The Protective Influence of Family Connectedness, Ethnic Identity, and Ethnic Engagement for New Zealand Māori Adolescents

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Adolescence is a life stage that marks an important developmental phase of physical, emotional, and cognitive maturation as young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood (Erikson, 1968). The developmental tasks and psychological changes during this period can adversely affect a young person’s emotional well-being and may cause a considerable amount of stress and manifest in a variety of negative adjustment outcomes. In a recent review of literature on life satisfaction in adolescence, it was noted that many dimensions of quality of life decrease after 12 years of age and continue to diminish until around the age of 16 (Goldbeck, Schmitz, Besier, Herschbach, & Henrich, 2007; Jose & Brown, 2008).

This “trough” of diminished well-being is seemingly a typical or normative aspect of the transition through adolescence in Western culture. However, declines in positive adjustment may not be manifested universally by all adolescents in all cultural groups, and a range of individual and contextual factors are likely to influence the direction and extent of change (see Park, 2004). Notably, few studies have examined the predictors and correlates of well-being for ethnic minority adolescents and determined whether reductions in well-being occur in a similar way for these young people during the developmental period.

For young people who are members of marginalized groups, decrements in well-being may well be exacerbated by contextual risk factors. For instance, some studies have shown that indigenous adolescents report lower levels of well-being and are at greater risk than majority youth for health problems and psychological dysfunction, namely, experiencing higher levels of depression, anxiety, suicide, substance abuse, delinquency, general health problems, and lower educational achievement (Wexler, 2009). These outcomes are thought to be a result of forced relocation, cultural colonization, and involuntary acculturation (Berry, 1999; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012; Wexler, 2009).

On the other hand, cultural affiliation seems to act as a protective factor for indigenous individuals, and studies have found positive associations between cultural identification and indigenous young people’s well-being (Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004). It has been suggested that one of the key ways in which cultural identification can promote positive outcomes is through enculturation, which has been broadly described as “the process by which individuals learn about and identify with their traditional ethnic culture” (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Washienko, Walter, & Dyer, 1996, p. 199). Indeed, enculturation factors such as cultural identity, connection to the ethno-cultural community, and retention of native language have been found to promote resilience and encourage cultural continuity for Norwegian Sami (indigenous) youth, effectively...
buffering the stress of trauma or historical loss (Bals, Turi, Skre, & Kvernmo, 2010).

Although there is a widespread belief that enculturation factors lead to greater well-being, these relationships have not been empirically studied with a diversity of indigenous young adults. In particular, very little research has been conducted on this dynamic for Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand), and to our knowledge, no research studies to date have quantitatively studied Māori youth development over time. One of the major reasons that published findings are lacking in this area is because no appropriate data have been collected to examine the relationships between enculturation factors and Māori well-being. In the present longitudinal study, we sought to fill this gap in the literature by examining whether Māori youth evidence decreases in well-being during middle adolescence, as is found in Western samples, and further whether three factors relating to enculturation (i.e., family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement) serve to protect these youth against this predicted decrement in well-being.

Māori Youth

New Zealand is a bicultural nation that recognizes Māori as Tanga Te Whenua,1 “the people of the land,” that is, the indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand). The majority cultural group in New Zealand is referred to as New Zealand European or Pākehā. According to the 2006 Census, Māori make up nearly 15% of the total population, and 22% of this ethnic group are under 25 years of age (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). In contrast, Pākehā constitute 67% of the population. Even though Māori youth are an important and growing demographic in New Zealand society, they suffer more deleterious outcomes than non-Māori,2 including consistently higher rates of unemployment, suicide, hospitalization, conduct and substance disorders and abuse, smoking, obesity, and teenage pregnancy (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2004; Te Puni Kokiri, 2006). Māori also manifest higher morbidity and mortality rates than the general population and are more likely to leave school without a formal qualification (Cotterell, Wheldon, & von Randow, 2008; Durie, 1995; Statistics New Zealand Census, 2006).

