Letting in/ "Coming out" – Agency and relationship for young ethnic queers in Aotearoa New Zealand on disclosing queerness

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Abstract

For queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, the intersections of family, culture, religion, race, and migration status make disclosing queerness a complex and fraught journey. Qualitative face to face, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 43 gender and sexually diverse ethnic participants between 18 and 35 years of age living in Aotearoa who shared their experiences, considerations, and decisions on how, to whom, and whether they disclosed their queerness. The findings showed that queer ethnic young people are agentic in searching for secure spaces to be queer, and being housed and safe were among the primary considerations when deciding to come out. Disclosing queerness was not seen as compulsory or obligatory and was understood in the context of a person's circumstances. Protecting the status of family and maintaining relationships and cultural traditions took precedence over the desire to declare one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Keywords: queer, ethnic, young people, agency, family, community, relationship, coming out, Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

The process of 'coming out' is said to be one of the main concerns of queer/ rainbow/ LGBTQIA+[1] young people. Coming out refers to being open about one's sexualized identity and can be seen as a form of political activism in the personal and professional lives of queer people (Klein, Holtby, Cook & Travers, 2015). Most of the literature on coming out reveal two main responses. It can either be a traumatic event or an authenticating experience. Advocates for coming out claim that it is a process with which one must engage in order to feel liberated, to acknowledge one's queerness, or to give credibility to the process (Rees-Turyn, 2007).

For queer ethnic[2] young people in Aotearoa[3], the intersections with which they must contend when considering coming out include family, culture, religion, race, and migration status. These intersections make coming out for this group a multi-dimensional and complicated journey. In addition, the small population of 'out' ethnic queers in Aotearoa makes it difficult for young ethnic people to find community and support if and when they choose to come out.

Narratives on coming out

One of the critiques of the coming out discourse is that it assumes the process, once done, to be completed (Klein et al, 2015). Coming out is not a static action, but dependent on different motivations, goals, and strategies that people use to manage their identity (Orne, 2011). Strategizing how one comes out is both contextual and continual. In privileging narratives of coming out as a single liberating political act, those who choose not to come out are thought to be embarrassed by or afraid of disclosing their queerness, or shying away from the political act of solidarity with other queers who have chosen to do so (Rasmussen, 2004). The coming out process as a singular, uniform act has been largely criticized as well as the importance of doing so to authenticate one's identity (das Nair, nd). Linear frameworks of coming out are said to be incapable of reflecting the complex lived experiences of queer and trans youth (Klein et al., 2015). Although a coming out narrative might serve to legitimize stigmatized identities of homosexual and transgender persons, Zimman (2009) claims that it fails to account for the stories of transgender people. This is crucial given the consistent devaluing of trans of color

[1] The term queer will be used in this paper as it is seen by young people as more inclusive in terms of sexuality though referring to more than just sexuality and including a particular lifestyle (Clunis & Green 2000), and includes gender diverse. The term rainbow were referred to by many of the participants in the study. For one of the ethnic groups in particular, the term 'rainbow' was preferred as it presented as more benign and accepting as opposed to queer which, for them, held negative undertones. The researchers empathized with the discomfort that some participants felt around the use of the term queer and sought and gained their approval for the use of queer throughout the paper (except where other authors have specifically used other terminologies in their work). The term 'gender and sexually diverse' is also used.
[2] The use of the term ethnic will be discussed later in the paper.
[3] Māori word for New Zealand. It will be used throughout the paper as it is being increasingly used in the country.

lives (Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013). Rasmussen (2004, 149) believes that the imperative to come out is pushed by gay and lesbian politics that "tends to unproblematically valorize the act of coming out".

The concept of coming out has been typically framed within a Westernized, white, cisgender, gay, male context (Han, 2009) and may not be applicable to the lived experience of other groups. Research has shown that queer whites are likely to disclose their gender identity and sexual orientation more often than queer people of color (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter 2004). However, although ethnic groups may share common experiences of racism and discrimination, the diversity of cultures cautions generalizations on coming out across ethnicities. Research with Latin@ teens concluded that they should decide for themselves whether and how much of their identity they wished to disclose (Boe, Maxey & Bermudez, 2018). In Tam's (2018) dissertation on queer (and) Chinese Canadians, the participants expressed concerns for the well-being of their family members; not coming out beyond their immediate family was seen as an act of care and there was no need for verbalization or declaration. Shannahan (2010) recognized the multiple identities of religion, culture and sexual diversity that queer Muslims in Britain had to negotiate. Queer Hmong American young people and their families navigated and maintained relationships among diverse and non-conforming gender identities and sexualities (Ngo & Kwon, 2015). Zimman's study (2009) with transgender people observed that a process of declaration whereby they assumed a social gender role that matched their gender identity was the epitome of their coming out. This contrasted with the ongoing nature of coming out that seemed to characterize gays and lesbians. Masoumi (2018) argued that, because of the highly racialized spaces in Western society, trans black and people of color have a complex relationship with coming out. Western society's view of coming out as a sign of progress did not take into account the lack of access to safe spaces for trans and queer people of color, and presumes that coming out is a main concern for them. Bao's (2013) autoethnography as a gay Chinese cisman in Australia revealed that his coming out experience to his mother put her in a difficult position of having to directly confront his sexuality and responding with either rejection or acceptance. The range of experiences among queer ethnic young people and their families is amplified by the diversity of religion, culture, language, rituals, and more in their lives.

Ethnic communities, families, and queerness

Queer ethnic people are one of the most invisible population groups even in their own communities (Ghabrial, 2019; Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016). They are typically surrounded by a heterosexual family and have minimal access to adult lesbian and gay communities. Gender and sexually diverse ethnic young people may not only face harassment from their parents but may be denied the support needed to deal with a society that is not willing to accept them. Although parents, families and communities might provide ethnic young people with the necessary tools to deal with racism, they may not give them the resources to cope with the treatment they could face from being queer. Ethnic queers are likely to face ostracism if their community believes that homosexuality is not part of their culture (Jaspal, 2012). Gossip and rumors also reinforced narratives and stereotypes and were forms of abuse that resulted in the mutual rejection of queer young people and community (Nakhid, Tuwe, Abu Ali, Subramanian, & Vano, 2022).

For ethnic queers, coming out to family involves the extended family and wider community networks. Family is central to their identity and isolating themselves from this central reference and from the cultural ties associated with this brings a loss of social and cultural capital (Zontini & Reynolds, 2007). Research suggests that queer ethnic youth may be at greater risk of experiencing parental rejection than queer youth from the dominant culture (Richter, 2017). This rejection is particularly difficult because of the close familial and communal ties that exist among ethnic communities and which serve as a protection against the racism that ethnic people experience outside these communities. The family is seen as the social and economic unit among ethnic minority families and being queer may be seen as a denouncement of that unit (Fish, 2007). Family is the main source of support, relationships, cultural traditions, and identity for queer ethnic young people living in Aotearoa. However, the behaviors of the family towards gender and sexually diverse children were strongly determined by the family's desire for approval and acceptance by the ethnic community (Nakhid et al, 2022).

The traditional expectations of heterosexual marriage and children held by some families are other considerations facing queer ethnic young people. In the USA, the families of queer Latina women were accepting of their nonheterosexuality so long as they conformed to hegemonic femininity (Robinson, 2018). In Aotearoa, familial and cultural obligations regarding marriage and children impacted on LGBTQIA+ Asians' disclosure of their sexual identity (Amerasinghe, 2018).

