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**“I’ve Got Your Back!”:  
The emotional influence of loyalty and fear of  
rejection on conformity and group  
compliance among adolescents**

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## Abstract

The fear of rejection by peers has been investigated in past and present literature with regards to adolescent conformity. However, adolescents' loyalty to their friends has not yet been explored. Given Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural nature and Māori tikanga emphasis on whanaungatanga (or relationships), the influence of cultural factors on peer relationships was of particular interest in the current study. Kaupapa Māori research highlights that Māori and non-Māori think and act differently due to differing worldviews. Therefore, the decision to conform to one's peer group may be influenced by these differing perceptions. Participants included male adolescents (15 to 18 years old) from local high schools who responded to a scenario-based questionnaire relating to the processes and reasoning that influenced their decisions about everyday social situations. Two-factor analyses of variance were conducted, and comparisons were based on ethnicity (Māori and non-Māori), prime group (Loyalty and Rejection Fear) and scores on the loyalty and rejection fear Likert scales. The study found that Māori and non-Māori did not differ significantly with regards to feelings of loyalty toward or fear of being rejected by their peers. Participants were mostly conflicted in their decision making when there was more than one group of loyalties.

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## Foreword

*“Youth development happens through quality relationships”*

This is the basic assumption of the present thesis, which was conceived during a long period of working with young people considered “at risk” in today’s society. I have had extensive experience of supporting adolescents who have been in trouble with the police, have difficulties making helpful choices in situations that involve risk or peer pressures, and those that have been raised in environments that have not been conducive to learning how to form safe and stable relationships.

Adolescents in families who have experienced significant economic losses, or who live in chronic poverty, are at heightened risk of psychological difficulties and “problem” behavior. Research on economic strain and its impact on the adolescent indicates that the main effects of financial stress are transmitted to the adolescent through the negative impact they have on parents’ mental health and marital relations (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). Generally speaking, parents under financial strain are harsher, more inconsistent, and less involved as parents, which in turn, lead to problems for their children. Poor children are more likely to be exposed to violence, feel alienated from school, and have higher overall stress levels, all of which can contribute to mental health problems.

The impact of these factors has hindered adolescent decision making and can often increase the young person’s vulnerability to emotional difficulties, crime or mental illness. The evidence shows that adolescents’ frontal lobes of their brains may not be

fully developed until their early twenties, and this is the area that is in charge of logic and common sense! So couple these factors with general adolescent stressors and we have a recipe for a “fork in the road.” Which path the adolescent goes down is heavily based on their decision making ability, their attitude towards themselves and/or life, experiences gained, opportunities available, and the support (parental, peer and community) around them. Parents can adopt family management and communication principles such as using promotive strategies (strengthening an adolescent’s confidence), or restrictive strategies (minimising an adolescent’s exposure to danger), which may alleviate some of the challenges.

A significant new trend in psychology is known as “positive psychology”. Initiated by Martin Seligman, positive psychology emphasises people’s inherent strengths and resilience and focuses on the abilities of clients rather than their dysfunction. Young people are heavily influenced by their peer group. If we want to understand adolescent behaviour we need to know more about the factors that might make it easier for teenagers to resist negative peer influence without sacrificing their group identity and their perception of loyalty.

### **Youth Development**

The current research study adopted a framework consistent with the Government’s Action on Child and Youth Development work programme, incorporating key principles from the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). In particular the six key principles of the YDSA are embedded as themes

into the chapters, urging the reader keep these principles in mind as they approach the current research and further research relating to youth.

In brief, the Strategy's vision is to create "a country where young people are vibrant and optimistic through being supported and encouraged to take up challenges" (p. 7). The process by which this is achieved is through a commitment and belief in the following key principles:

1. Youth development is shaped by the "big picture";
2. Youth development is about young people being connected;
3. Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach;
4. Youth development happens through quality relationships;
5. Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate; and
6. Youth development needs good information.

In relation to this present study, I share the Strategy's belief that young people can grow up knowing they can contribute positively to their community or friendship group, have quality connections, have a choice in the way their lives play out, and feel positive about their identity and skills. This also in turn, helps the Strategy's vision to be played out, thereby contributing to this process.

# Introduction

## The importance and characteristics of adolescent friendships

Gay (1992) described adolescent peer groups as “the halfway house between the family and the adult world...one of the most powerful and potent forces effecting change in the adolescent” (p. 207). This statement provides a good description of not only the importance of the transition from young person to adult, but also depicts the potential for major influence. For decades, early theorists debated contrasting views as to the importance of friendships. Early researchers have debated the main influencing factors in adolescent peer groups. Piaget (1965) proposed that adolescent friendships are crucial for the development of mature and independent morality. In contrast, Bronfenbrenner (1970) argued that pressure from friends lead to antisocial behaviour by adolescents.

It was these differing opinions that gave rise to a proliferation of research on friendships. Consequently, three major strands of research emerged: one embedded in Piagetian ideas which focused on the quality of friendships; another rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s views which emphasised the attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics of peers; and the final one accentuating the differences in social interactions between children who have friends and those who do not (Berndt, 2004).

From the literature in this area, it is evident that friendship groups provide the necessary basis and opportunity for young people to explore and develop their own interpretations of events, shape views on social justice, exercise mutual respect and

reciprocity, and create greater self-knowledge. Alongside this, not only do friendship groups allow for the development of strong bonds, increasing social support, and sharing in pleasurable activities with kindred spirits, it is also well-known that friends are the most frequent source of positive emotions (Schrerer, Walbott, & Summerfield, 1986). It is not surprising therefore, that being with friends has consistently been reported as the most important aspect of school life for most students (Corsaro & Eder, 1990), and the most influential element in their daily lives (Vadies, 1984). In fact, the support young people receive from their close friendships soon surpasses that of their parents during the adolescent years, where parents are viewed by their adolescents as less accepting and authoritarian, when compared with friends (Corsaro & Eder, 1990).

As young people progress through adolescence, they review and revise their beliefs, values and expectations about friendships and compare these with experiences of their own friendships (Azmitia, Ittel, & Radmacher, 2005). The growing importance of reciprocity, emotional closeness and trust in friendships is one of the major developmental adjustments that take place in adolescence (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Positive friendship qualities encompass companionship, intimacy, assistance, loyalty, caring, warmth, closeness, and trust (Burk & Laursen, 2005). These features of friendships are entrenched in the peer relationship literature (see Rose & Asher, 2000; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006) where it is stressed that having stable friendships are associated with positive well-being (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Hartup & Stevens, 1996) and positive school and behavioural adjustment (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Ladd, 1990). On the other hand, children who lack or are rejected by peers are

vulnerable to the effects of victimisation and increases in internalising and externalising problems in school (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999), loneliness (Brendgen, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 2000), social timidity and sensitivity (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Bowker, Rubin, Burgess, Booth-LaForce, & Rose-Krasnor, 2006) and having poorer social skills (Clark & Drewery, 1985). Social rejection is when a person is deliberately excluded from a relationship or an interaction. It can either be active (e.g., bullying or teasing) or passive (ignoring). While rejection on some levels may be inevitable, this can become a problem when people are highly sensitive to rejection, if the relationship is important to the person, or if the experience of rejection is prolonged. Individual and group rejection can have serious negative effects and can potentially lead to social isolation, thereby contributing to low self esteem, aggression, depression and problematic behaviours (sometimes in an effort to gain approval). Abraham Maslow (1954) also emphasised the basic human desire for belonging and love in stating that the reciprocity of affection is fundamental for positive psychological health.

It is clear that not all adolescents develop close and mutually supporting friendships (Zimmerman, 2004), and some are indeed characterised by disengagement (Berndt & Hanna, 1995), or negative friendship qualities such as rivalry, betrayal, hostility, antagonism, and competition. Being subject to behaviours such as scapegoating, singling out, or teasing, understandably has social and emotional consequences for the adolescent experiencing them. Therefore, not surprisingly, one of the most common fears for adolescents is rejection (Turk, Graham, & Verhulst, 2007).

## Peer influence among adolescents

A central and well-recognised feature of adolescence is that young people begin spending more time with their friends as opposed to their parents (Pardini, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2005). As friendships are often the top priority for an adolescent, being accepted by a group is extremely important. This can lead adolescents to behave in ways that will improve their likelihood of acceptance into or decrease chances of rejection from a group. This is commonly the time when parents and adolescents become aware of peer pressure. Consistent with Brown, Clasen, and Eicher's (1986) definition, peer pressure is a subjective feeling of being urged or dared by others to do something, and/or actually doing something because they have urged you to. In stating that, many of the literature's definitions of peer pressure perpetuate the view of it being a one-dimensional influence on behaviour. The reality however, is that peers influence the attitudes and behaviours of others in a variety of ways. To build on this notion, this research uses the term peer influence to describe its multi-dimensional nature. The influence of peers is believed to be a powerful force during the developmental stage of adolescence (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2008). Research in this area has produced somewhat inconsistent results as to the relative influence of parents or peers on adolescents. Some studies support that parents have more influence than peers on academic achievement (Biddle, Bank, & Marlin, 1980), occupational aspirations (Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001), smoking initiation (Thomas & Larsen, 1993) and choices of friends (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000), *especially* for those adolescents without close friends (Gauze,

Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996). Others researchers, however, have stated that peers influence each other more than parents in matters such as smoking behaviour (although parents' smoking behaviour also has a direct influence; Geckova, Stewart, van Dijk, Orosova, Groothoff, & Post, 2005), alcohol consumption (Urberg, Degirmencioglu, & Pilgrim, 1997), and sexual behaviour (Benda & DiBlasio, 1994).

More recent research by Steinberg and Monahan (2007) highlighted that there was little evidence for growth in the capacity to resist peer influences between the ages of 10 and 14, and again between 18 to 30 years. They found that among both genders and across different ethnic and socio-economic groups, middle adolescence was an especially significant time in which adolescents' capacity to resist peer influence and stand up for their own beliefs was heightened.

Taking this into account, the literature generally suggests that adolescents are influenced by their parents on some issues and by peers on others, and amongst other variables, this is dependent on their age and gender. Psychologist Judith Smetana believes that contrary to stereotype, adolescents do not generally rebel for the sake of rebelling. Furthermore, adolescents are usually willing to accept their parents' rules when they agree that the issue is a moral one, and less inclined to accept the rules when they view the issue as personal (Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991). Parents and adolescents generally agreed that parents have the right to set limits on the adolescent's behaviour if this involves safety (e.g., using illegal substances) or future life direction (e.g., dropping out of school), however not so much for issues such as the bed-time on weekends, or how to spend their pocket money. Relationships with peers

continues to be a challenge however, with parents viewing this under the ‘safety’ category and adolescents believing it fits more under ‘personal’.

