

Iwi Importance Predicts Systems Justification and Life Satisfaction Among Māori

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This study examined the views of 6,391 Māori, the Indigenous people of New Zealand, centring on the importance they place on their iwi (tribe or tribes) in forming their self-identity. Māori ancestors, as skilled navigators, were the first to settle in Aotearoa (Anderson, 2016). Kinship structures were pivotal in their survival during oceanic exploration and the following colonisation (Mika et al., 2019, 2022). Set against this backdrop and drawing on System Justification Theory, participants were asked to rate the significance of their iwi to their self-perception on a scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important). The results highlighted a sophisticated relationship between Māori perceptions of iwi importance and different dimensions of well-being (specifically, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and increased psychological distress). For those who regard their iwi as important/very important, there was a positive correlation with self-esteem. However, the influence of tribal importance on life satisfaction emerged as more multifaceted. Further investigation showed that views on systemic inequality influence this association. In particular, Māori who view their iwi, or even multiple iwi, as vital to their identity were more critical of New Zealand's prevailing social and political structures. This heightened awareness of systemic challenges was linked with decreased self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, and increased psychological distress. Consequently, while acknowledging the importance of one's iwi brings psychological advantages, the study suggests this recognition might be paired with a heightened consciousness of wider societal disparities, potentially impacting the overall life satisfaction of Māori.

Keywords: *Keywords: System Justification Theory, Māori, Iwi, Tribal affiliations, Well-being.*

INTRODUCTION

Māori, who are the Indigenous people of New Zealand, were colonised by the British from 1840 following the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) (Belich, 2015; Walker, 2004). The Māori version of te Tiriti, signed by the majority of Māori, promised Māori rangatiratanga (self-determination) over their taonga (valued possessions) for as long as they wished (Coxhead et al., 2014, 2022). However, this promise was not fulfilled (Moewaka, Barnes, & McCreanor, 2019; Reid et al., 2017). Māori experienced significant land loss (Dell, 2017), mass urbanisation, separating them from their cultural base (Keiha & Moon, 2008), pressures to assimilate (Thomas & Nikora, 1996), and persistent racism (Houkamau, Stronge, & Sibley, 2017). Māori, largely dispossessed of their lands, now comprise 17.1% of New Zealand's population and are disproportionately represented in negative socio-economic indicators such as unemployment, poor health outcomes, poverty, and high rates of imprisonment (Anderson et al., 2016; Leske et al., 2016; Mitrou et al., 2014; Quince, 2007).

Māori have systematically challenged the Crown, represented by the New Zealand Government, to honour te Tiriti (Mutu, 2019; Walker, 2004), leading to the formation of the Waitangi Tribunal (a judicial commission of inquiry where Māori can make claims for breaches of their Treaty rights) in 1975. In 1985, the Tribunal was granted retrospective power to investigate

claims from the date of the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840 (Office of Treaty Settlements, 2017; The Waitangi Tribunal, 2022). Some land and other resources have been returned to Māori as a result of treaty settlements, as well as recognition of Māori rights and interests in other taonga like the Māori language, which was made an official language of New Zealand under the Māori Language Act 1987 (Mika et al., 2022). Although the Treaty is not legally ratified, numerous New Zealand acts now refer explicitly to the Treaty (Waitangi Tribunal, 2022).

Although Māori identity is typically essentialised in New Zealand (van Meijl, 2020), Māori are not an “undifferentiated ethnic mass” (McIntosh, 2005, p. 69). Research has found that socio-political consciousness is a core aspect of Māori identity for some. This entails understanding the socio-historical factors that have created and maintained Māori disadvantage, particularly in the context of te Tiriti o Waitangi (Greaves et al., 2015; Houkamau, 2006, 2011). Variability in the significance of group identity is not unique to other ethnic or social groups; it is also observed among Māori. Previous research indicates a diversity of political beliefs among Māori (Houkamau & Sibley, 2014). It also shows wide variations in cultural knowledge (Matika et al., 2017; Matika et al., 2021), as well as in how individuals conceptualise the importance of being Māori to their overall sense of self (Houkamau et al., 2021).

This paper offers a deeper insight into Māori intra-group diversity, emphasising the variability in Māori well-being influenced by the importance individuals assign to their iwi in their self-conception. Participants were prompted to assess the significance of their iwi to their self-perception on a scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important). Moreover, we examine how system-justifying beliefs (i.e., perceiving New Zealand society as “fair”) illuminate the nexus between tribal importance and three crucial well-being measures: self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological distress. We begin by reviewing System Justification Theory, progressing to a discussion of Māori identity, which spans contemporary and traditional Māori social structures. We then present tribal affiliation statistics from the New Zealand Census before introducing our primary hypotheses and research methodology.

This paper aspires to augment the academic discourse surrounding Māori identity, its pertinence to the socio-political milieu of New Zealand, the correlation between iwi significance and its importance to Māori, and overall Māori well-being. At the heart of this research is the subjective valuation of the importance of iwi identification among individuals identifying as Māori. The results indicate a pronounced correlation: Māori who perceive their affiliation to their iwi, or multiple iwi, as central to their identity are generally less likely to endorse New Zealand’s existing social and political system.

System Justification Theory

Our approach is based on the extensive body of research on System Justification Theory (SJT) (Jost & Banaji, 1994), which proposes that individuals strive not only to hold positive attitudes about themselves and their social groups but also to maintain a positive perception of the overarching social structure (Jost et al., 2017). In New Zealand, some data suggests that the extent to which Māori support system-justifying beliefs may be related to their close interpersonal relationships with Pākehā (outgroup affiliation). Sengupta and Sibley (2013) found that system-justification ideologies were present among Māori who had close relationships with and spent more time with Pākehā, while the more time Māori spent with other Māori, the less likely they were to ideologically justify the status quo (specifically, to support the view that land should be returned to Māori). Further New Zealand-based research indicates that marginalised groups in New Zealand, including Māori, typically report reduced levels of well-being. However, these levels are moderated by the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs (Bahamondes et al., 2019), implying that system justification serves as a means of alleviating the effects of reduced well-being among some Māori.

