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Support for indigenous and multicultural rights and intergroup attitudes in New Zealand: The role of indispensability

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ABSTRACT

Different ethnic groups can be considered more positively if they are perceived to be indispensable for society, either in terms of 'who we are' -identity indispensability- or 'what we do'-functional indispensability. In this study we expand the boundaries of indispensability research by investigating the role of perceived indispensability of Indigenous (Māori) and immigrant (Chinese) groups on intergroup outcomes (support for rights and outgroup attitudes) in New Zealand, a settler colonial society. We also considered the role of perceived diversity ideologies of interculturalism (identity-conscious) and colorblindness (identity-blind) on these intergroup outcomes. Given New Zealand's bicultural history, we expected Māori to be rated higher on identity indispensability but lower on functional indispensability than Chinese New Zealanders. In this study, 174 New Zealand university students of European descent (Pākehā), with a mean age of 19.1 years, answered the online survey. As expected, participants rated Māori higher on identity indispensability but lower on functional indispensability than Chinese New Zealanders. Perceived identity indispensability of Māori was the strongest significant predictor of support for Māori rights. Perceived functional indispensability of Chinese New Zealanders positively predicted support for multicultural rights and outgroup attitudes. Perceived interculturalism was positively associated with support for multicultural rights and attitudes toward Chinese New Zealanders. The results are discussed in terms of the promising role of perceived indispensability of both Indigenous and migrant groups for more harmonious and equitable societies.

Western societies are, despite some wishing otherwise, inherently diverse with ethnic (super)diversity and immigration often viewed in public debates as disruptive to social cohesion (Holtug & Mason, 2010). Cultural diversity is here to stay and is a megatrend forecasted to significantly impact young people and their everyday relationships (Harris & Johns, 2021). As such, research looking at the promotion of more positive intergroup relations by focusing on the benefits and contributions of immigrants and minority groups to society is warranted (Graf et al., 2023). Although less common, recent social psychological approaches have looked at the strengths and contributions of immigrants and other minority groups. For instance, the Threat-Benefit Theory proposes that immigrants are also

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perceived as benefiting societies and contributing to social cohesion, beyond being seen as sources of symbolic or realistic threats by receiving societies (Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2016). Similarly, recent research showed that diversity can be perceived as instrumentally positive for society thereby reducing perceived threats and relating to more positive attitudes toward minority groups (Kauff et al., 2019).

One important but under-researched dimension for the promotion of more positive intergroup relations is group indispensability (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten, 2024). A minority or immigrant group being seen as indispensable for the national identity (i.e., identity indispensability) or functioning of the society (i.e., functional indispensability) is more likely to be perceived positively (Guerra, et al., 2015; Verkuyten, 2024). In the current study, we extend research on identity and functional indispensability to an under-researched context, the relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in New Zealand, a settler colonial society. While the positive impact of both forms of indispensability on intergroup relations has been shown consistently for immigrant and non-immigrant groups, no previous research has explored if these beneficial effects extend to the context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, which are marked by centuries of colonization, strong status and power asymmetries, and devastation (González et al., 2022). The core question is, can the positive effects of indispensability extend to this context, specifically amongst university students? We investigate the roles of perceived indispensability amongst a university sample of majority group New Zealanders (Pākehā) on (i) support for Indigenous and multicultural rights, and (ii) outgroup attitudes toward Māori and an immigrant group (Chinese New Zealanders).

We acknowledge that research on the role of indispensability on intergroup outcomes is nascent and other dimensions that consider diversity as positive such as diversity ideologies and pro-diversity beliefs have robustly been found to influence intergroup relations (e.g. Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Wolsko et al., 2000). We also consider how two different perceived ideologies: colorblindness (identity-blind) and interculturalism (identity-conscious) might influence the relationship between indispensability and these outcome measures.

Identity and Functional Indispensability

The concept of indispensability pertains to something that cannot be done without. The initial conceptualization of indispensability in social psychology focused on category indispensability whereby the superordinate group identity is composed of different categories that make up the different parts of the overarching whole, akin to the idea of a 'fruit salad nation' or a puzzle where all components are needed (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). Whilst it may not be realistic for minority groups to view themselves and be viewed as prototypical exemplars of the superordinate category, it can still be realistic for them to view themselves and be viewed as necessary parts- *indispensable*. Across a range of social contexts (the Netherlands, Portugal, U.S., UK), studies have shown that perceived group indispensability to the national identity is linked to more positive intergroup outcomes (e.g., Guerra et al., 2015; Kunst et al., 2025; Verkuyten, 2024). For instance, among Dutch native participants, perceiving immigrants in the Netherlands to be indispensable parts of Dutch society was associated with positive feelings and acceptance of immigrants' rights (Verkuyten et al., 2014). But groups might not only contribute to the identity of the superordinate category but also be instrumental in determining important economic and social outcomes in society- functional indispensability (Guerra et al., 2015, 2016). In fact, for some groups it might be more plausible and possible for them to claim or be viewed in terms of their economic and social contributions rather than in terms of the defining characteristics of the national identity. In a study in Portugal, Guerra et al. (2015) demonstrated that Ukrainian immigrants were viewed as more indispensable for the economic functioning of the society and Brazilian immigrants who share linguistic attributes with Portuguese as an ex-colony were viewed as more identity indispensable. Moreover, functional and identity indispensability were associated with more positive attitudes toward Ukrainians and Brazilians, respectively.

