Cultural festivals as intergroup settings: a case study of Pacific Islander identification

Matt Giles, Howard Giles & Quinten Bernhold

To cite this article: Matt Giles, Howard Giles & Quinten Bernhold (2019): Cultural festivals as intergroup settings: a case study of Pacific Islander identification, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2019.1569666

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1569666

Published online: 05 Feb 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 44

View Crossmark data
Cultural festivals as intergroup settings: a case study of Pacific Islander identification

Matt Giles, Howard Giles and Quinten Bernhold

Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

ABSTRACT
Addressing the current gap in the literature regarding cultural festivals as a unique site of intergroup discourse, we invoke social identity and group vitality theories to explore the effect of attending an international cultural festival on members of different groups. A total of 143 participants at the 2016 Festival of Pacific Arts in Guam completed surveys and interviews concerning identity salience. Measures of ethnic identity and meta-identity salience both increased (and interacted) after participation in the Festival, and the region of origin also had moderating effects. Standard paradigms regarding single identity salience are discussed as well as future avenues for intercultural work.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 2 April 2018
Accepted 2 January 2019

KEYWORDS
Festival; intergroup communication; identity salience; Pacific culture; functional antagonism

Performers from dozens of island nations in the Pacific gathered in Guam during the Summer of 2016 for the Festival of Pacific Arts, a quadrennial two-week cultural celebration of their unique traditions, cultural performances, and native artwork. These traditional performances take place alongside contemporary art and collaboration between groups. Participants enjoyed an impromptu Michael Jackson dance party that took place after the Festival’s closing ceremonies and the Tongan, Samoan, and Easter Island delegations collaborated in carving an elaborate ceremonial canoe prow figurehead using chainsaws. During this synthesis of tradition and modernity, the different groups of Pacific Islanders perform and provide a fascinating opportunity to study group membership negotiation and group identity salience in an intergroup environment. The resulting data provides a rich model for how identity is made salient and the complex way that multiple identities become salient simultaneously. This has valuable theoretical implications, as the predominant paradigms in the field posit that only one single identity can be brought to salience at any one time, invoking the idea of functional antagonism (Turner et al. 1987). To explore this idea, the festival context in which these disparate identities are being negotiated, namely, the 2016 Festival of Pacific Arts, deserves further discussion.

Literature review

Festivals and communication

Festivals warrant a significant place within culturally-based research because of their function as a confluence of ethnic and cultural identities. Identity scholars argue that participants in large cultural events go through a process of depersonalization (e.g. Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Turner et al. 1987). At this point, individuals see themselves as ‘an embodiment of the in-group prototype rather than a unique individual’ (Stets and Burke 2000). It is during this process that pertinent group phenomena such as cooperation, group cohesion, ethnocentrism, and collective action occur (Turner...
et al. 1987). These phenomena reflexively create and reify identities which are communicated between participants.

Festivals function as uniquely valuable sites for relationship development between members of disparate cultural groups, and the individual performances within a festival are reflexive demonstrations of group identities (Bauman 1992). These events provide a recurring opportunity to establish social order at a local level (Mendoza 2000), and as a strategy to increase autonomy for those disenfranchised by a global cultural economy (Noyes 2003). Both the identities of festival participants and those of local community members are enhanced and reinforced through the intergroup interactions inherent to these large group events (Getz 1993). Group vitality (for a review, see Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2018) focuses on the resources that a group needs in order to survive and ‘behave as a distinctive and active collective identity in intergroup situations’ (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 2009). At these festivals (including the one studied herein), vitality is on public display via pride displays, public representations, and comparisons between groups.

In what follows, we introduce the festival setting and examine intergroup theory that addresses the salience of one’s multiple identities in terms of whether only one identity can be triggered or whether more than one is evident simultaneously. We argue that the festival under investigation potentially allows for ethnic-level as well as meta-identities (herein Pacific Islander) to subjectively co-exist and explore the Festival as a unique site for doing so.