While this work provides insights into the incidences and impacts of system-justifying beliefs among Māori, as well as potential intragroup differences, the relationship between system-justifying beliefs among a large sample of Māori has not been explored.

Māori Identity

Identities are informed by the socio-political realities in which they are embedded (Bhabha, 1994; McIntosh, 2005); identifying as Māori has always, by necessity, implied the presence of non-Māori, as well as the need to

affirm a collective identity (Houkamau et al., 2020; Maaka, 1994). The use of the term Māori to describe the Indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand is thought to have emerged in the late 18th or early 19th century as European explorers and settlers began interacting with the local population (Stuart, 2003). Although the adoption of the identity label “Māori” helped to differentiate the Indigenous peoples from new arrivals (Moeke-Pickering, 1996), this term has come to obscure the complexity of Māori society, including differences stemming from unique tribal genealogies (Mahuika, 2019), socio-economic status (van Meijl, 2020), variations in cultural knowledge (Durie, 1994), connection to traditional Māori social structures (Maaka, 1994), and multiple ethnic affiliations (Kukutai, 2004).

The New Zealand Government has attempted to determine who should be counted as Māori, including applying (the now widely discredited) blood quantum measures (see Gillon, Cormack, & Borell, 2019; Greaves et al., 2022 and Kukutai, 2004). However, from a Māori perspective, whakapapa (ancestry) is the crucial determinant (Durie, 1997; Te Rito, 2007). If a person wishes to identify through their Māori ancestry, they are considered Māori: “How many other elements from Te Ao Māori [‘the Māori world’] a person draws on to add to that single critical factor can only make the identification stronger” (Durie, 1997, p. 160).

The ancestral foundations of Māori identity originate from what Rangihau et al. (1988) termed the “organic solidarity of kinship” (p. 58), specifically whānau (extended family based on shared genealogy), hapū (sub-tribes made up of several whānau), and iwi (tribes made up of several hapū) (Barlow, 1991; Rangihau et al., 1988). The term ‘iwi’ can be translated as “bone”, but it is most commonly interpreted as “tribe” or “a confederation of tribes” (van Meijl, 2011, p. 267). The word is singular and plural in the Māori language, so it is not pluralised in this context. While whānau, hapū and iwi presented numerous regional distinctions in terms of size and role, the demarcation between when a whānau evolved into a hapū and a hapū into an iwi, remained fluid. Despite these regional variances, a unifying feature persists across all: they are anchored in kinship, tracing lineage from a shared forebear and occupying a specific territory (Firth, 1959, pp. 110-116, cited in Maaka, 1994, p. 313). These kinship structures historically served as a vital survival system for Māori through periods of oceanic exploration, during their time as the first humans to settle Aotearoa, and in enduring colonisation (Mika et al., 2019).

According to Rangihau et al. (1988, p. 59), although traditionally “the tribal feeling was strong among Māori, hapū could trace their heritage to an ancestor several generations back and therefore comprised an even closer kin group than the iwi.” The arrival of Europeans in the late 18th and early 19th centuries had a significant impact on iwi and hapū organisation (Maaka, 1994; Metge, 1964; Reid et al., 2017), which was further transformed as a result of mass urbanisation from the 1950s (Meredith, 2015; Metge, 1976; Pool 1991; Walker, 1970).

Māori are now primarily urban dwellers, with over 80% residing in defined urban areas throughout New Zealand

Table 1. Number and percentage of Māori reporting at least one iwi.

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2013	2018*
Reported at least one iwi	370,476	426,234	454,479	512,325	535,941	503,000
Do not know iwi	113,196	112,563	111,807	102,366	110,928	115,000
Not coded*	27,606	40,917	37,824	29,331	21,852	68,000
Total Māori descent	511,278	579,714	604,110	643,980	668,721	870,000
% of stated who affiliated with at least one iwi (excluding not coded)	76.6	79.1	80.3	83.4	82.9	92.1
% stated did not know iwi	23.4	20.9	19.7	16.7	17.1	13.2

*Includes Refused to Answer, Response Unidentifiable, Response Outside Scope, and Not Stated
 Sources: Kukutai and Rarere (2015) and Stats N.Z. (2021, June 23).

(Kukutai, 2013). Although urbanisation has led to an intergenerational transformation of traditional tribal networks (Metge, 1976; Walker, 2004), understandings of ancestry remain widespread, and research shows Māori are proactive researchers of genealogies (Mahuika, 2019). Te Kupenga, Stats NZ’s survey of Māori well-being, surveyed 8,500 Māori in 2018 and found that 60% of Māori adults had explored their whakapapa in the 12 months preceding the survey (Stats NZ, 2020). More recently, Tūhono, a trust established to help Māori connect with their iwi, surveyed 900 Māori and found 82% of respondents agreed that hapū and iwi affiliations are a vital aspect of Māori identity, and 93% agreed that whakapapa should be maintained and passed on to future generations (Horizon Research, 2020). In the present day, when Māori introduce themselves in gatherings, the practice of reciting pepeha (tribal proverb) in which a person identifies with their iwi and hapū helps to establish connections with Māori from other areas. This interpretation of the whakapapa basis of personal identity is demonstrated in the following excerpt from an interview with Harata Ria Te Uira Parata (a prominent Māori kuia, or female elder, of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa, and Te Ātiawa descent), conducted by Judith Fyfe. in 1990, (p. 87).