Due to the high levels of developmental risk factors, research has tended to take a deficit approach when assessing outcomes for Māori, meaning that very few studies have examined the predictors of positive adjustment in this group. Furthermore, when comparisons are made between Māori and non-Māori, cultural values and practices that shape the living arrangements and social outcomes for young people are often not taken into account (and indeed this is the case with many other ethnic minority groups; see, e.g., Quintana et al., 2006). In fact, a point of departure in cultural belief systems between Pākehā and Māori is arguably the concept of whānau (broadly understood as the family collective or extended family) compared with the conventional definition of the nuclear family unit in Western society (Edwards, McCreanor, & Moewaka-Barnes, 2007). For Māori, the whānau (rather than solely the nuclear family) is seen to take the responsibility of nurturing, socializing, and providing social support for youth. According to Moewe-Pickering (1996), the whānau enculturates its members into a sense of collective affiliation and responsibilities, provides care and nurturing, and fosters a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging.

Following this emphasis on the collective as an agent of enculturation, Durie (2006) identified a range of culturally specific indicators of well-being for Māori, including cultural, spiritual, and whānau well-being; cultural identity and engagement; and Te Reo Māori (Māori language) usage. Furthermore, Gray, Barwick, Martin, and Asiaasiga (2002) have emphasized positive outcomes such as living at home, receiving parental support, maintaining strong ties with whānau, participation in cultural activities, and involvement in the marae (community meeting hall). These findings illustrate that for Māori young people, positive adjustment tends to emerge from an interplay of family dynamics, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement.

Family Connectedness in Māori Youth

Family is an important social structure that is critical to the health and well-being of all individuals regardless of cultural background, especially for young people (Cavanaugh, 2008; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). A general consensus exists that positive family dynamics (e.g., higher levels of cohesion, connectedness, and support) lead to better adolescent adjustment across a variety of domains (Crosnoe, 2004). Although family dynamics seem to have important influences on youth adjustment, few studies have investigated this issue for Māori youth. One reason for this may be that for Māori, family connectedness extends beyond the nuclear family unit and encompasses the whānau (collective family unit) more broadly. In contemporary New Zealand society, whānau is defined as “extended family,” although historically, a whānau unit was defined as several generations of family members and family friends whose roles and responsibilities were interrelated (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). It is important to note that the concept of whānau does not always require kinship (whakapapa) ties; whānau can represent a wider connection that is not necessarily defined by blood relationships.

Moeke-Pickering (1996) has suggested that the whānau unit is the foundation of Māori communities, forming the basis for indigenous social networks beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family. Following this contention, it has been argued that a strong sense of family connectedness underpins Māori health and well-being, although this relationship is anecdotal rather than empirical (Durie, 1995, 2006). In non-Māori samples of ethnic minority and indigenous youth, positive relationships in the family have been found to promote positive outcomes for both ethnic minority and indigenous youth (e.g., Bals, Turi, Vittersø, Skre, & Kvernmo, 2011; Zhou et al., 2012). Accordingly, in the current research, it is hypothesized that family connectedness will have a significant, positive effect on well-being during adolescence for Māori youth.

Cultural Awareness of Māori Youth

Māori cultural awareness and self-identification as Māori are derived from membership and learning within the whānau (family), hapū (subtribe), iwi (tribe), and waka (ancestors; Moeke-Pickering, 1996). The structure of Māori culture is linked to the

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1 See Appendix for a glossary of Maori terms.
2 Similar results have been found with other indigenous youth (e.g., Bals et al., 2010; Jones, 2006; Shortt, Hutchinson, Chapman, & Toumbourou, 2007).
history of Māori as an ethnic group and is central to the concept of Māoritanga (the acknowledgment and pride in one’s identity as a Māori). The concept of Māoritanga has two distinct components, namely, pride/belonging and involvement/participation, and it is thought that both are necessary for a secure Māori identity (Durie, 1997). Indeed, research on cultural affiliation for Māori has shown that knowledge of cultural practices and tribal structures are significant in the development of a positive ethnic identity (Durie, 2006; Moeka-Pickering, 1996). Therefore, in the present research study, Māori cultural affiliation was measured in two distinct ways: ethnic identity and ethnic engagement.