The cultural site

Given the significance of social identity in intergroup environments, we explore the effect of participation in the 2016 Festival of Pacific Arts on the identity salience of performers who were involved. The Festival is coordinated by an international politico-economic organisation known as the Pacific Community, a regional intergovernmental organisation comprised of the various island nations of the Pacific. The Pacific Community seeks to foster an overarching Pacific Islander identity that is achieved by reinforcing the traditional customary practices that are central to that identity, while simultaneously embracing emergent understandings of this identity. By performing in the Festival, ‘participants confront profound existential contradictions in their attempts to reconcile tensions between tradition and modernity’ (Glowczewski and Henry 2011). The 12th Festival of Pacific Arts took place in June 2016 and was held in Hagåtña, Guam (for anthropological and economic discussions of the Festival of Pacific Arts in previous years, see Bellwood et al. 2011; Chang et al. 2015; Glowczewski and Henry 2011; Henry and Foana’ota 2015; Mirabal et al. 2013).

Participants at the Festival claim ancestral ties to islands in the Pacific, in a region known as Oceania. Many cultural groups attending the conference are national, but some are not; for example, the different Guamanian, Hawaiian, and Micronesian delegations are all from the United States. Likewise, many participants hail from a singular village within a larger nation composed of such heterogeneous groups, such as the Triobrand Islanders who are almost entirely disconnected from the Southern Highlands Huli tribe, yet both hail from Papua New Guinea, and are referred to as such. Within the broader scope of Oceania, individual groups are generally associated with one of the three semi-distinct cultural groups of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia (Figure 1), but this division traces its roots back to non-scholarly imperialistic classifications by colonisers, and is a fraught method of distinction (Hermann 2011; Tcherkézoff 2003). As such, the dividing lines between the groups are crude and permeable – linguistically, geographically, culturally, and phenotypically (Jolly, Tcherkézoff, and Tryon 2009). Despite their imperfect nature, these groupings reflect a reference point which has been used extensively and can be considered salient categories in intergroup contexts (Thomas 1989).1

As with any colonial-era division and classification, globalisation and indigenous scholarship reveal the flaws in any oversimplified distinction between Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian people groups. Migration, inter-group marriage, urbanisation, and other factors blur what may have once been considered rigid dividing lines, while simultaneously revealing the permeable and
transitory nature of supposed cultural boundaries. Events such as cultural festivals serve to reify these cultural boundaries, while dialectically providing the participants with the opportunity to deconstruct them, reconstruct them, and synthesise their own. Pacific Islander identity cannot be understood as a fixed target. Any analysis of this construct must be engaged with in a way that honours both its fluid nature and its ancestral traditions, a dialectic that is inherent to the diaspora (Mackley-Crump 2015). It is this individual-yet-reciprocal understanding of identity that provides focus and context for this research, which investigates the salience of group level and meta-group level identities.

The Festival seeks to embody and reify the notion that the Pacific is not a location inhabited by detached ‘islands in a far sea’ but instead is home to an interconnected ‘sea of islands’ (Haùofa 1994, 152–153); this is seminal discourse in Pacific Studies.

**Research on identities**

This study tracks how meta-identity of Pacific Islanders interrelates with ethnic/national identities represented by Festival participants. We do not attempt to define Pacific Islander identity but, instead, seek to gain a sense of the level of identification with multiple identities. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that there are three mental processes associated with identity: Individuals learn to categorize themselves and others, adopt social identifications, and compare relevant identity dimensions between social groups. These identifications are significant because identity affects what decisions are made by an individual. Social identity theory (SIT; e.g. Tajfel and Turner 1979) asserts that by affecting an individual’s values and ideologies, identity cannot be considered entirely separate from actions (Abdelal et al. 2006). Many scholars argue that SIT predicts ingroup cooperation and outgroup conflict (Bonnell 1980; Siegelbaum and Suny 1994). Identity has been shown to predict social behaviours such as participation in both violent and non-violent social movements (Leff 1997; Rouhana 1997; Stokes 1995) and to explain otherwise irrational business decisions (Ouchi 1981). Identity influences...
voters based on either ingroup/outgroup dynamics or due to shared values based on identity (Jep- person, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996).

When an individual identifies with multiple groups, some identities are more significant in one situation than another. This is referred to as identity salience and work arising from this construct has explored when one identity takes precedence over another (Burke and Reitzes 1981). According to Hogg, Terry, and White (1995), ‘Identity salience is conceptualised (and operationalised) as the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations’ (257). A salient identity is the one that functions psychologically to increase the influence of group membership on both interpretations of events and decisions made on its behalf (Oakes 1987).