I see myself not as an individual but as part of a group. That is the difference between our culture and Western culture. In Western culture there is the individual first – you go the other way in Māoritanga and I literally mean this. When somebody sees me they don’t say ‘Harata’, they say ‘Ngati Toa’ or ‘Ngati Raukawa’ – the last thing they say is my name. And if I’m in a Māori situation to identify myself, I identify my canoe, my iwi, all of that. The last thing I do is say my own name.

As Māori demands for increased political and social representation grew in the 1990s, the government focused on negotiating policy and treaty settlements with iwi organisations (Maaka, 1994; Walling, Small-Rodriguez, & Kukutai, 2009). This approach heightened the prominence of iwi in legal and political contexts. However, as Durie (1994, p. 327) highlights, “the modern iwi arrangement represents the latest stage in a history of tribal restructuring. I doubt it should be seen, or represented, as having always existed.”

The New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings, held every five years, is the official count of the people and dwellings in New Zealand. The census collects data regarding Māori in three related but distinct ways: (1) Māori descent (the largest group), where a respondent indicates whether they have Māori parents, grandparents, or ancestry; (2) ethnicity, where a respondent is asked to identify their ethnic group(s) by ticking boxes or writing in specific ethnic affiliations; and (3) iwi affiliation, where a respondent is asked to name the iwi (up to five) that the respondent can whakapapa to (Greaves et al., 2023). Since 1991, the first census since 1901 to enumerate the Māori population by iwi, the percentage of Māori identifying with at least one iwi has been increasing (see Table 1: Number and percentage of Māori reporting at least one iwi.).

Notably, the 2018 census may not paint the most accurate picture of iwi affiliation due to low Māori response rates (Stats NZ, 2018b, 2022). Iwi have had their own tribal registration systems since the formation of Māori trust boards (Hill, 2009), but these registers are becoming more sophisticated with websites and services to support individuals in connecting with their iwi (e.g., Tūhono, 2004; YourIwi, 2020). Unlike census and most government data sources, iwi registration is based on self-identification and the acknowledgement of whakapapa, which senior members of the iwi or hapū endorse. No single data source provides accurate figures on the number of Māori registered on iwi registers. However, iwi registers only include those who register as members of the iwi, which is likely to be a subset of the iwi-affiliated population provided in the census (Bycroft, Reid, McNally, & Gleisner, 2016).

Notably, Māori have high rates of intermarriage and miscegenation with Pākehā and other non-Māori (Chapple, 2000; Paringatai, 2014). Most Māori have a non-Māori (typically Pākehā) ancestor, sometimes a non-Māori parent, but only some choose to acknowledge this as part of their ethnic identity (Kukutai, 2004; Metge, 1964; Pool, 1991), and instead preferring to identify only as Māori (Carr et al., 2017; Howard & Didham, 2005). Ultimately, an individual’s choice to affiliate with one ethnic background over others may be a matter of personal preference. However, Kukutai (2003) found that residing in an area with a high concentration of Māori and having a Māori partner are significant predictors of Māori identification, and, as McIntosh (2005, p. 68) observed,

Table 2. The number of ethnic groups, Māori 2006–18 N.Z. Census

Number of ethnic groups	2006 (%)	2013 (%)	2018 (%)
Māori only	52.8	46.6	45.4
Māori + one other ethnicity	39.6	45.6	46.1
Māori + two other ethnicities	6.0	6.4	6.8
Four ethnicities, including Māori	1.1	1.1	1.2
Five ethnicities, including Māori	0.3	0.3	0.3

Source: Stats N.Z. (2018). 2018 Census ethnic group summaries.

“identity may be less about choice and more about the dominance of outsider perceptions”. For example, sole-identified Māori report significantly higher levels of perceived discrimination than those who identified jointly as Māori and European (Harris et al., 2013; Muriwai, Houkamau & Sibley, 2015).

The latest data from the 2018 census reveal significant complexity in Māori affiliations (see Table 2: Number of ethnic groups, Māori 2006–18 N.Z. Census). Of 896,600 people claiming Māori descent (see Stats N.Z., 2019), only 775,836 marked their ethnicity as Māori (Stats NZ, 2018). Less than half (45.4%) of the Māori ethnic group identified Māori as their only ethnicity in 2018, versus 46.5% in 2013 (Stats, 2018).

Previous research has compared well-being and socio-economic outcomes among Māori who identify as only Māori, as opposed to those who report multiple affiliations (Chapple, 2000; Kukutai, 2011; Houkamau, Strong, & Sibley, 2017; Muriwai, Houkamau & Sibley, 2015), and it was found that sole Māori reported poorer outcomes on various indicators of social and economic status (including educational outcomes, economic outcomes, and life satisfaction) (Houkamau & Sibley, 2014). Previous research has also found ideological differences among Māori who identify as Māori and those who identify with other groups, particularly Pākehā. For example, sole-identified Māori have been found to report different views about social and political conditions in New Zealand compared to those who identify as both Māori and European. In a national probability sample (N=1,416) by Houkamau and Sibley (2014), Māori who identified exclusively as Māori showed different political leanings from those identifying as Māori and Pākehā. The former were significantly more likely to report supporting Te Pāti Māori (the Māori Party), which focuses on Māori interests.

In sum, Māori identity in New Zealand has been profoundly shaped by socio-political contexts and the term “Māori” can mask the diverse aspects of Māori society. While traditional identity is firmly rooted in kinship structures such as whānau, hapū, and iwi, the arrival of Europeans and the ensuing urbanisation altered tribal dynamics. Yet, the importance of ancestral tribal links persist (Mika et al., 2019).

