement in racial types. The presence in a population of considerable groups of alien races who cannot be readily assimilated into that population, or whose assimilation, for reasons dependent on the physical or other characteristics of the respective races, is not attended with advantage, presents administrative difficulties in no mean degree. (Department of Statistics, p.2 cited in Brown 1984).*

During this period in Aotearoa/New Zealand, theories of Social Darwinism were enjoying a degree of popularity (Ballara 1986), with their

accompanying anxieties about inter-mixing and miscegenation. A clear example of these anxieties is evident in the hearings of the Ngata Committee, a Committee of Enquiry established in 1929 to consider broadly the employment of Māori by Chinese and Indian market gardeners. In addition to investigating employment matters, the Committee was also charged with identifying the extent of relationships between Māori and Chinese or Hindu and commenting on moral issues surrounding the employment of Māori women within Chinese and Hindu-owned businesses (Ballara 1986; Lee 2003). Concerns with the potential negative impact of relationships between Māori and Asians (namely Chinese and Hindu) were reflected in the Committee's report:

*The indiscriminate intermingling of the lower types of the races – i.e. Māoris, Chinese and Hindus – will ... have an effect that must eventually cause deterioration not only in the family and the national life of the Māori race, but also in the national life of this country, by the introduction of a hybrid race, the successful absorption of which is problematic (as cited in Ballara 1986: 108).*

This example reflects the somewhat paradoxical interest in assimilation and anxiety about miscegenation that were features of the time.

This racialised, biological approach to ethnicity continued into the 1970s, although there was clear dissatisfaction with the measure among some individuals and groups (Kukutai 2003). In the 1971 and 1976 Censuses, the wording of the question was changed to make reference to 'ethnic origin'. However, proportion of descent criteria were still applied, with respondents required to indicate whether they were of full European descent and, if not, what their descent was, calculating fractions

where individuals identified they had more than one origin (Statistics New Zealand 1997: 1).

Key legislation was passed in the 1970s that was relevant to the definition of Māori in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and, more broadly, to the collection of ethnic statistics. The Statistical Act 1975 was concerned with the way in which official statistics in New Zealand were collected and outputted (Thorns & Sedgewick 1997), and made it mandatory to collect information on “ethnic origin” in the Population Census. A year earlier, the Māori Affairs Amendment Act 1974 was passed. The Act included a definition of Māori, whereby a Māori was defined as any person with Māori descent (as opposed to the requirement for 50% or greater proportion of descent). In response to this legislative change, an additional item on Māori ancestry was included in the 1976 Census question on ‘ethnic origin’ to collect information on the Māori descent population.<sup>5</sup> There were, however, issues with the question, with disagreement between the ways in which some individuals answered the ethnic origin and descent portions of the question, as well as some respondents not completing both portions of the question (Brown 1983). The portion of the question relating to descent was subsequently removed for the 1981 Census, and the wording of the question reverted to that which had been used in the 1971 Census, based on blood quantum and proportions of descent.

### **Moving towards self-identified ethnicity**

The wording change in the 1976 Census had signalled a shift closer to a construct of self-identified ethnicity, although the ethnicity question had retained the language of race, and had required people to specify their proportions of descent. In 1981, the Census again included the wording “ethnic origin” in the ethnicity question,

introducing a list of nine tick box categories for people to choose from. Eight tick boxes related to “full” origins, with the 9th tick box allowing respondents to write in their “Other full origin”. Where people identified more than one origin, they were required to calculate proportions of descent as in the earlier censuses (Statistics New Zealand 1996: 1).

A report was published by the Department of Statistics in December 1983, providing information on the collection and use of official ethnic statistics in various sectors. According to the preface, the Investigation of Official Ethnic Statistics was in response to public debate and concern about official ethnic statistics and was designed to inform the broader Official Review being undertaken. The report made note of the range of definitions and collection methods being employed by various sectors in relation to ethnicity data, commenting that “...self-identification and observer estimation methods are used, to a greater or lesser extent, to obtain ethnic data in all these collections, including the Population Census” (Brown 1983: 3). The document also highlighted concerns that the variability in collection practices and methods were having an impact on the data. It reported on a series of studies undertaken to identify levels of ethnic misclassification that had found a 17% undercount of Māori births, a 28% undercount of Māori deaths, and an overstatement of arrivals and departures for Māori (Brown 1983).

The investigation supported the case for a more standardised approach to data collection. In addition, and of significance to the development of the measurement of ethnicity in Aotearoa/ New Zealand, the paper proposed that a ‘cultural affiliation’ concept be used in preference to traditional biological approaches. This was seen to align more closely with the thinking at the time and

(5) The Maori descent population identifies Maori for the purposes of electoral boundaries and the allocation of particular entitlements and rights.

to address concerns about the relevancy of the degrees of blood measures that continued to be employed in official statistical collections (Brown 1983). According to the Report:

*... there is evidence to suggest that since at least the turn of the century the biological definition of Māori (i.e. half or more Māori blood) has not been accepted by a considerable proportion of the Māori population as a valid measure of their ethnicity (Brown 1983:29).*

There had also been more general public criticism of the 1981 Census ethnicity question (Statistics New Zealand 2001), which further supported the case for a reassessment of the appropriateness and saliency of a race-based approach to ethnic classification.