Situated identity has received significant attention as a topic of study as it relates to language and identity. Because language is intrinsic to identity (see Fishman 1977; Sapir and Mandelbaum 1968), the ability to successfully communicate in intergroup settings makes language behaviour and ethnic identity especially salient at festivals. Noels and Clément (2015) demonstrates how exposure to interactive intercultural situations changes both identity and behaviour. Noels (2014) explains these shifts as part of the process of acculturation which penetrates into more intimate situations outside of large-scale public interactions, thus demonstrating the lasting significance of events such as festivals (Clément, Dornyei, and Noels 1994; Clément, Noels, and Denault 2001). Social psychologists argue that contact with other cultural groups allows an individual to identify with multiple identities (e.g. Berry 1990; Noels, Clément, and Gaudet 2004). The possibility of assuming multiple ethnic identities has been studied extensively by researchers with respect to social identity complexity and biculturalism (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos 2005; Brewer 2001); however, it should be noted that this research has rarely, if ever, attempted to demonstrate simultaneous or combined identity salience.

**Problematising functional antagonism**

Much of the current research on identity operates from the standpoint of functional antagonism, which asserts that only a single identity is operationally salient at any given point in time (Turner et al. 1987). This dominant perspective within SIT contends that ‘only one identity is psychologically salient to govern self-construal, social perception, and social conduct. As the situation … changes, so does the salient identity’ (Hogg 2006). From this perspective, a person makes decisions and reacts to situations at any one moment based entirely on one single identity at a time. Similarly, Mullen (1991) posits an asymmetry of identity – a relationship in which one identity can only come to prominence at the expense of another.

Thoits and Virshup (1997) state that a single ‘role-based identity becomes salient and supplants the previous identity when an individual takes on specific responsibilities that provide a framework for negotiating identity issues’ (94). Similar perspectives can be seen throughout social psychological research (Burke and Reitzes 1981; Oakes 1987). Within this framework, when one identity becomes salient, other identities are diminished or even dismissed so that, in any one moment, a person identifies with one distinct group (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This dynamic has been explored to identify what factors influence the primacy of individual identities, such as generational status (García et al. 2015), gender (Dion and Dion 2001), reference group (Clément and Noels 1992), and situation (Clément, Singh, and Gaudet 2006). In sum, single identity salience is the base understanding within SIT theory.

Despite the prominence of single identity salience (SIS) approaches, there are researchers who suggest that the SIS paradigm needs additional nuance. These perspectives advocate for identities that are combined, transient, or layered, depending on the situation (Mullen, Migdal, and Rozell 2003). Swann et al. (2009) assert the notion of identity fusion in which individuals feel that their personal and social identities overlap. Research into multiple group memberships recognises ‘crossed categorizations’ in which individuals identify with multiple groups in certain situations (Crisp and Hewstone 2001), as well as larger meta-groups as manifest in superordinate attributes such as gender or nationality (Park and Rothbart 1982). The commodification and festivalization
(Mackley-Crump 2015) of identity in the tourism industry and at international events deserves a specific focus of study within identity research, although traditional theories of identity do not always map well onto the terrain. Complementing this work, this paper seeks to identify potential situations under which an individual experiences multiple identities as salient simultaneously.

**The current study**

Within this paradigm of multiple identity salience – which we find more convincing than the functional antagonist position – the exact nature of the interaction between the multiple identities as they struggle for prominence is currently unknown, and this study seeks to clarify that interaction. To explore the relationship between ethnic-level identities and the international meta-identity of Pacific Islander, we propose two research questions:

**RQ1:** Will festival-goers report increased salience in either or both their ethnic-level (e.g. Tongan, Papuan, Chamorro) and meta-identities (variably named Pacific Islander or Oceanic) after having participated in cultural events at the Festival?

**RQ2:** How will the experiences of festival-goers from various ethnic-level identities differ relative to each other group in terms of ethnic and meta-identity salience?