The role of indispensability extends beyond intergroup attitudes. Mepham and Verkuyten (2017) looked at the mediating role of identity and functional indispensability in the link between ethnic and civic representations of the nation and support for immigrant rights in a sample of majority ethnic Dutch. They found that the endorsement of civic citizenship was associated with more support for immigrant rights via stronger sense of both functional and identity indispensability of immigrants. Recently, Fluit et al. (2023) investigated whether the perceived indispensability (functional and identity) of minority groups by majority group members would increase anti-separatist attitudes toward these minority groups amongst Han Chinese vis-à-vis Tibetans and Uyghurs, and amongst Dutch toward Brexit and Frexit in the EU. Across these contexts, the more participants perceived the targeted groups as indispensable, the more anti-separatist of these groups they were. Specifically, only identity indispensability in the context of China, and identity more strongly than functional identity in the EU context, were associated with dissatisfaction with possible separation because these groups were perceived as irreplaceable to the superordinate overarching national or European identity (Fluit et al., 2023). This is important because it highlights that when a subgroup is perceived as fundamental to 'who we are', the other subgroups (majority or minority) are more likely to afford not only positive affect, but also rights to that subgroup and correspondingly react to any possibility of separation. Gonzáles et al. (2022) have argued that psychology has been slow to engage with Indigenous issues, and to the best of our knowledge, the role of indispensability in the support of Indigenous rights has not been investigated, and this is one of the main aims of the current study.

Diversity Ideologies and Intergroup Relations

Whilst research on the role of indispensability on intergroup relations is recent, research on the role of diversity ideologies on intergroup attitudes and support for diversity policies is extensive and points to the nuanced importance of diversity ideologies on these intergroup outcomes (e.g. Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Leslie et al., 2020; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). In a meta-analysis of 114 articles

of the effects of identity-blind ideologies (colorblindness, meritocracy, assimilation) and identity-conscious ideologies (multiculturalism), Leslie et al. (2020) found that colorblindness was negatively linked to stereotyping and diversity policy support only whilst multiculturalism was negatively associated with prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping but positively associated with diversity policy support. Interculturalism is a new identity-conscious ideology that has been proposed to address the criticism that multiculturalism focuses only on cultural differences (Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, Mepham, et al., 2020; Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). Interculturalism is based on the proposition that both cultural group distinctiveness and commonality across groups through the superordinate national category are important. A recent laboratory experiment in New Zealand showed that compared to the control condition, participants randomly assigned to an interculturalism condition reported more explicit and implicit positive intergroup attitudes (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). We therefore consider the role of one identity-blind ideology (perceived colorblindness) and one identity-conscious ideology (perceived interculturalism)) on support for Indigenous and multicultural rights and intergroup attitudes. Specifically, given Leslie et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, we expect that perceiving New Zealand as characterized by colorblindness (identity-blind) would be negatively associated with support for group-based rights whereas perceptions of interculturalism would be positively associated with support for group-based rights, and favorable outgroup attitudes (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021).

Importantly, past research has found diversity ideologies to moderate the influence of other variables such as SDO (Scott & Safdar, 2017) and contact (Adesokan et al., 2011) on intergroup outcomes. We therefore explore whether perceiving New Zealand in an identity conscious manner (interculturalism) or an identity blind manner (colorblindness) influence the association between indispensability and intergroup outcomes. Is it the case that interculturalism amplifies the hypothesized positive effect of indispensability whilst colorblindness dampens the effect? Or rather, that indispensability is a stronger predictor of positive intergroup outcomes in less diversity conducive contexts, i.e., low interculturalism and/or high colorblindness?