Lashbrook (2000) concluded that peers do not replace parents, but instead expand adolescents’ social arena. I would like to draw the readers’ attention to the question - can the fact that an adolescent is able to be influenced by their peers, be a *good* thing?

### **“I’ve got your back” - Loyalty in adolescent friendships**

Loyalty is an important factor for groups and relationships. The decision for someone to stay and conform to their group’s ideals and activities *despite* personal costs to their own wellbeing highlights the powerful nature of this emotive force. To feel loyalty to your group is typically viewed as a positive value to have. There have also been times when a strong sense of loyalty has manifested in unhelpful or risky behaviour and poor choices. This is particularly true among adolescent males, who are often stereotyped as being impulsive, risk-takers and sometimes easily led.

While researchers make subtle mention of adolescents’ loyalty to their friends, this personal value mostly remains relatively untapped. Rather, emphasis is placed on a fear of rejection by peers as being a main influential social factor in conformity. The current study proposes that loyalty between friends is under-emphasised, understudied and under-valued in adolescent research. Asch (1959) first highlighted this neglect half a century ago when he stated, “Loyalty to the group. A worker may be convinced that a call to a strike is unwise, but will lay down his tools because he believes that the welfare

of his union will be best served by his acquiescence. This quite human and powerful attitude seems not to have found credence in our psychology” (p. 382). Despite this plea, little attention has been paid to the theme of loyalty in the formal psychological literature.

As most would agree that group success is heavily dependent on the loyalty of its members, I have a particular interest in the construct of loyalty and how it manifests in male adolescent friendships. Kleinig (2000) provided a working definition which characterised loyalty as a “practical disposition to persist in an intrinsically valued associational attachment where that involves a potentially costly commitment to secure or at least not jeopardize the interests or well-being of the object of loyalty”. In other words, the loyal person remains committed to his or her group *even* when that choice is likely to be detrimental to their health or wellbeing to do so. Zdaniuk and Levine (2001) stated that this also includes leaving one’s group, even though one could have greater personal gains by staying, if that by leaving benefits other group members. Kleinig (2008) strongly argued that while some theorists held the view that loyalty is merely a *feeling* of bonding, or an “instinct to sociability” (Ewin, 1990, p.4, cited in Kleinig, 2008), he believed this view detracted from it, *rational motivation* – or the individual’s active anticipation of the outcomes of different choices and their evaluation of the best or most satisfying option for them, however much it may appear irrational or rational.

Zdaniuk and Levine (2001) highlighted that although the choice to stay or leave one’s group may benefit other members, while harming the individual (showing loyalty), the general norm that “one must not abandon their group” may motivate the individual

to stay (also showing loyalty). Both are loyal acts, based on the value of the individual's contribution to the group and the individual's available outside options. If the individual's contribution is valuable and they have a high comparative level of alternative options, then the choice to stay is a representation of personal sacrifice. If their contribution is lacking, and they have low comparative alternative options, then the choice to leave demonstrates a personal sacrifice. However, according to Zdaniuk and Levine (2001), as the choice to leave (or not conform to) one's group can have detrimental consequences for the members, such as increased workload, weakening reputation, looking for new members, the individual who has internalised the group norm – that one must not abandon their group – may be reluctant to leave even if leaving would benefit other members. This non-abandonment norm is further enforced by labelling leavers as “traitors” and treating them harshly (Levine & Thompson, 1996, cited in Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001).

Identifying with a group, and placing its interests above the individual's own occurs for a variety of reasons. For example, it increases the individual's perceived similarity to and liking for other members (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Brewer and Brown found that people assigned higher rewards to members within a group than to those outside the group, even when allocated privately and when there was no personal benefit for the allocators. This in turn increased helping behaviours as it fosters the norm of social responsibility (Dovidio, 1984). Also, group identification can trigger collectivist motivation – the desire to enhance the welfare of the group as a whole (Batson, Batson, Todd, Brummett, Shaw, & Aldeguer, 1995).

## **Theoretical explanations for friendship quality, selection and group compliance**

### ***Social learning theory***

Bandura posited that people learn through observing other's behaviours, attitudes and consequences of behaviours. Behaviour is strengthened through positive reinforcement and avoidance of negative reinforcement, or weakened by aversive stimuli (such as positive punishment) and loss of reward (negative punishment). Whether conforming behaviour is acquired or persists depends on past or present rewards or punishments for the behaviour, and past or present rewards for alternative behaviours (differential reinforcement). Also, during interaction within significant groups, people learn evaluative definitions (norms, attitudes and orientations) of the behaviour as good or bad. The more individuals define a behaviour as good, or at least justified, the more likely they are to engage in it. While the reinforcers can be nonsocial (e.g., physiological effects of drugs), social learning theory posits that the principal behavioural effects comes from interaction in or under the influence of those groups which control the individual's major sources of reinforcement and punishment and expose them to behavioural models and normative definitions.

### ***Attachment theory***

Attachment theory asserts that a child develops internal working models of themselves and others based on their experiences of effective or inefficient emotion

regulation by the caregivers (Bowlby, 1973). These working models provide children with expectations of how relationships function and guide their interactions with others. For example, Zimmerman (2004) found that adolescents with secure attachment representations had emotionally close friendships, were in a larger peer group, had good emotional regulation skills, low hostility and scored low on measures of social anxiety. Those with dismissing attachment styles however, did not value close relationships, perceived themselves as 'emotionally independent' and likely did not expect closeness, comfort or emotional support from their relationships. Early interactions with caregivers are in that sense, crucial in the development of children's interaction style towards others and experiences of rejecting caregivers can lead to acting in a rejecting way towards friends (Weimer, Kerns, & Oldenburg, 2004). Studies of parent-adolescent interaction show that the healthiest families are those that allow the adolescent to develop a sense of autonomy while staying emotionally attached to the family – when the relationship between the parent and their adolescent is characterised by enabling and allowing for the experience of interaction (e.g., problem solving, empathy) rather than by limiting interactions (e.g., distracting, judgmental) (Steinberg, 1987; Granic, Dishion, & Hollenstein, 2003). Prior studies have shown that attachment security and friendship quality are related during early and middle childhood (Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001).

## **Cultural differences in the nature of adolescent friendships**

While there is a wealth of studies investigating negative peer influences and an increase in studies exploring positive peer influence, there remains little research addressing positive peer influence in a context of adolescent ethnicity. Within the limited research literature examining peer influence among ethnically diverse adolescents, there are many discrepancies. In some cases, few or no significant differences in peer influence on adolescent risk behaviours was noted as a function of ethnicity (Urberg, Degirmencioglu, & Pilgrim, 1997), whereas others have showed some differences relating to the nature of friendships.

When compared with European Americans, African American adolescents appeared to orient themselves more toward family than friends, had fewer similarities to their friends (Tolson & Urberg, 1993), reported lower levels of perceived peer pressure and were less likely to seek peer approval (Giordano, Cernkovich, & De Marris, 1993). Pearl, Bryan, and Herzog (1990, cited in Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2008) found that adolescents from predominantly Hispanic schools were more likely than Anglo adolescents to believe that negative consequences would result from refusing a peer request to participate in deviant behaviour. Padilla-Walker and Bean (2008) also found that Hispanic adolescents perceived more negative and few positive indirect peer associations when compared with African American adolescents and European Americans (who showed no differences between them). In studies of Mexican-American adolescents, resistance to peer pressure was influenced by length of residence – that is, Mexican-American adolescents who had resided in the United States

longer were less resistance to peer pressure, most likely due to less emphasis on family values and expectations as a function of acculturation (Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2006).

Cultural or ethnic identity is an important aspect of one's identity in terms of psychological functioning of ethnic groups (Umana-Taylor, 2004), widely assumed that it plays a role in wellbeing, can impart a sense of belonging, facilitate ties with networks and support from like-minded individuals and groups (Ministry of Social Development, 2008), and is associated with less psychopathology (Bennett, 2003). Individuals exhibiting collectivist characteristics are often associated with wider social integration and social support (Tassell, 2004). There has been no research to date on negative or positive peer influence among adolescents in the context of Māori.

Key components in Māori group dynamics relate to whanaungatanga, kōtahitanga, manaakitanga and whakamā. These concepts may play a role in the driving force behind Māori adolescents' decision to conform or comply with group requests.

### ***Whanaungatanga***

Māori culture emphasises familial and community connections to the past and to the present. The extended family is the basic unit of Māori social organisation and many Māori include close friends as part of this family unit. Familial relationships and responsibilities are central to Māori identity. Whanaungatanga is the principle of relationship building. For many Māori this is an almost automatic occurrence. In an adolescent friendship context, Māori young people may view their group members as their whānaunga (family members). This follows that learning and behaviour within the

group is a collective activity and members are comforted knowing and trusting those that are within their group.

### ***Kōtahitanga***

Kōtahitanga is closely related to whanaungatanga. Traditionally, unity and collaboration were an important part of Māoridom as survival and endurance ensured the ongoing development of tribal units. The term kōtahitanga refers specifically to principles of collective cohesion and collaboration. In relation to this study's context, kōtahitanga may be exhibited through the expression of feelings of connectedness and loyalty to peer group as well as collective responsibility and obligations.

### ***Manaakitanga***

The obligations and responsibilities to demonstrate care for your family and for others is expressed in the term manaakitanga. As with many Māori concepts, a precise definition is difficult, however Ngati Raukawa Rangatira, Professor Whatarangi Winiata explained manaakitanga as “a behaviour that acknowledges the mana [personal power or prestige] of others as having equal or greater importance than one's own, through the expression of āroha, hospitality, generosity and mutual respect” (Berry, 2005). Displaying manaakitanga elevated the status of all, building unity through the humility and the act of giving. A host's willingness to receive, provide and welcome others can enhance or impair the reputation and status of his or her community. Being able to nurture and protect group members is also an important element of manaakitanga

(Mead, 2003). Communities (or friendship groups) must be places in which the people feel accepted and safe. Adolescents may show manaakitanga by actions or statements relating to keeping their friends safe, general care or sharing resources.

### ***Whakamā***

Whakamā has been described as a “state of shyness or shame” (Stewart, 1997, p.78) and has been associated with the loss of mana (prestige), lowered self-esteem, withdrawal from social interaction and depression (Metge, 1995). It may result from wrongdoing, perceptions of lower status, uncertainty and confusion in unfamiliar context, and recognition of fault. The wrongdoing of an individual can also adversely affect other family members or peers who also may experience stigma attached to group membership (Metge, 1995). In the current study, we may notice the concept of whakamā being played out when adolescents identify regret or reasons for actions based on being isolated by their peers or family.

