

MEASURING ETHNICITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

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Since the beginnings of the *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* in 1993, ethnicity has featured prominently in discussions. For example, the first edition had an article by Tipene O'Regan and Api Mahuika discussing "modern day developments within Māori society" in relation to policy advice from the "Social Policy Agency". While many of the papers published in the journal have had ethnicity as one of the variables, or issues associated with ethnicity have been the main focus of particular articles, clear definitions of who belongs to particular groups and, more fundamentally, how groups are actually defined, are often not set out. However, from time to time there have been discussions as to what we actually mean by ethnicity. A recent example has been the 2004 paper by Tahu Kukutai entitled "The problem of defining an ethnic group for public policy: Who is Māori and why does it matter?" A concern about what ethnicity is actually telling us is not unique to New Zealand. There has been an explosion worldwide of research on the construction of identity, of which ethnicity is just one part.

This collection of research papers and research notes around the measurement of ethnicity is an attempt to bring together some recent thinking on the construction of ethnicity in a New Zealand context. The collection was promoted by a literature review carried out in 2008 for Statistics New Zealand. The review identified a range of work either underway or recently completed in New Zealand. Much of the research in this Social Policy Journal collection has been connected, in a variety of ways, to the Institute of Policy Studies. This includes two reviews of the book *Ethnicity, Identity and Public Policy* by David Bromell. David was seconded from the Ministry of Social Development to the Institute in 2007 in order to write this book. But relying on such a connection also means the collection inevitably misses other important research being undertaken in New Zealand and, thus, by no means represents all the variety of opinions regarding the construction of ethnicity in Aotearoa. It is therefore certainly not the last word on the conceptualisation and measurement of ethnicity in New Zealand. This will be an on-going process, both in New Zealand and worldwide.