**Method**

**Participants**

A consecutive sampling technique was adopted to survey a total of 143 performers at the 2016 Festival of Pacific Arts in Hagåtña, Guam. Approximately 1200 stage performers from 27 island nations participated at the Festival, which attracted over 3500 attendees. Participants were approached and asked to complete a short survey about their experience at the Festival after performing at the main stage venue. Surveys were completed on hand-held tablets after performers completed their presentations. Because this form of sampling is non-random, where some nationalities were underrepresented in the responses, a quota-based stratified sample was gathered. Participants performed as members of delegations representing the 23 nations of the Secretariat of the Pacific and were sampled in a stratified design so that individuals from each national/ethnic delegation attending the Festival was represented. Participants were informed that all responses would remain confidential. Nineteen participants used some level of translation assistance in filling out the survey. After excluding incomplete responses, a total of 117 surveys were utilised (65 Male, 49 Female, 3 specified as Other). All performers were between ages 18 and 75, with the majority (58%) ranging between ages 18–35. Regarding home region, 46 were Polynesian, 32 Melanesian, and 39 Micronesian.

**Measures**

A 24-item questionnaire (adapted from Clément and Noels 1992) addressed the expressed level of salience of both performers’ ethnic-level and meta-level identities (as Pacific Islanders) after having performed at the Festival as well as their retrospectively-rated salience of these identities prior to preparing to attend. 12 questions in the survey were posed, as below, regarding the pre- and post- Festival cognitions and feelings:

To determine the reliability of the six pre- and six post- ethnic-level and meta-level identity saliences, Cronbach alphas were computed and ranged between .82 and .91, and the composite scores for these identities were thus used. All questions were framed in terms of 7-point rating scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Additional questions were posed about the performer’s gender, age, and experience with the Festival.
Results

Tests of RQ1

RQ1 asked whether participants experienced increases in their ethnic-level and meta-level identity salience after having participated in the Festival relative to a point prior to having prepared for the festival. To answer RQ1, we computed a two-way repeated-measures MANOVA (see Table 1) using the change variable between pre- and post-Festival measures to identify changes in how participants viewed their own identification with both meta- and specific ethnic-level identities. To explore this further, a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was done. The first within-subject factor consisted of participants’ ethnic-level identity salience (pre- versus post-Festival ethnic identity salience) and the second within-subject factor consisted of participants’ meta-identity salience (pre-versus post-Festival meta-identity salience). A main effect was observed for ethnic-level identification, Λ = .78, F(1, 107) = 30.23, p < .001, ηp^2 = .22; this increased from before preparing for the Festival (M = 5.38, SD = 1.02) to after performing on-stage (M = 6.13, SD = 0.94). Similarly, a main effect was observed for meta-identity, Λ = .39, F(1, 107) = 170.38, p < .001, ηp^2 = .61. Meta-identity salience also increased from before the Festival (M = 4.42, SD = 1.11) to the time after performing at the Festival (M = 5.97, SD = 1.21). The model also revealed a significant interaction between both types of identity, Λ = .61, F(1, 107) = 69.22, p < .001, ηp^2 = .39. As displayed in Figure 2, the interaction involved a steeper increase in meta-identity salience and a shallower increase in ethnic-level identification.

Although participants began with lower levels of recalled meta-identity salience compared to ethnic-level identification before the Festival, this gap was reduced during the event due to the more marked increases in meta-identity salience.

Tests of RQ2

RQ2 inquired how the experiences of festival-goers would vary based on ethnic-level identity. To answer this question, we conducted latent profile analyses in Mplus 7.3 (Muthén and Muthén Table 1. Results of repeated measures MANOVA test for culture- and meta-level identity variables; pre vs. post as repeated variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I am [ethnic-level identity] ...</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>38.11</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>I feel like I am a Pacific Islander ...</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>38.11</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would describe myself as [ethnic-level</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identity] ...</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17.92</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17.92</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>32.84</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>32.84</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Variable, means of 6 questions</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>68.57</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>68.57</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pre vs. Post) × Region</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant results in bold.
Latent profile analysis (LPA) examines how participants respond to a series of continuous items. LPA is an inductive technique: profiles emerge based on participants’ actual response patterns rather than on predetermined response patterns specified by the researcher. In this study, two sets of LPA models were run. The first set of models used the 12 items asking about participants’ identifications before the Festival (i.e. six pre-Festival specific identity items and six pre-Festival meta-identity items). Using these 12 items, five LPAs were run specifying between one and five latent profiles. The second set of LPA models used the 12 items asking about participants’ identity after having performed at the Festival (i.e. six items pertaining to specific ethnic identity after having performed at the Festival and six items pertaining to meta-identity after having performed at the Festival).