### **The present study**

Research has shown that strong social bonds to prosocial peers are significant protective factors for an array of social and psychological difficulties, including low childhood stress, resistance to drug use and desistance from violent reoffending (Lodewijks, de Reuter, & Doreleijers, 2010). As peer influence and conformity have shown to have negative consequences on adolescent health and behaviour, there appears a need to further understand the driving force behind adolescents’ choice to

conform or comply with their group despite the potential cost. For this reason factors such as emotional primes, reasons for conformity and ethnicity were investigated in order to better understand an adolescent's choice to conform to their peers when faced with a decision. Affective priming was employed in this study as it is a well-established and commonly used technique in experimental psychology (Evans, 2010). Priming is a memory effect which occurs without conscious awareness, whereby one stimulus (the prime) has a short-term, automatic influence on eliciting specific feelings towards the next stimulus. The technique has been used numerous times in research, showing the influence of primes on participants' response; for example, Baldwin (1994, cited in Evans, 2010) found when participants were exposed to positive, familiar names prior to self-evaluation, relevant aspects of the self-evaluation were more positive.

Cultural identity can also be an important contributor to people's actions of loyalty and feelings of well-being, in that identifying with a particular culture can enhance feelings of belonging and security, provide access to social networks, support and shared values and aspirations. Therefore, cultural identity and explicit reference to loyalty to family/whānau or friends in a child's upbringing may also have an influence on an adolescent's level of conformity to a group. This cultural component to loyalty is relatively unstudied in the literature and certainly with regard to Māori. Therefore, of particular interest in the current study, is the difference in this interplay between Māori and non-Māori male adolescents.

As Māori literature suggests, there is a difference in the way Māori and Pākehā/European people approach responsibilities within relationships and this

consequently has implications for the way clinicians, or other professionals tailor their approach to clinical and social interventions.

### ***Aims and purpose of study***

1. To experimentally analyse the influence of *loyalty* compared with *fear of rejection* as explaining the motivational force for conformity and group compliance among male adolescent friendships. I am particularly interested in whether being loyal to, or feeling fearful of being rejected by their friends is a factor in their conforming behaviour.

2. To investigate whether there are cultural differences in the value placed on these constructs between Māori and non-Māori male adolescents. As research depicts that some differences exist within ethnic groups, I am interested in finding out whether this is also true in New Zealand, when comparing Māori and non-Māori male adolescents.

3. To explore the relationship between ethnicity (Māori and non-Māori adolescents), emotional influence (primed feelings of loyalty or fear of rejection) and type of situation on adolescent males' conforming behaviour.

4. To better understand the thoughts involved when male adolescents engage in conforming behaviour.

## Method

### Participants

The criteria for participation in the current study were males between the ages of 15 and 18 years who were enrolled in school. The schools invited to participate were chosen due to having similar decile ratings (<3; a statistical term indicating the socio-economic level of the community surrounding it, on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high)) as well as sufficient numbers of mixed Māori and non-Māori students when compared to other schools in the area – both factors naturally important for comparative purposes. From 100 questionnaires distributed, 85 were returned, generating a response rate of 85%. One questionnaire was excluded due to a considerable amount of missing data, leaving a sample of 84 participants. Participants included 51 Māori and 32 non-Māori (61% and 38% respectively,  $n = 83$ ; one participant had missing data for ethnicity) aged between 15 to 18 years ( $M = 15.52$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $n = 81$ ; three participants had missing data for age) in Years 10 to 13 ( $M = 10.85$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $n = 80$ ; four participants had missing data for school year). There were 35 (42%) participants in the Loyalty condition and 49 (58%) participants in the Rejection Fear condition.

### Materials and Measures

The main measure used was a questionnaire consisting of six hypothetical social scenarios where a choice was required to be made. There were two groups of questionnaires which differed only by way of an emotive prime (see Appendices C and

D). That is, half of the questionnaires administered had loyalty primes, and the other, rejection primes (see example below). Questionnaires were randomly assigned to each participant, and participants were not aware of which priming condition they were in.

The front page of the questionnaire required demographic information of age, ethnicity and year level of the participant. Each scenario within the questionnaire had eight questions following the presentation of the hypothetical social situation. The participants were instructed that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged to be as honest as possible and not confer responses with their peers when they answered each question.

***Question One: Scenario and thoughts associated with situation.***

Question one was formatted as an open-ended question requiring participants to provide written responses about the thoughts associated with the hypothetical scenario presented. An example of the scenario is presented below (taken from Group One, Scenario 1; see Appendix for the other scenarios). The brackets in the below example highlight the response from the “mate” in the scenario and differed according to the priming condition group the participant was in.

*You're in town with a group of your mates. There's a new movie on, and you've all been hanging out to see it. You have enough money. But you know you have to be back before the movie's finished and you can't get hold of anyone to tell them. Your mates have been talking about the movie for ages and they're all going. You don't know what to do, so you ask your mate. He says, [Loyalty condition: C'mon bro, it's one for the boys! We been hanging out to see it together – and you know this is our only chance. It'll be sweet as; Rejection Fear condition: “C'mon bro,*

*don't be a loser, it'll be sweet as, just hurry up and let's go"]. Write down what goes through your mind:*

Responses on question one were analysed by scanning through all the questionnaires and exploring common themes. Major themes were assigned a numerical code and ordered according to categories based on comments relating to the participants':

1. Sense of responsibility to friends. For example, Respondent #1: "Don't wanna go, but if they get in [expletive deleted] I won't be there to help them outta it";
2. Sense of responsibility to others. An example is a response from participant #45: "Leave a message on the phone [parents] or try to go by your house if you don't have any thing on";
3. Fear of punishment by their friends. For example, Respondent #10: "They [friends] might think you're a loser for ditching them";
4. Fear of punishment by people other than their friends. For example, Respondent #15: "Mum's gonna tell me off";
5. Self-directed or responses based on internal morals. For example, Participant #45: "Ask them where they are going, if they don't know stay behind, if they do and it's an OK idea leave a note and set a time to be back";
6. Mere socialising. For example, Respondent #83, "Nha I don't really wana go to town, but I don't wana be bored by myself"; and

7. Being unsure or unable to make a decision. For example, Respondent #15:

“Nah, I don’t know?”;

There were a limited number of responses that highlighted loyalty, cohesiveness or belonging, explicitly. For example, Respondent #7: “I want to be a true friend and take a risk for him/her”. As this was only mentioned explicitly two times, the researcher collapsed these comments to be included in Category 6 under “socialising”. This left seven coding categories, and one for any missing data.

To check reliability of coding participants’ answers, I employed another rater to code 20% of the sample’s responses. Of 50 questions, there were 40 codes in agreement, obtaining 80% agreement between raters. For those ratings for which there was disagreement, the reasons for the two raters’ coding were discussed. In 95% of these cases it was resolved that the reliability coder had not fully applied the coding category and after discussion agreed with the coding provided by the primary researcher; in 5% it was acknowledged that the primary coder had made an error. As this represented a possible error rate of only 1%, the decision was made to use the primary rater’s coding for all analyses.

### ***Question Two: Conformity and compliance among adolescents***

Question Two explored the likelihood of participants’ compliance to their peer’s requests and subsequently, their actual behaviour. Participants

were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), how likely it is that they would either a) go with their friends, or b) leave by themselves.

***Questions Three and Four: Thoughts and reasons for choice made***

To gain further information regarding the decisions the participants made, questions three and four asked them to explain the reason and their perceived consequence (respectively) for their highest rated response in question two. The researcher paid particular attention to the themes in the responses which provided rich and more meaningful data.

***Questions Five to Eight: Loyalty and rejection fear***

Questions Five to Eight aimed to measure participants' individual cognitions associated with loyalty toward their peers and fears of being rejected by them.

The present study focused on four different thoughts – two relating to loyalty, e.g., “I’d do anything for my mates” and “My mates would do anything for me”, and two relating to rejection fears, e.g., “If I didn’t, they’d think I’m a loser”, and “If I didn’t, they might get annoyed with me”. Participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always) the extent to which these particular thoughts informed the decision they made in question two.

### ***Resistance to peer influence***

The Resistance to Peer Influence Scale (RPI; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007) was initially included in the questionnaire. The RPI consists of 10 pairs of acceptable but opposite choices about neutral situations, such as, “Some people go along with their friends just to keep their friends happy” but “Other people refuse to go along with what their friends want to do, even though they know it will make their friends unhappy”. Participants are asked to read through each statement and circle the statement that best fits with the group of people who are most like them and to what degree (“not at all like me” to “very much like me”). High scores on the 1 to 4 scale indicate high resistance to peer influence, whereas a low score indicates high susceptibility to peer influence. This measure has been diversely used, including 1) an ethnic minority sample of 1,350 young offenders aged 14 to 18 years in the U.S ( $\alpha=.73$ ), and 2) a multi-ethnic working class community sample of 935 people aged 10 to 30 years in the U.S ( $\alpha=.74$ ; Steinberg, 2006). Unfortunately however, due to a significant amount of missing data, the results of this measure were not valid. Upon reflection, the placement of this measure in the current questionnaire was problematic as it was positioned on the final page and back of the document. Of the very few participants who did attempt to complete the RPI, had done so incorrectly, also resulting in invalid data.

### **Research design**

This study adopted a quantitative, 2 (type of prime) by 2 (Māori /non-Māori ) factorial design using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical procedure to assess the

effects of the emotional constructs of loyalty and rejection fear on group compliance and peer conformity among male adolescents.

A factorial design was appropriate for this research as it allowed for multi-level analyses, and highlighted the relationships between variables while reducing the chance of errors and confounding variables.

## **Procedure**

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). Initial contact for access to participants was made by phone contact or emailing the principal, deputy principal or Head of Departments at secondary schools within the Manawatu and Horowhenua districts. From the six emails sent out, three schools responded positively. Two schools did not respond and one school initially agreed to consider but did not respond to further contact. The researcher was subsequently invited by participating secondary schools to spend approximately one hour with students at their school collectively and with the researcher present to provide instruction and guidance throughout the data collection process.

Students were informed that this study was looking at the relationship that adolescent males had with their friends (see Appendix B). They were informed that in particular, the researcher wanted to find out whether there were any differences between Māori and non-Māori adolescents in the way they made decisions when with their friends. Students were presented with the information sheet and given time to ask

the researcher questions regarding the study and decide whether they would like to participate. It was communicated that for students under 15 years of age, they consult with and allow their parents to read the information sheet prior to agreeing to participate. These students were given the opportunity to participate at a later date when the researcher returned to the school.