Being queer in Aotearoa

The Youth19 Survey (Roy, Greaves, Peiris-John, Clark, Fenaughty et al, 2021) explored the wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school students including those who identified as Rainbow[4] Māori[5], and Pacific[6] Rainbow. One of the reports drawn from the Youth19 Survey focused on Asian youth (Peiris-John, Kang, Bavin, Dizon, Singh et al, 2021) and made a brief mention of rainbow Asians while the reports on trans and gender diverse, and same- and multiple-sex attracted students did not specify ethnicity. The focus of these reports highlights the stark omission of queer and trans ethnic youth in the research and data collection, and the need for research on queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa. Our study, as part of a larger qualitative study with 43 gender and sexually diverse ethnic young people in Aotearoa, explored how young ethnic queers experienced relationships with family, community and intimate partners. This paper focuses on what 'coming out' means for queer ethnic young people living in Aotearoa.

Ethnic young people in Aotearoa

Ethnic youth[7] are one of the fastest growing populations in Aotearoa even surpassing the growth rate of Māori and Pacific youth. The percentage and numbers of ethnic youth from the New Zealand Census main ethnic categories of Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African, and between the ages of 15-24 years in Aotearoa are reported to be approximately 26.5% (318,954) (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2021[8]). With an increase in this population, a subsequent increase in the number of queer young people is expected. Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African young people often draw on or are responsive to cultures that differ from the dominant European culture in Aotearoa. Gender and sexually diverse young people may be met with different responses from families, friends, and the community in comparison to queer non-ethnic New Zealanders. Given the challenges posed by culture, religion, race, migration, and family for many young ethnic queers, research with this population is crucial.

[4] From the Youth19 Survey report - Those who identify as sexuality diverse, or are attracted to the same sex as themselves or more than one sex, and those who identify as gender diverse, non-binary or transgender
[5] Indigenous people of Aotearoa
[6] People with Pacific Island heritage
[7] The use of the term youth is discussed later on
[8] Communication from the office of the Regional Manager, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Wellington, March 2021.

Terminology

The term ethnic is widely debated as to its appropriateness, relevance, and inclusivity with reference to communities and populations. Until recently, ethnic groups in Aotearoa excluded Māori, Pacific Island peoples, and Europeans. The term ethnic has since been revised to exclude those same groupings although it now includes continental Europeans. Data on ethnic communities can be disaggregated to exclude this latter group.

In Aotearoa, there is a range of terms used by the LGBTQIA+ community, most of them referring to Māori[9] and Pacific peoples[10]. For the participants in this study, the words rainbow, queer, gay, lesbian, trans, non-binary, and gender fluid were used more frequently by some than others, with certain ethnic groups shying away from the term queer and preferring the term rainbow. The majority of the participants self-identified as queer hence the term queer is used in this paper. The research was open to all gender and sexually diverse ethnic young people to express themselves as they wished. The pronouns associated with a participant's excerpt are based on the pronoun(s) which they have chosen to use.

Methodology

This article is based on data from a larger qualitative research study that employed a case study design to allow for an intensive, systematic investigation of a community (Heale & Twycross, 2018). The research study is exploratory in nature and sought to determine how queer ethnic young people understand and experience relationships with family, community, and intimate partners, and how these understandings and experiences (attitudes, practices, responses) impact them. The study draws upon a social constructionist framework to understand how ideas and attitudes develop over time within a social and community context (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). Ungar (2004) argues that a social constructionist approach allows for a plurality of meanings which individuals negotiate in their self-constructions. A social constructionist framework views supposed vulnerable or marginalized groups as able to discover supportive

[9] Takatāpui is a Māori term, historically meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex'. The term was reclaimed in the 1980s and used by individuals who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or part of the rainbow community. https://takatapui.nz. See also Kerekere, E. (2017). *Part of the whānau: The emergence of takatāpui Identity-he whāriki takatāpui*. https://takatapui.nz/takatapui-part-of-the-whanau#part-of-the-whanau

[10] Fa'afafine or Fa'atama (Samoa, American Samoa), Fakaleiti or Leiti (Tonga), Fakafifine (Niue), Akava'ine (Cook Islands), Vakasalewalewa (Fiji), Palopa (Papua New Guinea), Mahu (Hawaii) Haka huahine (Tokelau) and Rae rae (Tahiti). https://finepasifika.org.nz
F'INE (fee-neh) is a Pacific MVPFAFF / LGBTQI+ focused not for profit organization. MVPFAFF+ is a Pasifika-based acronym coined by Phylesha Acton-Brown (https://www.leva.co.nz/our-work/suicide-prevention/finding-help/support-services/rainbow/).

and resilient ways which might be invisible to others but that create nurturing, social spaces to foster community and a sense of belonging (Ungar 2004; Fineman, 2014).

The research focused on members of the queer ethnic community living in Aotearoa who were between 18 and 35 years of age. In Aotearoa, 12 to 24 years is the generally accepted age range for defining "youth" or "young people". This is the age range adopted by the Ministry of Youth Development and within the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa[11]. This research engaged young people from 18 years of age as parental consent to participate in the research is not required at this age. Young adults to the age of 35 were also involved in the study as the researchers wanted the perspectives of a group who may have had experiences of 'coming out' that may be of benefit to younger persons. Most of the participants were between 18 and 25 years and identified with one or more of the main ethnic groups (Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African).

The researchers discussed the study with members and organizations associated with rainbow and ethnic communities prior to commencing the research. These discussions were to ensure that appropriate communities were involved in the research and that the language and approach were respectful of the communities. Consultation occurred with RainbowYouth, Human Rights Commission, Shakti Youth, the NZ Aids Foundation, and the Ministry of Social Development (Settling In division). The consulting organizations provided feedback on aspects of the study including the terminology, rationale, and aim of the research.

Ethics approval for this research was granted by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee in 2019.

Participants were invited to the study through social media sites, word of mouth, or advertising on researchers' networks and university student associations' websites. Network sampling was also used for recruiting participants, and initial contacts were made with queer persons who expressed interest in the research. The researchers carried out confidential, qualitative, face to face, semi-structured interviews with 43 participants. The participants gave consent to be interviewed by completing a consent form at the time of the interview. The duration of the interviews ranged from 1 hour to 4 hours. Interviews were held at venues including coffee shops, restaurants or pubs/bars depending on the individual and where they felt most comfortable. Although the participants were of legal drinking age, alcohol was not a factor in any of the interviews. A participant information sheet outlining the research had been given

[11] https://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/policy-and-research/policy-document-final.pdf

to potential participants prior to the interview and they had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and to have these questions answered. Every effort was made to conduct interviews in ways that reduced any discomfort or embarrassment for the participants. The participants were also advised that they could stop the interview at any time without needing to provide a reason. They also had the option to include their partners in the research study though only one of the participants brought their partner to the interview. The knowledge shared was guided by the participants. Pseudonyms were used for the participants, and participants who had requested it were sent a transcript of their interview.

The semi-structured interviews focused on questions related to queer ethnic young people's perspectives of 'coming out':

1. How do you relate to the concept of 'coming out'?
2. How do rainbow/queer/gender diverse/trans ethnic youth relate to the concept of 'coming out'?
3. How does your family/ethnic community/friends relate to the concept of 'coming out'?
4. How did your family (and extended)/ethnic community relate to your 'coming out'?
5. How did your siblings relate to your 'coming out'?
6. Why do you think ethnic youth may be reluctant to 'come out'?
7. What advice would you give to ethnic queer young people who are not 'out'?
8. What would you, as a queer ethnic person, want to say to your family/ community?

These questions were a guide as most of the participants spoke to their experiences without the need for all the questions to be asked.

The interviews were confidentially transcribed by a single transcriber. Thematic analysis was considered to be the most useful in capturing the "complexities of meaning" within the data set (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The exploratory nature of the research meant that analytic categories were not pre-determined; codes were derived from the data. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data and identified key themes. Initial codes were developed to represent these themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes were further revised and sub-codes added which also informed the sub-themes. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, was used to categorize and arrange the data for accessibility and for iterative review. The data for this paper focus on ethnic young people's perspectives of 'coming out', and their families' and communities' responses. The article also looks at the advice that

ethnic queers would give to other queer ethnic young people, their families, and communities on 'coming out'.

