Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
CULTURAL IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF MĀORI UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Psychology
Massey University

Simon Te Manihi Bennett
2001
ABSTRACT

Cultural identity, academic outcome and psychological wellbeing were investigated among a non-random sample of 72 undergraduate Māori university students studying at Massey University. Student problems were examined to identify the types of difficulties that were most prevalent among this population. The relationships between student problems and academic outcome, and student problems and psychological wellbeing were then examined to assess the degree to which cultural identity moderates these relationships. Major findings are that (a) there are consistent negative relationships between student problems and grade point average, and student problems and perceived stress levels; (b) cultural identity is associated with a number of positive psychological and educational outcomes; (c) cultural identity moderates the effect of student problems on grade point average in that a high degree of problems were associated with decreases in grade point average among respondents with low cultural identity, while among respondents with high cultural identity student problems had little negative effect on grade point average; (d) cultural identity moderates the effect of student problems on perceived stress in that under conditions of low problems, students low in cultural identity have significantly higher levels of perceived stress in comparison with students high in cultural identity. Despite limitations the findings have important implications for Māori students, deliverers of tertiary education, tertiary education providers, and those involved in the development and implementation of tertiary education policy. The findings also highlight the need for further research aiming to optimise positive academic and psychological outcome among Māori students.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, many thanks go to my primary supervisor Dr Ross Flett for his untiring and learned guidance throughout all stages of this research. His patient and expert supervision have been greatly appreciated. Thanks also to my secondary supervisor Mr Paul Hirini for his direction and advice during the early stages of this study and for the ongoing support he has given me throughout the year.

Thanks to Robyn Knuth and the administrative staff at the School of Psychology, for their help with accessing academic records and the collection of questionnaires. I would also like to thank the students who were so generous in the giving of their time, particularly the ‘Te Rau Puawai’, and ‘Manawatahi’ groups for their support of this study.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous support and encouragement I have received from my parents Bruce and Tui, my brothers Hamish and Maika, and my wife Emma throughout my time at university.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii  
Abstract iii  
Table of Contents iv  
List of Tables vii  
List of Figures viii

## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION 1

1.1. Cultural Identity 11  
1.2. Academic Outcome and Psychological Wellbeing 19  
  1.2.1. Academic Outcome 19  
  1.2.2. Psychological Wellbeing 21  
1.3. Student Problems as a Predictor of Academic Outcome and Psychological Wellbeing 27  
1.4. Cultural Identity as a Moderating Variable 30  
1.5. Summary and Research Goals 34

## CHAPTER TWO - METHOD 38  
2.1. Setting 38  
2.2. Participants 39  
  2.2.1. Discussion Group Participants 39  
  2.2.2. Survey Participants 39  
2.3. Measures 40  
  2.3.1. Demographic Variables 40
2.3.2. Cultural Identity
2.3.3. Academic Outcome
2.3.4. Psychological Wellbeing
2.3.5. Student Problems

2.4. Procedure
2.4.1. Ethical Approval
2.4.2. Recruitment of Discussion Group Participants
2.4.3. Recruitment of Survey Participants
2.4.4. Procedures to Preserve Anonymity and Confidentiality
2.4.5. Construction of a Student Problem Scale

2.5. Analysis

CHAPTER THREE - RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

3.2. Student Problem Scale Analysis

3.3. Relationships Between Variables

3.4. Regression Analysis
3.4.1. Regression #1: Maori cultural identity as a moderator of the relationship between problems and grade point average.
3.4.2. Regression #2: Collective self-esteem as a moderator of the relationship between problems and grade point average.
3.4.3. Regression #3: Maori cultural identity as a moderator of the relationship between problems and stress.
3.4.4. Regression #4: Collective self-esteem as a moderator of the relationship between problems and stress.
3.4.5. Contrasting the results of the hierarchical regression analyses.
CHAPTER FOUR - DISCUSSION

4.1. The Findings: A Summary and an Interpretation

4.2. Implications of the Research Findings

4.3. Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Research

REFERENCES

APPENDICES
List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents 51

Table 2. Summary of Means, Standard Deviations and Coding Algorithms for Variables 52

Table 3. Correlations among variables (n=56-72) 58

Table 4. Hierarchical multiple regression of individual and contextual variables and the interaction of Maori cultural identity on grade point average showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$. 61

Table 5. Hierarchical multiple regression of individual and contextual variables and the interaction of collective self esteem on grade point average showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$. 62

Table 6. Hierarchical multiple regression of individual and contextual variables and the interaction of Maori cultural identity on stress showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$. 64

Table 7. Hierarchical multiple regression of individual and contextual variables and the interaction of collective self-esteem on stress showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$. 65

Table 8. Summary of predictor variables (p<.05) for the hierarchical multiple regression analyses with significant interaction terms. 67
List of Figures

Figure 1. Model 1: Diagram depicting the proposed relationship between variables. 9

Figure 2. Model 2: Diagram depicting the proposed relationship between variables. 10

Figure 3. Bar graph illustrating the types of academic difficulties considered pervasive by the present sample (n=72). 54

Figure 4. Schematic representation of the collective self-esteem X problems interaction in the prediction of academic achievement. 63

Figure 5. Schematic representation of the collective self-esteem X problems interaction in the prediction of stress. 66