Although research has examined socio-economic outcomes among Māori who identify as only Māori, as opposed to those who report multiple affiliations, the role of iwi significance (the extent to which individuals see their iwi as important to their sense of self) for Māori self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological distress has not yet been explored.

Guiding hypothesis

This research investigates the relationship between iwi significance and Māori well-being, drawing on the predictions of System Justification Theory. Based on Shockley et al.’s (2016) findings, we predict that Māori who see their iwi as significant to their sense of self may be less inclined to resolve any dissonance through system justification. While higher group identification is likely to produce higher

self-esteem (O’Brien & Major, 2005), we expect that lower endorsement of system-justifying beliefs will be related to lower personal well-being among Māori (i.e. lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 6,391 participants provided partial or complete responses to the variables of interest in 2017. Most participants were women (62.7%) and employed (71%), and most participants knew the name(s) of their iwi (95.4%). With respect to ethnicity, 39.8% of the sample identified solely as Māori, while 60.2% identified as Māori and at least one other ethnicity, including Pākehā (56.8% of the total sample), Pasifika (4.6%), and Asian (1.8%) ethnicity.

Measures

Independent Variables

Iwi importance was assessed by asking participants, “How important is/are your iwi to how you see yourself?” on a 7-point scale from 1 (*not important*) to 7 (*very important*).

System justification was assessed by asking participants the following four items from Kay and Jost (2003): (a) “Everyone has a fair shot of wealth and happiness in New Zealand”; (b) “In general, I find New Zealand society to be fair”; (c) “In general, the New Zealand political system operates as it should.”; and (d) “Most of New Zealand’s policies serve the greater good”. These items were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and averaged to assess the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs ($\alpha = .73$).

Demographic Covariates

Age, gender, ethnic affiliation, and whether participants knew their iwi (or multiple iwi) were used as demographic covariates. Age was calculated using participants’ date of birth. Gender was assessed by asking participants, “What is your gender?” (open-ended), with responses dummy-coded for the analyses (0 = women, 1 = men). Ethnic affiliation was measured by asking participants, “Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to?”, with participants able to select one or more responses from “Māori, New Zealand European, Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Chinese, Indian, and Other (such as Dutch, Japanese, Tokelauan)”. Responses were dummy-coded based on whether participants reported sole Māori ethnicity (0 = Māori + at least one other ethnicity; 1 = sole Māori affiliation). To assess whether participants knew their iwi (or multiple iwi) we asked: “Do you know the name(s) of your iwi (tribe or tribes)?” (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between variables used in our analyses.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender ^a	---								
2. Age	.108***	---							
3. Sole Māori affiliation ^b	.034**	.205***	---						
4. Iwi importance	-.057***	.143***	.360***	---					
5. Iwi known ^c	-.056***	.015	.080***	.210***	---				
6. Self-esteem	.044***	.194***	.086***	.105***	.061***	---			
7. Life satisfaction	.033**	.094***	-.073***	-.052***	.025*	.495***	---		
8. Psychological distress	-.054***	-.269***	-.023	-.010	-.053***	-.558***	-.445***	---	
9. System justification	.144***	.177***	-.033**	-.108***	-.058***	.171***	.354***	-.154***	---
<i>M</i>	0.37	48.59	0.40	4.98	0.95	5.47	6.53	0.87	4.14
<i>SD</i>	0.48	14.78	0.49	1.94	0.21	1.21	1.93	0.76	1.29
α	---	---	---	---	---	.73	.76	.86	.73
<i>n</i>	6,391	6,391	6,391	6,391	6,391	6,218	6,214	6,191	6,384

Note. ^aDummy-coded (0 = woman, 1 = man). ^bDummy-coded (0 = Māori + other ethnicity, 1 = sole Māori affiliation). ^cDummy-coded (0 = no, 1 = yes). **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Dependent Variables

Self-esteem was assessed using three items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965): (a) “On the whole am satisfied with myself”; (b) “Take a positive attitude toward myself”; and (c) “Am inclined to feel like I am a failure” (reverse-coded). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 7 (*very accurate*) and averaged to assess self-esteem ($\alpha = .73$).

Life satisfaction was assessed using four items from Cummins and colleagues’ (2003) Personal Well-being Index. Participants were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with: (a) “your standard of living”; (b) “your health”; (c) “your future security”; (d) “your personal relationships”. Items were rated on a scale from 0 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 10 (*completely satisfied*) and averaged to assess life satisfaction ($\alpha = .76$).

Psychological distress was assessed using Kessler and colleagues’ (2010) 6-item psychological distress scale, with participants reporting how often they felt the following in the last 30 days: (a) ‘feel hopeless?’; (b) ‘feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?’; (c) ‘feel restless or fidgety?’; (d) ‘feel that everything was an effort?’; (e) ‘feel worthless?’; and (f) ‘feel nervous?’. The items were measured on a 5-point scale from 0 (*none of the time*) to 4 (*all of the time*) and averaged to assess psychological distress ($\alpha = .86$).

Sampling and procedure

This paper draws on the nationwide Te Rangahau o Te Tuakiri Māori me Ngā Waiaro ā-Pūtea | Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study (MIFAS). MIFAS is a pen-and-paper questionnaire posted to a random sample of 100,000 people on the New Zealand electoral roll (whether “general” or “Māori” roll—the voter’s own choice) claiming Māori descent and therefore already self-identifying as Māori. Data came from the first wave of respondents in 2017-2018. MIFAS comprises over 340 individual items, takes approximately 30-45 minutes to complete, and embeds a short 40-item version of the Multidimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement MMM-ICE. Information about the MIFAS sample, methods, response rate (approximately 7%), and representativeness has been provided elsewhere (see Houkamau, Sibley, & Henare, 2019).