The 1986 Census achieved a significant shift in terms of the domestic approach to measuring ethnicity, with an ethnicity question that asked “What is your ethnic origin?”, and prompted respondents to “Tick the box or boxes which apply to you”. There was no reference to degrees of blood and the question allowed individuals to respond on the basis of self-identified cultural affiliation, and further, to identify with more than one group where appropriate.

### **The Review Committee on Ethnic Statistics 1988**

A major review was undertaken in the mid-1980s to consider questions relating to the definition, collection, and classification of ethnicity data in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly in terms of official statistics. The Review was carried out by an intersectoral panel comprised of representatives from a number of government agencies including the Departments of Statistics, Justice, Labour,

Health, Social Welfare, Māori Affairs and Education, as well as representatives from other sector and stakeholder groups such as Housing Corporation of New Zealand, Office of the Race Relations Conciliator, and community based ethnic associations. Submissions were also sought from users of ethnic statistics.

The Review was partially in response to increasing critique of the ‘proportion of descent’ method by which ethnicity was being collected in the Population Census, as well as to broader questions relating to the responsiveness of the statistics to ‘non-majority ethnic groups’ (Department of Statistics 1988: 15-16). The Review Committee were charged with producing recommendations in relation to:

- *the need for ethnic statistics in specific subject areas;*
- *standards for the treatment of ethnicity in terms of definition, classification/ categorisation, and collection procedures;*
- *changes to specified official statistics in regard to the collection, compilation, analysis, abstraction, dissemination, and interpretation of ethnicity*

Source: Department of Statistics 1988: 17

A series of 32 recommendations were made to the then Department of Statistics, several of which are of particular significance to this discussion. The first of these was the call for the Department of Statistics to be responsible for developing a standard ethnicity classification, with a view to standardising data collection across official

surveys. In relation to the question of defining ethnicity for the purposes of the Review, the Committee drew on Smith's (1981) definition of an ethnic group as:

*... a social group whose members have the following four characteristics:*

- *share a sense of common origins;*
- *claim a common and distinctive history and destiny;*
- *possess one or more dimensions of collective cultural individuality;*
- *feel a sense of unique collective solidarity (Department of Statistics 1988: 29)*

The document also contained commentary on the concepts of race and ethnicity, noting the more general discrediting of race as a scientifically valid way of classifying population groups (Department of Statistics 1988: 28). Self-identification was supported as the most appropriate approach to defining ethnicity and the best method for collecting ethnicity data in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Although the official collection of ethnic (or historically, racial) data had a long history in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a range of methods and approaches had developed over time, and the Review Committee commented on the inconsistency of collection and categorisation across different collections, as had previously been noted in the 1983 paper discussed above.

The Review Panel also considered in some detail specific issues for Māori in relation to the classification, collection and use of ethnic statistics, and the unique position of Māori was emphasised by the Department of Māori Affairs. Within the context of issues raised by the Royal

Commission on Social Policy in the 1980s in regard to the role of the Treaty of Waitangi and public policy, the Review Committee noted that "...Māori statistics, for Māori purposes and Māori requirements, must thus be part of any official information gathering process" (Department of Statistics 1988: 20). Additionally, a number of recommendations were made in relation to the need for iwi statistics, as well as information on Māori descent, to be available.

With regard to the classification of ethnicity for the 'majority group', it was recommended that the Departments of Statistics and Māori Affairs, along with other relevant stakeholders, "... investigate alternative options for describing the ethnicity of the majority Pakeha/European culture in New Zealand" (Department of Statistics 1988: 9). This recommendation responded to submissions to the Review indicating some discomfort with the label "European", as well as discussions more generally about the term "New Zealander" being employed as an ethnic label:

*The Committee accepted that many New Zealanders, having no ties to other countries or any other ethnic background, view the "New Zealand culture" as an entity in itself. The Review Committee was aware that it is common for a predominant ethnic group not to consider itself as an "ethnic group" (Department of Statistics 1988: 35).*

The concerns highlighted in the 1988 Review in relation to the terminology for describing the majority group as well as the issue of New Zealander-type responses were to be features of later reviews of the ethnicity classification in official statistics (see discussion below).

In summary, the 1988 Review supported the movement towards a model of ethnicity based on self-identified cultural affiliation that had already begun to take place. It also addressed concerns about the lack of consistency and standardisation of official ethnic data in calling for a standard definition and classification.