Ethnic identity refers to one’s sense of belonging, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that derive from membership in an ethnic group, usually one in which there are claims to heritage, ancestry, or kinship. Phinney (1990) maintained that positive attitudes toward one’s ethnicity are central to the psychological functioning of those who live in societies where their group is a minority as it allows these individuals to construct a sense of unity and differentiation. An extensive body of literature demonstrates that the development of ethnic identity is an important aspect of a minority adolescent’s developmental experience, leading to higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Phinney, 1990), greater well-being (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002), increased academic achievement (Smith, Walker, Fields, Brooks, & Sey, 1999), lower levels of ethno-cultural identity conflict (Stuart & Ward, 2011), and fewer psychological problems (Berry, 2005).

The literature attests to the importance of a Māori cultural identity for health and well-being (e.g., Durie, 1997, 2006; Ratima & Ratima, 1997), although very little research has empirically examined the influence ethnic identity has on positive adjustment for Māori young people. However, recent empirical studies on the influence of Māori ethnic identity seem to support the predicted positive impact on psychological outcomes (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011; Ward, 2006). Therefore, in the current study, we hypothesized that greater feelings of pride and belongingness to Māori culture would be related to increased well-being for Māori youth over time. Furthermore, because the whānau provides a context where Māori identity can be expressed and cultivated, it was suggested that family connectedness (discussed earlier) would manifest a positive relationship with ethnic identity.

Ethnic engagement, or knowledge of and participation in one’s ethno-cultural community, is particularly important for Māori due to historic assimilationist governmental and educational policies that have attempted to suppress traditional Māori cultural practices (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Research has suggested that these policies precipitated the cultural alienation of Māori, which, in turn, contributed to a range of social and economic problems in contemporary Māori communities (Durie, 1995; Houkamau & Sibley, 2011; Ratima & Ratima 1997), similar to the experience of Native American communities in North America (Gone, 2009; Jones, 2006). However, during the late twentieth century, there was a social and cultural revival of Māori culture, which has led to more attention being given to the retention and promotion of ethnic engagement and an increased understanding of the importance of ethnic community involvement on health and well-being. In fact, Durie (2006) argued that contemporary issues faced by Māori may be mitigated through cultural immersion and more thorough engagement with Māori cultural institutions.

However, our understanding of the mechanisms by which ethnic engagement has a positive influence on Māori youth remains limited. Houkamau and Sibley (2011) suggested that increased Māori cultural engagement should result in the perception that one has the personal resources to act appropriately within Māori cultural contexts. Therefore, we believe that increased ethnic engagement may predict greater cultural identification and connectedness with whānau, which, in turn, may predict positive adjustment. This reasoning suggests that ethnic engagement may not be related directly to well-being but, in fact, may promote both family connectedness and ethnic identity, which, in turn, would predict greater well-being. Therefore, we hypothesized that engagement in Māori culture would positively predict family connectedness and ethnic identity, and as a consequence these would have positive effects on well-being longitudinally.

Overview and Hypotheses

The present study utilized longitudinal data from the Youth Connectedness Project (YCP) based in New Zealand (see Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012, for a description of the study) to investigate the associations between and among family dynamics, cultural affiliation, and well-being for Māori youth.3 This research is novel as, to date, no such longitudinal data on Māori have been collected, and to our knowledge, no research has specifically focused on positive outcomes for this understudied population. Furthermore, although there is a supposition that Māori youth benefit from engagement and identification with their culture, no previous research has quantitatively examined the relationships between cultural affiliation and well-being for this group. The current study addresses this significant gap in the research by illuminating how family and cultural factors contribute to positive outcomes for Māori youth during adolescence.

