Letting In - Closing Out

A research report on the perspectives and experiences of ‘coming out’ for queer/rainbow ethnic young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Camille Nakhid, Mengzhu Fu, Caryn Yachinta

Executive Summary

This report is based on a study that sought to determine how rainbow/queer ethnic young people understand and experience ‘coming out’, and their family and community responses to their coming out. The report also looks at the advice that queer ethnic young people would give to rainbow youth on ‘coming out’ and to family and community with queer members. The aim of the research is to understand the different ways in which ‘coming out’ presents for rainbow/queer ethnic young people.

The research focused on members of the rainbow ethnic community living in New Zealand between 18 and 35 years of age. The mixed method study used a survey design involving an anonymous online questionnaire as well as confidential, qualitative face to face semi-structured interviews with 43 participants in Aotearoa New Zealand. This report is based on the knowledge shared in the qualitative interviews. Consultation occurred with Rainbow Youth, Human Rights Commission, Shakti Youth, the NZ AIDS Foundation, and the Ministry of Social Development (Settling In division).

Rainbow/queer ethnic young people in Aotearoa described ‘coming out’ in many ways. For these young people, ‘coming out’ presented as staying in or letting go, letting in or keeping out, coming out again and again, or opening up conditionally. The many intersectional spaces of queer ethnic young people influenced the complexity and variety of the ‘coming out’ process.

This report discusses the findings from the research questions relating to ethnic youth and their coming out experiences and perspectives. The first part of the report describes these findings in three sections: i) ethnic young people’s perspectives on coming out ii) family responses to their children’s queerness iii) community responses to their members’ queerness. The second part of the report presents the findings on i) ethnic young people’s advice to queer ethnic youth on coming out ii) ethnic young people’s advice to family whose children are queer iii) ethnic young people’s advice to communities whose members are queer.

The key findings from the conversations with queer ethnic young people on their experiences and perspectives on ‘coming out’ revealed that it was about who they chose to let into their lives and to whom they disclosed their queerness. The young people did not think that they should be obligated to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many acknowledged the cultural expectations of marriage and children and their decision to remain silent about their queerness so as not to bring shame to the family.

Rainbow ethnic young people described several community responses to their queerness including community harassment and rejection, though some managed to find support among other queer ethnic groups. The participants had experienced a range of responses from their families - from acceptance to abandonment - as their parents struggled with understanding their children’s sexual orientation and many choosing to ignore or deny their queerness, some for reasons of religious belief or societal reputation.

The advice that rainbow ethnic young people wanted to give to queer ethnic youth who were considering whether to ‘come out’ was to ensure that they would be safe upon doing so. They strongly advised youth that the decision to disclose their queerness should be theirs alone, and in
their own time if that time ever came. They wanted the community to recognize the harm that rejection and ostracization had on the youth particularly as the wider queer community could be quite racist.

Queer ethnic young people said that they had given up relationships with others for the sake of their families, and had maintained secrecy around their queerness so that families did not suffer humiliation from the homophobia that existed within some ethnic communities. Most of all, many rainbow ethnic young people wanted their families to know that they still loved them and wished to maintain, if they could, a relationship with them.

Recommendations based on the findings include holding workshops for ethnic families and communities through places of worship, ethnic community organizations, and ethnic events to discuss and present issues pertinent to rainbow ethnic young persons, and to provide education on LGBTQIA+ communities. It is also recommended that a queer ethnic person/s is employed (in an organization like Office of Ethnic Communities or similar) with specific responsibility for identifying and addressing the needs of rainbow ethnic young people through liaising and working with relevant stakeholders and communities. There is also a need for accessible, safe and secure emergency housing options that are both queer-friendly and culturally responsive, and to have available translations and culturally specific resources on LGBTQIA+ issues and concepts. It is also crucial that specialized support services and programmes for queer and trans ethnic young people and LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and refugees are established.