### **Ethnic origin becomes ethnic group**

In 1991, the Census ethnicity question was again reworded. The reference to ethnic origin was removed and replaced with the question: “Which ethnic group do you belong to?” As had been the case in the 1986 question, a series of tick box response categories were included. These tick box labels were unchanged from the previous Census, with the exception of ‘European’, which was changed to ‘New Zealand European’. In addition, separate questions on descent and iwi affiliation (for those who specified that they had Māori descent) were introduced following the ethnicity question.

The 1996 Census ethnicity question differed from the 1991 Census, prompting respondents to “Tick as many circles as you need to show which ethnic group(s) you belong to”. Additionally, there were changes to the tick box response options in terms of the order of categories, the labels used, and the range of options included. Firstly, ‘New Zealand Māori’ was moved up to become the first response option. The label ‘New Zealand European’ was reworded to become ‘New Zealand European or Pakeha’. A new ‘Other European’ tick box was also included, with a separate list of 6 tick boxes (English, Dutch, Australian, Scottish, Irish, Other) added. There was a significant increase in the numbers of people reporting multiple ethnic identities, particularly for Māori and the ‘Other European’ groups (Lang 2002: 1).

For the 2001 Census, the ethnicity question reverted to that which had been used in the 1991 Census. In relation to response options, the label ‘New Zealand Māori’ was changed to ‘Māori’, and ‘Pakeha’ was removed from the ‘New Zealand European or Pakeha’ tick box label. In addition, the extra categories for ‘Other European’ included in the 1996 question, were removed. The change to the question appeared to impact on the number of multiple ethnic responses, which was 9% in 2001, compared with 16% in 1996. A further change in the 2001 Census was the enhanced ability of Statistics New Zealand to code up to six responses, while it had only previously been possible to code three (Lang 2002).

These changes in the ethnicity question in the Census reflected developments in the official definition and classification of ethnicity during the 1990s. In 1993, Statistics New Zealand released a Standard Classification of Ethnicity, which addressed a number of the recommendations that had been made in the 1988 Review. The document included a relatively detailed discussion of the concepts and definitions of ethnicity, more broadly and within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, adopting as the official statistical definition the definition of ethnicity based on the work of Smith (1981) that had been used in the 1988 Review (see above).

The 1993 Standard also outlined the hierarchical classification structure for ethnicity, including the rationale behind having Māori as a stand-alone category at all levels of the classification, saying that it:

*recognises the Māori as the tangata whenua or original inhabitants of New Zealand, as well as New Zealand’s unique position as the only territory where there is*

*a commitment to the status, preservation and continuity of Māori cultural traditions (including language) (Statistics New Zealand 1993: 18).*

The ethnicity classification was further revised in 1996 with the production of the 1996 Statistical Standard for Ethnicity. While the definition of ethnicity remained unchanged from the 1993 Standard, the ethnicity question was changed (as noted above). As in the earlier Standard, the 1996 Standard included discussion of conceptual issues, of the ethnic group label for the 'majority ethnic group' and the 'New Zealander' issue, and outlined the classification structure and procedures for coding and outputting ethnicity data, including the output of multiple ethnicities. In explaining the hierarchical classification structure, the Standard noted that the criteria, at the most disaggregated level (Level 4) were based on:

- *geographical locality or origin (country, regions within a country or islands within a particular island group);*
- *cultural differences (which include distinctions such as language and religious belief);*
- *size; and*
- *Recommendation 8 of the Ethnic Review Committee report on ethnic statistics (Refer to Attachment 1) which states that Pacific Island Groups should be separately identified where possible (Statistics New Zealand 1997: 5).*

The 1996 Standard remained in place until the introduction of the Statistical Standard for Ethnicity 2005, following the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity (RME) in the early 2000s.

## **Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity (RME)**

In 2000, Statistics New Zealand commenced a Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity (RME), the first such review since the 1988 Review, although the official classification had last been revised in 1996. According to the background paper for the RME, there was a need for a review because of changes in demographics, in the needs of stakeholders, in the ways ethnicity was being collected and used by agencies, and in perceptions about the measure (Statistics New Zealand 2001: 1).

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### TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE MEASUREMENT OF ETHNICITY

1. To evaluate the concepts of ethnicity that are used in official social statistics.
2. To define and categorise 'ethnicity', after exploring its association with variables such as nationality, 'race', ancestry, identity, and citizenship.
3. To produce a revised statistical standard for ethnicity, and for any applications of it, such as prioritisation and measuring strength of identity.
4. To take account of the need for the standard to measure all ethnic groups currently in New Zealand, and be robust enough to measure new groups arriving in the next 10 years.
5. To obtain a balance between the need for contemporary relevance and historical continuity.
6. To produce a report for the Government

Statistician, which contains recommendations on the measurement of ethnicity for at least the next ten years.