## **Setting**

The study took place in two secondary schools in the Manawatu-Horowhenua region – one school was a co-educational non-integrated secondary school (decile 2: school roll: 637) and the other was a single-sex integrated secondary school (decile 3; school roll: 191). Data were obtained collectively, during class time, with all students present in a classroom, hall or meeting room. Each student had access to a desk and space to complete the questionnaire. During each data collection phase, the researcher and at least one other staff member were present the entire time, in order to clarify questions regarding the questionnaire items and to monitor discussion.

## **Instructional strategies**

Students were encouraged to complete all questions in the survey, even if some of the scenarios had not applied to them personally. If this was the case, they were asked to imagine themselves in that position and answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Participants were instructed to sit comfortably and think about times in their life when they had been with their friends and were asked to do something that involved making a decision. The researcher clarified that this could be anything from being asked to watch a movie they would not necessarily choose themselves, to attending a party with their friends, when they might have had other plans. Students were asked to pay attention to what thoughts went through their minds, how they felt, and what they might have done in that situation. The purpose of this brief exercise was to allow students the opportunity to attend and concentrate on the task at hand, to access past memories of situations of decision making when with their friends, and to help reduce any test-taking anxiety that may have been present.

# Results

## Analysis overview

The data analysis was conducted in three stages and included: a) screening and preparing the data for analysis; 2) use of descriptive statistics; and 3) use of inferential statistics. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Inc., 2010). Where participants had not completed parts of the questionnaire, data were treated as missing. Means, standard deviations and frequencies were computed for all variables of interest in the present study (decimals were rounded to the nearest two points; percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number). Independent-samples *t*-tests were performed on measures to compare the mean scores for Māori and non-Māori, as well as Loyalty and Rejection Fear conditions. Effect size statistics were represented by partial eta squared and calculated by SPSS (2010). Analyses of variance were employed in all dependent variables of interest.

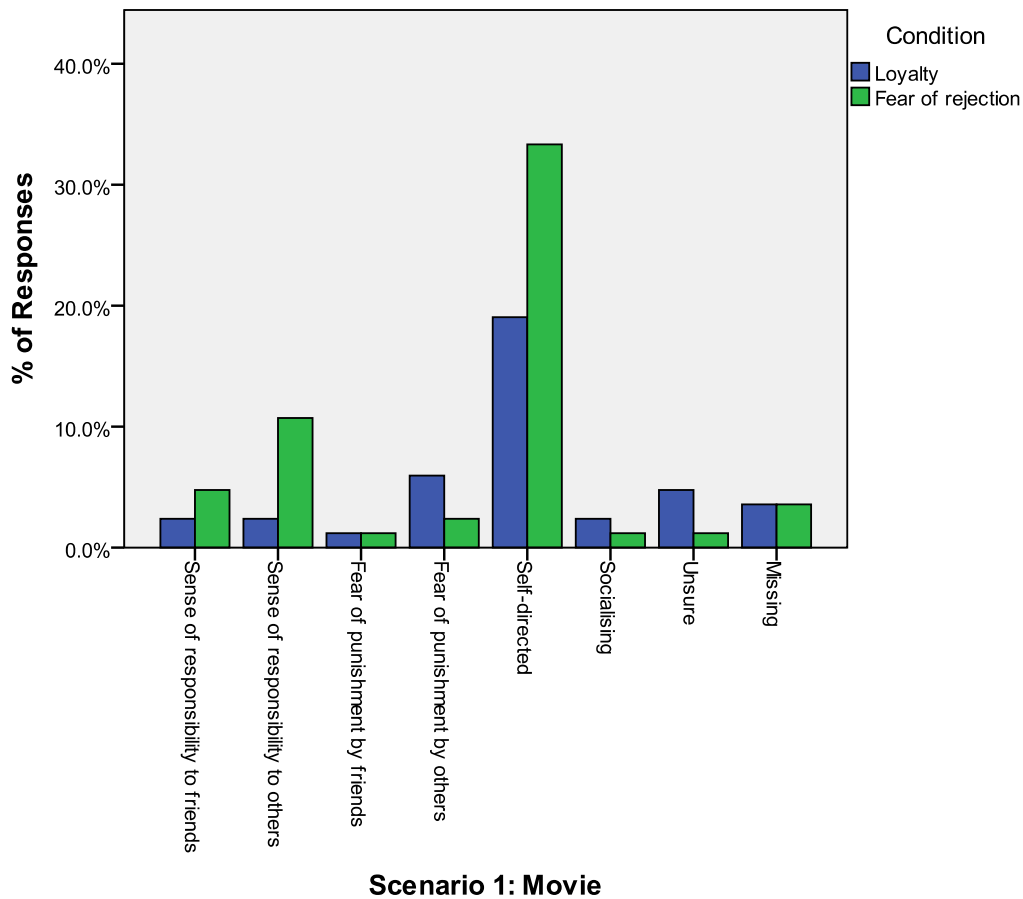
## Data analysis

### *Scenarios and thoughts about situations*

In describing the thoughts that go through their minds after reading each scenario, the majority of the sample alluded to being self-directed or motivated by their own beliefs when making a choice. The following comment from participants illustrates this point:

*“[I would] Go home. My mates already know if I’m gonna go home, I’m gonna go home”.*

The graphs below show the number of responses for each category per scenario. The data are grouped according to prime condition.



*Figure 1.1. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 1 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).*

Figure 1.1 graphically depicts the percentage of total responses in each category for Scenario 1 in each group. In both groups, the self-directed category was endorsed the most, achieving 19.05% and 33.33% of total responses for the Loyalty and Rejection

Fear groups (respectively). These findings suggest that adolescents had thoughts relating mostly to their own morals, needs and desires when faced with a choice.

In the Loyalty group, being punished by others was the next most frequent response, which accounted for 5.95% of the total responses. For the Rejection Fear group, a sense of responsibility to others was highlighted by 10.71% of the total responses. For both groups, being punished by their friends were least endorsed at 1.19% each.

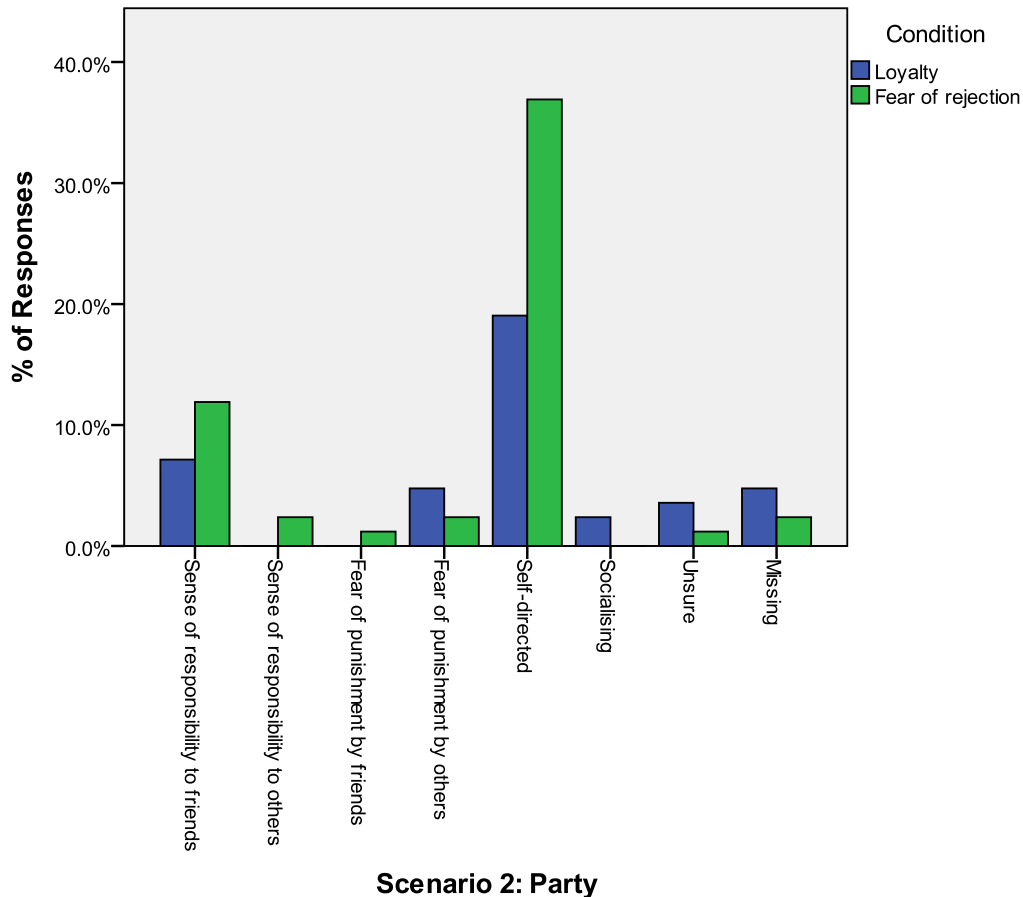


Figure 1.2. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 2 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).

Figure 1.2 graphically depicts the percentage of total responses in each category for Scenario 2 in each group. In both groups, the self-directed category was endorsed the most, achieving 19.05% and 36.90% of total responses for the Loyalty and Rejection Fear groups (respectively). In the Loyalty and Rejection Fear groups, responsibility to friends was the next most frequent response, which accounted for 7.14% and 11.90% (respectively) of the total responses.