It is recommended that there is an avenue for queer ethnic young people to share their ‘letting in/ closing out’ stories which could be made available to the rainbow ethnic communities and to the wider communities; and for a confidential online forum to be set up where rainbow ethnic youth can ask questions and provide perspectives on their journey, expectations, decisions and anything else that they may be experiencing, with or without that necessarily being related to their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful for the funding provided by the Rule Foundation and Rainbow Wellbeing Legacy Fund. We acknowledge the support of RainbowYouth, Shakti Youth, Ministry of Social Development (Settling In), and the Migrant Action Trust. We wish to thank Bloom Siriwattakanon who co-designed the online survey, Rafiqah Suleiman who provided feedback on the survey, Aram Wu and Claire Farrugia who gave initial feedback on the project, and Alesano Nakhid-Schuster for participating in the pilot study and providing feedback. We are also immensely grateful for the wonderful work of our transcriber.

The authors wish to thank Kara Beckford, Dumindri Amerasinghe and Pooja Subramanian for their review of and comments on the initial draft of this report.

The authors are indebted to the rainbow ethnic participants who shared their invaluable knowledge and their time with us. Through their stories, we have a better and truer understanding of their realities and lived experience.
Introduction

The process of ‘coming out’ can be one of the main concerns for queer/ rainbow/ LGBTQIA+ young people. What does ‘coming out’ mean? What does it entail? What are the alternatives to ‘coming out’? How do young people come out? When do they come out? To whom do they come out? There are also the questions associated with their coming out. What is the impact on young people of coming out? How do family, friends, peers, and the community respond to their coming out? Most of the studies on this process reveal a binary perspective on coming out, that is, it can be traumatic and or an authenticating experience with which one must engage in order to feel liberated or to acknowledge one’s queerness or to give credibility to the process. Most of the studies, however, are based on young white people in predominantly white societies. This research suggests that, although the impact of coming out may follow young people beyond adulthood, queer ethnic whites are likely to disclose their gender identity and sexual orientation more often than queer people of colour (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter 2004). For young Pākehā New Zealanders, their coming out behaviour appears to mirror that of other European youth internationally.

However, the studies on coming out for young people of colour in these regions indicate a dissimilarity in many ways to that of Pākehā young people. For queer/ rainbow/ LGBTQIA+ young people, there are intersections with which they must contend when considering coming out, for example, family, culture, religion, race and class. These intersections make coming out for groups such as African American, Asian and Latinx a much more multi-dimensional and complex journey. These intersectional factors are the same for many ethnic queers in New Zealand. In addition, the small population of ethnic LGBTQIA+ makes it difficult for young ethnic people in New Zealand to find community and support if and when they choose to come out. To date, there is limited literature or research on ethnic LGBTQIA+ young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Ethnic youth are one of the fastest growing populations in New Zealand even surpassing the growth rate of Pasifika and Maori youth. The percentage and numbers of ethnic youth between the ages of 15-24 years in New Zealand is reported to be approximately 26.5% (318,954) with youth coming from the main identified groups of Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (StatsNZ, Office of Ethnic Communities\(^1\)). With the increase in this population, it is expected that the number of LGBTQIA+ among this population will also increase. Given the challenges posed by culture, religion, race and family for many LGBTQIA+ young people, research on this unique population is needed.

The word queer is used in this report 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). Queer is also seen as an attempt to reclaim a word that was used historically to vilify LGBT peoples (Owens 1998). Harvey and Fish (2015) also use the term queer as a liberation narrative in the face of oppression though they encourage people to define themselves as they wish. In queer/feminist of colour scholarship, Ahmed (2006) uses “queer” in two ways. One is to articulate what is “oblique” or “off line”, the second is to describe people who practice non-normative sexualities (Ahmed 2006: 161). She brings up the etymology of ‘queer’ as originating

\(^{1}\) Communication from the office of the Regional Manager Wellington
from Greek as meaning “cross, oblique, adverse” (2006: 161). As a verb, she argues, “to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things” (Ahmed 2006: 161).

This report uses the term queer interchangeably with rainbow as the latter was used by many of the young people in the study to refer to the LGBTQIA+ community.