Findings

The findings are presented in two parts. Part 1 describes ethnic young people's perspectives on coming out, and family and community responses to their children's queerness. Part 2 presents ethnic young people's advice to queer ethnic youth on coming out, and the advice that they would give to family and community whose children and members are queer.

PART I

Ethnic young peoples' perspectives and experiences of coming out

Key emphases drawn from the conversations with queer ethnic young people on their experiences and perspectives on coming out include *letting in*, *reveal and repeat, owning your truth, vulnerable love,* and *remaining silent*.

Letting In – In an effort to maintain relationships, avoid conflict, and acknowledge the importance of community status to their family, participants treaded carefully when gauging with whom they could disclose their queerness. At times, the responses from families cautioned them to remain silent.

> Woxi: M*y mother and I were having lunch together... It's such a rare experience that my mother and I are both like, laughing together. And so I was like, wow, maybe this is a good time and so we were talking about new relationships and she was like, "you don't have to worry, you're gonna find another woman. It's fine". And then I was like, "Oh, yeah, but what if I dated a guy? Like, would that be okay?" And then she was just like, "No, you don't want to do that!". And it was like, almost as if you could feel a glass wall come up between us in the car…you could feel the tension. And it's like silence for the rest of the ride.*

Disclosing one's queerness was not seen as a process or journey that was meant for everyone. For many of the participants, 'letting in' depended on the kind of family and community you had and your social environment. Fuga identifies as a trans person and was aware of the risk to them in their home country. Even if they felt Aotearoa was a safer place in which they could come out, Fuga knew that the risk of doing so with a hostile family had to be weighed against the expectation or desire to do so.

> Fuga: *I used to believe that every queer people needs to come out. However, I have realized that coming out is not for everyone because it greatly depends on the kind of family that you have, the kind of community that you have, the kind of workplace, school, church that they have. If their family is more hostile, and my family are like really religiously hostile, then it would be very risky for them to put their lives at risk. Maybe it can get them killed because the reality is a lot of my community members gets killed. Maybe not in New Zealand.*

Some of the participants were reluctant to come out for fear of their straight friends thinking they had an interest in them. Deo recalled feeling embarrassed and insulted from having to explain to his friends that his disclosure to them did not mean that he had a sexual or romantic interest in them.

> Deo: *A lot of my male friends immediately had this reaction where they thought that because I was coming out to them, I was coming to them in terms of like, insinuating attraction ....There was this kind of helping them understand that I had no interest in them, and that in itself was quite uncomfortable barrier, to have to reassure people that coming out is not the same as I'm interested in you.*

For most of the participants, their approach to disclosure of their sexual or gender diversity was enmeshed in the stories of the reactions they received or the ways they had prevented their family from knowing. Some of the participants said that they did not have a 'coming out' or non-disclosure story or set of experiences. Uvea said that it was just as important to share the 'non-story' of one's coming out because everyone's experience is still a story.

> Uvea: *My coming out story is I never came out. One day, I think I was 18, and my mother opened the door to let me into the house and she just combed her hair, and she was like, "Are you gay?" And I was like, "yeah". And then that was the end of the conversation…I think that if she never asked me that question then I would have never told her…I feel like my story is a non-story, and that space should be allowed for other people with more heart-breaking stories who experience a lot more discrimination and hardship. But then I also thought, actually it's important for a level of stories, coz everyone's different and everyone is valid. So is my mine.*

Owning your truth – In communities where homosexuality was considered to contravene cultural and religious ideals, participants had self-doubts about their feelings towards others of similar-sex and often denied or dismissed these emotions. Coming out to oneself was a challenge for many as they realized that they had to own their own truth before disclosing this truth to others. At times, family and peers had suspected that they were queer long before the participants had, perhaps because they themselves had yet to come to terms with it.

> Lema: *I remember there was this girl in the high school my first year, and there was some urban legend going around, like "don't sit in that corner in the school, it's the lesbian corner". And I was like, I'm not gonna go there to the lesbians. At the same time, I had this massive crush on this girl and I didn't understand what it was but it felt really similar to the crushes I had with the guys, but I kept like suppressing it… . I think it was the moment when I came out to myself. Basically accepting myself as a queer person, as part of the queer community and being able to take my own truth. There was not a lot of people or anyone I know personally who I feel safe to talk about that to, so coming out to myself is very important.*

> Abe: *When I was 12, my mom pulled the car over and asked me if I was gay. And I was like, "why are you asking me this? Like, I don't even know". I knew. I knew that I liked girls way before I knew that I liked boys. But she asked me and I was like, "No", coz I didn't know why she was asking. And she was like, "okay, that's fine. But you know, if you're a lesbian, you can always tell me".*

As difficult as disclosure or the thought of disclosing might have been for many of the participants, they also believed that non-disclosure was mentally just as challenging. By choosing not to 'come out', the participants believed that individuals were placing greater pressure on themselves as they were faced with dealing for a longer time with the negative internalized emotions around queerness that they had created.

> Rossi: *Life is harder when you're out for sure. But life is also harder when you're not out. So you have to see which one you want to compromise. When you're not out, there's a lot of internalized stuff that you have to deal with for longer. So just have like an awareness of that, that you will have to do the work. Just not now. You're just putting it off till later.*

Reveal and repeat - For many participants, the act of 'coming out' was repeated in several situations for a variety of reasons. This could be when parents and families had difficulty accepting their queerness, believed that it was just a particular phase in their lives, or reminded them in subtle or less subtle ways that they expected them to marry someone of the opposite sex. With every new encounter, participants had to determine whether it was safe to express themselves in the ways that most truly reflected them, or to trust those around to accept them for who they were. This was a stressful and tiring process, though sometimes it was less about the approval of others and more about wanting to maintain a sense of comfort and belonging.

> Abba: *I feel like it's a repetitive process because it's like every time you meet someone, it's the same thing, "oh do you have a boyfriend", and it happens not daily but regularly.*
>
> Deo: *I feel in my case we have to come out many times. Coming out is like this continuous process in different spaces. I came out to my dad when I was 17, before I move to New Zealand. But then when I moved to New Zealand, it's like a whole new process of coming out again to new communities that you meet, like new workplaces, new education settings, and coming out to members of your own (*nationality*) community. I like to think that I'm very out but it still feels like every time I enter into a new space, you have to come out again. I mean it's not the feeling that I have to, it's more the inevitable conversations where you reveal that part of your identity that puts you in a vulnerable way or slightly vulnerable position, especially in communities that I'm part of…slightly conservative… . And inevitably people, if they start asking you about your intimate life, you are faced with either playing dumb or being upfront and honest, and that means coming out one way or another.*

At times, it was considered safer and less stressful for participants to behave in ways where they could 'pass' as straight without the constant monitoring or gossiping from the community about their gender or sexual diversity. Consequently, some participants opted to define themselves in ways that would deflect harm away from themselves or where, in certain situations, they would be perceived as straight.

> Xylo: *I think we grew up in a time where people were becoming more aware of LGBT issues. So there were all these terms that came out about how to define your sexuality, how to define your gender. So one of the things that my friend came up with was like,*

he's demi-sexual homo-flexible. And, to me, that's just like the safe option, you know, like, you're sort of gay. At the same time, you could still be construed as straight.

Deo: *I think I have the privilege of being able to be slightly straight passing in some environments that I'm in… . Sometimes like, especially the (*ethnic*) community, when I'm in those spaces, the people who simply don't have the ability or who are not perceived to be straight - coz it's a perception from the outside - the treatment you get from the community is quite different. Once the sort of straight passing facade wears off, like obviously in a more conservative setting, the treatment you get is different. So when I say privilege - because you get to spaces where some of these spaces are slightly homophobic - it can actually mean you can navigate those spaces without facing that discrimination from the get-go.*

The ostracization of queer ethnic young people from their families and community in Aotearoa felt more pronounced as it was such a small community, not just for ethnic people, but for those who were both ethnic and queer. Peqa said that disclosing one's queerness as a queer black woman was particularly difficult given the intersectional oppressions of those identities, and this resulted in a further sense of isolation and unbelonging.