Five longitudinal hypotheses were proposed. First, we expected to see a decrease in well-being in early and middle adolescence reported by our sample (Hypothesis 1). Further, it was hypothesized that greater family/whānau connectedness (Hypothesis 2) and greater ethnic identity (Hypothesis 3) would mitigate decreases in well-being over time. Finally, we hypothesized that ethnic engagement would positively predict both family connectedness and ethnic identity (Hypothesis 4) and, subsequently, that ethnic engagement would have positive indirect effects on well-being over time through family connectedness and ethnic identity (Hypothesis 5).

Method

Study Design and Procedures

Data were drawn from the Youth Connectedness Project (YCP), a longitudinal study following a group of adolescents over the course of 3 years (2006, 2007, and 2008). The project focused on young people’s perceived social connections to families, schools, peers, and communities (for more information, see http://www.vuw.ac.nz/youthconnectedness/index.aspx). Participants were initially

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3 Note that while this research project included Māori advisers, this was not a Kaupapa Māori research project.
recruited from 78 schools located in New Zealand’s North Island in a stratified random sampling approach. After obtaining parental consent and adolescent assent, the survey was administered three times via laptop computers at school in the presence of a teacher and a research assistant. In total, 1,774 students participated in all three time points of data collection. The obtained gender ratio was 52% females/48% males, and participants were recruited from a wide range of different types of schools that covered the full range of socioeconomic scores (SES) in New Zealand (from 1 to 10, where 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived). The average school SES score in our sample was 5.2, very near the mid-point of this scale. Two items diverging from national norms were noted. First, percentages of participants from urban/suburban/rural schools were 61%/33%/6%, which varied from the national averages of 71%/15%/14% (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Second, we oversampled Māori youth for the purpose of having sufficient numbers to examine this minority group. We obtained 52% European New Zealanders (67% by census), 30% Māori (15% by census), 12% Pacific Islanders, and 6% other ethnic groups.

Participants
Participants for this study included 431 individuals who self-identified their ethnic identity as Māori at T1 of data collection and who, therefore, had the opportunity to fill in information about their ethnic identity and ethnic engagement. The age range at T1 was from 9 to 15 years, with an average of 11.83 years (SD = 1.68). Over half of the sample (59.2%) was female, and in terms of family structure, 225 (52.6%) were members of intact families, 125 (29%) were members of lone-parent or solo-parent families, and 81 (18.8%) resided in stepfamilies, extended families, or other variations. Attrition for the whole sample was 17% between T1 and T3, and it was found to be higher among Māori youth (22%). All individuals included in the present sample yielded data at all three time points. Māori individuals who discontinued participation reported lower levels of well-being and family connectedness at T1. A missing values analysis was undertaken on this data set, and Little’s missing completely at random metric was found to be nonsignificant. χ²(534) = 561.399, p = .20, indicating that the data were not missing systematically. Missing data (about 1.5%) were imputed in SPSS using the expectation–maximization algorithm (maximum likelihood function).

Measures

Family/whānau connectedness. Family/whānau connectedness was measured with 20 items taken from six scales that assessed young people’s perceptions of cohesion, mutual activities, identity, conflict, monitoring, and autonomy in family relationships. This strategy was used in order to derive a multidimensional scale measuring family connectedness across a range of life domains. Items measuring family cohesion (five items assessing the importance to the respondent’s family of spending time together) and family mutual activities (four items assessing whether the respondent’s family members have meals together) were adapted from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES II) by Olson, Portner, and Bell (1982), whereas items for family identity (two items, e.g., “We are proud to be members of our family/whānau”) were specifically generated for the current study. The items for the conflict (three items, e.g., “People in my family/whānau criticize each other”; reverse scored), monitoring (three items, e.g., “Someone in my family/whānau makes sure I don’t stay up too late at night”), and autonomy (three items, e.g., “Someone in my family/whānau makes me feel that what I have to say is important”) were adapted from the Family Climate Inventory by Kurdek, Fine, and Sinclair (1995). All of the items for these scales were presented in 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (never/almost never) to 5 (always/almost always). A composite measure was derived from the 20 items to provide a single score for overall perceived family connectedness. Reliability of the composite scale was high at all three time points, Cronbach’s α = .85, .85, and .86, respectively.