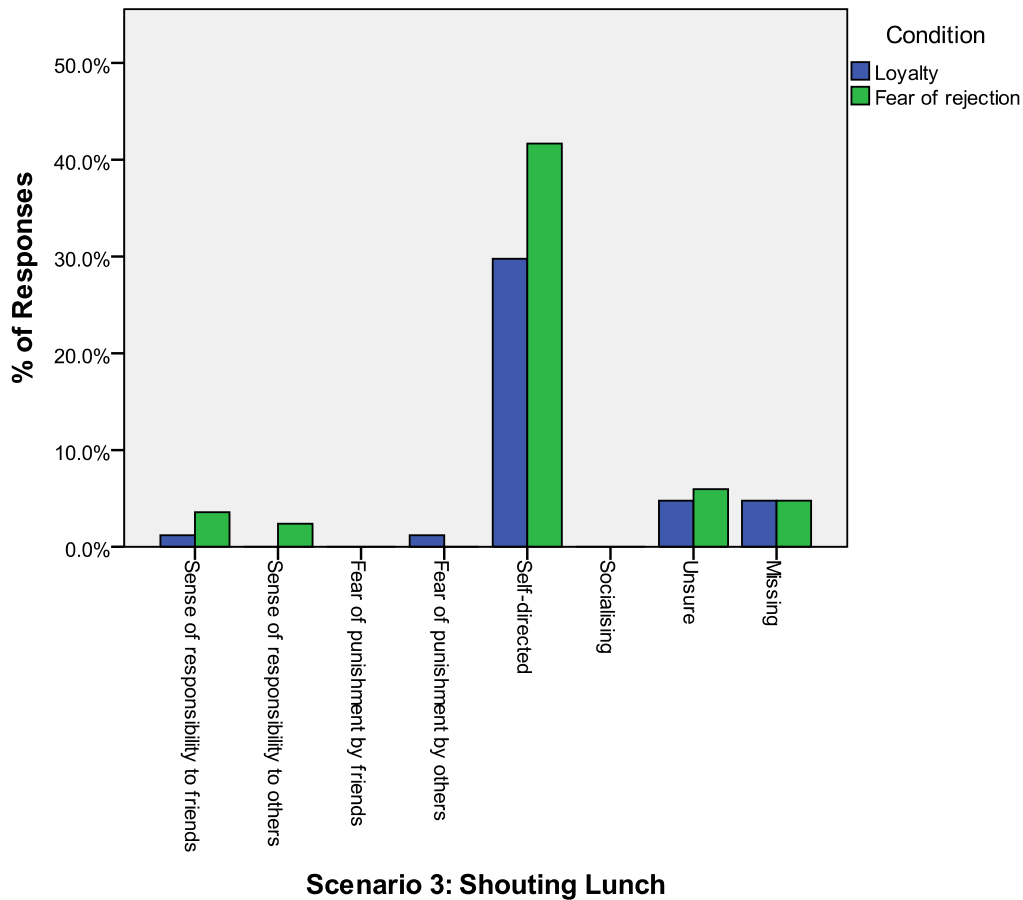


Figure 1.3. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 3 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).

Figure 1.3 shows that in both groups, the self-directed category was again significantly endorsed, achieving 29.76% and 41.67% of total responses for Loyalty and Rejection Fear groups. The fear of punishment by friends and socialising categories were not endorsed at all by either group.

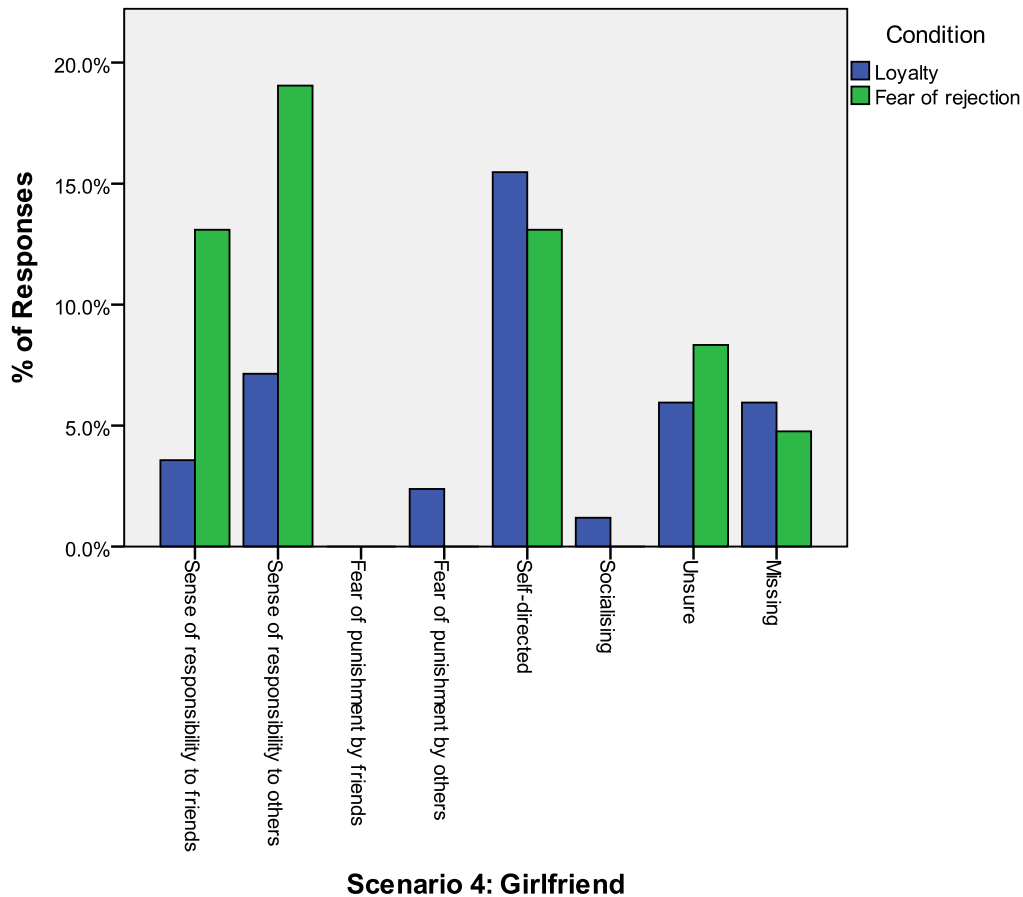
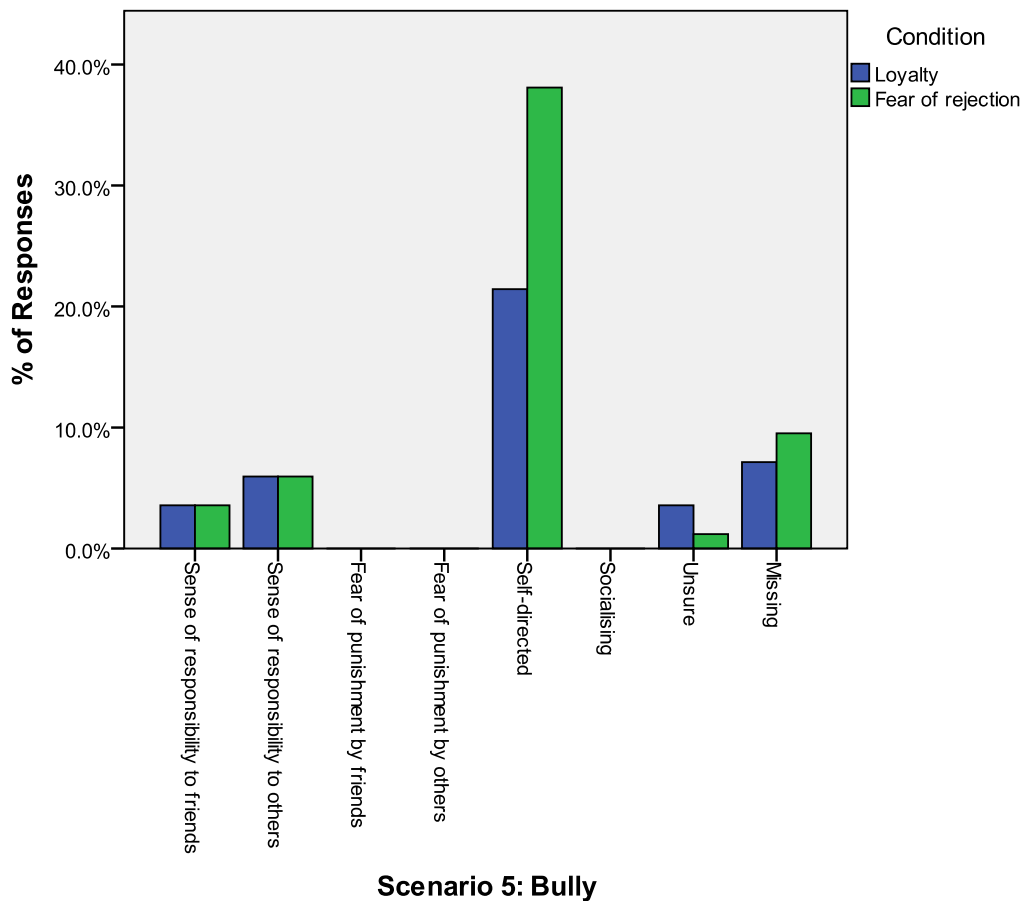


Figure 1.4. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 4 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).

The responses in Scenario 4 showed that most of the participants in the Loyalty group had self-directed (15.48%) reasons for their choice, and secondly a responsibility to others (7.14%). In the Rejection Fear group however most participants were

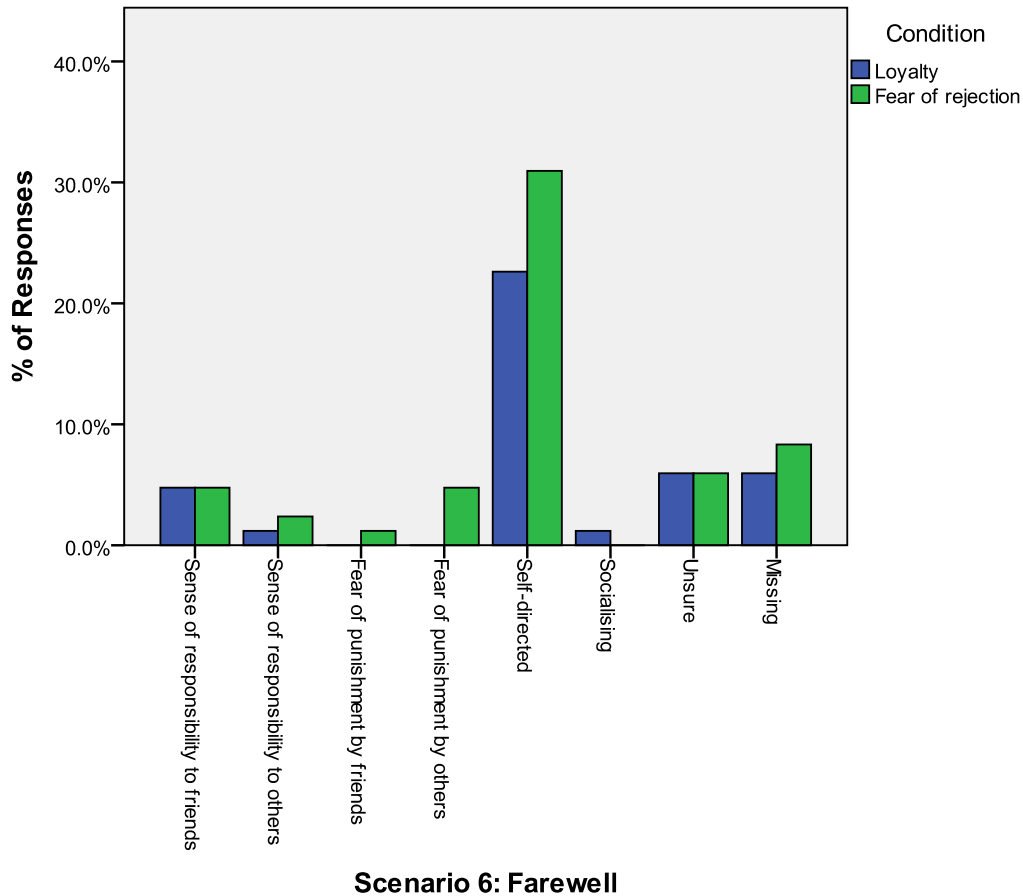
motivated by a sense of responsibility to others (19.05%) and friends (13.10%). Neither group appeared to be at all concerned about being punished by their friends and did not score in this category.