The Social Context: New Zealand/Aotearoa and the Treaty of Waitangi

New Zealand provides a unique and informative context to test the propositions for indispensability. Built on the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) in 1840, New Zealand is the only settler country enshrined by a single Treaty that recognized the Crown (settlers) and the Indigenous Māori people as partners, who were expected to act reasonably and in good faith in their formation of a new government. Fast forward to contemporary New Zealand, Sibley and Liu (2007) found that New Zealand was explicitly and implicitly viewed as bicultural with both Māori and Pākehā (European, notably those of Anglo-Celtic descent) perceived to contribute equally to the national identity. Additionally, this (bicultural) view of the national identity excluded Asian New Zealanders who were not implicitly associated with the national category. Despite the symbolic inclusion of Māori in defining New Zealand national identity, like many other Indigenous Peoples, they are socio-economically disadvantaged having a higher level of unemployment and lower levels of educational attainment, median incomes, and net wealth, compared to the general population (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2021; Statistics New Zealand, 2016).

Although the presence of Chinese workers dates to the 1860s, they were subjected to racist legislation such as exclusion from naturalization and a poll tax (Vosslamber & Yong, 2023). More recent Asian immigration started in the 1990s following changes to immigration policies with the first wave of people coming from Hong-Kong, Taiwan, and Korea (Meares et al., 2011) and the second wave in the 2000s from China and India (Domont, 2022). Asians are the fastest growing immigrant group (17.3%) and are just slightly less in numbers than Māori (17.8%). Most people in New Zealand are of European ancestry (67.8%) and the smallest group (8.9%) are the Pacific Peoples (Statistics New Zealand, 2024). Asian New Zealanders (mostly Chinese) are stereotyped as high on competence and low on warmth (Sibley et al., 2011). This reflects the fact that Chinese immigrants are often highly educated professionals or entrepreneurs with transferable and desirable skills (Yeung, 2012). Chinese New Zealanders (both early and recent ones) are well represented as business owners, and after South Koreans, they are the most likely to enter New Zealand on the Business Category visa (Ran & Liu, 2020). It is therefore safe to say that Chinese New Zealanders contribute to the economic functioning of New Zealand society.

The historic biculturalism of New Zealand and its emerging cultural diversity can both co-exist. Sibley and Ward (2013) argued that whilst in principle the bicultural nature of New Zealand was accepted, this was unfortunately not necessarily matched by 'in-practice' biculturalism. Research shows that 43% of Māori in a nationally representative sample experienced moderate to high levels of discrimination, which were then associated with poorer well-being outcomes (Houkamau, et al., 2017). Data from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS, 2014) showed that New Zealand Europeans strongly supported historical negation and symbolic exclusionary post-colonial ideologies to legitimize inequalities faced by the Māori population (Satherley et al., 2018). Notwithstanding, in European descent New Zealander youth, support for biculturalism was positively related to support for multiculturalism (Ward & Lin, 2005), and multiculturalism was preferred to assimilation and separation in a national survey (Ward & Masgoret, 2008). The distinction between abstract and concrete multiculturalism (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014) can be applied to the New Zealand context. Using the 2009 NZAVS survey, Sibley and Ward (2013) argued that New Zealanders endorse the promotion and appreciation of cultural diversity aspect of multiculturalism (abstract), but less so the equitable accommodation, i.e. addressing group-level disadvantage, aspect of multiculturalism (concrete). Interculturalism could be better suited to the bicultural history of New Zealand and allow for the interconnectedness of cultural groups within New Zealand.

The Present Study

The current study investigates the role of perceived indispensability of Māori and Chinese New Zealanders amongst European New Zealanders (Pākehā) on their support for Indigenous/multicultural rights and their intergroup attitudes. Based on the socio-historical context of New Zealand whereby Māori are viewed as contributing equally to the national identity as Pākehā, and Chinese New

Zealanders are viewed as competent and contributing to the economy, it is expected that:

H1. Participants perceive Māori higher on identity indispensability but lower on functional indispensability than Chinese New Zealanders.

H2. : Perceived identity indispensability of Māori positively predicts support for Indigenous rights and intergroup attitudes, whereas perceived functional indispensability of Chinese New Zealanders positively predicts support for their multicultural rights and intergroup attitudes.

H3. : Perceived interculturalism of New Zealand predicts both support for rights and positive intergroup attitudes whereas perceived colorblindness predicts lower support for Indigenous and multicultural rights but is unrelated to intergroup attitudes.

Finally, given the established roles of diversity ideologies, we explored whether colorblindness and interculturalism moderate the influence of identity and functional indispensability on the intergroup outcomes. Specifically, would it be that identity indispensability of Māori and functional indispensability of Chinese are associated to positive intergroup outcomes especially when participants endorse colorblindness strongly and/or endorse interculturalism weakly, that is, in less diversity conducive contexts? Or is it the case that perceived interculturalism amplifies the predicted positive association of indispensability with positive intergroup outcomes while colorblindness weakens the association? Given that prior research has not simultaneously considered the perceived indispensability of minority groups and diversity ideologies, we explore the latter questions.