Ethnic identity. This scale was adapted from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure by Phinney (1992). Six items assessing Māori ethnic identity (e.g., “I am happy to be part of my ethnic group” and “I think about how my life is affected by being part of my ethnic group”) were measured. The items were presented in 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The six items were averaged in order to derive a score for Māori ethnic identity. Reliability of the composite scale was high at all three time points, Cronbach’s α = .83, .86, and .87.

Ethnic engagement. This five item scale was developed for the purposes of this study in order to assess engagement in Māori culture and practices. All items were presented as a yes/no dichotomous choice, where yes was coded as 1 and no was coded as 0. The five items asked were “Do you . . . go to the marae with whānau, go to other marae with whānau, know iwi/hapū name(s), know the name of your marae, and know your maunga/awa/waka?” Reliability of the composite scale was adequate at all three time points, Cronbach’s α = .76, .77, and .78.

Well-being. Overall well-being was measured with 11 items adapted from the Ryff Well-Being Scales that assessed young people’s well-being in relation to purpose in life, confidence, and positive relationships with others (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The well-being measure was composed of four items related to purpose in life (e.g., “I set goals and work hard to achieve them”), four items for confidence (e.g., “I feel confident and positive”), and four items for positive relations with others (e.g., “I get along well with others”). The items were presented in 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All 11 items were averaged in order to derive a score for overall well-being. Reliability of the composite scale was high at all three time points, Cronbach’s α = .88, .89, and .89.

Results

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: (a) preliminary analyses of factor structures and computation of descriptive statistics, (b) development of the latent growth curve model (LGC) to test the hypotheses concerning the variables of family connectedness and ethnic identity as predictors of well-being over time, and (c) construction of the longitudinal path model to test the hypothes-
ses concerning the indirect effects of ethnic engagement on well-being as mediated by family connectedness and ethnic identity.

To begin with, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on each of the four constructs. Results indicated that all of the constructs represented the data well, \( \chi^2/df \) values ranged from 2.19 to 6.15; comparative fit index (CFI) values ranged from .96 to .99; and root-mean-square errors of approximation (RMSEAs) ranged from .05 to .10. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients were computed between the predictors of family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement and the outcome measures of well-being across the three time points in order to assess associations within each time period and over time (see Table 1). Results indicated that well-being scores fell on the high side of the range across the three time points, whereas family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement scores fell on the low side of the range across the three time points, and ethnic engagement was high (4.12 on a 5-point scale), and the average slope was significantly negative (\(-.05\)). Implied means indicated that average scores on well-being declined significantly over time (T1 = 4.12, T2 = 4.07, and T3 = 4.02). This result supports Hypothesis 1 and indicates that Maori youth manifested a decrement in well-being over time similar to that found by adolescents around the world. And last, the intercept and the slope did not significantly covary, meaning that initial levels of well-being did not relate to changes in well-being over time.

