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**Does Māori Representation Matter?: An Analysis of
the Relationship between Māori Descriptive and
Substantive Political Representation in Parliament and
Local Government**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the relationship between Māori descriptive and substantive political representation in New Zealand's parliament and local government. The 1993 parliamentary electoral reforms and optional changes to the structure of local body elections in 2001-02 aimed, in part, to help increase Māori descriptive representation. The overall number of elected Māori representatives in parliament has grown, and the proportion of Māori representatives in local government could increase should electoral reforms be implemented. Consequently, arguments based on democratic justice and equality for ensuring an adequate Māori political presence are being superseded by questions of who Māori MPs and Māori local councillors represent, and whether these representatives are making a difference in politics. This study examines the extent to which elected Māori representatives feel a specific responsibility to represent Māori and the ways Māori substantive representation is manifested. It also considers how institutional arrangements and attitudinal factors constrain or facilitate the promotion of Māori interests. This thesis presents case study analyses of Māori substantive representation based on in-depth interviews with elected Māori representatives. It is supported by an examination of three specific issues relevant to parliament, to help demonstrate how Māori MPs react and respond to issues of importance to Māori.

The evidence suggests elected Māori representatives generally feel a specific responsibility to act for Māori interests within and outside their electorate's geographic boundaries. The data demonstrates that whakapapa influences the perceptions elected Māori representatives have of their role in terms of substantive activities and style of politics. However, electoral system influences, political party practices, the type of representation provided by Māori, the proportion of Māori actually elected to a governing body and non-Māori attitudes to Māori issues, are salient to Māori substantive representation because they mediate the role of the representative. While the relationship between 'standing for' Māori and 'acting for' Māori interests is not directly correlated, this thesis suggests elected Māori representatives largely do promote Māori interests. Māori ethnicity influences the role of Māori MPs and councillors. Thus, Māori representation matters. This research adds to current understandings of the nature of Māori political representation and of New Zealand's representative democracy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Scope and structure of thesis</i>	4
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	6
<i>Research design and method</i>	11
<i>Conclusion</i>	21
CHAPTER ONE: Reviewing Representation	23
<i>Group-differentiated rights to representation</i>	23
<i>Models of political representation</i>	31
<i>The descriptive-substantive relationship</i>	38
<i>Conclusion</i>	51
CHAPTER TWO: Developments in Māori Political Representation	53
<i>A representative's role</i>	54
<i>Māori descriptive representation</i>	60
<i>Māori substantive representation</i>	70
<i>Conclusion</i>	85
CHAPTER THREE: Factors Influencing the Descriptive-Substantive Relationship.....	87
<i>Electoral systems</i>	88
<i>Māori electorates</i>	95
<i>Party practices</i>	102
<i>Māori identity</i>	107
<i>Conclusion</i>	114

CHAPTER FOUR: Māori Local Body Councillors' Perceptions of their Representation Role	117
<i>Roles and responsibilities</i>	118
<i>A unique style of politics</i>	129
<i>Māori ethnicity versus a consciousness of Māori issues</i>	136
<i>Understandings of, and attitudes towards, electoral reforms</i>	142
<i>Conclusion</i>	149
 CHAPTER FIVE: Māori Members' of Parliament Perceptions of their Representation Role	152
<i>Māori MPs representing Māori</i>	153
<i>Collegiality and Māori political behaviour</i>	160
<i>The critical importance of Māori MPs</i>	168
<i>The impact of public opinion, proportions and party politics</i>	173
<i>Conclusion</i>	181
 CHAPTER SIX: Tensions of Representation between Party and Ethnicity	183
<i>Foreshore and Seabed Act (2004)</i>	184
<i>Whenuakite Land Claim</i>	203
<i>Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Deletion Bill</i>	206
<i>Conclusion</i>	210
 CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion	211
<i>A Māori representative's role</i>	212
<i>Scope of mediating elements</i>	217
<i>Implications</i>	219
<i>Concluding remarks</i>	221
 APPENDIX A: List of Interviewees	222
<i>Māori local body councillors</i>	222
<i>Māori Members of Parliament</i>	224
 APPENDIX B: Ethics Committee Requirements	226
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	233