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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
FRIENDSHIP BEHAVIOUR OF MAORI AND PAKEHA
CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

In this thesis, two aspects of the friendship behaviour of a group of children are investigated to see whether an apparent difference in patterns of behaviour between Maori and Pakeha children is supported.

Two questionnaires requiring written answers are prepared and presented to all the pupils (938 in all) in the Form One intake of all five schools in a North Island town, on two occasions six months apart. These surveys provide the data on which the analysis is carried out.

The relevant literature is searched for possible 'causes' of the presumed difference in behaviour. A hypothetical explanation is proposed derived from the literature which places emphasis on the effect of different patterns of child socialization, believed to be culturally based. In particular, it is suggested that Maori families might still be influenced by traditional childrearing patterns which exert some influence towards friendship networks which are larger and more fluid than those of Pakeha children. This is the question being investigated.

Besides the variable Ethnicity, the effects of four other variables, considered to be plausible alternatives, are included in the investigation. All five variables are believed to have significant influence within the family life experiences of children. The effects of these variables on the criterion variables, the Size and Persistence of the children's friendship groups, are measured and compared.

The first stage of the analysis indicates that among the children surveyed, the Maori children tend to prefer friendship groups that are larger but more

changeable than those of Pakeha children. However, the result of the second stage analysis, using multiple regression analysis, indicates that when the effects of the other variables are controlled for, the influence of ethnicity is in fact negligible. Of far more significance are the effects of family size and the presence of similar age relatives, variables which are closely correlated with ethnicity. A contributory factor to the original impression would be the high 'visibility' of the Maori children.

The results of the investigation do not lend any support to the explanation proposed, viz. that the friendship behaviour of Maori children is still showing the influence of traditional child-rearing practices. The evidence suggests that larger and more changeable friendship groups tend to be favoured by those children, Maori or Pakeha, who grow up in association with a large group of similar age siblings and cousins.

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