In Step 2, the covariates (age, family structure, and school decile) and predictors (family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement) were entered into the model (see Table 2). Fit indices suggested that the model represented the data very well, \( \chi^2/df = 1.65, \text{CFI} = .97, \text{RMSEA} = .04 \). Family connectedness was found to significantly, positively predict the intercept (\( \beta = .51, p < .01 \)) and significantly, negatively predict the slope (\( \beta = -.26, p < .01 \)) of well-being. Ethnic identity was also found to significantly, positively predict the intercept (\( \beta = .28, p < .01 \)) and marginally, negatively predict the slope (\( \beta = -.21, p = .06 \)) of well-being. Ethnic engagement predicted neither the intercept nor the slope. In terms of the covariates, there was a marginal negative effect of age (\( \beta = -.11, p = .05 \)) and a positive effect of belonging to a lone-parent family (\( \beta = .13, p < .05 \)) on the intercept. The addition of the covariates and predictors to the model was found to account for 46\% of the variance in the intercept and 18\% of the variance in the slope of well-being.

As expected, these results indicated that both family connectedness and ethnic identity predicted higher initial levels of well-being. Evidence was also obtained to support Hypothesis 2: family connectedness was found to negatively predict the slope of well-being, effectively meaning that greater family connectedness at T1 negatively predicted (or mitigated) decreases in well-being over time. A similar result was found for ethnic identity, although

### Latent Growth Curve Model

In order to assess the first three longitudinal hypotheses, we developed a LGC model on well-being in AMOS (Version 20) in two steps: (a) an unconditional model was constructed to describe the starting point and change in well-being over time, and then (b) covariates (age, family structure, and school decile) and predictors (family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement) were added to the model (see Figure 1).

In the unconditional model, the variance in the intercept and slope for well-being were found to be significantly different from zero, indicating that further exploration of predictors could be undertaken. Results indicate that the average intercept for well-being was high (4.12 on a 5-point scale), and the average slope was significantly negative (\(-.05\)). Implied means indicated that average scores on well-being declined significantly over time (T1 = 4.12, T2 = 4.07, and T3 = 4.02).

### Table 1: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics

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<td>.26**</td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Bolded correlations indicate relationships between constructs over time. 
* \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \).
this result was marginally significant and therefore did not support Hypothesis 3, namely, that greater ethnic identity would be associated with lower reductions in well-being over time.

### Residualized Path Model

In order to test Hypotheses 4 and 5, namely, that ethnic engagement would predict family connectedness and ethnic identity and subsequently manifest a positive indirect effect on well-being over time, a fully saturated residualized path model was constructed (see Figure 2).10 Controlling for covariates, this model estimated the predictive effects of T1 ethnic engagement on residualized T3 well-being as mediated by T2 family connectedness and T2 ethnic identity. Indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping of 500 samples. Fit indices suggested that the model represented the data very well, $\chi^2(11) = 11.59, p = .40$, Tucker–Lewis Index = 1.00, comparative fit index = 1.00, root-mean-square error of approximation = .01, 90% CI [.00, .05]. Correlations between variables are not shown for ease of interpretation, although they are reported in Table 2. Nonsignificant regression pathways from covariates are indicated by dashed lines. $^1 p < .10. ^* p < .05. ^** p < .01.$

### Discussion

In the present study, we examined the associations among family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement on...
well-being for Māori youth with the chief goal of identifying and documenting positive youth development in this understudied and frequently denigrated minority group in New Zealand. We tested and found partial support for all five hypotheses relating to the adjustment of Māori youth over time. The first hypothesis, namely, that well-being would decline over time as a result of the normative development process, was supported. This finding is not surprising, as it is well established that youth around the world experience diminishing adjustment as they progress through middle adolescence. However, as stipulated by the second and third hypotheses, a novelty of the study was that we found culturally specific protective factors attenuated this general decrease in adjustment over time. In fact, findings indicated that both family connectedness and ethnic identity positively predicted initial levels of well-being, family connectedness significantly, negatively predicted decreases in well-being over time, and ethnic identity marginally negatively predicted decreases in well-being over time. These results suggest that while normative developmental processes tend to result in decreases in adjustment during middle adolescence, appropriate supports can significantly buffer these reductions in well-being.