Peqa: *I think in a place like New Zealand, where (*whiteness*) is the mainstream culture, you are a minority when you go to work. Everywhere you go, even to put gas in your car, you're the only one usually. So it's like you find solace in being around people that look like you. And then once you come out to those people, you've been outed again. So it's like, OK, you're fucked because you're black. And then, OK, another whammy, you're a woman. Oh, and now you're a queer woman, Whoo! Yeah. I think most people don't come out because it would just mean further and further isolation and the deeper sense of not belonging.*

Vulnerable love - The level of vulnerability and acceptance that participants felt with their family influenced the degree to which they disclosed their queerness. Participants knew the risks of disclosure included homelessness, being ostracized, or shame-talked by the family. They were also aware that the reputation of their family would be damaged if the extended family or community found out that someone in the family was queer.

> Abba: *I was raised up (*religion*) and I had a cousin who is I think, like eight years older than me, and he was gay and it was very hush hush in my family. They knew, but they would just kind of whisper about it, like no one ever talked to him to his face about it…you hear a lot of youth, "oh I don't want to be homeless, I'm just not going to say anything". Also it eats away at you I think, like it can cause a lot of depression. It can cause a lot of anxiety. It can trigger all these things.*

The love and care that the participants felt for their families were evident in the conversations that took place. It was this love that made many participants put the feelings of their families before their own and decide not to disclose their queerness so as not to hurt the family. The participants were prepared to make this sacrifice especially if it meant they could lose the love of their family.

> Guhe: *I'm the only child. I worry if they just end up the family relationship with me. I won't leave and nobody take care of them later. I just worry like, if they just don't talk to me anymore... I'm not well prepared for that. And I'm not strong enough to face this as like an easy situation. I can't accept if my parents they just like leave me and no contact with me.*

Although some participants had chosen family over intimate partner relationships, for some, they would make a different choice if they found a partner to whom they wanted to commit. In that situation, they would choose to 'come out' to have the relationship they wanted.

> Thu: *I think for me, if I came out to my family… it would have to be if I was in a relationship. That it was a queer relationship that I prioritize more than making my family feel uncomfortable.*

Participants spoke about the sacrifices their parents had made by migrating to Aotearoa in the hopes of providing a better future for their children. Some of the values, beliefs, and expectations that the parents held did not align with those of their children who felt a sense of betrayal for not adhering to these values or fulfilling the expectations.

> Thu: *I think it's hard because your parents, they come here and they just want the world for you. But their world is very different to the world you then grow up in, so they want you to succeed and be the best person that you can be. But they have only maybe one image of what the best person you can be is. And then when you come to a different country and you're forced to grow up in a culture that is so far away from the culture*

that they grew up in, you become also the best self you can be. But the best self that you can be doesn't match the best self that they wanted you to be when they moved here, and so coming out is sort of like, you know, confirming that they won't get the ideal daughter that they wanted when they moved here.

Remaining silent - The potential damage to the family's reputation from having a queer family member was very effective at silencing participants' expressions of queerness or any discussions on the subject. Participants talked about the discomfort of being around friends whose prejudices of queerness were reflected in their attitudes, comments, and behaviours. The pressure from the community for queers to engage in and live a heterosexual life prompted young people to remain silent and to disclose their queer identity only to those with whom they could be themselves.

> Thu: *I did come out to a few (*country*) friends but even now that they know, we still don't talk about it. I just pretend that I'm straight and that's fine. And when my sister came out to some of the (*nationality*) friends that we have, there was just homophobic comments… Like my friend, who I consider to be my close friend, my sister told her that she was dating girls and one of my closest friends, she said, "ew, that's gross". And so I was like "okay, maybe I won't tell this friend about me either". I don't know what I would do if someone reacted like that to me, so I guess I'm still scared of that…*

Silence within the family and among the community indicated a lack of acceptance of queerness. It also meant that the family and community deprived themselves of opportunities to engage with their members in ways that affirmed them. Like many of the participants, Woxi chose to remain silent rather than argue with their family.

> Woxi*: At home I'm like, don't talk, don't do anything, just like listen to my mom and see what needs to happen, you know? Because then you don't have to get yelled at, so it's good.*

Family responses to young family members coming out

Family responses to queer young family members coming out had prompted a range of emotions and actions - from acceptance to abandonment. The knowledge shared by the participants reflected themes such as *understanding and acceptance*; *parents' self-blame, non-acceptance and denial; gender policing and shaming queerness; it's not our culture*.

Understanding and acceptance – Parents had shown support for their children's queerness in a variety of ways. One father's unique way of support was letting his daughter know that he preferred her being with a woman as he did not trust men to look after her. Parents had also shown their support by attending Pride events or interacting with the queer community.

> Abba: *Like (*my parents*) went to their local pride event, and we didn't tell them that it was Pride month. They took it upon themselves to go look it up. My mom like sends me pictures of her with a drag queen and all this stuff.*

It was common for participants to have one parent who was more supportive of their queerness than the other. Participants alluded to gaslighting and dishonesty by parents who sought to hide their discomfort with their child's queerness or to convince them that their disclosure would be uncomfortable for the other parent.

> Jiko: *My mom is Pākehā (white) so that plays out I think as well. I told her a few, maybe three years ago and she was like "oh okay". She was distressed but she said, "don't tell papa". And then a few weeks later, I got a text from her very early in the morning, four o'clock in the morning saying, "I've told papa". Obviously she's been kind of stressing out about it the whole night… then a few days later I went over to the house and had a very typical conversation with (*my dad*), well it went in a very typical way. I went over and said, "so mum told you about me being with a woman" or whatever, and he's like "yes", and then I said, " is that okay" and he was like "yes", and that was it.*

Most of the participants said that their siblings were supportive of their gender and sexual diversity. This support was both welcoming and comforting as often the parents were not as accepting.

> Zara: *I told my brother I have something important to tell him, and every time I tell him that he freaks out because he thinks I'm going to say that I was pregnant. And when I told him (*I was queer*), his face just went from this really worried face to this bright smile because he thought, "my baby sister's not pregnant!"*

Some of the parents had made a determined effort to understand their children through counselling, and participants accepted that they needed to give parents the time to process their children's queerness. Participants said that it was the most wonderful and affirming experience for them when parents were accepting of their queer identity.

Breci: *There was a time I came out to my dad. But it was my dad who confronted me and he was like, "So, I heard from your cousin that you like girls", and I was like "Umm yea, I do like girls". And he is like, "Are you sure that you don't like boys?", and I was like "Yes", and he said, "That's good". And then after that we started crying in the car and my dad was like "I love you for who you are but just be yourself", and it's like the best thing you ever hear. It just feels really liberating and I just hope that everyone can come out like that too.*

Parents' self-blame, non-acceptance, and denial – Participants acknowledged that their families, especially parents, were struggling to cope with their queerness. Some parents blamed themselves or regarded the children's queer identity as a form of rebellion. Participants felt ashamed and humiliated when their queerness was seen as a problem by the family. Lema's secrecy around their queerness had threatened the relationship with their partner and the partner's family, and had resulted in them being 'outed' by the partner's mother.

