Nothing for us, except by us - Support for queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract

In Aotearoa New Zealand, LGBTQIA+ support services fail to account for the intersectional identities of young ethnic queers thus presenting a considerable challenge for this community. The long history of racism and exclusion in the queer community and the prioritising of Pākehā identities and experiences have limited the support that queer ethnic youth can access, and is compounded by the lack of funding for the few organisations that could provide support. This qualitative study focuses on the experiences of 43 queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa New Zealand and their experiences and responses when seeking support for their queerness. The findings showed that most queer ethnic young people, though feeling isolated in and disconnected from mainstream LGBTQIA+ organizations in Aotearoa, have managed to establish their own informal and formal networks of support often through voluntary associations or political activism. Their agency and continued advocacy for intersectional equity in support services have been salient to ensuring their well-being.

Keywords: social support, intersectionality, ethnic, queer, youth, LGBTQIA+ organizations

Introduction

Social and professional support for the intersectional experiences and needs of ethnic[1] queers[2] in Aotearoa[3] New Zealand is practically non-existent. Much of the support that is openly available caters more appropriately to a mainstream[4] queer population comprised of those from the majority white population. The policies and processes of LGBTQIA+[5] organizations in Aotearoa are managed and directed by Pākehā[6] queers whose voice and priorities are most often listened to and addressed. This is not unique to Aotearoa as the international literature reveals the same phenomenon in colonial and colonized countries. The presence of ethnic queers in Aotearoa means that there will be calls for services that can effectively support their intersectional identities. However, the small number of openly queer ethnic people, or those who choose to disclose their queerness makes it easier to ignore the lack of appropriate support or the difficulty in safely accessing this support. In light of increasing migration from Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries, the number of ethnic young people is expected to rise and, as such, the population of ethnic queers.

[1] In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities' official definition (https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/community-directory/) of ethnic refers to peoples of Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American heritage as well as those from Continental Europe, but excludes Māori, Pacific Island peoples, and those from the dominant European culture. The participants in this paper are those considered ethnic but excludes people from Continental Europe.

[2] Queer is used in this study except when authors' work reference other terminology (eg. lesbian, gay, trans persons). Most of the participants identified as queer including those who identified also as trans and non-binary as they believed this term more appropriately reflected their identities and understandings. Deciding on a terminology is never easy without the risk of homogenizing groups and communities particularly as terms 'label' and cannot account for the changes in how a person might identify or as new or different terms feel more appropriate to the user, and as society itself changes and alternates how sexual and gender minorities people are seen.

[3] Aotearoa – Māori name for New Zealand and will be used throughout the paper as it is now common usage.

[4] Mainstream queer community refers to that part of the queer community which mirrors the dominant non-queer community in Aotearoa, that is, the white/ Pākehā/ Anglo Saxon community. In June ending 2021, for 18+ gay or lesbian adults, 79.3% identified as European, 11.5% as Ethnic (8.6% Asian, 2.9% MELAA). In the New Zealand population as a whole, 70% identify as European, 15.1% as Asian, and 1.5% as MELAA. https://figure.nz/chart/duzW4OKaq50xCaRo

[5] LGBTQIA+ is generally used to refer to LGBTQIA + communities and organizations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

[6] Māori word for white person.

Aotearoa is a country with an Indigenous Māori population and culture, and a settler colonial history and present. In 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed between the representatives of the British crown and many hapū (the primary political unit for Māori) affirming tino rangatiratanga (ultimate power and paramount authority) (Mutu, 2020). This agreement granted the Crown 'governorship' over non-Māori people/British subjects and set the foundations for future immigration. Te Tiriti, however, has been consistently breached including colonial attempts to erase Indigenous genders and sexualities, a move which has been resisted by Māori. LGBTQIA+ organisations which seek to honour Te Tiriti would respect the self-determination of takatāpui[7] in their work. While the focus of this paper is on ethnic queer youth, many young people in Aotearoa have shared/mixed ancestries. With increasing levels of migration to Aotearoa, LGBTQI+ people come from and exist within all communities in Aotearoa (Treharne & Adams, 2017). The ongoing colonial system into which we arrive is dominated by whiteness that employs multiculturalism to undermine Te Tiriti and the sovereignty of Māori as Indigenous peoples of the land. This is the colonial and racial context within which ethnic queers navigate when seeking social support.

The Ministry of Social Development in Aotearoa defines social support as encompassing the emotional, instrumental, and informational support that a person receives from their network in times of need (MSD, n.d.). Emotional support is seen as the love, care, sympathy, understanding, and esteem or values that others offer. This support is often provided by someone close, although less intimate relationships can also provide such support. Instrumental support focuses on helping with practical things, such as financial

[7] [7] Takatāpui is a Māori term meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex.

assistance, lending items, or help with childcare responsibilities. Professional/informational support refers to people who serve as information and referral sources (e.g., housing or job referrals) or provide expert advice on medical, legal, financial, or technical advice (Frieling et al., 2018).