The aim of this research was to determine how rainbow/ queer ethnic youth understand and experience relationships with family, community and intimate partners and how these understandings and experiences (attitudes, practices, responses) impact young people. We hope that this research will assist us in knowing how to better support rainbow ethnic youth given the diverse cultural backgrounds, in the context of their familial and partner relationships, from which these youth come. The outcome of the research can help inform more culturally sensitive and accessible forms of support for a cohort that is often marginalized in mainstream service provision.

Little is known about how rainbow ethnic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand understand safe family, community and intimate partner relationships, what this looks like for them or how they experience it, and the way in which cultural affiliations might impact how different ethnic individuals perceive queerness and experiences of unsafety. Ethnic youth are represented in the largest growing youth population in New Zealand, primarily those with Middle Eastern, Latin American and African heritage. Together with ethnic youth whose backgrounds are from countries in Asia, these youth often draw on or are responsive to cultures that differ from the dominant European culture in New Zealand and Australia. Queer and gender diverse ethnic youth may be met with different responses from families, friends and the community due to their sexuality and/or gender as opposed to non-ethnic New Zealanders, as too, their experiences of safety in their relationships with families, communities and partners. Given the different cultural backgrounds of queer and gender diverse ethnic young people, this research aims to investigate their perceptions and experiences of their relationships and of safety in the context of family, community and partner. This information is crucial if we are to adequately support ethnic LGBTQIA+ in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way.

The research offered ethnic young people an opportunity to talk and to be listened to about their understandings and experiences of family, community and intimate partner relationships and of safety. Participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge of these relationships and to suggest what approaches they believed would be most effective in assisting rainbow ethnic young facing similar circumstances and challenges. The study allowed researchers to build on their knowledge of safe relationships and to have a greater awareness of, and to be better informed on the way that family and community relationships impact queer and gender diverse ethnic youth. We hope that Aotearoa New Zealand society, and in particular, ethnic communities will gain a better understanding of what constitutes safety for queer ethnic youth and how their attitudes, practices and responses are impacted by unsafe environments. This awareness, knowledge and understanding could result in approaches to dealing with incidents of domestic violence among rainbow ethnic youth and more importantly, developing strategies to prevent those incidents and experiences.

This report presents the ‘coming out’ experiences of young queer/ rainbow ethnic people in New Zealand and what that means for them. The circumstances surrounding their coming out and the responses of their family and community to their coming out are also discussed. We also look at the advice that queer ethnic young people would give to other young queer ethnic people, their families and communities about coming out for queer ethnic young people.
Literature

Queer youth are one of the most invisible population groups (Martin 1996). They are typically surrounded by a heterosexual family and have minimal access to adult lesbian and gay communities. Although parents, families and communities may provide ethnic youth with the necessary tools to deal with racism, they may not give queer ethnic youth the resources to cope with the treatment they may face from being queer. Queer youth 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. For ethnic young people, 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 sense of dislocation and loss (Morales 1989). In a report by Cray, Miller and Durso (2013), the authors found that the average age of coming out for LGB youth was 13 years with 25% of transgender youth coming out before they were 18 years of age.

The traditional expectations held by some families of heterosexual marriage and children to continue the traditions of culture are considerations facing queer ethnic youth. Amerasinghe (2018) reported that familial and cultural obligations regarding marriage and children impacted on LGBTQIA+ Asians in Aotearoa (New Zealand) disclosing their sexual identity. The families of queer Latina women were accepting of their nonheterosexuality so long as they conformed to hegemonic femininity (Robinson 2018). Queer youth, more than any other group of adolescents, are likely to be affected by psychological abuse from parents. Earlier studies carried out by the National Gay Task Force in New York (Martin 1996) reported that thirty-three percent of gay and lesbian teens experience verbal abuse from their families because of their sexual orientation. Hetrick-Martin’s (1987) study found that 50% of youth said they had been rejected by their parents because of their sexual orientation. The high rate of parental rejection and abuse of openly queer teens indicates to queer teens who are not open about their sexual orientation that there are risks to disclosure. The risks are even greater for queer ethnic youth as they try to navigate having both a strong queer identity and a strong ethnic identity, the conflicts that might arise from having to choose between the two, and having to deal with both homophobia and racism.