Lema*: My partner and their family, particularly their mum, could not handle the secret that I'm dating their child for almost a year and it's stressing them out…. They know that I am from a very strict, conservative family since my mum occasionally visits their family… . It stresses my then partner… it ended up me not outing myself to mum and then their mum outing me to my mum because she couldn't handle the stress…. My mum kept sending me a lot of messages and I think there is one day where I got eighteen messages in one solid hour and a lot of it consisted of prayers and (*religious*) quotes. And on the day when we talked - my mum and I sat down at the library - she gave like this solid five minute prayer, "this is a hard time you know I'm going through, bless Lema with your purity and wholeness". And it just made me feel humiliated, and I mean not because someone is hearing it, but it was just like - this is how my mum is seeing me, as a problem.*

Many of the participants said that parents often made the situation about themselves and were more concerned with what their friends and community would say if they found out their child was queer. Ophu said that her mother pretended to others that she did not know the personal life of her daughter rather than admit that she knew her daughter is a lesbian.

Ophu: *To my immediate family, meaning my mom, it wasn't great, it was not well received. And even after I came out, actually the same day that I came out, she was in*

*tears and she kind of flipped the script, almost where she was just like "oh what are my friends gonna say? How will I ever face my friends". She made it all about her... I'll never get that support from my family you know, from my mom. And I would say, maybe couple of weeks later, she asked me if I was dating men even after me, you know, me telling her you know like, "no, I'm dating women". It was kind of like she didn't want to accept it. And even a couple of years ago, I was at my cousin's graduation down in (*city*). I was with my aunts and my uncles and some of younger cousins and it was a big deal like, "oh we know Ophu is gay". And they asked my mom and she was just like "oh, I don't know, she didn't tell me. No, she didn't tell me about her personal life". But she clearly knows, and I can tell she hasn't accepted.*

Participants talked about their family seeking assistance for them by approaching medical professionals, counselors, or homeopathic healers in an attempt to 'cure' their children. Cedro said he had lied to his parents about complying with these treatments.

Cedro: *It was scary and nervous – when they were visiting in (*country*) - and they felt, "we need to cure you, we need to go to homeopathic healer and give you like tiny vials of liquid to drink to just cure you and become straight". And they keep on asking me if I have been buying them and finishing them and I said "yes, yes but it didn't work"... And then it was more on, "okay, what did we do wrong as a parent", and they brought me to a healer who is also (*ethnic*).*

It was sometimes more difficult for children whose parents, on the surface, seemed to be accepting of gender and sexual diversity outside the family but were reluctant to tolerate it within their own homes. These behaviours were barriers to their children developing open and honest relationships with them.

Peqa: *So the person who would have a heart attack would be my dad. He'll be like, what kind of colossal fuckery is this?... I think it's difficult because on paper and appearance wise, my parents appear to be liberal because of the way that my brother and I are. I'll never forget when my cousin messaged me when she was in (*country*). ...She lives in (*country*) right now where it's completely illegal to be gay. If you're caught, you're killed. At the time - she has a boyfriend now - but the time she had a girlfriend she messaged me saying, "oh, my God, I'm so sorry. I don't know duh-duh-duh. But now it's a girl". My message was "babe send me a photo, ok? You guys look cute. Like, have fun. Just please be safe". But having a conversation at home…I was like oh, "she's got*

a girlfriend". My dad was like "Ugh! Why would she do such a disgusting thing?" I've never lost my mind more because I'm so perplexed! I think it then goes back to that whole thing of them appearing to be liberal, but them not being. I mean, my friends are queer. They come home and everything but it's like, "oh, you're my daughter's friend. I don't have to see you unless you come over. Or if I see you out or you with her there's no connection between us". It's like if it was to happen in the family immediately, I don't know how they would react, but I think it would be like a big, "Ah, what!" But again, no one in my family has ever publicly come out. ...I think if I knew my parents were welcoming, I probably would have, probably by now, I would've had at least one or two like serious girlfriends.

Gender monitoring and shaming queerness - Participants said they often performed to the images and expectations of their parents mainly because of their love for them and to maintain the relationship, to keep the peace and not bring disrepute to the family, or not to be seen as disrespecting the family or the culture. Parents often posted reminders of their children as the gender they knew them to be or their expectation of that gender, or made references to their clothing, hairstyles or other factors that aligned with those expectations.

Breci: *It's just so hard because I love my mum so much, like I would do anything. For years I tried to just like, be like she wanted me to be, a really girly, girl stuff. And I mean, I love wearing dresses and stuff but it's not the kind of really girly dress that she wanted. ...It was really hard for her to accept that.*

Disclosure through clothing, hairstyle, and the company that they kept were also identifiers for the participants if they chose not to talk about but opted instead to show their queerness. Despite the many signs (chest binders, photographs, accessories) that attested to Breci's queerness, their parent opted to deny or ignore them.

Breci: *When I was in grade school, she (*mum*) saw me coz I saw this on TV, like this girl was wrapping her chest with this binder and I was like, "I put a bandage on my chest", and she was like, "why're you doing that? Are you a tomboy?". I just looked at her, I didn't say anything. I just paused the talk and then she chucked the bandage away. After she left, I got it out of the bin and I'm like, "I need it". She got me these push-up bras that I really hate, like the wired ones, they just hurt my chest so much.*

Many queer ethnic young people found communities outside their ethnic community which did not include family or close friends. This was to avoid being criticized and shamed for who they were but also to protect their family from feeling ashamed or being subjected to ridicule and gossip. For many of the participants, the shame that they believed would be a likely consequence of disclosure prevented many from doing so. Shaming queerness was primarily how ethnic queers viewed the responses of their family to their queerness.

> Thu: *I think coming out for me is not easy because I've come out to a few of my friends that are (*nationality*), and not anyone in my family, because my sister came out in my family…everybody was fine with it but you can see it was like, we don't talk about it. We just didn't. It was uncomfortable for everybody and so I didn't come out because of that, because I thought I don't wanna make everyone uncomfortable again. And also, we could come out to everyone in our family but not our father. So she didn't come out to our father and I would never come out to our father as well.*

It's not our culture - For many gender and sexually diverse ethnic young people, declaring their queerness was not something that they would have thought about doing because they knew that their family considered it unacceptable. The homonegative attitudes and beliefs that some ethnic communities held did not disappear upon migrating to Aotearoa, and explained ethnic families' reluctance to embrace their children's queer identity within the community.

> Guhe: *The other thing I think of if I come out to them - how do they explain that to someone around them because I can really be selfish in telling them all who I am. I need to think of what kind of stress they're facing in there. Because it's really hard for them to understand my identity. But also it's really hard for them to tell someone else around them…coz it's really relate to my culture.*
>
> Thu: *It makes me very scared and conflicted (*to come out*) because obviously my culture is very, very important to me. Even though sometimes it can feel a little bit more constricting, I still think like at the end of the day, I still want to be recognized as a (*nationality*) woman. And so it feels like if I say that (*I'm queer*), then maybe they will see me as less (*nationality*).*

Family and cultural expectations around marrying and having children influenced how parents responded to the participants. Even though they were aware that their children were queer,

parents expected them to get married to someone of the opposite gender with the expectation that they would have children.

> Uvea: *It's hard to re-learn your traditional understandings for children and marriage partnerships. Sometimes when we talk about children, she just slips into "when you get a husband", and I know that she's not discounting my relationship. But still like, "Oh, you know, when you have a husband, then you have children", and it feels like some sort of cognitive dissonance where you can't see something right in front of you. But I think what she's grown up with for 60 years is children, husband, marriage.*

Homosexuality was seen by parents as part of Western culture, and parents blamed the young people's adoption of this culture and the denial of their own culture and customs as reasons for their queerness.

> Cedro: *I decided to talk about (*being queer*) on my second coming out. (*My parents said*) "I thought you were gonna be single and that's foreign". So I showed them some clips from well-known celebrities who talk about sexuality and gender and try to educate them, and then my mom said, "oh, it's not part of (*ethnic*) culture, it's so western culture", the LGBTQ and gender identity.*

> Abe: *Like my friend from (*country*), her parents were like, "we send you to America and now you are lesbian…if we would have kept you at home, this would never have happened".*

Participants' cultural upbringing had been a strong factor in their decision on whether or not to be open about their gender identity and sexuality. The taboo placed on non-heterosexual activities and identities informed and influenced how they viewed their queerness. The participants envied the pride that they believed Western society held of LGBTIQ+ communities and saw this pride as a value that their own ethnic communities did not have.