Research with LGBTQ persons of colour have shown the significance of social support in their lives which enabled the affirmation of their racialized identities and thus prompted them to seek help and advice (Hailey et al, 2020). LGBTQ persons of colour who had social support were less likely to experience psychological distress (Hailey et al, 2020). Logie et al's (2016) research also found that social support provided LGBT African and Caribbean immigrants in Canada with self-acceptance and improved mental health, and a sense of belonging. Seeking social support from other LGBT persons of colour created safe spaces for sharing knowledges and without intersectional microaggressions. Giwa and Greensmith (2012) argued for cultural sensitivity in the planning and delivery of sexual health education programs and advised white sexual and gender minority persons to find meaningful ways to address the racism and power imbalances inherent in mainstream queer spaces. Similarly, Pattisapu (2019) called for closed spaces for LGBTQ youth of colour. This would give them the opportunity to reflect on their intersectional and racialized experiences without being judged by mainstream white queers or having to constantly educate them, especially as mainstream LGBTQ spaces have continually failed to dismantle or challenge racism and transphobia (Pattisapu, 2019).

Social stigma surrounding seeking support

The multiple-marginalised identities of ethnic queers have been argued to lead to social stigma that prevents them from seeking support, and to hamper potential "helpers" from offering support (Calton et al., 2016; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Social stigma has been identified as one of the reasons that some queer individuals manage who knows about their sexual orientation and gender identity (Nakhid et al, 2022a). The desire to maintain privacy and safety influences their decision to seek support, and this can lead to increased levels of isolation, depression, and adverse health outcomes, especially when compounded by the fear of separation from family (Calton et al., 2016). Even though some LGBTQIA+ organisations, collectives, and groups might offer some social support for ethnic members, many ethnic communities perceive queerness as culturally and socially unacceptable (Balsam et al, 2011; Nakhid et al, 2022b; Reid, 2021; Wuestenenk et al., 2022). In Aotearoa, while there are legal consequences for discriminating on the basis of gender or sexual identity, professionals who are part of the ethnic community may hold prejudices that prevent ethnic queers from accessing these opportunities and resources (Yip, 2012). In tight-knit ethnic communities where it is likely that a professional might know a queer individual's family, there is an increased risk of their queerness being disclosed, and the corresponding fear of being disowned by family and excluded by community members (Divakalala & Bal, 2024; Nakhid et al, 2022a).

For queer ethnic young people, often navigating three rigidly defined and strongly independent communities - the queer community, an ethnic or racial community, and the wider society - seeking and finding support is complex (Armstrong, 2022; Brekhus, 2003; Harper et al., 2004; Sadika et al., 2020; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). A lack of information and understanding of the needs of the queer ethnic community in Aotearoa

poses a challenge to government departments which typically rely on data to inform policy and allocate resources. The limited research and knowledge of this community makes them less visible and, consequently, less likely to be allocated resources. It also means that harmful practices and behaviours towards queer ethnic young people by families and communities are more likely to go unnoticed and unaddressed.

Family and community support

Studies suggest that the experiences of queer ethnic young people can be mitigated with support from their families (Gartner and Sterzing, 2017; Pastrana, 2014; Ponnet et al., 2013; Sterzing and Gartner, 2018). Parents' connection with their children, social support, school safety, and belonging are crucial factors in protecting LGBT youth from adverse circumstances including poor peer relations, victimisation, discrimination, abuse, and substance abuse (Tankersley et al., 2021). Additionally, being in a community with those from similar backgrounds is essential, particularly for minoritised communities (Chan & Tam, 1997; Chile & Simpson, 2004), as 'minority stress' can be eased by receiving social support from those who share comparable experiences. A study by Power et al (2014) showed that LGBT parents living in outer metropolitan or regional and rural areas were less likely than those living in the inner city to feel connected to their local community or to be out in community settings, while also having less contact with the LGBT community.

Findings from the Counting Ourselves Study[8] (2018) carried out in Aotearoa with the trans and non-binary communities revealed that those who agreed to having a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group(s) were less likely to have seriously considered suicide in

[8] Aotearoa New Zealand's national study on trans and non-binary communities.

the last 12 months (44%) compared to those who did not agree with this statement (65%). A strong sense of belonging to one's ethnic group is said to reduce adverse mental health outcomes, and the social support received protects queer youth from anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and behaviour (Curtis, 2022; Forrest, 2013; Jamil et al., 2009; Riggle et al., 2014; Valentine & Shipherd, 2018). Fraser's study (2020) with 34 rainbow young adults in New Zealand about their experiences of accessing mental health support showed that they faced significant structural barriers to accessing this support. The participants perceived mental health settings as embedded within a heteronormative and cisnormative societal context, rather than as a safe place outside this context.