7. To produce a plan for implementing the review's recommendations across all official statistics.
8. To carry out the project with regard to Statistics New Zealand's commitment to the Crown's obligations to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi.
9. To complete the review by mid-2002, so as to contribute to the development of the 2006 Census of Population.

Source: Statistics New Zealand 2001: 6-7

A series of discussion papers and reports were produced in 2001 as part of the Review process, covering a range of issues including international comparisons, policy considerations, Māori and Pacific perspectives, and perspectives from the Federation of Ethnic Councils. Some of these documents were internally produced from within Statistics New Zealand. Others were prepared by authors and researchers from outside the agency.

Consultation was undertaken by Statistics New Zealand and a Draft Report prepared and released for comment in 2002. Updated draft recommendations were subsequently produced (although these did not go out for public comment). More than 120 submissions were received, and in 2004, a final report Report of the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity was released (Statistics New Zealand 2004a). The report recommendations made a number of significant suggestions for changes to the standard and classification. This included:

- updating the standard definition of ethnicity;
- a change to the classification system, including changes to the Level 1 category;
- the introduction of 'New Zealander' into the classification system;
- the recommendation that prioritisation be discontinued as a standard output; and,
- the commitment to undertake a significant research programme, and to address outstanding issues raised in the review

The review demonstrated that there was general support for an ethnicity measure, but also that there was still a degree of variation in how ethnicity data was collected and recorded across different sectors. The RME differed somewhat from the 1988 Review in that it was undertaken internally, in the sense that it was driven by Statistics New Zealand and was not inter-sectoral per se, but rather achieved inter-sectoral input through consultation.

### **Statistical Standard for Ethnicity 2005**

The Statistical Standard for Ethnicity (sometimes referred to as Ethnic 05) was produced following the RME, as an official standard to support consistent ethnicity data across different data collection sources:

*Data from a large number of collections is combined with other sources, such as the population census, to produce official measures in a range of areas such as education, health, employment and unemployment, income, housing and crime. Unless consistent ethnicity data is available, valid and reliable measures cannot be produced. Lack of consistency across different collections means data may not be comparable (Statistics New Zealand 2005: 1).*



In a similar vein to earlier standards, the 2005 Statistical Standard for Ethnicity outlined the standard definition of ethnicity for the purposes of official statistics, and contained guidelines on operational issues in relation to data collection, ethnic mobility, and the output<sup>6</sup> of multiple ethnicities. A series of supporting papers and documents were also prepared by Statistics New Zealand to accompany the revised Standard.

The Standard included a revised definition of ethnicity, based on the work of Smith (1986) (this definition is discussed in an earlier section). The Standard also outlined the Classification, which is a hierarchy of four levels (Level One least detailed and Level Four most detailed), and is based on responses and geographic, national, and ethnic group labels (Statistics New Zealand 2005). As was signaled in the Report on the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity, 'New Zealander' was included in the classification at level four. In addition, changes were made to the Level One classification categories, namely the inclusion of a separate Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MEELA) category.

The changes outlined in the new Standard, namely the revised classification and the changes to recommended output, impacted on the 2006 Census and related products. The ethnicity question remained the same as that which had been used in the 2001 Census, maintaining some stability in the denominator in terms of the question asked. However, the introduction of 'New Zealander' into the classification system, as well as the promotion and publicity surrounding this at the time of the Census, appear to have significantly impacted on the way that people responded to the question, with a large increase in the numbers of individuals writing in a 'New Zealander'-type response.

In addition, ethnicity data was outputted using the total response method to code multiple ethnic responses. Prioritised ethnicity data was not produced<sup>7</sup>. This impacted on the comparability over data over time, as well as limiting the ability to make comparisons between ethnic groupings.

## **Current state of play in official statistics**

As part of the planning and development for the 2011 Census, Statistics New Zealand undertook a review of the Official Statistical Standard for Ethnicity. The review commenced in 2008, and involved discussion with stakeholders and a research programme. In April 2009, a draft report was released for public feedback, and a final report was produced in October 2009 (Statistics New Zealand 2009a).

This most recent review focussed principally on the issue of 'New Zealander' responses in official statistics. Other issues relating to ethnicity are being considered as part of a review of culture and identity statistics being undertaken by Statistics New Zealand, with a final report projected for 2010 (Statistics New Zealand 2009b).

The Review Report made several recommendations relating to the ethnicity question and the classification of 'New Zealander' responses. It was decided that the current format of the ethnicity question should be retained in the census, other surveys and administrative data collections. The addition of a 'New Zealander' tick-box to the question, as well as the introduction of a 'national identity' question to the Census were considered, but not taken up (see the final report document for a fuller discussion)<sup>8</sup>.

(6) 'Output' here refers to the way in which ethnicity data is output for analysis and/or publication.