Method

Participants

There were 174 university students of European descent (Pākehā) who chose to participate in this study as part of their course requirement for participation in psychological research. All participants were born in New Zealand, and 95.88% were enrolled as full-time students. The mean age was 19.10, $SD = 1.66$, age range 17–30 years. The sample was composed of more females (72.99%) than males (27.01%). The research was approved by the School of Psychology's Human Ethics Committee (HE027835) under the delegated authority of the University's Human Ethics Committee. A post hoc power analysis using the *pwr* package (Champely, 2020) in R (R Core Team, 2025) indicated that at least 130 participants were required to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) with 90% power at a two-tailed significance level of 0.05 for a regression analysis with seven predictors. Therefore, our sample size ($N = 174$) was sufficient to conduct the regression analyses for this study.

Measures

Participants filled in the online survey on the Qualtrics platform. They first answered demographic questions of age, gender, and mode of study (part-time or full time) before rating the study measures on Likert scales. Measures were presented in the same order for all participants.

Identity and Functional Indispensability were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), using the Functional and Identity Indispensability Scale (FIIS, Guerra et al., 2016), which is made up of six identity items such as "I would have a very different conception of New Zealand if Māori were not part of New Zealand" (Cronbach α =.87 for both Māori and Chinese) and six functional indispensability items such as " Economically, New Zealand needs Chinese" (Cronbach α =.86 for Māori and.89 for Chinese). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived indispensability. Participants answered the scale for Māori and for Chinese group targets.

Perceived Colorblindess and Interculturalism were assessed respectively by a single item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The item for interculturalism was as such: "According to me, different ethnic groups in New Zealand are mixed with many overlaps and cultural blending" and for colorblindness "According to me, people in New Zealand are all separate individuals rather than members of ethnic groups". Each item was accompanied by a circle diagram (see Appendix) illustrating the ideologybased on Harmann and Gerteis (2005).

Support for Indigenous Rights was assessed using four items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The items are based on UNESCO policy on engaging with Indigenous Peoples (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000262748). Two sample items are: "Māori have the right to revitalise their cultural traditions and customs" and "The New Zealand state should provide redress in respect to land rights, cultural and spiritual property of Māori." Cronbach α was.87. Higher scores indicated higher support for Indigenous rights.

Support for multicultural rights was assessed using two items adapted from Verkuyten et al. (2014) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); higher scores indicated higher support. The two items are: "Ethnic groups should be allowed to celebrate their holidays not just at home, but also in public" and "Ethnic groups should be allowed to build their own houses of worship". Spearman Brown was.83.

Outgroup attitudes were measured using the social distance scale (Bogardus, 1926) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Five items were used to rate the extent to which participants were favorable to having a Māori/Chinese person as each of the following: classmates, teachers, neighbors, houseguests, in-laws. Cronbach α for outgroup attitudes toward Māori was.97 and toward Chinese was.95, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. We conducted paired *t*-tests to compare means of identity and functional indispensability and applied Holm-Bonferroni correction to adjust *p*-values for multiple comparisons. As expected (H1), participants reported significantly higher identity indispensability of Māori ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.03$) than identity indispensability of Chinese New Zealanders ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(169) = 19.78$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.52$, and participants reported significantly higher functional indispensability of Chinese New Zealanders ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .95$) than functional indispensability of Māori ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .92$), $t(169) = 2.07$, $p = .04$, Cohen's $d = .16$.

Support for Indigenous Rights and Multicultural Rights

Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of identity and functional indispensability of Māori, perceived colorblindness, and perceived interculturalism, on support for Indigenous rights. All continuous predictor variables were mean centered. We controlled for gender (0 = female, 1 = male) which was entered in Step 1 and was significant, $F(1, 167) = 7.29$, $p = .008$. Females reported higher level of support for Indigenous rights than males ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -2.70$, $p = .008$). As shown in Table 2, in the second model we tested for the main effects of functional and identity indispensability and diversity ideologies (colorblindness, interculturalism) $F(5, 163) = 32.29$, $p < .001$. Step 2 showed significant improvement from the first model, $\Delta F(4, 163) = 36.97$, $p < .001$ and accounted for 45% of the variance. There were positive main effects of identity ($\beta = .54$, $t = 8.54$, $p < .001$) and functional indispensability ($\beta = .133$, $t = 2.18$, $p = .03$) and a negative effect of colorblindness ($\beta = -.14$, $t = -2.54$, $p = .012$). As expected (H2 and H3), the positive effect of identity indispensability was the strongest one and perceived colorblindness was associated with lower support of Indigenous rights. In Step 3, we added the interactions of identity indispensability and respectively colorblindness and interculturalism. The ΔR^2 was.02, $\Delta F(2, 161) = 3.10$, $p = .048$. However, neither interaction term was significant.