Homelessness was also a major concern for the queer community. According to New Zealand data (Counting Ourselves, 2018), one in four trans people of colour experience homelessness. Studies revealed the difficulties experienced by LGBTIQ+ youth in Aotearoa when it came to finding adequate housing, and this was exacerbated by discrimination and other systemic failures (Fraser et al's 2021; 2022a). Homelessness was also related to the connection that queer young people had with religion. Participants in Schmitz and Woodell's study (2018) with LGBTQ homeless young adults revealed that their complex and personal social dynamics with religion impacted their already vulnerable social environments. Religious institutions and their followers created a sense of tangible social stigma for the young adults and distinctly interacted with their other social locations, such as their racial/ethnic identities (Schmitz & Woodell, 2018). Sahgal and Smith (2009) showed that while African Americans were generally more religious than other racial/ethnic groups, homophobia in the Black

church hindered the supportive role the church could play in the lives of LGBTQ people of colour (Battle & DeFreece, 2014). Additionally, many queer young people avoided getting support from faith-based organizations, even those persons who were not overtly religious (Hendry, 2022). Hendry attributed this to their experiences of discrimination from people of faith. Queer young people were often made homeless due to their gender identity and sexual orientation because parents or caregivers were unable to reconcile who they were within the framework of their faith tradition (Hendry, 2022). Ethnic communities in Aotearoa are more likely than the general population to declare themselves religious although young ethnic people were less likely than older members of their ethnic communities to hold a religion[9].

Intersectionality in queer ethnic spaces

An intersectional approach to sexual and gender minorities (SGM) communities acknowledges the structural privilege and oppression that varies with the race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation among other social identifiers of SGM persons (Edwards et al, 2023). For queers of colour, focusing on only one of these identities was significantly disadvantageous. Miller and Vaccaro's study (2016) showed that queer students of colour were tokenized and stereotyped in white queer student organizations. African American gay and bisexual men said they received the most harassment from their heterosexual African American peers (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

The absence of intersectional interventions is argued to be a result of sociopolitical racism, defined by Sadika et al (2020) as the avoidance of race-based discussions, as well as the silencing of any discourse on intersectional experiences (Giwa & Greensmith,

[9] https://figure.nz/chart/nNRsyrknc68JeZns

2012). This correlates with the documented intersectional microaggressions experienced by people of colour and ethnic queer minorities (Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 2018; Kinouani, 2021; Nadal et al., 2015; Nadal et al., 2011). Society and social institutions continue to privilege whiteness regardless of white people's sexual orientation, prioritising the voices of white cis-gendered lesbians and gays. This results in the centering of white queers and their needs and perspectives in mainstream support services, and the further marginalisation of queer ethnic people (Logie & Rwigema, 2014; Petzen, 2012; Ritchie, 2014).

In most institutionalised lesbian and gay networks, the limited understanding of oppression held by middle-class gay white men and women gives rise to the continued colonisation of queer spaces, and a lack of awareness and consideration of the needs of queer community members who hold intersections of race, ethnicity, and non-European cultures (Duffus & Colliver, 2023; Hà, 2023; University College London, 2022). Queer people of colour remain critical of the dominance of European identities and narratives in LGBTQIA+ institutions and organisations, and their refusal or inability to include intersectional frameworks (Nakhid et al., 2023a; Rees et al., 2021). As such, mainstream service providers have a limited understanding of queer ethnic young people - a significant barrier to adequately informing interventions (Calton et al., 2016).

The use of online connection and social support

In the absence of social support and face-to-face connections, many LGBTQIA+ young people have found the Internet to be a medium for exploration, information, and connection and where they can share and express themselves more truthfully (Bradlow et al., 2017). In the GSLEN 2021 National School Climate Survey, just under half of LGBTQ+ students (48.2%) with internet access at school reported being able to access

LGBTQ+-related information online via school computers; access to LGBTQ+-related internet resources through school computers was highest in 2019 but decreased in 2021 (Kosciw et al., 2022).

Studies show that online spaces are generally viewed by LBGT and gender diverse youth as meaningful environments where they can find a sense of belonging (Austin et al., 2020; Craig et al., 2021; Lucero, 2017). While the internet can be a source of connection and information for LGBTQ+ youth, studies have shown that these youth are often the targets of online bullying because of their gender identity or sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2013). The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2019 Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance System revealed that 25% of LGBTQ youth of colour and 34% of transgender youth were bullied online or electronically (Underwood et al., 2020). Moreover, sexual minorities' adolescents, including queer youth were more prone to sexual victimization relating to their gender identity, unwanted sexual attention, or forced to send sexual content or subjected to blackmail or coercion (Gámez-Guadix & Íncera, 2021).

