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THE SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF VISIBLE ETHNIC MINORITY ADOLESCENTS OF ASIAN ORIGIN IN AUCKLAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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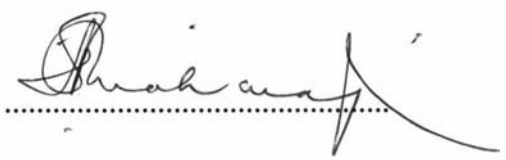
December 2002

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.



Amritha Sobrun-Maharaj

ABSTRACT

This research explores the social acceptance of visible ethnic minorities of Asian origin within three selected secondary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and presents the visible ethnic minority perspective on social acceptance within a diverse ethnic environment. This is done through an investigation of interethnic attitudes and perceptions of social acceptance amongst adolescents from the European, Maori, Pacific Island, West Asian (Indian) and East Asian (Chinese) groups in these schools, and an examination of the nature and extent of bullying and ethnic intimidation as key indicators of social non-acceptance. The thesis distinguishes between bullying and ethnic intimidation as separate issues within the domain of 'intimidatory practices', and argues that ethnic intimidation occurs independently of intra-ethnic bullying behaviour and has negative social, psychological and physical effects on visible ethnic minorities. 'Bullying' is used to signify intimidatory behaviour that occurs intra-ethnically, and is not ethnically motivated. 'Ethnic intimidation' is used to signify intimidatory behaviour that occurs inter-ethnically, is ethnically motivated and directed at peoples who are ethnically different. The behaviour does not have to be motivated by the usual personal and behavioural characteristics that motivate intra-ethnic bullying. Ethnic minority status is the primary motivation.

Preliminary data from a small pilot study indicated that ethnic minority pupils feel unaccepted by their peers and consequently suffer varying degrees of health problems. These indications were examined in a main survey of 208 pupils from years 9, 11 and 13, and triangulated with interviews with pupils, parents, and teachers, plus observations of interactions in schools. Through an analysis of participants' perceptions of others (direct perspectives) and their perceptions of the perspectives held by others (meta-perspectives), the survey examined attitudes toward others of different ethnicity ('interethnic attitudes'), the extent of interethnic interaction, perceptions of intimidatory practices, orientations toward the acculturation of immigrants, the degree of peer victimisation and bullying experienced, and the effects of these on pupils' mental and physical well-being and self-esteem.

Quantitative data from the survey suggests average levels of interethnic social acceptance, but significant social distance (separation) between ethnic groups, as well as some misconceptions on the part of the ethnic groups regarding acceptance and understanding of one another's ethnic differences. It confirms the existence of ethnic intimidation (as distinct from bullying), but suggests no significant difference in victimisation to *bullying* and the physical and mental well-being of pupils from the different ethnic groups.

However, qualitative data from interviews suggests visible ethnic minority pupils are victims of *ethnic intimidation* to a significant extent, and experience poorer physical and mental well-being to varying degrees. This inconsistency may be due to the nature of the instrumentation used to measure non-acceptance. The Peer Victimisation Index, which was borrowed from an Australian study (Rigby, 1993), may have been devised to measure intra-ethnic bullying within a mono-ethnic environment, and may be insensitive to the subtleties of ethnic intimidation and feelings of non-acceptance.

The relative invisibility of ethnic intimidation can be understood in terms of the impact that colonialist and liberalist discourses have had on the construction of social inquiry into school-ground intimidatory practices. A liberal understanding of social life that is embedded within colonialist practice, has contributed to the interpretation of school ground intimidatory behaviour in individualised terms, and the difficulty of recognising the ethnic vector that comes into play when such practices are interethnic in form.

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