(7) 'Total response' refers to a method for coding multiple ethnicities. The 'total' response method counts each individual once in each ethnic group they identify with. 'Prioritisation' is a method that assigns people who identify with more than one ethnic group to a single mutually exclusive category based on an established hierarchy.  
(8) The report is available on: [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz)



# ETHNICITY DATA IN KEY SOCIAL SECTORS

The variation in measurement and collection practices both within and across agencies and sectors in terms of ethnicity data has been previously noted. For example, in relation to Statistics New Zealand surveys, the Household Labour Force Survey and the Household Economic Survey have historically used different questions, wordings, and processes to collect their ethnicity data (Statistics New Zealand 1997: 2). However, the need for high quality, complete and standardised ethnicity data is increasingly being recognised and supported by policy development.

The discussion below will focus on data collected within and by specific sectors, particularly the nature and methods of collecting ethnicity data in key routine datasets. This background information facilitates a more critical interpretation of ethnicity statistics and also provides an overview of the issues with data quality in other sectors, that impact on our ability to understand Māori health determinants, experiences and outcomes, and, therefore, to intervene to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

## THE HEALTH AND DISABILITY SECTOR

Ethnicity data has been collected within the health sector for a number of years, with varying levels of completeness and standardisation. A fuller discussion of ethnicity data in the health and disability sector is included in a related discussion paper (Cormack forthcoming).

Ethnicity data is usually collected in the health sector during contact with a health service or provider. Some of the ethnic data that is collected

within healthcare settings is reported or recorded on key routine data sets, including the National Health Index (NHI) and databases and registries maintained by the Information Directorate at the Ministry of Health, such as the New Zealand Cancer Registry (NZCR), and the National Minimum Dataset (NMDS).

Although ethnicity data has been collected for some time in hospitals, it has historically been collected in an ad hoc manner. Hospital admission forms were traditionally completed by admission clerks, with a limited range of possible response categories available (Brown 1983) drawing on a biological, descent-based approach to ethnicity data collection. In the 1980s, there was a shift towards self-identified cultural affiliation and alignment with the census approach (TRRHAEP 2000). Since 1996, hospital ethnicity data collection has officially been aligned to the Statistics New Zealand concept of ethnicity and the population census question, allowing for the collection of multiple ethnicities. There is, however, evidence of variable quality and completeness and a lack of standardisation of data collection methods (Kilgour and Keefe 1992; Harris, Robson, Reid & Keefe 1997; Moala 1999; TRRHAEP 2000; HURA 2006). It is not mandatory to collect ethnicity data within private hospitals.

In more recent years, ethnicity data has been collected in the primary care setting. The increase in primary care collection was in part a response to the introduction of the Population-Based Funding Formula, of which ethnicity was a variable. Primary care ethnicity data is often collected as part of the patient registration process. As with

hospitals, there is evidence of quality issues with primary care ethnicity data (Bramley & Latimer 2007; HURA 2006). Ethnicity information is also routinely collected by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), who report on injury statistics by ethnicity.

The introduction of the Ethnicity Data Protocols for the Health & Disability Sector in 2004 was a significant development in that they provided guidance for the standardisation of data collection and output across the health and disability sector. The Protocols were based on Statistics New Zealand standards, but were released in advance of the Statistical Standard for Ethnicity 2005 and therefore reflect the policies and practices in place prior to this. As part of the implementation of the data protocols, training resources were developed and training carried out in District Health Boards.

The Statistical Standard 2005 is intended to be implemented across the whole of government. As a part of this, some changes have been nominated as mandatory, while others are voluntary. Consultation has been undertaken within the health sector on the implications of the move to alignment with the 2005 Standard, and to seek views on proposed changes. In light of this process, the health sector has been notified that there is a new codeset (as a result of the updated official classification of ethnicity), and changes to the Level One and Level Two codesets were part of the 2009 National Collections Annual Maintenance Project (NCAMP).

In summary, while there have been significant improvements in approaches to ethnicity data collection in the health and disability sector, issues in relation to standardisation, completeness and quality of ethnicity data remain.

## ETHNICITY DATA IN VITAL STATISTICS

Birth and death registration forms have historically collected information using a 'degrees of blood' approach. Until September 1995 the question on birth and death registration forms asked about the "degree of Māori blood" and "Pacific Island blood" of the parents (mother and father):

If the person's mother or father had Māori "blood", details of the Tribe were requested. If the person's mother or father had Pacific Island blood, respondents were asked to state the Island (Statistics New Zealand 1997: 2).

Information was, therefore, only collected if one or both parents were Māori or Pacific Island (in descent terms), and no ethnic information was collected for other groups (Brown 1983; TRRHAEP 2000). There is evidence of high levels of undercount of Māori on death registrations historically (Graham, Jackson, Beaglehole & de Boer 1989).