*Figure 1.5. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 5 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).*

The Bully scenario (Figure 1.5), yielded a similar pattern between the Loyalty and Rejection Fear groups, where the majority of participants had responses that indicated self-directed choices (21.43% and 38.10% respectively), followed by a responsibility to others (5.45% in both groups). There was a significant proportion of missing data for

this question (7.14% and 9.52%, respectively). Respondents in both groups did not score on the fear of being punished by friends or by others.



*Figure 1.6. Percentage of total responses per category for Scenario 6 grouped according to prime condition (Loyalty and Rejection Fear).*

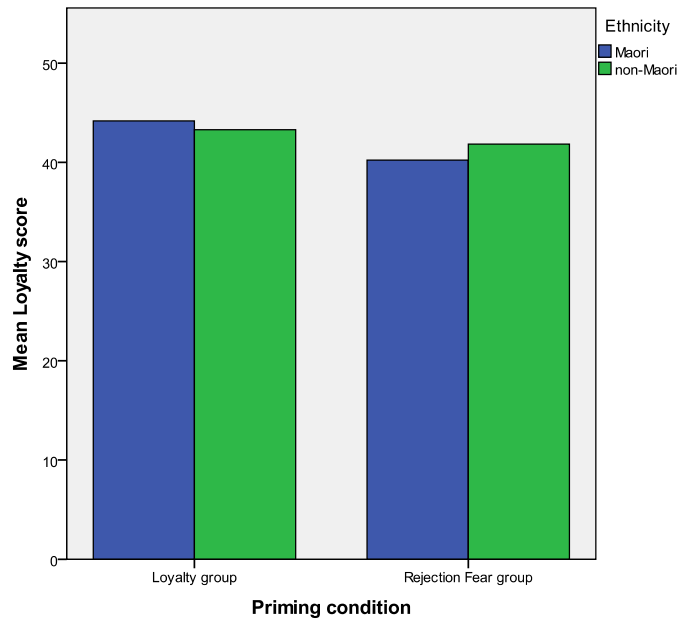
The majority of the responses in Scenario 6 (Figure 1.6) referred to self-directed motives (22.62% and 30.95%, respectively). In the Loyalty group, there were no responses that alluded to a fear of punishment by friends or by others, whereas the Rejection Fear group were guided by this somewhat – 1.19% of the sample feared being

punished by their friends and 4.76% feared being punished by others. None of the participants in the Rejection Fear group made decisions based on merely socialising.

### ***The impact of ethnicity and priming on choices***

The graph presented below shows that when primed with feelings of loyalty, Māori had higher mean loyalty scores than non-Māori. However when primed with rejection fear, Māori mean loyalty scores were lower than their non-Māori counterparts. In both prime conditions, Māori and non-Māori had higher mean loyalty scores when compared with their respective rejection fear scores. These findings suggest that priming appears to have an effect on loyalty scores for Māori and non-Māori.

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of ethnicity and priming on loyalty scores. The main effect for ethnicity  $F(1, 72) = .01, p = .93$ , priming  $F(1, 72) = .39, p = .54$  and the interaction effect  $F(1, 72) = .08, p = .78$  did not reach statistical significance. Figure 2.0 shows mean loyalty scores for Māori and non-Māori participants in each prime group.



*Figure 2.0.* Mean self-reported loyalty scores for Māori and non-Māori male adolescents in both prime conditions.

Figure 2.1 shows mean rejection fear scores for Māori and non-Māori participants in each prime group. It suggests that when primed with feelings of loyalty, Māori had higher mean rejection fear scores than non-Māori. However, when primed with fear of being rejected by their peers, Māori mean rejection fear scores were lower than non-Māori. In both prime conditions, Māori and non-Māori had lower rejection fear scores when compared with their respective loyalty scores.

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of ethnicity and priming on rejection fear scores. There was a statistically significant main effect for priming  $F(1, 72)=4.56, p=.04$ . The magnitude of the difference in the means was moderate (partial eta squared = .6), indicating that 6% of the variance

in fear scores was explained by priming participants. The main effect for ethnicity  $F(1, 72)=.00, p=.97$  and the interaction effect  $F(1, 72)=.05, p=.82$  did not reach statistical significance.

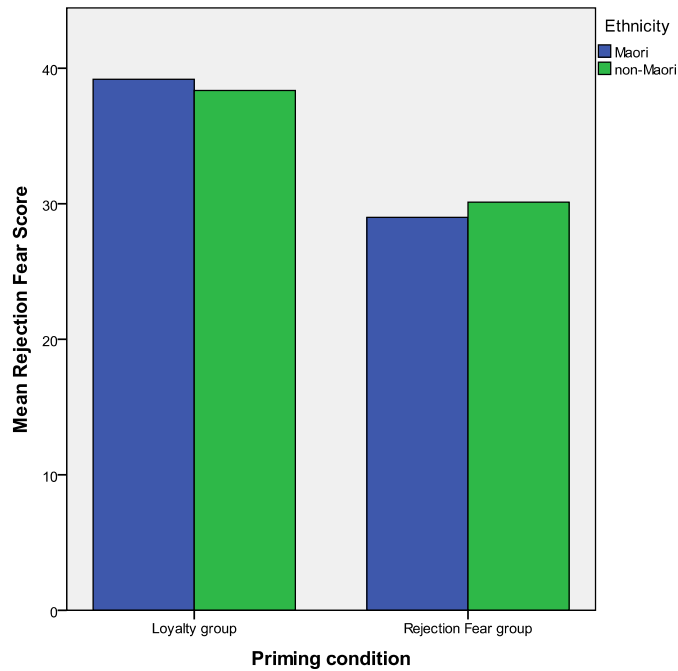


Figure 2.1. Mean self-reported rejection fear scores for Māori and non-Māori male adolescents in both prime conditions.

### ***Ethnicity and priming on conformity***

Figure 3.0 depicts mean conformity scores for Māori and non-Māori in both prime conditions. Māori had higher total conformity scores than non-Māori, in both loyalty and fear of rejection conditions. Māori and non-Māori had higher mean conformity scores in the Loyalty prime condition when compared with the Rejection Fear condition's scores.

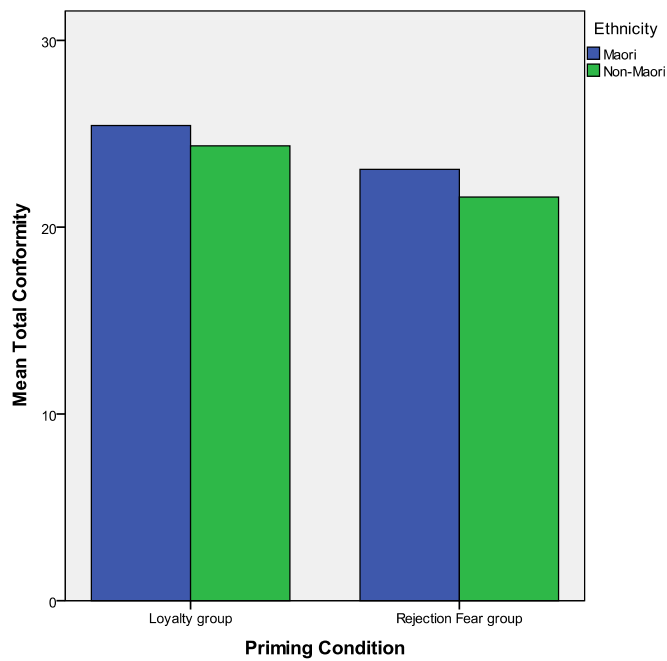


Figure 3.0. Mean self-reported conformity scores for Māori and non-Māori male adolescents in both prime conditions

To explore the impact of priming and ethnicity on levels of conformity, a two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted. The main effect for priming  $F(1, 77)=2.50, p=.12$ , ethnicity  $F(1, 77)=.64, p=.43$ , and the interaction effect  $F(1, 77)=.02, p=.90$  did not reach statistical significance. This finding suggests that there is no significant effect of priming on conformity for Māori and non-Māori.

### ***Participants' responses in coded categories***

Table 1.0 shows the typical responses given by participants in each coded category. Three examples from each category are presented.

Table 1.

*Examples of participants' responses in each category*

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Responsibility to friends	"Me and my bros are like a whanau...If one of the bros doesn't have any money, I will buy them a feed"	"Don't wanna go but if they get in [trouble] I won't be there to help them outta it"	"Again, I would go because my friends are trustworthy, and I would trust them"
Responsibility to others	"We will see if my girlfriend don't wana hang out"	"Nah, family before friends.."	"Leave a message on the phone or try to go by your house if you don't any thing on"
Fear of punishment by friends	"Wouldn't want my mates to hate me"	"My mates would have thought I was a dick"	"My mates would have [teased me] and say that I was whipped"
Fear of punishment by others	"My girlfriend will not like me if I do this, she will hate me"	"Not keen on getting into [trouble]"	"Mum's gonna tell me off"
Self-directed	"I'll say, <i>not this time boys, I'm saving up</i> "	"That's wak, I'm not a bully"	"I would tell them to get stuffed and buy their own"
Socialising	"Probably the only time we're together, so I should just go and deal with the rest later"	"I like going places with my friends"	"My life is focused around social activity"
Unsure	"Depending on the reason why I have to go home"	"You're [they're] a loser – if I had to be back for an important reason, I would not if. If I didn't, I'd watch the movie"	"[Thinking of the] dangers of going into town, missing out on the party, want to be with mates"

## Discussion

An examination of the results of the study revealed no significant differences in loyalty or fear of rejection between Māori and non-Māori with regards to peer conformity. There was a significant difference, however between Māori and non-Māori in the Rejection Fear group when they were primed with feelings of rejection. The result was interesting in that when primed with rejection, Māori fear scores decreased while the opposite was true with non-Māori (even though no significant differences were found with the latter). This study sought to answer three questions:

1. To what extent does loyalty factor in peer conformity among adolescent males?
2. To what extent does fear of rejection factor in peer conformity among adolescent males?
3. Does ethnicity predict participants' responses on the questionnaire?