RESULTS

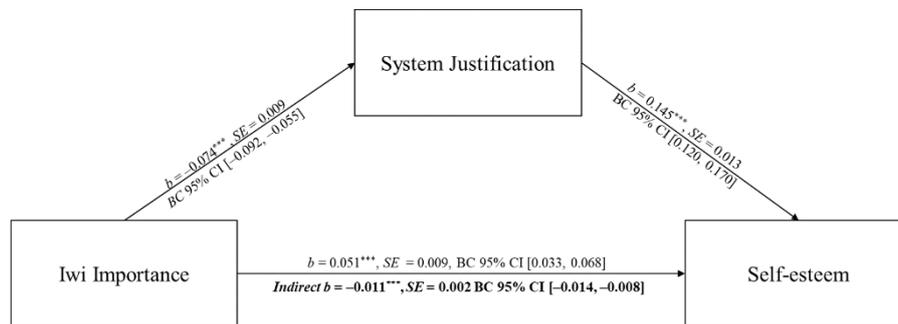
The present study examined the relationships between iwi importance and well-being and whether these associations are mediated by system justification. To this end, we performed hierarchical regression analyses to model our dependent variables. First, we regressed (1) self-esteem, (2) life satisfaction, and (3) psychological distress on to our demographic covariates (Block 1). These models were estimated using Maximum Likelihood with

Table 4. Final regression models predicting Self-esteem, Life satisfaction and Psychological distress

	Self-esteem				Life satisfaction				Psychological distress			
	<i>b</i> (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i> (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i> (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	<i>p</i> -value
Gender	0.077* (0.031)	[0.017, 0.137]	0.031 (0.012)	.012	0.094 (0.051)	[-0.006, 0.193]	0.023 (0.013)	.064	-0.040* (0.019)	[-0.077, -0.003]	-0.026 (0.012)	.034
Age	0.014*** (0.001)	[0.012, 0.017]	0.176 (0.013)	< .001	0.015*** (0.002)	[0.012, 0.018]	0.114 (0.013)	< .001	-0.014*** (0.001)	[-0.015, -0.013]	-0.275 (0.013)	< .001
Sole Māori affiliation	0.053 (0.033)	[-0.012, 0.118]	0.021 (0.013)	.109	-0.330*** (0.055)	[-0.438, -0.222]	-0.084 (0.014)	< .001	0.045* (0.021)	[0.004, 0.086]	0.029 (0.014)	.033
Iwi known	0.254** (0.078)	[0.102, 0.406]	0.044 (0.014)	.001	0.379** (0.131)	[0.122, 0.636]	0.041 (0.014)	.004	-0.209*** (0.051)	[-0.310, -0.109]	-0.059 (0.014)	< .001
Iwi importance	0.040*** (0.009)	[0.023, 0.057]	0.064 (0.014)	< .001	-0.045** (0.014)	[-0.073, -0.017]	-0.045 (0.014)	.001	0.011* (0.005)	[0.001, 0.021]	0.029 (0.013)	.034
Model												
Intercept	4.281*** (0.094)				5.762*** (0.151)				1.695*** (0.059)			
Sample size	6,218				6,214				6,191			
R ²	0.047***				0.021***				0.077***			
Model comparisons ¹												
ΔR^2	0.003				0.002				0.001			
ΔF	22.30***				10.67**				4.75*			

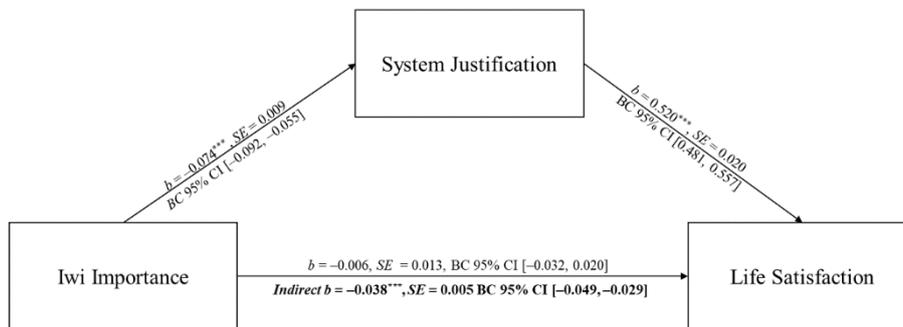
Note. Models estimated using Maximum Likelihood with robust estimation of standard errors. ¹Compared to models excluding our iwi importance measure. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Figure 1. Unstandardised regression coefficients for the associations between iwi importance and self-esteem, partially mediated by system justification.



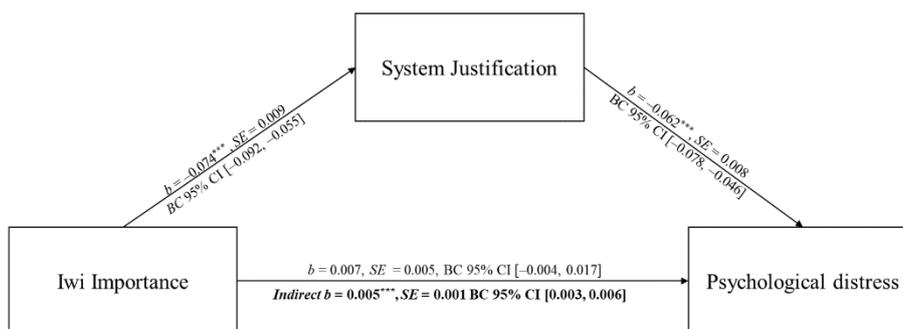
Note: Bias-corrected 95% Confidence Intervals are provided in parentheses. ***p < .001

Figure 2. Unstandardised regression coefficients for the associations between iwi importance and life satisfaction, fully mediated by system justification.