Following the passing of the Births, Deaths, Marriages and Relationships Registrations Act 1995, there was a shift to collecting ethnicity (as opposed to descent) for all births and deaths, and an alignment with the 1996 census ethnicity question, which allowed for multiple ethnicities to be recorded. There was a resultant increase in the number of Māori deaths recorded (TRRHAEP 2000), as well as in the number of Māori births, which doubled between 1994 and 1996 (PHI 2000).

More recently, the question on the birth and death registration forms has been aligned with the 2005 Statistical Standard for ethnicity, and now includes a version of the 2006 Population Census ethnicity question (with some slightly modified wording).

Ethnicity data also used to be collected on arrival and departure cards at the border. However, the collection of migration data changed, with "... the introduction of a cultural affiliation based ethnic question in April 1982" (Brown 1983), and ethnicity is no longer collected on arrival and departure cards. Information on Maori migration is important in producing reliable inter-censal population estimates for the Maori population. Population estimates are often used in constructing population rates for important health and disability indicators, such as deaths and hospitalisations (Robson & Reid 2001).

## ETHNICITY DATA IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The Ministry of Education routinely obtains ethnicity data from early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education providers. The data is used to produce statistics and information on a range of indicators including student participation, achievement, and outcomes. Ethnicity information for students attending early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions is generally collected on enrolment forms. The Ministry of Education (2010) provides guidance that "... enrolment forms should allow for students to self identify or be identified by their parents/guardians as belonging to more than one ethnic group". However, it is likely that there is variation within early childhood centres, primary and secondary schools, and tertiary institutions, in terms of the specific question and method used to collect ethnicity. In the tertiary sector, for example, university enrolment forms currently contain a range of ethnicity questions, which are generally neither consistent with each other or with the population census ethnicity question.

Early childhood, primary and secondary student ethnicity data is collected by the Ministry of

Education via school roll returns submitted by institutions. From 2007 onwards, the Ministry of Education has required that numeric codes based on Level Three of the Statistics New Zealand classification of ethnicity be used to code ethnic group data in School Management Systems (SMS), ENROL (the student enrolment system for schools) and Tertiary Student Management Systems (Ministry of Education 2009).

Schools are also advised to allow for students to identify with up to three ethnic groups. However, for the purposes of Roll Returns, the data is provided to the Ministry of Education in a collated form, with only one ethnic group reported for each student (Lang 2001; Leather 2009; Ministry of Education 2010). Students with multiple ethnic responses are coded to one ethnic group based on the Statistics New Zealand prioritisation method outlined in the 1996 Standard (Leather 2009; Ministry of Education 2010). This method of obtaining data, summarised rather than disaggregated data on student ethnicity was noted in the 1983 Investigation of Official Ethnic Statistics (Brown 1983: 20). It appears to continue to be routine practice with the exception of the tertiary sector, although schools with Student Management Systems also provide electronic data files to the Ministry of Education with their Roll Returns that includes non-prioritised ethnicity data (Leather 2009).

In addition to student roll data, summarised ethnicity data is also provided to the Ministry of Education on students participating in particular programmes, such as Reading Recovery.

The Ministry of Education is involved in a number of national and international projects, including the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) and the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP),

within which ethnicity data are collected. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) collects some ethnicity information on students' national qualifications, and has also moved to numeric codes.

Supplementary to providing information on student participation and outcomes, ethnicity data provided by schools was used in the past alongside census information to calculate decile rankings for each school. However, the ethnicity weighting was removed from the decile funding formula following the Review of Targeted Programmes. It was also removed from the Equity Funding for early childhood centres from 2005.

Ethnicity data is collected on members of Boards of Trustees (although only data for Māori and Pasifika members appears to be routinely published), and on teachers through the 3-yearly Teacher Census. Some ethnicity data is collected in educational institutions on the ethnicity of staff as part of Equal Employment Opportunity policies. There is no centralised collection on the ethnicity of staff employed in the tertiary sector, although some information is available from Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) returns for those staff eligible and those institutions who participated. However, according to the Ministry of Education (2005), ethnicity was not completed for approximately 25% of PBRF-eligible staff in 2003.

In addition to ethnicity data, information on iwi affiliation is collected by many educational institutions and reported to the Ministry of Education.

## ETHNICITY DATA IN THE SOCIAL WELFARE SECTOR

Ethnicity has been variably collected in social welfare statistics over time. In a 1983 paper

on official ethnic statistics, Brown notes that ethnicity data was historically collected for some indicators, specifically benefits and pensions, juvenile offending, adoptions and state wards. Completeness of the data was noted to be variable, however. For example, information on the ethnicity of state wards was derived from district office returns only for those state wards in institutions (reported to be approximately 5% in 1980) (Brown 1983: 22).