A study by Anderson (19870 identified a range of emotions that some parents go through after learning of their child’s queer sexual orientation - from shock and denial to anger and guilt. Parents that had ‘successfully’ managed this information have learnt to acknowledge their child’s homosexuality. Anderson’s study also showed that parent’s preconceived notions around homosexuality influenced their response to the child’s sexual orientation. The dominance of heterosexuality in society can result in parents feeling angry and betrayed.

Morales (1989) observed that a lack of discussion on sexuality issues and the expectations of a heterosexual orientation challenged ethnic minority families when a family member discloses a queer sexual orientation. Ethnic queer people are said to live within three defined and independent communities – the LGBTQIA+ community; the ethnic community; and society (Morales 1989). Their loyalty to one or other of these communities challenges their ‘coming out’ process. Each of the three communities provide different needs and queer ethnic youth may find it difficult to integrate the three. Though there is considerable data on sexual identity and human sexuality
among white Americans, little is known about this among ethnic gays and lesbians. Morales (1989) attributed this, in part, to the diversity of cultures among ethnic groups which restricts generalizations across ethnicities even though they may share a common experience of racism and discrimination. The dual minority lives of queer ethnic minorities, first as ethnic and second as queer result in increased anxiety, isolation and depression as they fear being removed from their bases of support including the family. Morales (1989) noted that ethnic families needed to reconsider their value systems if their queer members were to remain secure within the family.

The three main communities - the dominant white community, the queer community and the ethnic community - within which ethnic queers find themselves have their own norms and cultural practices that present particular sets of challenges. For many ethnic queers, they are likely to hear from their community members that homosexuality is a Western disease and that it is not part of their culture. For ethnic queers coming out, they face ostracism and claims that they are betraying their culture. The ostracization from their community and family is particularly difficult, says Morales, because of the close familial and communal ties that exist among ethnic communities and which serve as a protection against the racism that they experience outside their communities.

Gender variant children present special challenges to parents if parents do not approve of their gender nonconforming children or choose to engage the children in gender conversion therapy (Hill, Menvielle, Sica & Johnson 2010). Gender, more than sexuality, is what parents appear to control as gender expression is more on display and visible than sexuality. Even if parents wanted to support their child, they may be anxious at the ostracism and discrimination that they believe the child might face throughout their lives. Menvielle (2012, p.361) focuses on supporting the child and family rather than on conforming to gender ideals and observed that families that are strongly committed to certain religious or cultural traditions may find that gender variant children contest these traditions (Menvielle 2012, p. 361). Menvielle (2012) suggests that we avoid pathologizing parents and focus instead on building familial relationships. Although Wallace and Russell (2013) say there is no clear evidence as to the effectiveness of this approach, they believe that supportive interventions are likely to reduce shame and the likelihood of depression among adolescents and to increase the possibility of secure relationships between the parents and child.

Robinson (2018) argued that we risk pathologizing parents as homophobic and transphobic when we claim the rejection of their queer child as the cause of their homelessness. Robinson believes that structural, interpersonal and individual factors contribute to the homelessness of LGBTQIA+ youth and that we need to ascertain how and why certain practices around gender and sexuality lead to rejection. Given that poor queer youth and queer youth of colour are disproportionately homeless, this is likely to depict poor families and families of colour as more homophobic than white, middle income families. Robinson proposed the concept of ‘conditional families’ in an attempt to understand the social processes at play in how families respond to their queer children. Robinson used the term conditional families to define those families where particular conditions surrounding a queer youth’s gender and sexuality had to be met for them to be accepted by the family. Conditional was also used to illustrate how poverty and ethnicity impacted on the conflict related to the youths’ gender and sexuality. Even as families say that their love is unconditional, it becomes conditional when faced with their queer youth’s gender and sexual orientation.
As same-sex sexuality becomes more accepted, families and society may hold to a gender binary, and trans youth and gender expansive youth may bear the cost of this position. For families, it may be gender expansiveness, rather than coming out as LGBTQIA+, that may cause the strain in families resulting in abuse and homelessness. It is also likely that with families marginalized by race, their response to their queer children may be an attempt to prevent further marginalization of them in society. Services that assist families to understand their children’s sexual and gender identity have been used to help youth reunite with their parents.