It was conceptualised that Māori and non-Māori would differ in their reasons for conformity or non compliance, and that this difference would be driven by the loyalty to their friendships, or belonging to the group, rather than a fear of being rejected by their peers. The main reason this for this was due to the explicit lore of whanaungatanga among Māori culture and households.

A possible reason for the lack of a significant finding could be the quality of a person's cultural identity. The study did not utilise a cultural measure to assess their level of understanding, belonging or level of engagement with their ethnicity (other than asking the participants to identify their ethnicity on the questionnaire), nor

whether the participants have “lived” or “learned” their culture. This separation of cultural identity in previous research has shown that each group tends to be different with regards to social and economic conditions (Stevenson, 2001), therefore may have added to an explanation for the current findings.

While the results were not significant, the most interesting finding in the study remains to be the drop in fear of rejection scores among Māori when primed with thoughts and comments alluding to being rejected by their peers. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. Firstly, on a cognitive level, it is possible that Māori adolescents hold a belief (based on whanaungatanga) that “family should stick together no matter what – family is family even if mistakes are made” and that whanaungatanga allows for friends to be viewed as family members. So, if a friend indicates that you (a perceived family member) are going to be rejected on the basis of non-conformity, this threatens your belief about your place in the group, affects your view of the group members’ loyalty to you, and leads you to questioning whether in fact they view you as family (as you view them). As the evidence in that moment supports the notion that “because they are willing to reject me from the group, I am not considered their family, they don’t view me the same way, and they would not stick up for me”, a protective mechanism may kick in, reducing the fear of being rejected, and increasing autonomy and self-motivated decisions as a driving force for behaviour. This view is consistent with Mead (2003) description of manaakitanga in that the ability to nurture and protect members is important and that people need to feel accepted, safe and mutually supported. Metge’s (1995) description of whakamā also may apply in that

the rejecting comments (and subsequent whakamā) have led to a perception of lower status, confusion around the uncertainty of belonging and/or perception of mutual support, lowered self-esteem and a withdrawal or isolation from social interaction.

Another finding in the study was the overwhelming response of “self-directed” responses. This result remains consistent with the developmental stage of the participating adolescents and previous research that middle adolescents are most able to resist peer influence when compared with early and later adolescents (Steinberg and Monahan, 2007). It was noticed that each scenario differed in its ability to elicit different types of responding. While all the scenarios showed that participants made choices based on their own motives, three situations stood out as having clear patterns – the movie, party and girlfriend scenarios. The results from the first of these two scenarios showed the conflict between responsibility to others (most often parents) and self (*movie*) and between responsibility to their friends and self (*party*). Differences in the shift of responsibilities could be partly due to age. As the majority of the participants were 15 years old, they are still legally responsible to their caregivers and this may have swayed their responses. However it did not appear to be a significant factor in the party scenario. Many of the responses for this included comments such as “I’ll just go with them - don’t want to miss out on a good time”, “Go with the boys to town and do some missions.. cause can’t ditch the bros”, and “Don’t wana go but if they get in trouble I won’t be there to help them outta it”. This signifies that their motives were oriented towards fun, excitement, and keeping their friends safe. The *girlfriend* scenario was particularly interesting, showing a much more conflicted response between a

responsibility to others, responsibility to friends, self, and being unsure. Many of the comments for this situation were based on a desire for sexual intimacy or an equal distribution of time between their peers and girlfriend.

## Limitations

The limitations of the study are presented below.

1. The measurement was a self-report questionnaire. Therefore the responses may not have accurately reflected the adolescents' actions in real life. The questionnaire however, did measure an attitude and provided some interesting commentary.
2. Depending on age, maturity and academic capability, the students may have interpreted the questions differently.
3. The study participants were all adolescent males ranging in age from 15 to 18 years. The majority of the sample was 15 years old. In general, the participants of this study could be described as young and without the capacity to place themselves in the hypothetical situations asked of them. This is a common issue with research using hypothetical scenarios, however I did my best to counter these effects by being available to participants if they had any difficulties with interpreting the information or instructions. Another consideration I took was to ensure that the hypothetical scenarios used were as "real-life" and as generalisable as possible, without choosing situations that focused too heavily on legal issues. I may have seen different scores if the sample's ages leaned more towards the 18 year old age group, in that they are less likely to be influenced by their parents' expectations of them, and have less parental rules to follow.

The developmental level was arbitrary and because two different age levels were not compared, I can not be sure about the relevance of development to the outcomes of this study.

4. All participants were enrolled in a mainstream secondary school. Given that all participants were engaged and attending school, this may not provide an accurate measure of “at risk” adolescents. However, in saying that, the participating schools had low decile ratings ( $\leq 3$ ), indicating that participating adolescents were from families of a low socio-economic background.

5. Loyalty and fear of rejection were the only constructs relating to peer conformity that were explored in this study. Concepts such as self esteem, family upbringing and attachment and parental style, may have provided richer data from which to draw conclusions. There was difficulty defining loyalty and rejection fear and the inclusion of the question “to what extent did these thoughts [loyalty and fear based] help you make your decision” aimed to account for this.

6. There is a dearth of research with regards to adolescent loyalty to their peers, and even more so in relation to Māori adolescents or New Zealanders in general. This was problematic as it limited the interpretation against comparative research, and forced a reliance on international literature that may not apply to Māori due to differing cultural lore.

Despite these limitations, the study chose to define the boundaries of the research in this way because a) I was particularly interested in loyalty among Māori as an influencing factor in conformity due to the explicit emphasis on whanaungatanga

within Māori culture, and comparisons with non-Māori needed to be made to gain an understanding of these differences; and b) anecdotally, male adolescents stereotypically tend to be viewed as being “risk takers”, “not willing or able to think about the consequences” or “act silly around their mates”. There is not a lot of mention of the strengths that come with being an adolescent male in today’s society, or the view that “going along with your group” could also be a positive phenomenon. This study highlighted that an adolescent’s loyalty to their peers is an area worth paying more attention to due to the potential for positive peer influence. According to this study, adolescents in general appear to be self-motivated when making decisions about peer conformity, so the ability to voice the reasoning behind their actions in a supportive manner (not one that elicits rejecting type comments) may contribute to an increase sense of group belonging, secure attachment to their peers, and a willingness to keep them from harm’s way.

Research in this area would benefit from a more representative and user-friendly Loyalty and/or Rejection Fear scale in order to foster further discussion around the power of loyalty among adolescents. The development of a New Zealand friendly scale, incorporating self identification, affiliation to culture, group participation and key social principles and beliefs would be of particular relevance. Furthermore, a sensitive scale that differentiates the concept of loyalty to a group from the fear of being rejection by that group would be invaluable.

## Conclusion

This study has emphasised the need to move beyond the notion that peer influence is problematic or the fundamental reason for unsafe choices among adolescents. Rather, it is a normal and inevitable aspect of adolescent socialisation, which can also in fact be an encouraging factor in adolescents making safe choices. In this sense, it is likely undesirable (and perhaps impossible) to attempt to stop peer influence processes. However, strengthening adolescents' positive connections to their peers as well as the adults in their lives may help direct them towards more positive choices.

According to my findings, male adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age, irrespective of ethnicity, are in fact making decisions based on their own self-interest – this highlights that they use their innate reasoning, their rational thinking and are able to weigh up the potential consequences prior to engaging in behaviours that may or may not be in their best interest. While this may be described as egocentrism, being self-centred or selfish by the critics, I believe these are acts of values – morals, exerting autonomy and perhaps even an attempt at being a leader (the *influencer*) themselves. Future research could therefore examine what occurs when one member of this young group chooses not to conform to their peers – will the others stay with the group or leave because one person has chosen to? This would highlight the power of peer influence, and more importantly, will do so with regards to making safe choices.

Young people are a sponge for information and therefore role modelling positive behaviours and values remain to be a valid avenue for change. One unsafe choice can be end of the road for a young person's dreams, despite their strengths and desire to make a life for themselves. It is therefore not only their own responsibility to make safe choices, but their parents', their friends', and their community's obligation to provide opportunities, role model and encourage participation. The Ministry of Youth Affairs emphasised this when they declared, "effective participation will ultimately result in a country where young people are more optimistic and positive" (2002).

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## **Appendix A: MUHEC**

## Appendix B: Information Sheet

### ***“I Got Your Back”***

#### Information Sheet

***You are invited to participate in a questionnaire about some of the decisions you and your friends make in everyday situations.***

Kia ora.

My name is Di Paki and I am a Masters of Psychology student at Massey University in Palmerston North. I am doing this research study to find out more about young people and their friendships. Prof. Ian Evans is my primary supervisor and under his guidance, I will ensure that you and your information are well respected.

#### ***What’s it about?***

I am interested in what is important in friendships for young adolescent males and how this may affect some of the everyday interactions or decisions they make. I’m especially looking to find out whether there are differences in the reasons behind young people’s choices, or in the ways they interact with their friends, for Māori and non Māori young people.

So...if you are keen to participate in this research study, you will need to meet the following criteria:

Identify as male;

Be between the ages of 15 and 18 years;

If under 16, give your parent/caregiver this information sheet and the opportunity to decide whether you can participate.

#### ***What’s involved?***

Firstly, I will meet with you all to tell you a little bit more about what this is all about...

Then, when you have had enough time to think about whether or not you want to join in (usually about two weeks), I will come back and hang with you for about *one hour* while you fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire will have some questions in it about:

Some details about you – your age, ethnicity, level at high school...that sort of stuff. But I will not ask for your name. This is to make sure what you write down on the paper is kept confidential!

Everyday scenarios that you or your friends may find yourselves in – There will be some multi-choice options at the end of each scenario where you will be asked to pick the option that best describes what you would do in that situation and you will be asked to rate the likeliness of your actions. There are no right or wrong answers – I am just interested in what you think!

I will be randomly handing the questionnaires out so some of the scenarios may differ slightly depending on which questionnaire you get. I'm hoping to find about 60 young people so if you know anyone else that may be interested and fits the criteria, please ask them to email me and I'll get a pack out to them!

### ***Your rights***

Massey University Human Ethics Committee guidelines are adhered to at all times. Therefore, you are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in the research study. If you do decide to participate however, you have some rights! You have the right to:

- Choose not to answer any question;
- Leave the study at any time up until you complete and submit the questionnaire;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during the whole process;
- Answer questions knowing that your name will not be used unless you give me permission to use it;
- Have a copy of the study's overall findings when it's completed.

The information you give me will only be used for the purposes of this research study and publications arising from it. Your participation in the research study will not be of any harm or risk to you, myself, or Massey University.