Although online queer spaces such as internet apps can create a sense of space and belonging (Austin et al., 2020; Craig et al., 2021; Lucero, 2017), it can also have the opposite, detrimental effect on ethnic queer people given the stigmatization, and racial and gender minority discrimination within these apps (Conner, 2022; Nakhid et al, 2023b; Stacey & Forbes, 2021; Tran et al., 2020). Efforts by some popular queer dating apps have attempted to address this problem by eliminating the ethnicity filter, though this will make it more difficult for ethnic queer people to connect with others within their ethnic cohort (Henderson, 2022; Miles, 2021; Stokel-Walker, 2018; Wade & Pear, 2022). This further adds to intra-minority stress and impacts the mental health of the intra-minority

gay community (Pachankis et al., 2020). The susceptibility to online bullying as well as the difficulty in making cultural social connections poses real risks to queer ethnic youth and highlights the importance of creating safe spaces where they feel accepted.

The queer ethnic community in Aotearoa

The ethnic population in Aotearoa New Zealand is one of the fastest growing demographics in the country. The percentage and numbers of ethnic youth between the ages of 15-24 years are reported to be approximately 26.5% (318,954), with youth coming from the main identified groups of Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African (Ministry of Ethnic Communities[10]). Within that group, statistics provided by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities estimate approximately 17,500 LGBTQIA+ ethnic youth between 12-24 years. Although these statistics highlight the considerably large population of queer and gender-diverse ethnic young people in Aotearoa, to date there is no funded organisation specifically providing support to this group. Most support services, social networks and organizations cater for Pākehā, although in recent years, initiatives have increased to include support for takatāpui and queer Pacific populations.

Methodology

This paper is based on data from a larger research study with members of the queer ethnic community living in Aotearoa who were between 18 and 35 years of age with the majority of the participants in the 18 - 25 age group. The research study gathered qualitative data on ethnic queer young people's understandings and experiences of family, community, and intimate partner relationships. Confidential, qualitative, face to face, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 43 participants. The data for this

[10] Communication from the office of the Regional Manager Wellington, March 2021.

paper focuses on the social and professional support for queer ethnic young people living in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) and Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) as experienced by the participants.

The study interviewed participants who identified as queer, non-binary, gay, pansexual, demisexual, gender fluid, non-binary, and trans among others. Participants held ethnic heritage from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas and were recruited through various promotional and recruitment means such as Facebook notices, personal contacts, tertiary institutions' online pages and word of mouth. Network sampling was also used for recruiting participants, and initial contacts were made with queer persons who expressed interest in the research.

Prior to commencing the research, the core research team[11] discussed the study with young ethnic queers and LGBTQIA+ organizations in Aotearoa. These conversations ensured that the relevant communities were involved in the research, and that the language and approach used were respectful of and endorsed by the communities. Consultation included RainbowYouth, Human Rights Commission, Shakti Youth, the NZ Aids Foundation, and the Ministry of Social Development (Settling In division).

The participants lived either in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland - the largest city with 1,652,000) or Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington - the capital city with 419,000), with most of them (36) residing in Tāmaki Makaurau. A participant information sheet explaining the research was given to potential participants who had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and to have these questions answered. Participants gave consent to participate by completing a consent form. Interviews ranged from 60

[11] The core research team as well as the co-authors of this paper identify as queer with one identifying as a queer ally, and all identifying as ethnic except one person of Māori heritage.

minutes to three hours depending on the stories and knowledge that the participants wished to share. Most of the interviews took place in coffee shops, the preferred venue for the majority of the participants. Although there was the possibility that participants might have experienced a level of discomfort recalling instances of lack of support from social and professional organizations, social services, family and community, every effort was made to conduct the interviews in ways that reduced any unease or embarrassment for the participants. Participants could bring their partner to the interview but only one set of participants (two people in an intimate partner relationship) chose to do so. Participants also had the option to review a transcript of their interview. Only one person opted for this but made no changes to the transcript. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Pseudonyms are used for the participants.

Ethics approval for this research was granted by the principal researcher's institutional ethics board.

This exploratory, qualitative study was designed to investigate the support experienced and responded to by young ethnic queers. Given the small population of Aotearoa (5,124,100) and the even smaller population of the close-knit communities of ethnic queers, the countries, nationalities, and ethnicities of the participants[12] are omitted to protect their confidentiality.