For questions asking about identity prior to attending the Festival, a two-profile solution was deemed most appropriate. Figure 3 depicts the latent profile plot for this two-profile solution. The first profile (comprising 59.9% of the sample) was labelled *lower meta-identity*. Participants in this profile felt a mild identification with their specific ethnic identity but scored lower for identification with their meta-identity as Pacific Islanders. The second profile (comprising 40.1% of the sample) was labelled *highly identified on both identities*. Participants in this profile indicated high levels of identification with both their specific ethnic group and the meta-group before the Festival.

**Figure 2.** Net change over the timespan of festival for ethnic level (top line) and meta-identity (bottom line) salience.

**Figure 3.** Latent Profile Plot of Specific (i.e. Ethnic)- and Meta-Identification Before Attending the Festival.

Note: SI = Specific Ethnic Identity. MI = Meta-Identity.
Regarding post-performance identity, a two-profile solution was judged most appropriate for the time after having performed. Figure 4 depicts the latent profile plot for this two-profile solution. The two profiles in this solution resembled the two profiles described previously. One profile (comprising 87.0% of the sample) was highly identified on both identities; the other profile (comprising 13.0% of the sample) reported lower meta-identity compared to their specific ethnic identity. Thus, the majority (87%) found themselves experiencing a high level of salience in both their specific ethnic and meta-identity. This led to important questions about who specifically was identifying highly with which identities before and after the Festival, which is explored further below.

A majority of participants (59.9%) fell into the lower meta-identity profile before the Festival, but only a minority of participants (13.0%) fell into the lower meta-identity profile after having performed at the Festival. Conversely, a minority of participants (40.1%) could be characterised as highly identified on both identities before the Festival, but this percentage increased to 87.0% when considering post-performance scores. Taken together, this suggests that many participants moved from the lower meta-identity profile to the highly identified on both identities profile over time. To more systematically examine the extent to which participants remained in the same profile versus moved to the other profile, a latent transition analysis was conducted in Mplus 7.3. Latent transition analysis (LTA) allows researchers to examine the degree to which participants move (or transition) from one profile to another over time, versus the extent to which participants remain in the same profile over time.

The LTA revealed that lower meta-identity participants before the Festival had a .20 probability of remaining lower meta-identity participants after having performed at the Festival and a .80 probability of transitioning to highly identified on both identities participants after having performed at the Festival. On the other hand, highly identified on both identities participants before the Festival demonstrated virtually no likelihood of transitioning to lower-meta identity participants after having performed at the Festival (.02 probability). Rather, participants who were highly identified across both specific and meta-identities before the Festival were almost certain to remain in the same profile over time (.98 probability of remaining in the same profile). This demonstrates not only the low likelihood of deidentification after having participated in the Festival, but also the dramatic effect that the Festival had on raising metagroup identity salience for the majority of participants (but not all participants).

This latter finding raised another question about whether or not participants with specific ethnic identities differed from one another in terms of their profile memberships from the time before the Festival to the time after having performed at the Festival. No specific identity group demonstrated an increase in the number of participants in the lower meta-identity group from the time before the

---

**Figure 4.** Latent Profile Plot of Specific (i.e. Ethnic)- and Meta-Identification After Having Performed at the Festival.

Note: SI = Specific Ethnic Identity. MI = Meta-Identity.
Festival to the time after having performed at the Festival. Rather, all specific ethnic identity groups either saw no change in their participants’ profile membership over time or an increase in the percentage of participants in the highly identified on both identities profile over time. For example, French Polynesians were almost evenly split between the two profiles before the Festival (n = 7 in the lower meta-identity profile, n = 6 in the highly identified across both identities profile) but were uniformly in the highly identified across both identities profile after having performed at the Festival (n = 13). Perhaps even more notable, New Zealanders were almost all in the lower meta-identity profile before the Festival (n = 11, with n = 1 in the highly identified across both identities profile), but all New Zealanders were in the highly identified across both identities profile after having performed at the Festival. Similarly, all Samoans in the sample transitioned from the lower meta-identity profile before the Festival to the highly identified across both identities profile after having performed at the Festival. These results suggest that participants with certain specific ethnic identities (most notably, French Polynesians, New Zealanders, and Samoans) demonstrated marked shifts to the highly identified on both identities profile.