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) currently has responsibility for activities across the social welfare sector, including child and youth protection, youth justice services, and adoption services, and administration and delivery of superannuation, employment and income support, and student allowances and loans.

The Ministry of Social Development collects ethnicity for those people obtaining Work and Income Services. This information is used for the monitoring and development of appropriate services and policies. However, as it is not related to entitlement or eligibility for assistance, it is not a compulsory field (Personal communication, Ministry of Social Development 2010). Ethnicity information may be collected on application forms or through other interactions with Work and Income such as in person, on-line or through call centres.

Ethnicity data has been collected since the SWIFTT computer system began to be used at the end of 1991. Data transferred to SWIFTT from before this time did not have ethnicity recorded. Ethnicity would, therefore, sometimes not be added until a person re-applied for assistance. Initially, ethnicity classification on SWIFTT was not completely in line with Statistics New Zealand standard classification. When Work and

Income New Zealand (WINZ) merged with the Employment Service in 1997/98, information on individuals was available from the Employment Services SOLO system, including ethnicity. The SOLO system allowed for individuals to identify with multiple ethnic groups and used the Level Three classification for coding. There is now a single system that holds information about users of Work and Income services, including ethnicity. However, some of the information will have been collected over different time periods and using different methods<sup>9</sup>.

In relation to application forms for financial assistance (or benefits), there appear to be several variations of the ethnicity question in use, which may impact on data comparability. In addition, the questions differ somewhat from the Census ethnicity question in terms of wording, layout and order of response categories. For example, the question asked on the paper application form for the unemployment benefit asks:

“To which ethnic group do you believe you belong?” Response categories include ‘Other European’ (which is not a standard response category in the Census ethnicity question, and there is an iwi question embedded within the ethnicity question<sup>10</sup>).

The voluntary nature of the question may impact on the completeness of ethnicity data. There is some indication that there have been relatively high levels of missing ethnicity data historically (Wilson 1999). However, recent publications suggest lower levels of individuals with no ethnicity coded; approximately 2% of working age recipients of a main benefit as of June 2008, for example (Ministry of Social Development 2009).

Monitoring of benefit receipt and access to social welfare more broadly is important, as access to and receipt of social welfare are relevant to understanding determinants of health, access to health care services and health outcomes for Māori, but also provide some important health indicators around disability support.

## ETHNICITY DATA IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTOR

Historically, there has been some level of collection of ethnic (and/or racial) data within the criminal justice sector, although there continue to be large gaps in the completeness of ethnicity data and a lack of standardised approach. The collection of ethnicity data has yet to become routine practice across the whole sector (Statistics New Zealand 2008). The data that is currently available is collected primarily through the Police, the Department of Courts, and the Department of Corrections

When the Police collect data, ethnicity is included as one of the demographic variables and this is published by the Police in apprehensions statistics. Historically, the Law Enforcement System (colloquially known as the Wanganui Computer) used the categories of ‘Caucasian’, ‘Pacific Islander’, ‘Māori’, ‘Asiatic’, ‘Negro’, ‘Other’, and ‘Unknown’ (Brown 1983: 16). Since the Law Enforcement System was replaced by the National Intelligence Application in 2005, ethnicity for apprehension statistics has been collected using the following categories: ‘Asian’, ‘European’, ‘Indian’, ‘Latin American/Hispanic’, ‘Māori’, ‘Middle Eastern’, ‘Native African (or cultural group of African origin)’, ‘Other (specify)’, ‘Pacific Island’, ‘Unknown’. However, in order to preserve historical time series, in apprehension statistics these categories are mapped to ‘Caucasian’, ‘Pacific Islander’, ‘Māori’, ‘Asiatic’, ‘Indian’, ‘Other’, and ‘Unknown’.

(9) Personal communication, Ministry of Social Development 2010.

(10) See the Ethnicity question on the Unemployment benefit application form 2010, available on WINZ website ([www.winz.govt.nz](http://www.winz.govt.nz))

While the collection of ethnicity data by the police is based on self-identification, this may be difficult to implement in practice in all circumstances. In cases where "... a person is unable or unwilling to identify their ethnicity, police may access other relevant information in their possession, such as data about the person previously recorded on police systems, the person's name, or the police officer's knowledge about the person's family" (Personal communication: Police National Headquarters, 2009). In these situations, people may have their ethnic group recorded differently than if they had self-identified (Morrison, Soboleva & Chong 2007).

In addition, only one ethnic group is recorded by police, and there is no facility for individuals to have multiple ethnicities recorded (Statistics New Zealand 2008; Morrison, Soboleva & Chong 2007; Lang 2001). Ethnicity is not recorded for traffic offences (Statistics New Zealand 2008).