Our results showing that whānau connectedness predicted higher levels of well-being for Māori youth are consistent with international research showing that relationship quality, cohesion, and familial support are key factors in positive adolescent adjustment (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). For the New Zealand context, this research finding also lends empirical evidence to Durie’s (1997, 2006) health and well-being framework for Māori, which posits that the well-being of youth is crucially influenced by the quality of whānau, chiefly because these relationships are the foundation for healthy intergenerational cultural transmission. Furthermore, the results of the current study are important in that they illustrate that even though many Māori youth live in nonnuclear family arrangements, this experience does not negatively affect the well-being of youth; rather it seems that the quality of family relationships is what is important for adjustment. In fact, it was found that when accounting for cultural affiliation and family connectedness, young people in sole-parent families were actually more likely to report higher initial values of well-being, indicating that Western ideas of optimal family structures may not apply to Māori families. Future research should seek to examine these relationships more closely in order to focus on the most culturally appropriate measure of family relationships.

The finding that ethnic identity positively predicted well-being for Māori youth was congruent with international research on ethnic identity that shows that stronger levels of ethnic identification for minority individuals lead to better outcomes overall (e.g., higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and higher academic achievement; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002). In fact, it has been suggested that ethnic identification is a protective factor for marginalized groups because when the ethnic group is viewed favorably, self-esteem is enhanced (Phinney, 1990). In addition, it should be noted that ethnic identity explained variance above and beyond that explained by family connectedness. This result suggests that these two constructs provide distinct cumulative developmental assets (defined as relationships, skills, opportunities, and

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Ethnic identity</th>
<th>Family connectedness</th>
<th>Well-being</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>T2</td>
<td>T3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>.31**</td>
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<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-parent dummy</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>School decile</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>T2 Family connectedness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Ethnic identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 ethnic engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone-parent dummy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-parent dummy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School decile</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlations</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 ethnic engagement ↔ Age</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 well-being ↔ Age</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School decile ↔ Age</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone-parent dummy ↔ Other-parent dummy</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 family connectedness residual ↔ T2 ethnic identity residual</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* T1 = Time 1, T2 = Time 2, T3 = Time 3.

\( ^* p < .05, \quad ^{**} p < .01 \)
values that foster resilience and promote thriving), and each exerts unique positive influences that facilitate the development of healthy and positive living for Māori youth (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000).

An important contribution of the article was the identification of the role of ethnic engagement in indirectly improving well-being over time. Understanding the role of ethnic engagement for Māori (and indeed for indigenous youth more broadly) is particularly important because many social policies that are directed at improving the negative outcomes for these groups have focused on promoting “a return to one’s ‘cultural roots’ [as] a potential ‘cure’ for the range of social, health, and economic problems facing indigenous peoples” (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011, p. 379). However, there is a lack of research identifying how disparities between indigenous peoples and majority groups can be reduced and how mechanisms promoting greater engagement in Māori culture could increase psychological adjustment (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011). The current study addressed this gap in the research by investigating the pathways from ethnic engagement to family connectedness, to ethnic identity, and subsequently to well-being.

With reference to the positive influence of Māori ethnic engagement, Smith et al. (2002) suggested the ability for these youth to locate themselves in relation to their ancestors and tribal places enables young people to take pride in themselves and to develop a greater sense of well-being. Moewe-Pickering (1996) made similar suggestions, arguing that supports to Māori ethnic engagement enable community revitalization and growth in both pride and awareness of Māori culture in general. Our results partially support these assertions, showing that engagement in Māori culture had a significant, albeit small, positive indirect effect on well-being over time through ethnic identity. However, it is notable that the mechanism by which engagement led to adjustment occurred through an increase in the salience and positive feelings that the individual held toward his or her ethnic group (and not directly through engagement).