Note: Bias-corrected 95% Confidence Intervals are provided in parentheses. ***p < .001.

Figure 4. Unstandardised regression coefficients for the associations between iwi importance and psychological distress, fully mediated by system justification.



Note: Bias-corrected 95% Confidence Intervals are provided in parentheses. ***p < .001.

robust estimation of standard errors. Block 2 then included iwi importance as a predictor variable. Finally, a measure of system justification was added to the model and path analyses conducted to assess the indirect effects of iwi importance on well-being outcomes *via* system justification. Table 3: *Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between variables used in the analyses*, displays the bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics of variables used in the analyses.

Self-esteem

Table 4 displays the results of our analyses. The final model, including iwi importance showed significant

improvement from the previous model ($\Delta F_{(1, 6212)} = 22.3, p < .001$; see Table 4). These results show that men ($p = .012$) and older participants ($p < .001$) reported greater self-esteem than women and younger participants. Likewise, participants who knew their iwi (or multiple iwi) reported higher self-esteem than participants who did not ($p = .001$). In contrast, whether participants identified as solely Māori or Māori and another ethnicity did not affect levels of self-esteem ($p = .109$). After controlling for these covariates, our findings suggest that participants who ascribed greater (versus lower) importance to their iwi also reported higher self-esteem ($p < .001$).

Life Satisfaction

Concerning life satisfaction, the final model including the measure of iwi importance also showed significant improvement from the previous model ($\Delta F_{(1, 6208)} = 10.67$, $p < .001$; see Table 4). These findings reveal that older participants reported greater life satisfaction than their younger counterparts ($p < .001$), while the association between gender and life satisfaction was not significant ($p = .064$). Additionally, participants identifying as solely Māori were *less* satisfied with their lives than those who identified as Māori and another ethnicity ($p < .001$), while participants who knew their iwi reported greater life satisfaction than those who did not know their iwi ($p = .004$). After controlling for these covariates, participants who assigned greater (versus lower) importance to their iwi were *lower* in life satisfaction ($p = .001$).

Psychological Distress

The final model for psychological distress including iwi importance showed significant improvement from the previous model ($\Delta F_{(1, 6185)} = 4.75$, $p = .029$; see Table 4). The findings for psychological distress reveal that women ($p = .034$) and younger participants ($p < .001$) reported higher psychological distress than did men and older participants. Likewise, participants who identified as solely Māori reported higher psychological distress than those who identified as Māori and another ethnicity ($p = .033$). In contrast, participants who knew their iwi (or multiple iwi) reported lower psychological distress than those who did not know their iwi ($p < .001$). After controlling for these differences, participants who considered their iwi to be more (versus less) important reported *higher* psychological distress ($p = .034$).

System Justification as a Mediator

After identifying the direct associations between iwi importance and well-being outcomes, we conducted path analyses assessing the potential mediating effects of system justification. That is, we examined whether Māori who considered their iwi to be important to their self-concept (how they see themselves) endorse *lower* system-justifying beliefs and, in turn, whether this correlates with differences in well-being. We estimated the direct and indirect paths between our variables in *Mplus* v. 8.8 using Maximum Likelihood estimation. As in our previous analyses, we controlled for gender, age, ethnic affiliation, and whether participants knew their iwi (or multiple iwi). Additionally, we estimated bias-corrected (BC) 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs) using 5,000 bootstrapped resamples (with replacement).

Self-esteem

As in our previous analyses, Figure 1 reveals that iwi importance was directly associated with *higher* self-esteem ($p < .001$). However, iwi importance was indirectly associated with *lower* self-esteem via system justification. Namely, Māori who deemed their iwi to be important to their self-concept (how they see themselves) reported lower system justification ($p < .001$), which, in turn, correlated with *lower* self-esteem ($p < .001$).

Life Satisfaction

Figure 2 reveals the significant mediating effects of

system justification on the association between iwi importance and life satisfaction. Namely, Māori who deem their iwi (or multiple iwi) to be important to their self-concept reported lower system justification and, in turn, reported *lower* life satisfaction ($p < .001$). Notably, this effect represented *full* mediation, as the association between iwi importance and life satisfaction became non-significant after adjusting for system justification ($p = .641$).

Psychological Distress

Finally, Figure 3 revealed that Māori who deem their iwi (or multiple iwi) to be important to their self-concept reported lower system justification and, in turn, reported *higher* psychological distress ($p < .001$). Additionally, this effect reflected *full* mediation, as the direct association between iwi importance and psychological distress became non-significant ($p = .212$).

DISCUSSION

The present study drew on national sample data to explore the connection between tribal affiliation and personal well-being among Māori and how these are mediated by system justification.

Associations between demographics and well-being measures – the impact of Iwi Importance

We explored associations between demographics and well-being measures to clarify the importance of iwi affiliation for well-being. Regarding self-esteem, men and older participants reported greater self-esteem than women and younger participants. As predicted, controlling for covariates, we found that those who ascribed greater importance to their iwi also reported higher self-esteem.

Gender differences in respect of self-esteem have long been studied. Multiple reviews have found that males tend to report higher self-esteem (Zuckerman, Li, & Hall, 2016), which is thought to reflect structural power relations embedded in class, age, and gender structures that undermine women's self-esteem (McMullin & Cairney, 2004). Previous research among Māori has found that being male, older, having a higher household income, and having higher socio-economic status were associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Houkamau et al., 2021); therefore, this finding is consistent with previous research.

Longitudinal studies examining the development of self-esteem have found that self-esteem decreases in old age for both men and women (Orth & Robins, 2014; McMullin & Cairney, 2004); however, our data suggest age-related increases in self-esteem as Māori move into old age. This may reflect cultural nuance in Māori society as kaumātua (elders) are held in high esteem (Higgins & Meredith, 2015), recognised for their life experiences and the knowledge they have accumulated over the years, and valued for the role they play in their iwi (Mika, 2016). Accordingly, they are afforded social status and responsibilities in their whānau (Durie, 1999; Mika, 2016).