Chamorros, Micronesians, and Guamanians demonstrated a different pattern. Some participants in these three specific ethnic groups started out in the lower meta-identity profile and transitioned to the highly identified on both identities profile over time. However, these three ethnic groups are unique in that at least half of all participants who began in lower meta-identity profile before the Festival remained in the lower meta-identity profile after having performed at the Festival. In other words, participants in these three ethnic groups did not demonstrate as seismic of shifts to the highly identified on both identities profile over time. Rather, many participants who started in the lower meta-identity profile remained stagnant in this profile over time, thereby contributing to the overall .20 probability of remaining in the lower meta-identity profile over time.3

Comparisons of identity salience change

Given that some groups within the Pacific experienced similar changes across their different identities at the Festival, the way in which these groups relate to one another in terms of identity salience change merits further inquiry. A 2×3 chi-square was therefore run with participants’ most likely profile membership after having performed at the Festival (two categories: lower meta-identity and highly identified on both identities) and broader geographical region (three categories: Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian) as the two nominal variables. The test was significant, χ² (2) = 11.84, p = .003, meaning that participants in the three broader geographic regions systematically differed in the frequency with which they fell under the two profiles. As Table 2 illustrates, Polynesians almost all fell in the highly identified on both identities profile after having performed at the Festival (98%), whereas only one Polynesian (2% of all Polynesians) fell in the lower meta-identity profile. Polynesians contrasted most sharply with Micronesians: 29% of Micronesians remained in the lower meta-identity profile after having performed at the Festival, and only 71% of Micronesians fell in the highly identified on both identities profile after having performed at the Festival.

Table 2. Mean levels of meta-identity salience for Festival participants across regions and time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant group</th>
<th>Prior to preparing for the festival</th>
<th>After performing at the festival</th>
<th>Total change between pre-and post-</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polynesian</td>
<td>3.29 (1.43)</td>
<td>5.26 (0.87)</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesian</td>
<td>3.51 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.30 (1.55)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanesian</td>
<td>3.27 (1.12)</td>
<td>4.79 (1.36)</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>.247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means. For all groups, p < .05.
Given these systematic differences, two mixed-model analyses were run to further explore the relationship between Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian salience of ethnic-level and meta-identities. The first MANOVA used region as the between-subjects factor and ethnic-level identity as the repeated within-subjects factor. The model revealed a significant interaction effect between the two factors, Λ = .94, F(2, 105) = 3.23, p = .04, η² = .07. Inspection of 95% confidence intervals revealed that participants from Polynesia experienced stronger identification with their ethnic-level group during the festival (M = 6.10, SE = 0.14, 95% CI: 5.82–6.37) than they did before the festival (M = 5.13, SE = 0.15, 95% CI: 4.83–5.42). Participants from Melanesia also experienced stronger identification with their specific ethnic-level group during the Festival (M = 5.51, SE = 0.17, 95% CI: 5.34–5.68) than they did before the Festival (M = 5.13, SE = 0.15, 95% CI: 4.83–5.42). Participants from Micronesia did not experience changes in their ethnic identity from before the festival (M = 5.61, SE = 0.18, 95% CI: 5.26–5.97) to the time in which they were at the festival (M = 6.06, SE = 0.17, 95% CI: 5.72–6.40).