Garcia Coll et al. (1996) have suggested that social stratification and the differential access to resources sets ethnic minority children apart from the dominant culture and forces the development of an adaptive culture. Ethnic engagement can be seen to form a component of this adaptive culture, where young people attempt to more fully access their ethnic community and develop a more coherent sense of belonging. However, as part of this process, engagement in things Māori may also be associated with greater salience of discrimination, historical loss, and racism. Therefore, it is important that engagement is coupled with pride and identification with the ethnic group. Effectively, behavioral and psychological engagement may help youth feel that they are able to legitimately be Māori in Māori contexts, which in turn increases well-being when the individual feels good about being Māori.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of the current research that must be pointed out. The first issue is that due to the focus on the psychological aspects of well-being, we were unable to make any conclusions concerning the impact of Māori family and cultural connectedness on other adjustment indices, for example, health and behavioral outcomes. Due to high levels of risk factors for problem behaviors in Māori youth, future research would benefit from investigations of the effects of family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement on health and behavioral outcomes for young Māori. Second, we analyzed only family and cultural affiliation influences on well-being; we are aware that these are merely two of the many contexts that influence the adjustment of adolescents. It is very likely that other influences, such as the media, peers, and experiences of discrimination also influence adjustment for this group of young people. Third, due to the higher than average attrition of Māori in the project, the results might not reflect the experiences of all Māori youth, particularly as those most at risk tended not to complete the three time points. Finally, we have focused on a very specific population, Māori youth, which may be seen to limit generalizability of the results. However, we would argue that the results found in this sample may have important implications for the experience of other indigenous and ethnic minority youth, and encourage future researchers to test the generalizability of the relationships identified in this study to other groups of young people.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, this study has a number of singular strengths. First, the study obtained quantitative data from a large, longitudinal Māori adolescent sample. We are unaware of any other empirical research conducted on positive adjustment with this population, and consequently data such as these are valuable in understanding the development of indigenous youth. Second, we included the variable of ethnic engagement, which is rarely examined in developmental psychology studies and often overlooked in research with indigenous youth. And last, the longitudinal nature of the study allowed us to make conclusions about predictive relationships over time, which can begin to illuminate the direction of effects between constructs.

Prevention and intervention programs would benefit from recognizing that cultural affiliation seems to play a crucial role in supporting adjustment in young Māori. The strengthening of Māori cultural affiliation among youth may enable and support the emergence of resilience, effectively acting as a form of primary prevention in terms of buffering against the impact of environmental stressors or disadvantages. Furthermore, we argue that more support designed to foster positive whānau environments and encourage greater ethnic engagement in the presence of ethnic pride should be created and disseminated. Durie (2006) has suggested that the best outcome for Māori is one in which whānau members have a strong sense of identity, remain concerned about the well-being of other whānau members, have access to the cultural heritage of the whānau, are knowledgeable about whānau heritage, and actively support the whānau as the major agent of cultural transmission. The current research supports this assertion for Māori youth and proposes that strong family ties, as well as engagement and identification with the Māori community can lead these young people toward positive development.

References


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**Appendix**

**Glossary of Māori Terms**

* Aotearoa literally “long white cloud”; in common usage as the Māori name for New Zealand
* iwi A people, as in “te iwi Māori” (the Māori people), usually translated as “tribe.”
* awa River
* kaupapa Philosophy, plan, purpose
* Māoritanga Māori culture
* marae Meeting house and associated land and buildings recognized as belonging to and being of ancestral significance to local indigenous people; cultural center of local Māori community
* maunga Mountain
* Pākehā Non-Māori, mainly refers to New Zealand Europeans of British descent
* tangata whenua Māori on their own ancestral land, indigenous Māori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand

* te reo [Māori] The [Māori] language
* Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi; the constitutional agreement between the British Crown and the indigenous Māori people
* tino rangatiratanga Sovereignty
* waka Canoe; also refers to the arrival ancestors, signifying descent from the founders of iwi (tribe) and hapū (subtribe)
* whakapapa Ancestry or bloodline
* whānau Family, blood relation, used with a broader contemporary meaning for “extended family”

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