We replicated the same analysis strategy to examine the effects of functional and identity indispensability of Chinese New Zealanders, interculturalism, and colorblindness on support for multicultural rights (see Table 3). We controlled for gender which was entered in Step 1 and was non-significant, $F(1, 167) = 1.08$, $p = .299$. In Step 2, we tested the main effects of identity and functional indispensability and of diversity ideologies (colorblindness, interculturalism). Step 2 was significant $F(5, 163) = 10.55$, $p < .001$ and accounted for 22% of the variance. As expected (H2 and H3), there were positive main effects of functional indispensability of Chinese ($\beta = .22$, $t = 2.73$, $p = .007$) and interculturalism ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.40$, $p < .001$). In Step 3, the addition of the interaction terms between functional indispensability and respectively interculturalism and colorblindness were significant, $F(7161) = 8.720$, $p < .001$. Only the interaction between functional indispensability and interculturalism was significant, $\beta = -.17$, $t = -2.37$, $p = .019$. Simple effects analysis showed that functional indispensability was not associated with support for multicultural rights at high levels ($M + 1$ *SD*) of interculturalism, $t = .33$, $p = .745$, whereas at low levels of interculturalism (M −1 SD), it was positively related to support for multicultural rights, $t = 3.64$, $p < .001$.

Outgroup attitudes toward Māori and Chinese New Zealander

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the effects of identity and functional indispensability of Māori, colorblindness, and interculturalism on attitudes toward Māori (see Table 2). All continuous predictor variables were mean centered. In Step 1, gender was controlled for and accounted for 6.5% of the variance in social distance, $F(1, 166) = 11.62$, $p < .001$. Females reported more positive attitudes than males ($\beta = -.26$, $t = -3.41$, $p < .001$. In Step 2, we added the main effects of functional and identity indispensability and diversity ideologies, $F(5, 162) = 14.25$, $p < .001$ which was a significant improvement over Step 1, contributing 22% to the variance.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Measures.

Variable	*M*(*SD*)	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.IIM	5.86(1.03)	.87	–								
2. FIM	4.26(0.92)	.86	.39***	–							
3.IICh	3.74(1.13)	.87	.16*	.51***	–						
4.FICh	4.42(0.95)	.89	.30***	.38***	.50***	–					
5.Interc	4.09(0.78)	-	.36***	.27***	.14	.21**	–				
6.CB	2.50(1.03)	-	-.05	-.02	.11	-.08	-.15	–			
7.SR	4.20(0.76)	.87	.66***	.40***	.09	.30***	.38***	-.19*	–		
8.SMR	4.35(0.77)	.83	.59***	.36***	.19*	.32***	.42***	-.07	.74***	–	
9.OM	4.42(0.79)	.97	.48***	.35***	.09	.22**	.29***	-.14	.59***	.52***	–
10.OC	4.24(0.89)	.95	.46***	.35***	.16*	.35***	.32***	-.10	.56***	.51***	.85***

Note. $N = 174$; Identity Indispensability Māori (IIM), Functional Indispensability Māori (FIM), Identity Indispensability Chinese (IICh), Functional Indispensability Chinese (FICh), Interculturalism (Interc), Colorblindness (CB), support for Māori rights (SR), support for multicultural rights (SMR), Outgroup attitudes towards Māori (OM), outgroup attitudes towards Chinese (OC).
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Results for Support for Māori Rights and Outgroup Attitudes toward Māori.