Participants were asked about their knowledge of and experiences with accessing and using social and professional support. The following questions provided information on

[12] The following conventions apply to this paper - where participants refer specifically to their home country, the country is identified as (country), (ethnicity) when referring to an ethnic heritage, or (nationality) when referring to being a person from a particular country.

the support experienced by young ethnic queers in relation to their queerness: How do you/ rainbow/queer ethnic young people/communities find or access support for your/ their queerness? Do you think that queer ethnic young people need their own spaces of support? What are your or rainbow/queer ethnic young peoples' experiences of services related to health and wellbeing? Additional prompts were used to help elicit information.

Mash Up as the analytical method

The excerpts presented in this paper are the participants' responses to the questions on support. Persadie and Narain's Mash Up methodological approach (2022) was used to analyze the data. Mash Up methodology aligns with the diasporic backgrounds and lived realities of the participants and is positioned as a (queer) disruption of the normalization of white queer respectability and social order. Mash Up provides a critical intervention through embodied theory. Embodied theory privileges local forms of knowledge emerging from the lives of marginalized peoples facing varied forms of oppression and discrimination (Nixon & King, 2021). As a method of analysis, Mash Up allows us to understand the intersectional spaces of queer ethnic lives in white dominated spaces, and the ways in which young ethnic queers resist the marginalization of their racialized being.

Mash Up methodology is a novel approach to analyzing and understanding ethnic queers' intersectional experiences. Persadie and Narain's development of a research methodology that does not depend on whiteness for approval or to reify its presence is essential when analyzing young ethnic queers' responses to the support available to them in a predominantly white society. Mash Up is seen as an affirming methodology (Nakhid, 2022) as it centres the experiences and responses of ethnic queers to the lack

of intersectional approaches in the support offered within the mainstream queer community in Aotearoa. Mash Up allowed the researchers to identify those responses which revealed young ethnic queers' challenges to the white-embodied practices of LGBTQIA+ support. The researchers listened to and looked for participants' experiences that showed their disruption of marginalization and institutional racism in the support and support organizations available, and identified those instances where participants had taken agency to counter actions and decisions that negated their presence and intersectional identities.

Findings

The findings showed that a common response from young ethnic queers to the lack of adequate support services was to establish their own voluntary organizations and support networks. The study revealed the ways in which participants critiqued the existing white-dominated LGBTQIA+ support organizations, created spaces that affirmed their intersectional identities and supported their well-being, while still advocating for equitable resources for the provision of these spaces and an intersectional approach in queer mainstream services.

Almost all the participants interviewed said that they were unaware of organisations or services they could contact which offered support for queer and gender-diverse ethnic young people, either within their ethnic community or in mainstream queer spaces. The dominance of Eurocentric narratives, perspectives, and priorities in LGBTQIA+ organisations and support services in Aotearoa overshadowed the small, openly queer ethnic community and made it easier to ignore their needs. The lack of a critical mass of visible voices - a consequence of community and family attitudes and cultural and

religious beliefs - muted a potentially strong call to address the dearth of appropriate and culturally relevant services for young ethnic queers.

The following sections explore how young ethnic queers in Aotearoa experienced and responded to the absence of intersectional awareness within mainstream queer organisations, representation in queer support services, finding 'family' and community support, and creating self-determined spaces of social support and political agency.

Absence of intersectional awareness within mainstream queer organisations

Participants discussed their experiences as members of the queer ethnic community engaging with mainstream queer support organizations. They found these organizations to be homonormative, relying on processes, ideologies and behaviours that were monocentric and exclusive of the intersectional experiences of queer persons of colour. Beni's experience with RainbowYouth, a place where he was hoping to volunteer and to engage with other queer people of colour, was a disappointment to him. At the time, there were no queer persons of colour employed at the organization, and Beni's efforts to bring this to their attention drew a muted response.

> *Beni: I remember one time I went to Rainbow Youth to volunteer there... I really wanted to volunteer there coz I needed a queer community here and I tried to tell them this is a really, really white space. I haven't met a single person of colour the whole time I have been here.*

The participants felt lost when entering white queer spaces; for their own welfare, they had learnt to distinguish safe organisations and institutions from those which embedded racist and oppressive processes and systems. Participants wanted a sense of solidarity

and comfort which they believed they would find if other queer culturally and religiously diverse individuals were present.

> *Awan: "It's easy to feel lost. It's easy to feel out of place. Especially if you're going to try like involve yourself or attend a queer white space. It's easy to feel small. It's easy to feel, lost, awkward. And having an ethnic presence will, I think, expose whatever oppression that they (the organization) may have there. Especially if they're not just ethnic and migrant and person of colour, but especially if they belong to other faiths, other beliefs.*

Although there are a number of LGBTQIA+ organizations that support the queer community in general, the participants wanted places where their intersectional identities were acknowledged and where they did not feel as though they were intruding, but this turned out to be a futile endeavour. Participants did not think that the current LGBTQIA+ organizations were culturally competent to deal with the diverse and unique needs of ethnic queers. In addition, the inequalities that existed in the allocation of resources to ethnic organizations meant that the services they were able to provide were insufficient to address their needs.