Whether participants identified as solely Māori or Māori and another ethnicity did not directly affect levels of self-esteem. This points to the impact of a complex interplay of individual, social, and cultural factors and may vary based on individual experiences and circumstances as

opposed to whether they affiliate with one ethnic group or multiple groups.

As predicted, controlling for covariates, we found that those who ascribed greater importance to their iwi also reported higher self-esteem. These results are in line with previous large-scale qualitative research which shows that, at a broader level, Māori who have a higher sense of connection to their culture report higher levels of self-esteem (Matika et al., 2017; Matika et al., 2021), as well as qualitative research that has found ethnic identity is tied to positive well-being for Māori (Durie, 1985; Durie, 1997; Gilchrist, 2017; Muriwai et al., 2015), Webber, 2012; Webber & McFarlane, 2020). Given that most Māori are now urban dwellers, knowing one's iwi provides a link to the past and a sense of belonging to a wider community of people who share common ancestors and cultural traditions (Durie, 1997; Webber & McFarlane, 2020). Each iwi has unique cultural practices, customs, and traditions passed down through generations. Being part of an iwi allows Māori to participate in these practices and celebrate their culture (Webber & McFarlane, 2020), which can contribute to a sense of personal self-esteem and meaning. There are also practical elements to iwi connectedness. Many iwi offer te reo Māori (Māori language) and tikanga Māori (Māori protocols and customs) educational opportunities, and develop businesses and savings schemes offering financial literacy, employment, and educational services. All these elements support Māori to connect with their iwi, thereby contributing to practical, cultural, social, and psychological well-being.

Psychological distress

Our findings for psychological distress reveal that women, younger participants, and participants who identified as solely Māori reported higher psychological distress than men, older participants, and participants who identified as Māori and another ethnicity. Previous research has found that psychological distress, as measured by the K6 model (used in this study to assess non-specific symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression) tends to decrease as people age (Krynen et al., 2013), potentially reflecting a range of factors related to life stage. Younger people may face transitions or challenges such as starting higher education, leaving home, or entering the workforce, leading to increased stress and uncertainty about the future. Psychological distress has been found to be more common in women (Viertiö, Kiviruusu, Piirtola et al., 2021), which has been linked to various factors, including high caregiving responsibilities and relational work within families. Women are also more likely to experience gender-based discrimination and disadvantage in New Zealand (Bahamondes et al., 2019). Such experiences and expectations are linked to elevated stress. Previous research has found that Māori women have a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms and a higher level of life stress than non-Māori women in New Zealand (Signal et al., 2017), which contributes to understanding the patterns we see here.

The high level of psychological distress observed for sole Māori aligns with previous research which compared well-being and socio-economic outcomes among Māori who identify as only Māori, as opposed to those who

report multiple affiliations (Chapple, 2000; Kukutai, 2011; Houkamau, Stronge, & Sibley, 2017). Previous results from a national probability sample show that both sole Māori and Māori and European reported poorer outcomes than European on various indicators of social and economic status (including educational and economic outcomes, and life satisfaction); however, those who identified as sole Māori experienced worse outcomes on all measures (Houkamau & Sibley, 2014). For instance, Māori who identify as Māori only are also less likely to own a home, which is a significant source of security and stability (Houkamau, & Sibley, 2015).

After controlling for these differences, participants who deemed their iwi to be more (versus less) important reported higher psychological distress. We note that while this pattern was found, research has also shown that psychological distress among Māori is mitigated for those who have a high sense of cultural efficacy and are actively engaged with Māori culture (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011; Muriwai, Houkamau, & Sibley, 2015). Cultural efficacy was not included in this analysis, though it is possible that this pattern would not appear if such a measure was included. Potential explanations for higher stress are further discussed below. Overall, the impact of ethnic identity on psychological distress is complex and can vary from person to person.

Life satisfaction

Concerning life satisfaction, older participants reported greater life satisfaction than their younger counterparts, while the association between gender and life satisfaction was non-significant. Additionally, participants identifying as solely Māori were less satisfied with their lives than those who identified as Māori and another ethnicity.

Bartram's (2021) comprehensive review of research in this area shows that life satisfaction generally remains strong as people age. Low life satisfaction among sole Māori could be attributed to the extent and nature of the disadvantage experienced by sole Māori (discussed in the previous section). Regarding age differences, as discussed, younger people tend to show higher levels of psychological distress (Krynen et al., 2013), which may combine to reduce overall life satisfaction. We find that men and women show no significant differences in life satisfaction despite our results showing elevated stress levels and lower self-esteem among women. Previous international studies have found that average levels of life satisfaction tend to be similar for men and women (Della Giusta et al., 2011); however, men and women may evaluate life satisfaction and assign different importance to life dimensions when evaluating overall satisfaction with their lives (Joshani, 2018; Joshani & Jovanović, 2020), with women attributing life satisfaction to relational aspects and men to career and job satisfaction (Della Giusta et al., 2011), although the latter was not captured in our measure.

After controlling for these covariates, it was found that participants who assigned greater (versus lower) importance to their iwi had lower life satisfaction. That is, they were generally less satisfied with their standard of living, health, future security, and personal relationships. Given the psychological value of affiliating with iwi, which elevates self-esteem, we further hypothesised that

system-justifying beliefs would mediate the relationship between life satisfaction and iwi importance, given that SJT proposes that those who adhere to system-justifying beliefs benefit from a palliative function.