	Support for Māori Rights							Outgroup Attitudes toward Māori						
Variable	*B*	95%CI *LL UL*		*SE*	β	R^2/Adj.R^2	ΔR^2/ΔAdj.R^2	*B*	95%CI *LL UL*		SE	β	R^2/Adj.R^2	ΔR^2/ΔAdj.R^2
Step 1						.04/.04	.04*/04*						.07/.06	.07***/.06***
Constant	4.30	4.17	4.43	.07				4.55	4.41	4.68	.07			
Gender	-.34	-.59	-.09	.13	-.20**			-.45	-.70	-.19	.13	-.26***		
Step 2						.50/.48	.46***/.45***						.30/.28	.24***/.22***
Constant	4.25	4.16	4.35	.05				4.51	4.39	4.62	.06			
Gender	-.18	-.36	.005	.09	-.11			-.32	-.55	-.09	.12	-.18**		
Identity Indispensability	.39	.30	.48	.05	.54***			.27	.16	.38	.06	.35***		
Functional Indispensability	.11	.01	.21	.05	.13*			.13	.01	.25	.06	.16*		
Interculturalism	.10	-.01	.22	.06	.11			.08	-.06	.22	.07	.08		
Colorblindness	-.10	-.18	-.02	.04	-.14*			-.08	-.18	.02	.05	-.10		
Step 3						.52/.50	.02*/.01*						.36/.33	.05**/.05**
Constant	4.29	4.19	4.38	.05				4.54	4.41	4.65	.06			
Gender	-.18	-.36	.003	.09	-.11			-.30	-.52	-.08	.11	-.17**		
Identity Indispensability	.35	.26	.45	.05	.49***			.23	.12	.35	.06	.31***		
Functional Indispensability	.12	.02	.21	.05	.14*			.13	.01	.25	.06	.15*		
Interculturalism	.10	-.01	.21	.06	.10			.08	-.06	.21	.07	.08		
Colorblindness	-.11	-.19	-.03	.04	-.15**			-.09	-.19	.002	.05	-.13		
IdenIndis × Interculturalism	-.09	-.20	.01	.05	-.11			-.08	-.21	.05	.06	-.09		
IdenIndis × Colorblindness	.06	-.03	.14	.04	.07			.17	.06	.27	.05	.20**		

Note. Gender: Female = 0, Male = 1; IdenIndis = Identity Indispensability.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Results for Support for Multiculturalism Rights and Outgroup Attitudes toward Chinese New Zealander.

	Support for Multicultural Rights							Outgroup Attitudes toward Chinese New Zealanders						
Variable	*B*	95%CI *LL UL*		*SE*	β	R^2/Adj.R^2	ΔR^2/ΔAdj.R^2	*B*	95%CI *LL UL*		*SE*	β	R^2/Adj.R^2	ΔR^2/ΔAdj.R^2
Step 1						.006/.0005	.006/.0005						.04/.04	.04**/.04**
Constant	4.39	4.25	4.53	.07				4.36	4.20	4.51	.08			
Gender	-.14	-.41	.13	.14	-.08			-.42	-.72	-.11	.16	-.20**		
Step 2						.24/.22	.24***/.22***						.21/.18	.17***/.15***
Constant	4.37	4.25	4.49	.06				4.33	4.19	4.48	.07			
Gender	-.05	-.29	.19	.12	-.03			-.31	-.60	-.03	.14	-.15*		
Identity Indispensability	.03	-.08	.14	.06	.04			-.02	-.15	.11	.07	-.03		
Functional Indispensability	.18	.05	.31	.07	.22**			.28	.12	.43	.08	.29***		
Interculturalism	.38	.24	.52	.07	.38***			.28	.12	.45	.08	.25***		
Colorblindness	.01	-.10	.12	.05	.01			-.01	-.14	.11	.06	-.01		
Step 3						.27/.24	.03*/.02*						.26/.23	.05**/.05**
Constant	4.40	4.28	4.52	.06				4.37	4.23	4.51	.07			
Gender	-.05	-.29	.19	.12	-.03			-.31	-.59	-.04	.14	-.15*		
Identity Indispensability	.08	-.04	.19	.06	.11			.04	-.09	.17	.07	.05		
Functional Indispensability	.17	.04	.29	.06	.20*			.26	.12	.42	.08	.28***		
Interculturalism	.37	.23	.51	.07	.37***			.26	.10	.42	.08	.23**		
Colorblindness	.02	-.09	.12	.05	.02			-.01	-.13	.11	.06	-.01		
FuncIndis × Interculturalism	-.17	-.32	-.03	.07	-.17*			-.18	-.35	-.01	.09	-.15*		
FuncIndis × Colorblindness	.03	-.07	.12	.05	.04			.13	.01	.24	.06	.16*		

Note. Gender: Female = 0, Male = 1; FuncIndis – Functional Indispensability.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

As expected (H2), the positive main effect of identity indispensability was significant (β=.35, $t = 4.765$, $p < .001$) as well as of functional indispensability albeit weaker (β =.16, $t = 2.17$, $p = .032$). The main effects of diversity ideologies (colorblindness, interculturalism) were non-significant. However, in Step 3 we added the interactions of identity indispensability with the diversity ideologies, $F(7, 160) = 12.79$, $p < .001$, which contributed an additional 5% in variance (see Table 2). The interaction between identity indispensability and colorblindness was significant, β = .17, $t = 3.09$, $p = .002$. Simple effects analysis showed that identity indispensability was not associated with positive attitudes toward Māori at low level (M −1 SD) of colorblindness but at high level of colorblindness (M +1 SD), the association was positive and significant, $t = 4.93$, $p < .001$.