> Xia: *There is very limited funding for rainbow organisations and then there is no specific attention on rainbow ethnic communities. I don't think mainstream organisations have the cultural competency to be able to service rainbow ethnic people and their needs... I think it's symptomatic of a much larger problem of the unequal distribution of resources especially for marginalised communities. Like ethnic organisations in general don't get as much as mainstream organisations.*

Accessing professional services such as mental health and counselling was difficult for the participants as there were few places that considered their intersectional identities. The stress of searching for and not finding these services worsened their feelings of isolation.

> *Beni: If I needed support around the experiences I was having as a queer person of colour, I wouldn't know where to go. In my case, I think I'm lucky to not feel I need that much support, but if I did, I can imagine I wouldn't know where to get it. Even in terms of mental health, I have been looking for someone who explicitly…is either part of the rainbow community or a person of colour, and I just can't find anyone who is expressly those things*.

Young ethnic queers faced being displaced from home if they chose to disclose their queerness to family (Nakhid et al, 2022a). The influence of their parents and older family members' religious background made them feel as though they had contravened religious beliefs (Nakhid et al, 2022b) and aggravated their discomfort and anxiety in accessing shelters managed by religious organizations. With limited housing availability, participants expressed concern at the religious nature of some homeless shelters which made some queer and trans youth feel unsafe.

> *Xia: Because young people who decide to come out are often at risk of being kicked out of home, LGBT youth are disproportionately represented in stats around suicide attempt and … suicide. Housing is a basic need and there are no shelters for any young people. I think that's a big problem and I don't trust the existing child protection agencies to help in those circumstances. A lot of housing*

for homelessness organisations are run by religious organisations and that's not safe for a lot of young people who are queer and trans.

Representation in queer support services

The privileging of white voices in queer support services was expressed by most of the participants. Existing mainstream support networks were perceived as unsafe and difficult to navigate due to the dominance of white ideologies and processes, and participants did not feel that they were represented or included. Pākehā queers appeared to be accepted and included in mainstream society; conversely, queer ethnic people constantly faced discrimination and rejection, or feeling unable to fit in (Nakhid et al, 2023a). Participants who had attended local community queer events had felt a sense of unbelonging and unwelcome. Mainstream LGBTQIA+ organizations that did have queer persons of colour were rare but they provided ethnic queers with a moment to feel seen and to know that there were others holding that space.

Awan: I don't want to go to the parade alone so I signed up with RainbowYouth. When I went, there's a few minority people, there's a group of people of colour there. However, I notice that no one is trying to talk to me except [name]. She approached me. But I imagine if [she] wasn't there, I would feel really awkward because before [she] approach me, no one was really trying to talk to me. I don't know why. I assume in my head, maybe there's a cultural difference.

LGBTQIA+ organizations lacked awareness of the discomfort that ethnic queers felt in approaching or entering white centric queer places, and of the anxiety when seeking assistance knowing that there would be no one with whom they could identify. This is a

significant concern particularly for a community already marginalized by racism and ethnocentrism.

While some ethnic groups had set up small but crucial social networks, sometimes these were limited to those of a particular ethnicity and other ethnic queers did not feel comfortable joining these networks. Understandably, cultural connections, and meeting and socializing with those from similar cultural backgrounds were the driving forces behind these networks but, unfortunately, it meant that other ethnicities did not feel as though it was a place for them.

> *Waqa: RainbowYouth is dominated by white people but EquAsian is dominated by Asians so when you asked me, do I think there was adequate support, so even if it does exist, it's like a barrier, it is not so easy to get in. You feel like you're not going to fit in there anyway.*

The adequacy of mainstream LGBTQIA+ organizations to address the needs and intersectional identities of queer ethnic young people was not the only concern for the participants. For many ethnic queers who had chosen not to disclose or to let others in about their queerness, accessing overtly named LGBTQIA+ organizations risked disclosure and the consequences that arose from that.

> *Tahi: Even if there was support, it's really hard for some people to go. Rainbow Youth is there. I wouldn't have gone there because if somebody sees me walking there then they would know I'm going to seek support therefore I'm gay.*

For many participants, mainstream health services embodied a cishomopatriarchal ideology with other forms of intersectional oppression at play.

Adi: I said let's get checked for chlamydia too, because they don't offer that in their actual standard STD checks. And the person, because I had a female body kind of made me feel like there was no point for me to do that, because it's mostly on the rise with the gay male relationships. And I'm like, how do you know I'm not having sex with a guy who's gay? How do you know that? You know, like you're judging me based on the fact that I looked back then straight and female.

