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Happiness, ethnic discrimination and human rights in post-colonial / multicultural New Zealand

An exploration of ethnic discrimination as a barrier to the fulfilment of human rights in New Zealand, through a study of the impact of ethnic discrimination from state institutions on the ability of ethnic minorities to pursue their versions of happiness.

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Abstract

The impact of ethnic discrimination on the ability of ethnic minorities to pursue their own versions of happiness has not been explored, especially in a New Zealand context. The pursuing of the primary sources of happiness has an impact on how people live their daily lives. When these primary sources are either hindered or threatened this can have an adverse effect on happiness. This research is positioned in the post-colonial / multicultural setting that is 21st New Zealand. From a viewpoint of liberal multiculturalism, the relationship between *recognition of identity* and *distribution of resources* is examined through an investigation of ethnic discrimination. This relationship is explored by positioning happiness as both an object at stake in its navigation and as a pivot point in debate on the status of multiculturalism.

This research draws its data from an online survey of 1878 participants in Auckland, New Zealand, with each identifying primarily with one of six ethnic identities (Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Māori, Pākehā and Samoan). The survey asked respondents about their primary sources of happiness and their experiences of ethnic discrimination from state institutions. Survey findings show that ethnic discrimination has a negative impact on the happiness of ethnic minorities when that discrimination puts barriers in place that prevent them from meeting their basic needs, and, therefore their access to primary sources of happiness. The survey findings identify family as the primary and shared source of happiness across ethnic groups. Furthermore, the survey data indicate that it is the state institutions responsible for meeting basic needs, or at least not hindering them, (Work and Income, Ministry of Health and Department of Corrections) that have the highest frequency of reported experiences of ethnic discrimination. Contextualised in a human rights framework, these results raise suggest a possible role for group rights (as compared to individual) in the both the negotiation of the relationship between recognition and distribution and the eradication of discrimination by New Zealand state institutions.

Preface

I am under no illusion about the benefits I have enjoyed from my position as an educated male Pākehā (European), and am becoming increasingly aware of the disadvantages others experience because they do not fit a similar profile. I start with this statement to express my declaration of 'white privilege' at the earliest opportunity. While considerable debate might emerge around me defining my experiences as 'white privilege', at the very least I know I have not been discriminated against because of the ethnic group with which I identify. Equally, I am aware of a tension in my work. I criticise the system from which I personally benefit, one that allows me to submit this thesis, and that will differentiate me from my peers in accordance with the grade that will be allocated.

As a citizen of New Zealand I seek to scrutinise the system in terms of an abiding social-cultural value associated with our history as a nation. I seek to analyse the fundamental structures that shape and control our society in terms of the normative concept of social equality, including the social welfare and justice systems. As well as those fundamental structures, this study inquires of those ancillary structures that are intended to provide equal opportunity and service to all members of New Zealand society, including state institutions such as Work and Income. Not only do I not support systems that discriminate on the basis of social difference, but I wholeheartedly reject any notion of inequality that results from social difference, whether that be based on ethnicity, religion, age, sexuality or any number of the unique aspects that make humanity so diverse. Regardless of the seemingly countless number of atrocities of the past, I believe we are at a point in humanity's existence where knowledge is shared instantly and vastly so that we know enough to, and have the ability to, eradicate racism, sexism, ageism, and generally all of the 'isms' that manifest through prejudice and discrimination. Regardless of the privileges I have experienced and still receive as I write this thesis, I care about social injustices both in a broad sense and in their specific manifestations.

It is my personal experiences that have lead me to the topic of this thesis. I can trace my academic opportunities and position to one single decision as a starting point.

This decision was not made by me, but rather by someone within a position of power and with authority over myself and others. This person was an employee of a state institution and responsible for performing their role with a view to the equal treatment of others and without discrimination. This person's decision gave me the opportunity to attend a course. This was an opportunity that was not given to others who had been on the waiting list for that particular course for much longer than I had been and had, arguably, a higher level of need to attend. It was my completion of this course that had huge knock-on benefits and eventually gave me the opportunity to undertake tertiary education for a second time, and to do so at a specific juncture in my life journey that has lead me to this point. I was given preference over one specific individual who certainly should have, all other things being equal, been accepted onto this course before I was. At a similar time when I was starting to experience benefits from completing this course, this individual was still experiencing barriers on their path towards further opportunities. The primary difference between this other individual and myself was our ethnic identity. This individual identified as Māori. The decision maker identified with the same ethnicity as myself, as Pākehā.

Further university education has enabled me to understand what happened that day. Once I possessed the words to understand that situation, I became increasingly outraged when discovering the frequency of situations like that, which I had experienced. At the same time, I am immensely grateful for the opportunities open to me and am motivated to not only avoid squandering these, but also to not consume them for only my personal gain.

My experiences and academic journey have taught me not only about the type of researcher I want to be, but also about the kind of person to which I aspire. More specifically, I understand the person I do *not* want to be. I do *not* want to be someone who knows of injustices yet does not speak up. I want to be someone who uses my 'white privilege' in spite of it, and to call out the hypocrisy, injustice and inequality of it.

I am an educated male Pākehā, and this thesis is my first formal attempt at challenging the system from which I have benefited immensely.

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