The same analysis strategy was employed to test the effects of functional and identity indispensability of Chinese New Zealander, colorblindness, and interculturalism on attitudes toward Chinese New Zealanders (see Table 3). In Step 1, $F(1, 167) = 7.25$, $p = .008$, females reported more positive attitudes than males (β = −.20, $t = -2.69$, $p = .008$). We added the main effects of identity and functional indispensability and the diversity ideologies measures in Step 2, $F(5, 163) = 8.590$, $p < .001$and this model accounted for 15% of the variance, $\Delta F(4, 163) = 8.59$, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). As expected (H2 and H3), there was a significant positive effect of functional indispensability (β =.29, $t = 3.565$, $p < .001$) and of interculturalism (β=.25, $t = 3.415$, $p < .001$). In Step 3, the interactions between functional indispensability and interculturalism and colorblindness respectively were added, and the model was significant, $F(7, 161) = 8.195$, $p < .001$ and an improvement from Step 2, $\Delta F(2, 161) = 5.91$, $p = .003$. The interaction between functional indispensability and interculturalism was significant (β = −.15, $t = -2.10$, $p = .037$) and between functional indispensability and colorblindness (β=.16, $t = 2.22$, $p = .028$). Simple slope analyses showed that functional indispensability was not associated with positive attitudes toward Chinese New Zealanders at low level of colorblindness (M−1SD) but was at high level of colorblindness (M +1 SD), $t = 4.06$, $p < .001$. At high level (M +1 SD) of interculturalism, functional indispensability was not significantly associated with positive attitudes toward Chinese New Zealander, $t = 1.16$, $p = .247$ whereas at low level of interculturalism (M −1 SD), functional indispensability was significantly associated with more positive attitudes toward Chinese, $t = 4.19$, $p < .001$. See Supplementary files for interactions graphs.

Discussion

The current study investigated the role of identity and functional indispensability on positive intergroup relations in terms of support for rights and positive attitudes toward Indigenous and immigrant groups in New Zealand. Most of the current research has considered the perceived indispensability of migrant or minority groups, and we expanded indispensability research to the realm of relations between Indigenous (Māori) and non-Indigenous groups. As expected, we found that New Zealanders of European descent (Pākehā) rated Māori as higher on identity indispensability than Chinese New Zealanders but rated Chinese New Zealanders (immigrant group) as higher on functional indispensability than Māori. Our hypothesis (H3) for the diversity ideologies was partially supported. Colorblindness was negatively associated with support for Indigenous rights but not multicultural rights, and interculturalism was positively associated with multicultural rights but not Indigenous rights. Interculturalism also predicted positive attitudes toward Chinese New Zealanders but was unrelated to attitudes toward Māori.

Overall, these findings are in line with previous research showing that different ethnic groups, depending on the socio-structural and historical relations with the majority society, are seen as indispensable in different ways (Guerra et al., 2015; 2016). Importantly, identity indispensability of Māori was positively associated with more support for Indigenous rights and more positive attitudes, and functional indispensability of Chinese was associated with more support for multicultural rights and more positive attitudes. These results point to the differential positive roles of identity and functional indispensability depending on the group in question and their socio-historical place in the society under investigation. These findings replicate research conducted in the context of immigrant and non-immigrant relations (e.g., Guerra et al., 2015), suggesting that the benefits of perceived indispensability extend to Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

Whilst it is a settler country with those of European descent holding political and economic power, New Zealand is unique in its bicultural (Māori-Pākehā) nature, and this was reflected in the explicit and implicit perceptions of nationhood by New Zealand Europeans (Sibley & Liu, 2007). Therefore, it is no surprise that in the present study, the participants rated Māori as higher on identity indispensability than Chinese because Māori people contribute to 'who New Zealanders are'. We found that identity indispensability, functional indispensability, and perceived colorblindness accounted for 45% of the variance in support for Indigenous rights, of which identity indispensability was the strongest predictor. When participants agreed that "Without Māori, New Zealand would feel different", they were more likely to support that "Māori, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from discrimination of any kind", i.e., when the Indigenous group is viewed as necessary and therefore indispensable to the definition of the nation, then individuals are more likely to support Indigenous rights. Fluit et al. (2023) found that identity indispensability of a minority group was associated with anti-separationist views of that minority group. Taken together with the present finding on the role of identity indispensability in support of Indigenous rights, both these results highlight that the concept of indispensability is an important dimension in what is afforded to groups within a polity.

Moreover, our study also showed that participants' indispensability ratings differed by ethnic group. As expected, the immigrant group of Chinese New Zealanders was rated as higher than Māori on functional indispensability, and importantly it is their perceived functional indispensability (and not identity indispensability) that predicted the intergroup outcomes. There are different ways in which a group can be considered necessary and indispensable for the superordinate national category. It can be more difficult and sometimes less plausible for recent migrant groups, especially immigrant groups that are culturally distant from the mainstream, to be viewed as necessary for the identity of the nation. But it is realistic and plausible for these immigrant groups to be considered as functionally indispensable whereby they contribute to the everyday economic running of the nation. When they are seen as

functionally indispensable, this was associated positively with support for multicultural rights and more positive attitudes toward them.