Beni: In terms of sexual health, I would probably go to family planning but even that name family makes it sound like I'm gonna have a baby which is the opposite of my queer problems.

Finding 'family' and community support

While some participants had the support of their families, others expressed the need for groups and resources to support both them and their families. Participants wanted family to understand their gender and sexual identities and to support them in navigating these identities. For some, having family support meant that they did not rely as much on external sources of support.

Adi: I think maybe it would be great to have education for the parents because we shouldn't be having to do all the work. We've been doing the work our whole lives.

Hao: I've been fortunate in that case because if something does come up, I just go to them (my family), you know, yeah. And I've got an older brother who's gay, and we sort of have the same experiences. I just asked for his advice sometimes.

In the small, closely associated, and highly communicable ethnic communities where gossip and innuendo were rife (Nakhid et al, 2022b), even distant or indirect association

and contact with other queers, or LGBQIA+ organizations and events made involuntary disclosure a real possibility. Some participants knew that they would not be accepted within their communities and spoke about the fear that others, including other queers, felt in associating with them, particularly if they were from the same ethnic community. The social stigma of queer association and the risk of having their sexual or gender identity questioned resulted in community members keeping their distance.

> *Tahi: There is no support at all. I don't really know many gay (ethnicity). I have met some but even those who I have met would not hang out with me in public because they are afraid to be outed just for even associating with me. They fear somebody would know they are.*

There are more than 200 different ethnicities in Aotearoa's population of 5 million. Thus, the desire to find, connect, and create family with other ethnic queers, especially from one's own ethnic and cultural background with similar homonegative communities, was a monumental challenge for the participants.

> *Jamin: That's all that I want, and I think that's what my friends want, is just a space to talk about things like that and to find your family.*

For some participants, the Internet provided an alternative to a physical connection with other queers, a sense of control, safety, and anonymity, and was useful for reaching out to other queer communities. Participants mentioned their preferences for certain apps that enabled users to specify the types of emotional connections and intimacy they desired, for example, sex, dates, or friends. Internet chatrooms and apps provided an opportunity for the participants to build strong networks, discuss safe sex practices,

offer social support, seek partners for sexual encounters, and more importantly, find supportive friends.

> *Asha: On the internet, I do know lots of people where that is a safe space for them.*

> *Xia: I would say many, like younger people probably find (support) through the internet and through friends. And if they don't have the friends, it would be like the online space can be support space. There's a lot of groups out there online.*

Despite the internet being a source of connection for some participants, others noted that even with internet apps, the small numbers of ethnic queers made it difficult to find other ethnic queers with whom they could connect.

> *Jamin: I think in New Zealand it's very hard because the queer community in general is so small, and then the queer, coloured people community is so small. It's hard for us to find each other like even on the online apps and stuff like that.*

Although there was an expected use for apps with terms such as "dating app" or "hook-up app", many of the participants were looking for friends and friendship and were willing to wait until they met other ethnic queer persons with whom they could form solid and meaningful friendships.

> *Jamin: You have to just find friends that are also queer people of colour. But that takes quite a lot of time. Like for me, it took a while. Like pretty much only got my first good friend, queer, person of colour this year which is a little bit long to wait.*

Creating self-determined spaces of social support and political agency

Queer spaces in Aotearoa are dominated by whiteness, not only in terms of the overall approach to how LBTQIA+ organizations are managed but in those that occupy the spaces within. Participants recognized the value of support institutions that created a place of acceptance and belonging.

> *Awan: I think that space (for ethnic queers) is needed because…it's not just about us integrating in the culture here, but also sharing the experience, having the safe platform, a safe space for us to share experiences. Because most of ethnic groups…queer ethnic migrant people here they came from communities that are not really open to gender diversity.*

Due to the lack of formal queer ethnic support organizations, and the prevalence of mainstream, Pākehā-dominated queer organisations which failed to provide the intersectional support for ethnic queer young people, community led initiatives by and for ethnic queer people had been set up to address this deficit. Concerted and successful efforts had been made to create self-determining spaces for ethnic queer young people. Instead of looking for acceptance and inclusion in mainstream queer spaces, organisations such as EquAsian, Ethnic Rainbow Alliance, Adikhaar Aotearoa, Rainbow Path, Indian Origin Pride NZ, FILTH, FAFSWAG, and more informal networks of support had been established to provide support and, at times, political advocacy for ethnic queers.

Young ethnic queers varied in terms of their ethnicity, religion, resident status, and cultural practices. The vastness of their being contrasted with the narrowness of

whiteness, and the participants were determined not to be diminished by the dominant presence of white queers or to participate in their oppressive spaces.