The second mixed-model ANOVA consisted of geographic origin as the between-subjects factor and meta-identity as the repeated within-subjects factor. A significant two-way interaction emerged in this model, Λ = .88, F(2, 105) = 7.20, p = .001, η² = .12. Festival-goers from Polynesia experienced greater meta-identity salience during the Festival (M = 4.36, SE = 0.16, 95% CI: 4.03–4.69). Festival-goers from Melanesia also experienced greater identification with their ethnic-level group during the Festival (M = 5.88, SE = 0.21, 95% CI: 5.46–6.30) compared to before the Festival (M = 4.32, SE = 0.20, 95% CI: 3.92–4.72). Finally, festival-goers from Micronesia also experienced increases in their meta-identity salience during the Festival (M = 5.58, SE = 0.21, 95% CI: 5.16–6.00) compared to before the Festival (M = 4.62, SE = 0.20, 95% CI: 4.22–5.02). Hence, people from all three geographic regions benefitted from the Festival in terms of enhanced meta-identity salience, but participants from Polynesia experienced the greatest increases (an increase of 1.93 points on the 7-point scale), followed by participants from Melanesia (a 1.56-point increase), and ending with participants from Micronesia (a 0.96-point increase) (Tables 3 and 4).

Hence, participants from Polynesia and Melanesia experienced relatively large increases in their ethnic-level and meta-identity salience during the Festival compared to the time before the Festival. Conversely, participants from Micronesia experienced no change in their ethnic-level identity;

### Table 3. Profile breakdown of participants according to broader geographical region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical region</th>
<th>Time before the festival</th>
<th>Time after having performed at the festival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower meta-identity</td>
<td>% Lower meta-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>n = 32</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesia</td>
<td>n = 14</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanesia</td>
<td>n = 19</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4. Mean levels of ethnic-level identity salience for Festival participants across regions and time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant group</th>
<th>Prior to preparing for the festival</th>
<th>After performing at the festival</th>
<th>Total change between pre- and post-</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polynesian</td>
<td>4.18 (1.05)</td>
<td>5.14 (1.83)</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesian</td>
<td>4.55 (0.42)</td>
<td>4.90 (0.86)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanesian</td>
<td>4.56 (0.93)</td>
<td>5.27 (0.86)</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means. For all groups, p < .05.
although Micronesians’ meta-identity increased, this increase was not as large as the increase for participants from Polynesia and Melanesia. These results are discussed below (Figure 5).

**Discussion**

From an intergroup communication perspective (see Giles and Harwood 2018; Giles and Maass 2016), the Festival of Pacific Arts takes a noteworthy approach to building a meta-identity amongst disparate groups. Because all participants presented their own unique cultural arts, the Festival runs the risk of raising ethnic-level identity at the expense of meta-identity. However, the documented increase in identity salience for both ethnic and meta-identities demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy for mutually increasing group vitality as a result of intergroup interaction. This increase in both identities demonstrates that the concept of functional antagonism needs to be reconsidered in light of complementary and nested identities. Social identity complexity theory (Roccas and Brewer 2002) could provide a valuable framework for this phenomenon.

Because participants were asked about both ethnic-level identity and meta-identity salience simultaneously, an increase in both identities indicates that the participant had experiences which contributed to the salience of multiple identities. Given that all groups of participants evinced an increase in level of identity salience for both ethnic and meta-identity, the Festival was successful at its stated goal of increasing the sense of unity for all participants.

It is important to note that even though identity salience was increased for both ethnic and meta-identities in the sample, the effect of festival participation was more effective for some groups than others. To understand the way that different groups within the Pacific were building identities relative to the Festival, we found different profiles of how identity salience changed between the two time points. Although these profiles did not precisely match the designations of Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian, there were striking similarities within these classifications across their respective groups contained therein, prompting analysis within that framework. The similarities in change between the Polynesian participants from Samoa and New Zealand suggested that regional classification could shape how participant identity was experienced.

Both Melanesians and Polynesians indicated a significant increase in the salience of their ethnic and meta-identities, which was not as pronounced for Micronesians. This could be due to a prototypicality bias in the context of Pacific performances (Bettencourt et al. 2001), which favours Polynesians among the various groups of Pacific Islanders. It is similarly possible that the experience of travelling across the Pacific to another nation for the Festival has a net-positive mediating effect, or that hosting the Festival in one’s home nation has a deleterious mediating effect. Although participation in the Festival resulted in a statistically significant net change for all groups, these differences between regional groups merit further inquiry and explanation.

