

Research busts myth that "Pakeha" is a derogatory term

February 5 2013

The recurrent myth that the label "Pākehā" is derogatory is challenged by the latest findings from the large scale New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study. The study found generally positive feelings between Māori and New Zealanders of European descent, say researchers Dr Chris Sibley, Dr Carla Houkamau and Dr William Hoverd.

"We found no evidence whatsoever for the suggestion that the term 'Pākehā' is in any way pejorative or might reflect a [negative attitude](#) toward New Zealanders of European descent," says Dr Sibley from The University of Auckland's School of Psychology. Dr Sibley leads the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS).

"Our findings indicate that the choice by Māori to use the term Pākehā is linked to how strongly they identify as Māori. The choice to use Te Reo is part of identity – rather than anything to do with Maori attitudes toward New Zealanders of European descent," says Dr Carla Houkamau of The University of Auckland Business School.

"Our data show that Māori who prefer the term Pākehā to other descriptions, such as 'New Zealand European', 'Kiwi', or 'New Zealander', tend to view their own ethnicity as a more central to their [self-concept](#)," says Dr Sibley. "Māori also express very positive, warm attitudes toward New Zealanders of European descent generally, regardless of the label that they use to describe them."

"We think this is a really positive finding for New Zealand," adds Dr

William Hoverd, a Research Associate in the School of Classics, Art History and [Religious Studies](#) at Victoria University of Wellington.

"The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study provided the first opportunity to actually test this idea out in a nationally [representative sample](#)" says Dr Carla Houkamau. The study surveys the attitudes and beliefs of thousands of New Zealanders, and provided data on a wide range of questions from race relations to religious beliefs and [personality types](#).

New Zealanders of European descent also had generally warm attitudes towards Māori, but those who preferred to self-label as Pākehā expressed more positive views of Māori than those who chose other terms, such as "New Zealander" or "New Zealand European"

"Our findings suggest that Europeans who prefer to use the term Pākehā to describe themselves, are likely expressing a desire to recognise a positive relationship with Māori", says Dr Sibley. Europeans who prefer to use the term Pākehā were generally supportive of symbolic aspects of biculturalism the study showed.

The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study, launched by Dr Sibley in 2009, surveys thousands of New Zealanders every year on a wide range of topics. The latest findings are derived from an analysis of two of the questions in the 2009 survey, about the terms people prefer to describe New Zealanders of European descent and their ratings of warmth toward themselves and members of other ethnic groups.

Use of the term Pākehā was relatively low overall (14%) and the most popular term was New Zealander (50%). Amongst Māori levels of support for the four main terms were: New Zealander 37%, Pākehā 31%, Kiwi 24%, and New Zealand European 19%. Amongst New Zealanders of European descent they were 53%, 12%, 17%, and 25%

respectively. The findings were published in the journal *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*.

A total of 6,518 people took part in the survey and their ethnicities were broadly representative of the New Zealand population, with 1,163 Māori participants and 4,618 New Zealanders of European descent.

More information: For more information about the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study visit the study website:

www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/NZAVS

Provided by University of Auckland

Citation: Research busts myth that "Pakeha" is a derogatory term (2013, February 5) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-myth-pakeha-derogatory-term.html>

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