> Kalu: *I think you're really scared of people around you to see you this side. I mean, it's just historical and your cultural backgrounds stops you. You regard yourself as a shame, as something different from others. Pride culture is really a Western thing. Like for (*ethnicity*), they never find themselves proud of being queer.*

Community responses to young family members coming out

Although the wider society in Aotearoa had become more accepting and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ communities and of ethnic communities, this greater acceptance did not take into account what being queer and ethnic would mean for the wider society or how it would be perceived by ethnic communities. The main responses that young ethnic queers had received from their communities around queerness centred around *support and rejection*.

Support and rejection - A supportive community, whether that was online or elsewhere, was important to the participants as it meant having someone with whom they could share experiences, discuss concerns, and navigate the wider gender and sexually diverse spaces. Most of the participants sought communities where no one questioned or focused primarily on their gender or sexuality but saw beyond that. Minee found it safer and more satisfying to have community with those whose values were similar to hers and with whom she identified in areas other than her sexuality.

> Minee: *I have always been in a community with people who reflect, to the most part, my values. So I never really had a problem coz I just think I just project myself as myself, and this is just part of me, and I think when people just accepted me is just by extension they were like "This is just Minee". I can't just say the people who I grew up with were overly friendly with queer but it is because we share more than just sexuality in community, because we are (*ethnicity*), or we grew up in the same small town or whatever. There is more to the relationship than who you choose to be with. So for me, I wasn't gonna get rejected because there were more things keeping us together.*

For those participants who had migrated from countries with larger and more visible queer communities, they were not able to easily find similar communities in Aotearoa. As a result, they had held on to their queer communities in their country of origin.

> Ophu: *I've hung on to the (*queer*) community that I've had back home in the absence of having one here. I still have that sense of people I can go to back home, people I can talk to. It would be great to have one here.*

Ethnic queers that the participants did meet were usually not open about their sexuality or had not disclosed their queerness to the wider community.

> Abba: *I also feel like it's an (ethnicity) thing cause I've dated several (ethnicity) women who aren't out to their families. It's like a cultural thing, like it's a crime.*

Yezu recalled the rejection and humiliation she felt from her high school peers, teachers, and school community which made her feel ostracized and unsafe.

> Yezu: *I went to high school and it's like a really kind of white, horrible place. It was so awful and when people started to find out, teachers would stalk the classes that I wasn't in to ask my friends if it was true that I was a lesbian or that if I was gay. And the teachers would just stop the class and gossip about me and then my friends would come and tell me this afterwards. And kids would make up horrible rumours. My school community was just awful.*

The varied experiences of young ethnic queers in Aotearoa indicate the complexity and fraught nature of and responses to queer identity disclosure. Dismissing the expectation to come out or determining the circumstances under which one would reveal their queerness suggest that queer ethnic young people have considered the many aspects of their lives including family, cultural traditions, community, and religious beliefs that would be or have been impacted by the 'letting in' of others to their queerness.

PART II

The second part of the findings explores the advice that young ethnic queers would give to young people who were deciding whether to disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation. It also looks at the advice that queer ethnic young people would give to family and community who had queer family and community members.

Advice to Ethnic young people on 'coming out'

The main advice that participants said they would give to queer ethnic young people who were thinking about 'coming out' or who were contemplating the need to do so was around *finding safety, support, and home*.

Finding safety, finding support, finding home - Safety was the most important factor that ethnic young people needed to consider when thinking about disclosing their queerness. Home was a physical space which provided shelter and a feeling of belonging for the participants. However, it was for the person to decide whether they were willing to risk that sense of security by 'coming out' and living openly and uncompromisingly with their queerness.

> Peqa: *I'd say ask yourself, what does home mean to you? Is a home a roof over your head? Is home a feeling? Is home a sense of belonging? And I feel like once you establish what home is, then you can take it from there and decide whether home is worth losing. Coz sometimes you realize that some of the things that you're afraid of losing, at the end of the day aren't actually worth your peace or you compromising who you want to be.*

Participants did not think that 'coming out' should be prioritized in the face of rejection and abuse. They advised queer ethnic young people to build a community of support around them that was accepting of who they were if their family and ethnic community were unable to do so.

> Minee: *Are you safe to come out? That's the most important thing. Are you safe? Because if you gonna come out and people will gonna disrespect you and hurt you, don't do it. Just don't do it until you are safe. Why do it? For who? I understand that you speaking the truth. Living your truth is important. But you know what? It's important not to get violated, not to get put down and belittled. And put yourself in a situation that would build a community around you, that reflects where you can go to if you don't have a family that is accepting. Make sure you have people there…your family needs to work through that and so make sure you are safe, make sure you have a safe community.*

Participants advised ethnic young people to recognize that a journey was also being taken by the family in coming to terms with their queerness. The family may also be finding it difficult to shift from how they had been accustomed to seeing their child or family member, and away from the expectations that they might have had for that person.

> Minee: *Sometimes things take time too. You can't expect people to come from one mindset and go, "oh now my kids think differently!" Sometimes things take time. I have been in a conversation with my dad for eight years for him to get to the point where he*

can sort of accept Pram as my partner. But even then, he's not, but he's come a long way. Sometimes those conversations take a while.

Participants advised that if ethnic queers chose to come out, it should be for their sake and not anyone else's. They needed to see the value of coming out and be comfortable doing so. Participants stressed that 'coming out' should not be necessary to validate one's queerness. It was more important, and often safer, for a person to do what was best for them in their own situation and for that time in their life.

Abe: *I would say like, take your time. I feel like the narrative is always like "do it", you know? "Come out and make everyone else important to you". But I think there are lot of people like, it really isn't safe and you have to be able to live with the fall out of that decision for a long time. If you lose relationships over coming out, you need to be very confident that you did the right thing for yourself in order to cope with that. And so I don't think there is value in coming out just for the sake of being out. When it comes to a point that you need to be out for you, then do it. But don't let the idea that you have to be out to be valid make you do it earlier than you are ready to do it. Coz like for me, if I would've come out when I was like 15, 16, I knew I would have been kicked out.*

Participants wanted young ethnic queers to know that there would always be people who would be accepting of them. Peqa said that there were more welcoming and open arms than were possibly anticipated if young people did decide to come out, but they also needed to be open to having those people connect with them.

Peqa*: And the truth is, like what I said in breaking out of the community, I was like "Oh, my God but I have no friends". But it's almost like out of nowhere – people! There are people out there who have arms that are really open to love and accept you for who you are hundred percent. And so there is always family, there's always a home, there is always community. You just have to, one, be open to that coming to you and two, be open to going out to connect with that, you know. Because would you rather live in a home and live in a family or community or space where you have to pretend, where you have to lie, where you made to feel like there's something wrong with you when there's nothing wrong with you? Or would you rather thrive and live?*

All the participants acknowledged that more support is needed for queer ethnic young people but said there were informal networks where they could find community. They realized though that this would be harder for some than others. It was important for young people to know that

they were not alone, to speak with someone such as a counsellor, a therapist or a friend, and to focus on those that supported and loved them.

> Rossi: *Wherever you are, try your hardest to zoom out and realize that the problem that you're facing is not in isolation. You are not the only person facing this. There are so many people in your city, in your country, in the world who are experiencing the same thing. Find them and connect with them. Because if your community doesn't accept you, find another community that will, because I guarantee you they are out there, just that you need to find them. That's it. Unfortunately, it means work. You have to go find them.*

> Cedro: *Find a support system, talk to your counsellor or therapist, just tell your friends. Voice who you are because the more you are oppressed, you can't say it, the more you not come out. There are people who never come out.*

Participants wanted young queers to know that they were more than their sexuality and should not be limited to the definitions imposed on them. They believed that being of color and queer carried unlimited possibilities for creating the person that they wanted to be and that they did not need to conform to how society believed they should be.