---

**Figure 5.** (a) Net change over the timespan of festival for *ethnic-level* salience for different groups within the Pacific. (b) Net change over the timespan of festival for *meta-identity* salience for different groups within the Pacific.
The usage of the terms Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian to signify individual cultural types remains controversial due to the outdated and counterfactual logics that helped establish the distinctions among Melanesians, Polynesians, and Micronesians. However, the prominence of these labels as culturally-meaningful regional types has persisted despite various substantial changes in interpretation and intellectual value judgements. These discredited ethnological typifications continue to live on in political, academic, and social realms. Outside of academic circles, the terms have been integrated into the everyday life for the people from these regions, and any well-intentioned attempt to decrease their usage is disconnected from the lived reality of Melanesians as self-identifying Melanesians (Lawson 2013). The results from this study suggest that at the Festival of Pacific Arts, these identifiers are linked to a common experience which is felt similarly by group members within their group, but differently from other groups. One of the most important findings from this study is that Micronesians are experiencing the Festival differently than Melanesians or Polynesians, and further efforts should be made to understand why these differences occur. If the goal of the Festival is to build a unifying Pacific Islander identity, then the fact that this goal is being achieved at disparate levels of efficacy by different culture groups provides information about the nature of socially identifying distinctions and the way that the Festival operates.

Limitations of this study suggest the benefit of longitudinal research. Because participants were only able to be contacted at the Festival, participants completed the surveys by reflecting on their previous experiences from ‘before preparing for the Festival’. Clearly, it would be advantageous for participants to be contacted prior to, during, and multiple times after an event to gauge long-term effectiveness of change in identity salience. Interviews with, and focus-group discussions among, participants about their feelings towards and practices about enacting ethnic-level and meta-identities would yield important discursive data for in-depth analysis. Participants were given the opportunity for follow-up interviews, but due to the drop-out rate, an appropriate sample size could not be achieved for the post-study. Due to the regional focus of the Festival, findings about the efficacy of cultural festivals in spurring identity salience may not translate across regional or cultural boundaries. It should be noted as well that within the different classifications, there were a range of responses within the group. More specific work could be done to investigate these variances on a micro level.

This study supports the possibility of multiple identity salience and demonstrates that ethnic and meta-identities can both become more salient without having a negative effect on the other. In the context of politically-divided nations, or environments where minority cultures can be seen as a threat to the larger national meta-identity, this indicates the possibility for social interventions that strengthen and make salient multiple distinct identities without negative interactions between the two. Future research attending to demographic variables such as gender and status as performer or audience member needs to attend to different kinds of festivals globally as well as examine more focally how participants enact their meta-identities contrasted against other salient identities. Such research, when appropriately framed, will provide valuable information on how festivals are represented across different media and create and contribute to a group’s relative ethnic-level as well as meta-identities and, thereby, enhance vitality theory development with regard to the inclusion of superordinate identities (Abrams, Eveland, and Giles 2003; Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis 1994; Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2018).

**Data availability**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

**Notes**

1. The way in which these identities relate in broader Pacific context, and how participants labelled themselves at the Festival is discussed in-depth in the Methods section. Participants were asked to provide the name of their
own ethnic-level ethnic category for analytical purposes. Throughout this manuscript, we refer to these categorizations as ethnic identity groups, with a recognition that ethnic, cultural, and national identity are not synonymous. However, throughout the Festival the participants are divided up into delegations based on these groupings. When participant responses were analyzed, some key trends emerged which correlate to regional groupings within Oceania that are constantly made salient during the Festival.

2. A table of fit indices for all ten LPA models are available from the authors upon request. The two-profile models were chosen after examining changes in a range of fit indices and weighing conceptual considerations. Extensive work was completed to decide on these specific profiles as well as the LTAs. Both the dataset and the analyses run are available upon request from the first author.

3. For the sake of space, we discussed three examples of how participants transitioned profiles over time (e.g., the results for New Zealanders) and three examples of how participants stayed in the same profiles over time (e.g., the results for Guamanians). A full table detailing how participants in all other ethnic groups transitioned between profiles across time is available upon request.

Acknowledgements

Overwhelming thanks to the Festival organisers for their efforts in organising and shepherding the Festival, with especial gratitude to both Elise Huffer who encouraged the delegations to participate in this research and to Lilnabeth Somera, who provided very helpful local support during the Festival. Thanks to Karen Myers and Daniel Linz for assistance in crafting the survey instruments. We appreciate greatly the careful feedback and assistance from two anonymous reviewers, as well as very influential support from the editor.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