### ***Keen to have a go?***

After reading through the information sheet, think about whether you would like to be a part of this research study on adolescent male friendships. I will come back in one/two weeks and give you an opportunity to take part. Completing and handing the questionnaire in to me will let me know you want to take part.

*If you are under 16 years of age*, and would like to take part, please give your parent/caregiver the opportunity to read through this sheet and decide whether they are OK with you participating. They are welcome to contact me if they have any questions.

### ***Want to know what I found out?***

On the attached "Summary Request Form" you can let me know if you would like to find out about the *overall* findings of this research. If you would like a summary, you are invited to leave your email or mail details on the consent form, and I will send you a copy when I have completed the data collection and analysed its findings. I will also leave a copy of the summary in the school office for you to read if you would prefer.

**Competition**

You will be contributing to an important piece of research that aims to help young people make better life choices. I really appreciate what you have to say and so...to thank you for your time, all participants have the opportunity to enter a draw to win one of four items of clothing donated by Kia Kaha Clothing Ltd. I will contact the winners by 1 June 2010.

***What happens to the information after the research study is done?***

Apart from age, ethnicity, and level at high school, no personal information is collected, and what you write will stay anonymous and confidential. All the questionnaires will be kept in a locked up cabinet and *separate* from the prize draw entry and summary request forms (which will have your name on it). Therefore, no connection between the questionnaire sheets and you as a participant can be made. After five years, the questionnaires and the other forms will be disposed of.

If you have any questions about the study, please give me a call or flick me an email ☺

Thank you for your time

Nga mihi

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 09/59. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz).

# ***"I Got Your Back"***

## **SUMMARY REQUEST FORM**

I'd like to know about the overall findings for this research study! I have provided my contact details below so a summary can be sent out to me once the research has been completed.

**Name**

.....

**Address**

.....

**Email**

.....

.....

---

## **PLEASE ENTER ME IN THE DRAW TO WIN ONE OF FOUR ITEMS OF CLOTHING DONATED BY KIA KAHA LTD.**

I have provided my contact details below so you can contact me if I win one of the prizes.

I understand that if I do not fill this section out I will not be able to go in the draw.

**Name**

.....

**Address**

.....

**Phone**

.....

**Email**

.....

.....

## Appendix C: Loyalty based scenario

# “I Got Your Back”



Thanks for choosing to participate in this research study. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

There are no right or wrong answers – I just want to know what you think 😊

### A little bit about me..

Tick all that apply

Maori: ☐

Pakeha/European: ☐

Asian: ☐

Pacific Islands: ☐

Other: ☐

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year level: \_\_\_\_\_



**picture this:**

You're in town with a group of your mates. There's a new movie on, and you've all been hanging out to see it. You have enough money. But you know you have to be back before the movie's finished and you can't get hold of anyone to tell them. Your mates have been talking about this movie for ages and they're all going. You don't know what to do, so you ask your mate. He says, "C'mon bro, it's one for the boys! We been hanging out to see it together – and you know this is our only chance. It'll be sweet as".  
Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all						Definitely
	always						
a. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Leave by yourself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7




If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**picture this:**

You're at a party and your mates want to go into town. You want to be with your mates, but don't really want to go to town. You're worried about what might happen when you get there. They urge you to come with them – everyone is going. They say, "C'mon bro, get your gears! Let's hit town - Power in numbers! At least we'll all be together".

Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

- ★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all						Definitely
	Always						
a. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Leave by yourself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- ★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


- ★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

- ★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7




If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You've been saving up your money to buy a new pair of shoes you've been hanging out for. You are in town and catch up with a group of our mates. It's lunchtime and your friends see that you have money in your wallet. They ask you to shout them all lunch at BK. You know that if you shout lunch, you will have hardly any money left and you definitely won't be able to buy those shoes. They say, "Be a good guy bro, hook the boys up! We hard out feel like BK!".

Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Shout your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Don't shout them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7




If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You have a girlfriend and you've wanted to spend some time with her for a while. Your friends have just planned a "boys only weekend" for the same weekend you have been planning to hang with your girlfriend. Your friends say to you, "All the boys will be there bro, you gotta turn up, it'll be mean!"

Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

- ★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Go with your girlfriend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- ★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


- ★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---


- ★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You and your mates are hanging out together at school when a junior boy walks past your group by himself. You all know this boy and know that many other children don't particularly like him. Your mates all start teasing him. You can imagine what it must feel like being teased and don't want to join in. They notice you haven't joined in yet and say to you, "C'mon it's a laugh - You're one of us ain't you?"

Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Join in with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Don't join in with them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7




If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

Your best friend is leaving town and is throwing a farewell party at his place. You have been grounded and are not allowed to go. All your friends are going to be there and you know it's going to go off. You really wish you could be there too. You tell your mates that you won't be able to make it and they say, "Just sneak out bro, no one will nark – we got your back – in this together aye".

Write down what goes through your mind:

---



---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Sneak out and go out	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Stay at home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---


★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### One last thing.....

Both columns contain acceptable choices to make in a situation. Please read through each statement and circle the statement that **best fits with the group of people who are most like you**.

- |    |   |            |  |
|----|---|------------|--|
| 1  | Some people go along with their friends just to keep their friends happy.   | <b>but</b> | Other people refuse to go along with what their friends want to do, even though they know it will make their friends unhappy.            |
| 2  | Some people think it's important to be an individual than to fit in with the crowd.                                     | <b>but</b> | Other people think it is more important to fit in with the crowd than to stand out as an individual.                                     |
| 3  | For some people, it's pretty easy for their friends to get them to change their mind.                                   | <b>but</b> | For other people, it's pretty hard for their friends to get them to change their mind.   |
| 4  | Some people would do something that they knew was wrong just to stay on their friends' good side.                       | <b>but</b> | Other people would not do something they knew was wrong just to stay on their friends' good side.  |
| 5  | Some people hide their true opinion from their friends if they think their friends will make fun of them because of it. | <b>but</b> | Other people will say their true opinion in front of their friends, even if they know their friends will make fun of them because of it. |
| 6  | Some people will not break the law just because their friends say that they would.                                      | <b>but</b> | Other people would break the law if their friends said that they would break it.   |
| 7  | Some people change the way they act so much when they are with their friends that they wonder who they "really are".    | <b>but</b> | Other people act the same way when they are alone as they do when they are with their friends  |
| 8  | Some people take more risks when they are with their friends than they do when they are alone.                          | <b>but</b> | Other people act just as risky when they are alone as when they are with their friends.  |
| 9  | Some people say things they don't really believe because they think it will make their friends respect them more.       | <b>but</b> | Other people would not say things they didn't really believe just to get their friends to respect them more.                             |
| 10 | Some people think it's better to be an individual even if people will be angry at you for going against the crowd.      | <b>but</b> | Other people think it's better to go along with the crowd than to make people angry at you.  |

Thanks heaps for your time!

I will be in touch with you in the next few weeks with the results of the prize draw ☺

**Before you hand this in, please spend the next minute checking that you have answered all the questions you feel comfortable answering.**

## Appendix D: Rejection fear based scenario

# “I Got Your Back”



Thanks for choosing to participate in this research study. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

There are no right or wrong answers – I just want to know what you think 😊

### A little bit about me..

Tick all that apply

Maori: ☐

Pakeha/European: ☐

Asian: ☐

Pacific Islands: ☐

Other: ☐

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year level: \_\_\_\_\_



**picture this:**

You're in town with a group of your mates. There's a new movie on, and you've all been hanging out to see it. You have enough money. But you know you have to be back before the movie's finished and you can't get hold of anyone to tell them. Your mates have been talking about this movie for ages and they're all going. You don't know what to do, so you ask your mate. He says "C'mon bro, don't be a loser, it'll be sweet as, just hurry up and let's go". *Write down what goes through your mind:*

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★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), *circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:*

	Not at all						Definitely
	always						
a. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Leave by yourself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---


★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**picture this:**

You're at a party and your mates want to go into town. You want to be with your mates, but don't really want to go to town. You're worried about what might happen when you get there. They urge you to come with them – everyone is going. They say, "C'mon bro, get your gears! Don't be a sad sack – You scared or something? You one of the boys or not?". Write down what goes through your mind:

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- ★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all						Definitely always
a. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Leave by yourself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- ★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


- ★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---


- ★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You've been saving up your money to buy a new pair of shoes you've been hanging out for. You are in town and catch up with a group of our mates. It's lunchtime and your friends see that you have money in your wallet. They ask you to shout them all lunch at BK. You know that if you shout lunch, you will have hardly any money left and you definitely won't be able to buy those shoes. They say, "Don't be a sad guy! Shout us lunch! We hard out feel like BK" *Write down what goes through your mind:*

---



---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), *circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:*

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Shout your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Don't shout them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7




If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You have a girlfriend and you've wanted to spend some time with her for a while. Your friends have just planned a "boys only weekend" for the same weekend you have been planning to hang with your girlfriend. Your friends say to you, "Boys day bro! All the boys will be there – don't diss us – is it going to be us or her?" *Write down what goes through your mind:*

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★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), *circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:*

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Go with your girlfriend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Go with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



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★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---


★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

You and your mates are hanging out together at school when a junior boy walks past your group by himself. You all know this boy and know that many other children don't particularly like him. Your mates all start teasing him. You can imagine what it must feel like being teased and don't want to join in. They notice you haven't joined in yet and say to you, "What's your problem? You're not one of the boys or something?"

*Write down what goes through your mind:*

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---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), *circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:*

	Not at all					Definitely	
	always						
a. Join in with your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Don't join in with them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



---


★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




I'd do anything for my mates...

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If I didn't they'd think I'm a loser..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Picture this:**

Your best friend is leaving town and is throwing a farewell party at his place. You have been grounded and are not allowed to go. All your friends are going to be there and you know it's going to go off. You really wish you could be there too. You tell your mates that you won't be able to make it and they say, "Just sneak out man! Don't be soft....or you ain't one of the boys!"

Write down what goes through your mind:

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---

★ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always), circle the number that shows how likely it is that you would:

	Not at all					Definitely always	
a. Sneak out	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Stay at home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

★ Look at the choice that you gave the highest rating to. Why did you make that choice?

---



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★ If you had chosen the other option, what would have happened?

---




---

★ To what extent did these thoughts help you make your decision? Please rate each thought on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely always)




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1 2 3 4 5 6 7



My mates would do anything for me...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



If I didn't, they might get annoyed with me..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### One last thing.....

Both columns contain acceptable choices to make in a situation. Please read through each statement and circle the statement that **best fits with the group of people who are most like you**.

- |    |   |            |  |
|----|---|------------|--|
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**Before you hand this in, please spend the next minute checking that you have answered all the questions you feel comfortable answering.**