> Noio: *What is so amazing about being queer and about being of color, it's that you are way bigger than these spaces that are created for you and you need to think of yourself like that rather than having to stretch yourself.*

For many participants, they knew the journey was difficult and some had suffered the loss of love from their parents. Despite this, they wanted young ethnic queers to believe that no matter how difficult it seemed at the time, most of them will still have the love of their parents.

> Woxi: *Regardless of how they would react, your parents will still love you… And like there will be a degree of love there, extreme cases there won't be a degree of love there, right? But I think in the majority of cases, your parents will still love and it's gonna be really fucking hard, but it would probably be worth it.*

Advice to Family on their queer ethnic young people coming out

Participants saw their decision not to disclose or talk about their gender identity or sexual orientation in terms of the sacrifices they were prepared to make to preserve family connections and communication. They did not see this as a weakness or being secretive. Their main advice to family was around *maintaining relationships*.

Maintaining relationships – Participants felt that many parents were unaware of the hurt they were causing their children by their negative responses to their queerness. They said parents did not seem to realize how much the family relationship meant to the children and how much of themselves they had concealed to maintain that relationship. Yezu urged families to think about whether they wanted to lose the relationship they had with their queer family members because of their beliefs, and to see and understand the damage that their rejection was having on them.

> Yezu: *You would hope that like, if they had to make a choice between a particular belief or keeping a good relationship with their family member, that they would choose the relationship. But I don't know how you could convince someone that that's the right thing to do. How can you emotionally not recognize the damage that's happening?*

For many of the participants, their relationships with their family were often the only relationships they had, and they were not prepared to sever these relationships particularly if their relationships with the wider Aotearoa New Zealand society were impacted by racism and discrimination. Families needed to know that their queer children wanted the firm and solid acceptance of a family to enable them, particularly trans young people, to deal with the challenges they were facing with being queer.

> Jiko: *I guess the importance of acceptance around the issues that queer and trans youth face now. I think it would be important to talk about the racism that queer people of color face within queer spaces so that they see that it's having a support from family first is foundation, they understand it's important.*

Understanding gender and sexual diversity required communities to be educated about it or to learn from the relationships with their children. Participants did not want or expect their parents to have or to gain a full understanding of queerness or of LGBTIQ+ issues as understanding did not necessarily bring acceptance. It was more important to the participants that parents showed support for their gender and sexually diverse children.

> Thu: *I think it's not important to understand being queer… because a lot of people think that if they can understand it, then they can accept it or they can be okay with it. But the point is not to understand, because sometimes you will never understand. Like I don't understand how people can be straight. I don't understand that at all but I'm not*

trying to understand it. We just have to support them. You don't have to understand them. That's it.

Participants wanted parents who felt guilty about their children's queerness to not blame themselves or to believe that they did not educate their children in the right way. Parents had to realize and accept that there was nothing wrong with their children being queer.

> Sito: *(*I want to tell them*) that they didn't make me gay. I was born as a gay so I don't want them to feel guilty and is not their problem. My mom would probably think so, yeah… Coz once she told me like she is not educate me very well, she didn't taught me very well, and I said "it's not your problem".*

Parents, they said, should choose to have children only if they were prepared to accept them for who they were, to recognize their individuality, to be compassionate, and to help them navigate the world that they were facing as the person they were or may be coming to terms with. Parents needed to know that it was difficult for queer children to fight these battles on their own, thinking that they were alone in this world; and that even though they had a queer community or some friends, the love, support and understanding of their family mattered most to them. Participants reasoned that if parents had been able to love their children before disclosure, they could still love them after because the child had not changed as a person, it was the parent that had changed how they saw the child.

> Woxi: *Don't treat them any differently because that will ostracize them and make them feel like they're doing something bad, you know? Just love them. It's not difficult. And if you could love them before you had that piece of knowledge, you can love them after you have that piece of knowledge. Nothing about them changed. Only your perception of them changed.*

The participants knew that their parents had fears about the child that they once knew in a particular way and needed time to adjust to the unfamiliar and unknown aspects of their children. Although there were times when participants felt that the love they had for their parents was not reciprocated, they wanted them to know that being queer did not stop them from aspiring for success, becoming the best person that they could, and maintaining the love they had for them.

> Lema: *I know that they are scared that their child is becoming more and more something that they are not familiar of and almost unfamiliar to get to know. But it's*

still the same child. I'm still the same child. They need to know that there are people who are like me in a similar situation as with my parents. I just want to tell those parents that we still love them, we still care about them. There is no single day that we don't think about them and on how to handle ourselves the best way we can, and know that we are doing our damn best to do anything we can in this world. And being gay is not gonna turn us away from success and from having a successful life. Rather it's just a part of ourselves and there is nothing to be worried about. We still love you. I think that by the end of the day, that's the most important part - that we still love you.

Advice to Community on their ethnic young people coming out

Most of the participants had managed to find communities that were supportive and embracing of their queerness or had joined communities where members were queer. Many of the participants had not disclosed their queerness to their ethnic communities as they feared the stigmatization and criticisms over what the community saw as a rejection of cultural values and behaviours. Participants believed that the community, particularly ethnic communities, needed to support queer community members by *seeing the harm caused by their rejection* and *by uplifting, supporting, and listening*.

See the harm - Ethnic communities, like families, often relied on religious and cultural teachings and customs to determine their responses to social issues. For many of the communities from which the participants came, homosexuality was viewed from a homonegative interpretation of religious books and cultural expectations, much of these derived from colonialism and colonial values. Participants wanted to advise communities to educate themselves on the patriarchal and racial agenda of those who interpreted religious books, and on the histories of their own societies prior to colonization. It was an overwhelming task for ethnic young people to have to educate their communities on these matters.

Fuga: *They have to understand that the book that they're believing in has been 2000 years ago, and has been translated in the different languages…and they have to take note that when the (religious book) gets translated, the translators have their agenda. The translators are practically men. So they have an agenda. Fun fact, the term homosexual was first used in 1983, in 1983 only! So, it's a modern concept. It's a modern term. However, they view certain verses from the (religious book) to demonize*

us. What the fuck! So they have to understand first of all that their belief is not the authority. Second, they have to do due diligence. They have to educate themselves. They shouldn't expect queer people to always educate them. They should do their part. If they have mobile data, if they have Wi-Fi at home, if they have access to the Internet, there's a lot of educational materials and the Internet.

Communities needed to provide space and support for gender and sexually diverse young people. In the absence of a supportive ethnic community, the participants advised young ethnic queers to establish their own communities where they could find and build solidarity. However, participants were concerned that if communities did not provide visible and welcoming support and shelter for their young ethnic queers, they would leave to find community elsewhere.

Rossi: *If you want to create a community, you can't do that unless you acknowledge that they want to be there for them. If they don't want to be there for them, then you can't do anything because there's nothing you can do. But if they've acknowledged, yes, we want to be better, we want to try to do better, to be more accepting to gender diverse and diverse sexualities, cool. Make a group, a support group within your community where people can go if, say, their family is asking them (*to leave*). They shouldn't have to leave their community to get the support. So make support groups within your community. I just don't know how easy that is. I don't know how visible it would be.*

The constant criticism and rejection of queerness can eventually take its toll on the queer community. Many of the participants had turned their back on their communities and had chosen to disassociate from them. Participants' advice to communities was to embrace queer members; it was not enough simply to tolerate them. Celebrating who they were as people gave queer young people a sense of belonging in their community.