The Department of Courts records ethnicity data for Family Court applicants and those involved in domestic violence programmes (Lang 2001). According to Bartlett (2004), while it is possible to record multiple ethnicities on the Ministry of Justice's Case Management System (CMS), most cases have only one ethnic group recorded, and this is suggested to be related to the way in which the screen is configured. Prior to 2003, Family Court data was collected on the Family Court database (FCDB), domestic violence database and via 'manual returns' (Bartlett 2006).

The Department of Corrections collects ethnicity "...from people serving prison sentences or in community correction programmes" (Lang 2001: 8). Inmate ethnicity collection allows for inmates to identify with more than one ethnic group. However, inmates are then asked to identify their preferred

ethnicity (Statistics New Zealand 2008). While preferred ethnicity is used in many Corrections publications, total response ethnicity data is used to calculate rates (Statistics New Zealand 2008).

A biennial census of prison inmates was undertaken by the Department of Justice (and then the Department of Corrections) from 1987 until 2003. In publications of the prison census, ethnicity was categorised into 'preferred ethnicity' and 'combined ethnicity'. The combined ethnicity method coded people into combination groups: European; European and Māori; Māori; Māori and Pacific; Pacific peoples and Other. Preferred ethnicity was based on an individual's most recent self-identified preferred ethnicity. Those individuals who identified with more than one ethnic group were asked to rank the ethnicity in order of priority (Department of Corrections 2003).

The Department of Corrections now produces an Offender Volumes Report. The data for this report is sourced from Corrections Analysis and Reporting Systems (CARS) tables, which are derived from the Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) database, in use since the late 1990s. The IOMS also contains historical data from older Corrections collections and from the Law Enforcement System (LES) (the Wanganui Computer) (Harpham 2008).

The report includes analysis by 'preferred ethnicity', which is based on the most recent self-identified preferred ethnicity of an individual (where more than one ethnicity is identified with). The report notes that ethnicity data has not been collected in line with the Statistical Standard for Ethnicity 2005, and "... results from an amalgam of historical methods relating to the time the data was collected, the agency doing the collecting and the standard of the day" (Harpham 2008: 62).



Missing ethnicity data in the Correction's database is sourced from the Ministry of Justice, however, ethnicity is still unknown for a significant number of offenders (Harpham 2008). The report states that:

*As far as the author is aware the missing ethnicity data is an artefact of the data collection and import processes of the time, and all ethnicities would have been equally impacted (Harpham 2008: 62).*

The Ministry of Justice also undertakes some surveys within which ethnicity data is collected. The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey (NZCASS) includes a question on ethnicity for participants, using the 2006 Census ethnicity question. In discussing self-reported criminal incidents, on several occasions the Survey also asks participants to identify the ethnicity of perpetrators/offenders. This question uses Level One codes, rather than the Census ethnicity question (Ministry of Justice 2006).

# CONCLUSIONS

Ethnicity is a complex concept; however, it has real and material impacts on people's lived realities and on relations between individuals and social collectives. Contemporary discussions of ethnicity are often conducted with reference to increasing diversity, attributed primarily to globalisation and greater population mobility (Jenkins 2008). The supposition is that understanding and defining ethnicity and ethnic groups is becoming more and more complex. However, this positioning of the debate has also been questioned. Jenkins (2008) for example, notes that societies have always been 'plural' and that globalisation is contributing to increasing homogeneity as well as increasing heterogeneity. While the purposes and ways of characterising ethnicity have certainly changed, it is not clear whether collective identities are more complex now than in the past – or whether we acknowledge their complexity in more and different ways.

The ethnic enumeration of populations has always been political and contested. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the approach to ethnicity data in official statistics has arisen out of particular colonial and settler context, and developed through concepts of biology and race, to more constructivist notions of shared culture and self-identification. Although the official move has been away from race-based approaches to the classification of ethnic affiliation, this movement has not been completely operationalised within official statistics, nor is it fully transferred through into the public sphere. As evident in reviews of ethnic statistics and through the preliminary mapping of current data collection

methods in key sectors, there remains substantial variation in the way in which various official agencies collect ethnicity data, the questions that are asked, and the response categories that are included.

The Official Statistical Standard for Ethnicity is intended to be a whole-of-government standard, and there are recent developments in official ethnicity data collection policy and practice demonstrating increased standardisation of the collection and classification of ethnicity data in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Standardised approaches to the collection, classification and output of ethnicity data support the measurement and monitoring of experiences and outcomes of ethnic groups across settings and over time. However, standardisation in and of itself does not necessarily ensure that approaches to ethnic classification are appropriate or accepted.

This summary of ethnicity data in official statistics demonstrates the variability and dynamic nature of the concept, which is not surprising from a constructivist viewpoint that sees ethnicity as embedded and contingent. It does suggest that it is important to view ethnic classifications within their context, giving due regard to the power relationships and interests at play. It also highlights the need to have an understanding of the broader policies and practices of official ethnicity data in order to better understand the data that is produced on Māori health and on ethnic disparities in health.

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