In addition, and as expected, perception of interculturalism for New Zealand was also associated positively with these two intergroup outcomes. Interculturalism, as an identity-conscious ideology, has been found to be associated with more positive attitudes toward migrant groups and willingness to engage in contact with them in the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). The current finding for the role of interculturalism on endorsement of multicultural rights and positive attitudes toward Chinese New Zealander is consistent with previous research conducted in the Netherlands. However, the significant negative interactions between functional indispensability and interculturalism on both multicultural rights and attitudes toward Chinese point to interculturalism weakening the positive link between functional indispensability and the two intergroup outcomes. When society is less likely to be perceived as being made up of different groups that share commonality, then viewing Chinese New Zealander as functionally indispensable was associated with endorsement of multicultural rights and more positive attitudes. It seems then that perceived functional indispensability of the migrant group is especially likely to lead to more positive intergroup outcomes among those who are more opposed to perceived interculturalism (identity-conscious ideology). A parallel can be drawn to research on intergroup contact that found that contact was more likely to reduce prejudice amongst those who opposed diversity beliefs demonstrating the importance of contact (e.g., Adesokan et al., 2011). In the same manner then, these significant interactions highlight the importance of functional indispensability on positive intergroup outcomes, especially at low levels of endorsement of interculturalism.

In line with previous studies (Leslie et al., 2020), colorblindness as an identity-blind ideology was negatively associated with support for Indigenous rights but contrary to expectation was unrelated to support for multicultural rights. We found positive significant interactions between identity indispensability and colorblindness on attitudes toward Māori, and between functional indispensability and colorblindness on attitudes toward Chinese New Zealander. In both cases, when society is more likely to be viewed as made up of separate individuals (colorblindness), then identity and functional indispensability were significantly associated with more positive Māori and Chinese New Zealander attitudes, respectively. Taken together with the significant interactions involving perceived interculturalism, these results point to identity and functional indispensability leading to positive intergroup outcomes especially for those who report lower endorsement of identity-conscious ideology or those who report higher endorsement of identity-blind ideology.

Interestingly, identity indispensability more but functional indispensability also, were the significant predictors of support for Indigenous rights and positive attitudes toward Māori. Contrary to expectation, endorsement of interculturalism was not significantly linked to either outcome measures. These findings illustrate the importance of the concept of indispensability when considering Indigenous groups and show that when groups are perceived as fundamental to defining the nation, then this is associated with positive intergroup outcomes independently of perceiving the nation in terms of identity-conscious ideologies, such as interculturalism. However, for groups who are perceived as functionally indispensable, like Chinese New Zealanders, pro-diversity ideologies matter. Specifically, our results showed that functional indispensability is particularly relevant for those who do not perceive New Zealand in identity-conscious terms, as if in contexts where groups are not seen as an important definitional part of the nation, they can be seen as indispensable at more surface level instrumental dimensions. Future studies in other settler countries with an Indigenous group such as Australia are warranted to further investigate the link between different forms of indispensability and intergroup outcomes.

Although our study has investigated the concept of indispensability in a settler colonial country and with an Indigenous group, there are limitations to the research. First, the data come from a university sample, are cross-sectional, and correlational. It would be worthwhile to extend this research to a community sample and consider other migrant groups, with different historical relations in New Zealand, to further examine the nuanced, context-dependent role of group indispensability. Furthermore, future studies could consider adopting quasi-experimental surveys to ascertain the effects of identity and functional indispensability and tease out when and for whom it is better to highlight the identity or functional indispensability of a group for more positive intergroup outcomes.

Our study has made a small step in advancing understanding of group indispensability and the legitimacy of considering the two types of indispensability: identity and functional for different groups depending on the socio-historical context. It demonstrated that identity indispensability was a significant contributor to support for Indigenous rights. Therefore, when New Zealander of European descent viewed Māori as necessary to 'who we are', they were more likely to support the rights of Māori and endorse more positive attitudes toward them. This has implications for the stories and narratives that nations weave for themselves and highlights that viewing different components as necessary, i.e., indispensable, whether in terms of 'who we are' or 'what we do' is a promising positive way to build acceptance of diversity.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ng Tseung -Wong Caroline: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Rita Guerra:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Inkuk Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Formal analysis. **Colleen Ward:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology.

Declaration of Competing Interest

none.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2026.102470.

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