System Justification as a Mediator

Mediation analyses found that Māori who deemed their iwi to be important to their self-concept reported lower system justification, which, in turn, correlated with lower self-esteem. Similarly, this was related to lower life satisfaction: Māori who deem their iwi (or multiple iwi) to be important to their self-concept reported lower system justification and, in turn, lower life satisfaction. Finally, we found that Māori who deem their iwi (or multiple iwi) to be important to their self-concept reported lower system justification and, in turn, reported higher psychological distress, which, in turn, negatively affected well-being. Our data, therefore, aligns with previous research which shows that individuals with a strong sense of ethnic identity are less likely to adopt beliefs that justify the existing order (e.g., Houkamau & Sibley, 2014; Jost et al., 2004). This suggests that Māori who feel their iwi is important to their overall sense of identity may find it hard to adopt system-justifying beliefs, perhaps experiencing sustained discontent at New Zealand's socio-political system.

Although New Zealand is increasingly culturally diverse, given its history Māori-Pākehā relations dominate discussions of "race relations" in political discourse and the media, which makes it difficult for those who identify as Māori to ignore political issues related to Māori in New Zealand. Previous research has found those who are politically conscious experience stress and pressure relating to the perceived injustices and can feel overwhelmed in the long term due to the lack of change effected within the social and political systems in which they live (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Cox, 2014). Māori who see their iwi as important to their overall sense of self may find injustice in New Zealand particularly challenging, thus adding to personal experiences of stress, which, over time, can erode well-being and general life satisfaction depending on the level of perceived injustice.

Perceptions of injustice have been linked to various mental health problems, including depression and anxiety (Houkamau et al., 2020). At the same time, research has found that while perceptions of the system as fair and legitimate in the face of harm from others in society buffers life satisfaction in the short term, the resulting experience-belief conflict engenders a state of ideological dissonance. This suggests that facing the reality of injustice, although challenging to reconcile, is more effective for well-being in the longer term (Harding et al., 2013), perhaps because facing injustice can lead to meaningful actions to create change, including via activism (Houkamau et al., SIMCA under review 2023). Longitudinal research, which tracks populations over time, could help to clarify this relationship.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

We believe that our data provide grounds for further research into how perceptions of injustice towards Māori can have significant psychological impacts on Māori. The items we used did not permit respondents to differentiate between what aspects of the New Zealand social system

they found problematic; future studies should look more closely at different forms of social and economic policy that are problematic to Māori and how they may impact their perceptions of system injustice. Understanding what is perceived as injustice and how it operates would help clarify the sources of injustice and how these can be effectively addressed in New Zealand society. Notably, we did not look at the extent to which individuals felt that the system was personally disadvantageous to them, as opposed to their iwi or Māori generally. Of these two phenomena, we only assessed perceptions of unfairness generally. Thus, we are unsure if the relationships we identified here generalise to perceptions of unfairness towards Māori; nor can we confirm the causal relationship between system justification and iwi affiliation. It is possible that stronger affiliation is a consequence of system justification. Longitudinal data are needed to clarify the causal direction of the associations reported here.

In our study, participants were asked to specify the importance of their iwi in relation to how they perceive themselves. This perception aligns with what is typically called "self-concept" in psychology. Self-concept encompasses an individual's beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about their own identity, traits, abilities, and roles across various contexts. However, it should be noted that a specific measure of self-concept, in its comprehensive definition, was not included in this study. As such, while we utilise the term 'self-concept' in our discussions, it could be argued that an additional, more encompassing measure would have been necessary to fully assess self-concept in its broadest sense.

The paper illuminates the importance of iwi for individual Māori but falls short in comprehensively exploring its positive impact on lived experience. The three scales utilised—Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, Cummins et al.'s Personal Well-being Index, and Kessler's 6-item psychological distress scale—are empirically validated and commonly used in psychological research. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is celebrated for its reliability and validity (Pegler, Gregg, & Hart, 2019), just as the Personal Well-being Index has been validated with large samples (Cummins et al., 2003), and Kessler's psychological distress scale is noted for its high reliability across multiple studies and countries (Prochaska et al., 2012). Despite employing these well-validated scales, we acknowledge that the research methods and tools used may overlook the cultural nuances vital to Māori well-being – including connection to whakapapa and whenua (Durie, 1995; Cram, 2014; Reid et al., 2016) and the absence of Māori-centric indicators could result in a limited understanding of well-being as experienced within the Māori community (Cram, 2014).

We found this data among Māori; therefore, our findings may be most relevant to the New Zealand context. However, our results are consistent with international literature showing that system-justifying influences well-being among groups in various countries (see Shockley et al., 2016). Future research should aim to investigate the cross-cultural generalisability of our findings.

Finally, it's worth noting that the impact of stronger iwi importance and sole Māori identification can be influenced by various confounding variables, not limited

to socioeconomic status, level of education, and individual experiences with discrimination or systemic barriers. Our results showed that the direct effects of stronger iwi affiliation on well-being and system-justifying beliefs were not large, warranting future research to clarify these correlations and guide more nuanced discussions of the relationship between well-being and iwi importance, as presented in this paper.

Conclusion

The current research investigated the relationship between system-justification, iwi affiliation and well-being. We demonstrated that system-justifying beliefs are more prevalent among Māori who are less strongly identified with their iwi, and those who are more strongly identified experience greater dissatisfaction due to lower system-endorsing beliefs. Our results are the first to identify a psychological mechanism through which system justification confers psychological benefits and disadvantages to Māori based on how important they feel their iwi is to their identity.

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Funding and ethical approval

This research was supported by a Marsden Grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand awarded to the first author for “How great can we be? Identity leaders of the Māori economic renaissance” (15-UOA-316). The research was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee for the period 16 May 2016 until 16 May 2022. Reference Number: 017154.