Ophu: *I know what I'd say to someone that wasn't accepting of me. Basically like, "fuck off". That's how I feel about it but I choose not to focus on people that are un-accepting. It's kind of like one of those "go where you're celebrated not where you're tolerated" mentalities. So if you don't accept who I am, I don't care coz you're not a factor. You are not gonna factor into my life, so I don't care. You can go over there with that.*

Uplift, support, listen - It was important for communities to listen without wanting to offer solutions, assistance, or advice. Participants said that communities needed to acknowledge the queerphobia that their members faced and their own contribution to that through their attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and silence. Communities needed to see the racial discrimination that ethnic young people were confronted with, and that they needed a community to which they could turn. Participants advice to communities was to think about why they believed what they did, why they felt uncomfortable about queerness and types of love that were different to what they had been taught, and what made them unaccepting of others who were different. Fuga expressed the hurt, anger, and frustration of many young ethnic queers.

> Fuga: *Communities, especially heterosexual communities, need to have a listening heart, a humble listening heart. If queer people are talking about their struggle, are talking about their experiences, they need to understand that. Of course it's going to be an attack on them! However, those experiences happen because of them as well. So they need to understand that. The LGBT community have been oppressed, discriminated because of the gender roles and the gender norms that they have established, because of the homophobic rules that they have implemented or imposed on us. So they have to be humble enough to listen to us. And of course, from our part, we also need to have a calm, collected approach.*

Limitations and Future Research

This is an exploratory study of young ethnic queers in Aotearoa. The sample of 43 participants, though small, constituted a reputable sample size given the largely undisclosed population of young ethnic queers. The diversity in Aotearoa's ethnic population (200+ ethnicities) made it impossible to represent all ethnicities, however, the sample comprised a wide range of sexual and gender diversities. As many of the participants were recruited by their peers, the perspectives offered may have been of a similar political and philosophical vein. This might have been mitigated by the many small groups of ethnic queers. The majority of the participants (38 out of the 43) were based in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Aotearoa's largest city. The remaining 5 participants were based in the country's capital of Pōneke (Wellington). While these two cities are home to almost 63% of the ethnic population, the voices of rural, ethnic queer young people are missing from the study. The perspectives of queer asylum seekers are present in the data although they are not identified as such as their experiences would make

them easily identifiable to a close-knit community. Despite this, there was not enough of a focus on their experiences especially as they are a group of people for whom queer identity might have been the reason for their forced migration, and their disclosure would have vastly different associated factors and emotions.

One of the key areas for further research highlighted by this study is how siblings and parents experience their own 'coming out' and disclosure as a family member of a queer young person. Given that many of the young people were not out to, or in strained relationships with, their parents, the sampling would likely be much more challenging to obtain.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal the considerations undertaken by queer ethnic young people when deciding to let people into their lives and with whom they choose to share knowledge of their gender orientation and sexual identity. Although 'coming out' is said to lead to a sense of liberation for the queer person, this freedom and liberated self may not exist the same way for young ethnic queers. For young ethnic queers, a queer identity is only a part of who they are, although they are aware that it is what impacts them the most at times in their relationships with family and community. The prominence given to their queerness by family and community detracted from the many other areas of their lives such as being a sister, brother, dancer, researcher, daughter, child, friend, or partner. Utilizing a social constructionist framework, this study was based on the participants' lived experiences, and honored and respected the voices and experiences of each participant.

Many of the young ethnic queers in this study have used their agency to find ways and spaces to be themselves though they lament that these opportunities and spaces are few, very small, and hard to find. Like the youth in Klein et al's (2015) research, the young people in this study identified in different ways at different times and in different situations, thus revealing their agency in the way that they navigated the disclosure of their identities and the dynamic process of disclosure. At times, they chose to keep their queer and ethnic communities separate because of the differences in values and beliefs. Disclosing one's queerness was not seen as a compulsory, obligatory or universal act but was determined by the individual's circumstances including what they believed they might lose or were willing to give up.

The pressure from the media, LGBTQIA+ advocates and organizations, mental health experts, LGBTQIA+ celebrities, friends, and supporters to 'come out' illustrates a uniform expectation

of how this is done and what it means to the person (Wuest, 2014). While these media and social institutions may mean well, they have not taken into account what the process, experience, and contexts might mean for queer ethnic young people. It was a frustrating experience for the participants of having to repeatedly 'come out', and some found it more difficult to come out to one parent than the other.

Young ethnic queers valued the cultural traditions that existed within their ethnic community which gave them a sense of belonging and roots with which to ground themselves. However, some of these cultural beliefs were at odds with the sexualities and gender identities of some of their community members, and participants found themselves having to join communities where these invaluable aspects of themselves were more likely to be accepted. Some of the participants had a supportive home environment, and educating and supporting parents and community to understand their queer young people will help the young person to explore their gender in a safe environment (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Communicating with one another is necessary to address issues around sexuality and identity. Parents might want to avoid enforcing gender stereotypes that could lead to young people feeling shame and experiencing low self-esteem. Parents and communities should be encouraged to educate about and advocate for their queer young people and to resolve whatever shame and discomfort they themselves may feel so that they and those around them can be more supportive of the gender and sexually diverse person. This is crucial as the risk of losing the young queer person from the community would leave them in further isolation as an essential part of themselves - their relationship to family and ethnic community - is stripped from them. Some parents may find that acceptance of their queer child is all that they can manage without wanting to be involved in advocacy and activism related to the queer community (Broad, 2011).

For queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa, 'letting in' to protect the reputation of their family and/or to maintain relationships and cultural traditions appears to be more of a priority than disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity which, they believe, may rupture the ties that they have with their family. Familial relationships not only provide love and support and serve to maintain cultural practices and strengthen cultural identity, but they are also necessary for living as an ethnic person in a white-dominated country. Despite literature showing the LGBTQ community as an open and welcoming family (Muraco, LeBlanc, & Russell, 2008), the young people in this study did not find the wider queer community to be a welcoming site due to the racism that existed. The openly queer ethnic community in Aotearoa, for most ethnic groups, is quite small, and supportive environments for LGBTQ young people

are necessary as sources of social support are lacking (Haas & Lannutti, 2021). If they are to safely negotiate their identities, queer ethnic youth need to form friendships with both queer and ethnic people, and to have control over how and whether they decide to come out or invite people in (Beckett, Mohummadally & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014).

While the participants recognized the significance of coming out, other factors, as shown in Ecker's (2016) study, such as financial stability, being homed, and familial relationships held far more importance for them. Like the Chinese and South Asian individuals in Adams and Neville's research (2020), disclosure for some of the participants in this study hinged in part on their financial dependence with their parents. The study also revealed that family expectations are a dominant feature in the lives of queer ethnic young people. In particular, the family expectation for children to get married in a heterosexual arrangement impacted greatly on young queers' sense of duty to meet this expectation. The potential for shame and rejection, both for them and their families, meant having to prioritize family over intimate partner relationships.

Although young ethnic queers want understanding and acceptance, their familial relationship, kinship, and loyalty take precedence in their decision not to openly disclose their queerness. This is not cowardice but an act of selflessness and care, a considered decision on their part, much like the sacrifices any other person might make for their family under a given set of circumstances. To Western and mainstream society or the LGBTQIA+ community, it may seem that queer ethnic young people were not living their 'true selves'. This perspective denies the agency that ethnic queers have in the decisions that they make and in the choices that they take. The typical stories of 'coming out' for queer white young people as popularized in the media were often not the stories of queer ethnic young people, and it may be time for them to tell their stories in their own words and in their own way. The young people have shown their agency by making decisions with which they are comfortable and that they believe will maintain the relationships with their family, and their family's relationship with the community. This does not mean that they deny their sexual orientation or gender identity. The strength of their sacrifice should not be overshadowed by the strength of those who decide to 'come out'. Everyone's journey is different, as is everyone's destination.

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