> *Dayn*: *A lot of things that people go to, like kind of queer oriented things that are in Auckland anyway, are very like white dominated or male dominated, and I think that it's not necessarily because of a lack of (ethnic queer) people to attend. But I think there's like there's a whole new generation of (ethnic queer) kids growing up that haven't really existed before*.

Queer international students had formed their own networks of support, often in their own language. For Chinese international students, WeChat groups, and Chinese language queer apps connected others of similar backgrounds or country of origin. The failure of mainstream LGBTQIA+ organisations to translate resources or to have support groups in non-English languages had made it necessary for ethnic queers to create informal social support systems with a shared language. For the participants, doing this helped them to recognize that their strength came from within themselves.

> *Kan: On Wechat, that's a Chinese social media, we got a group chat and that's all the people in the community. So sometimes I would just talk to people from the community. Like it's good enough to be support ... And then I think having like a very strong mind in myself is the most important thing coz I don't doubt myself even when I know I'm the only one stand for myself or fight for myself. I think that is good enough, yeah*.

Discussion

For queer ethnic young people, experiencing queerness in queer spaces can provide a sense of comfort and acceptance, and having LGBTQIA+ organizations that provide

intersectional support is essential. The challenge to find meaningful support, however, prevents young ethnic queers from feeling a sense of belonging within mainstream queer spaces. Aotearoa's LGBTQIA+ support services are informed by the voices of the majority white queer community and framed in line with their perspectives and realities. The unique experiences and intersectional identities of queer ethnic young people do not appear to be considered. Mainstream support services for queer communities must address issues of racism and homonormativity if they are to provide culturally appropriate services. The racialized hegemony of supposedly safe spaces for queer support groups have led to ethnic queers feeling further minoritized within minority communities (Tan & Wang, 2018).

The Mash Up analytical process offered a lens through which the researchers could identify participants' responses that revealed a disruption of and resistance to the white-centric queer support available. Participants created their own transgressive and transformative spaces where they found family and community and were open about their queerness without the fear of rejection and stigma. These were spaces where ethnic queers could share stories and have their experiences validated. The existing support networks for queer ethnic people managed by ethnic queers were preferred by the participants though these places received minimal funding from government or the community. Participants' refusal to enter unsafe spaces where they would be confronted with mainstream organizations' unwillingness to consider their intersectional identities indicated that they were not satisfied with supporting an oppressive system. Internet sites offered a place to find friendship in a safe way, and though it took time for this to occur, participants were willing to wait if it meant forming meaningful relationships.

The limited research on queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa New Zealand means that little is known about this population and, as such, service providers lack the knowledge to address their needs. A focus on the relationship between LGBTQIA+ organizations and queer ethnic young people would foster a better understanding of their intersectional identities and thus their particular concerns. The importance of building knowledge of queer ethnic people (Calton et al., 2016; Hagai et al., 2020; Moorhead & Jiménez, 2021) can assist in attitudinal shifts in society and result in more appropriate support for this community (Keuroghlian et al., 2017; McDermott et al., 2023). Organizational social support that embraces the intersectional identities of ethnic queers will result in better well-being; a lack, thereof, will result in poorer well-being (Sotardi et al., 2022; Eisenberg et al., 2019; Snapp et al., 2015).

While young ethnic queers have been agentic in disrupting the discriminating practices of LGBTQIA+ support organizations and creating their own spaces, this does not exculpate these organizations and Aotearoa from providing equitable and intersectional support for queer ethnic young people.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. The majority (36) of the participants resided in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), the largest urban city with seven residing in the capital of Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington). Although these two cities are home to the majority of ethnic peoples living in Aotearoa, the voices of the very marginalized and likely unsupported ethnic participants in rural areas or in smaller cities are not heard. It is necessary to know how this group of ethnic queers access support given the paucity and

inaccessibility of support for urban queers in a more densely populated area with greater availability of resources.

The nuances of the different intersectional gender identities (male, female, non-binary, transgender, etc) and sexual orientations (bi, gay, lesbian, pan, etc) as well as the ethnicities (Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American) cannot be specified given the small numbers of openly queer ethnic persons in each of these ethnic groups. Although this might have been interesting to know, it was more important to note the commonality of experiences and perspectives of young ethnic queers regardless of ethnicity and cultural background.

Another limitation is the small number of participants. However, given the population of Aotearoa (5 million), the small population of ethnic peoples, and the even smaller ethnic queer population, the 43 participants gave us insights into the (lack of) suitability of support for ethnic queers. A further limitation is the focus on the support for young ethnic queers. It would have been useful to know the support available and accessible to older ethnic queers. Given the greater invisibility of older ethnic queers and the likely barriers they faced, their voices would have been an invaluable contribution to the knowledge. This would be an area for further study as well as to understand how older ethnic rainbow people survived and thrived in perhaps a less open and inclusive environment.

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