Ethnic minorities are said to hold more conservative views than those from the dominant group (Brown and Amoroso 1975). Brown and Amoroso’s study showed that sex-role stereotyping was related to anti-gay prejudice. Carrier’s study (1976) showed that the strongly gendered roles in Mexican society led to the stereotyping of homosexual men as effeminate. Warren’s (1980) and Aoki’s (1983) studies on Asian Americans showed that educational achievements were prioritized over social interactions. Queer Asian Americans believed that if they met family expectations around achievement, this would detract attention away from their sexual orientation or avoid their being questioned about the absence of a visible presence of heterosexual behaviours. More recent research such as the transnational queer research on Chinese diasporas in Canada and Australia, showed culturally specific considerations and alternatives to the white liberal queer strategy of ‘coming out’. In Tam’s (2018) dissertation on queer (and) Chinese Canadians, the participants’ tensions between queer liberal pressures of ‘coming out’ and familial harmony are evident in the experiences. Bao’s (2013) autoethnography as a gay Chinese cisman in Australia speaks to similar expressions of regret. Bao (2013) reflected on his coming out experience to his mother as putting her in a difficult position of having to directly confront his sexuality, and having to respond with either rejection or acceptance. He referred to a process that Chou Wah-shan (2000) called ‘coming home’ as an alternative - bringing your partner home to meet the parents firstly as a “good friend”.

Many people in Tam’s (2018) study expressed concerns for the well-being of their family members, and that not coming out beyond their immediate family were acts of care. Cindy, in Tam’s study, argued that silence is itself a form of communication, and there was no need for verbalisation or declaration. The hegemonic queer liberal prescription of ‘coming out’ as a strategy is a contentious one that does not align universally with culturally specific Chinese contexts or family dynamics.

The family is seen as the social and economic unit among Black and ethnic minority families and being queer may be seen as a denouncement of that (Fish 2007). Research has shown that black and ethnic minority lesbians are more likely to maintain family relationships than white lesbians, to rely on family support, and to have children or parent other children within the wider family network. Blakey, Pearce and Chesters’ (2006) study of the South Asian LGBT community in Bradford, UK showed that this community faced religious and cultural intolerance. The mosque served as a site for condemnation, and the close-knit community acted as monitors to curtail community members’ freedom, behaviours and activities. Shannahan (2010) recognized the multiple identities of religion, culture and sexual diversity that queer Muslims must negotiate. Beckett et al (2014) say that in order for communities 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. Masoumi (2018) argues that because of the highly racialized spaces in western society trans black and people of colour have a complex relationship with coming out which western society see as a sign of progress that people of colour
will soon achieve. This view does not account for the lack of access to safe spaces for queer people of colour and presumes that coming out is a main concern for queer people of colour.

Research suggests that rejection by families to a queer young person’s coming out is the exception rather than the rule. According to Morales (1989), queer ethnic young people’s anxieties about being rejected by family may be more exaggerated than in reality. Tanner and Lyner (2004) warn, however, that such data are collected from support group members and organizations, and families that are likely to reject their members are less likely to participate in such research. Similarly, queer youth who anticipate rejection are less likely to out themselves by participating in research. Tanner and Lyner (2004) suggest that young people should have a plan that slowly gets family and parents used to the reality of their being queer as well as using positive rather than neutral messages.
Methodology

The research focused on members of the rainbow ethnic community living in New Zealand who are between 18 and 35 years of age. The research was a mixed method study incorporating a survey design using an anonymous online questionnaire designed by rainbow ethnic young people. The questionnaire gathered quantitative data on rainbow ethnic youth that provided demographic information on the young people regarding their understandings and experiences of family and intimate partner relationships. In addition, there were confidential qualitative face to face semi-structured interviews with 43 participants in Aotearoa New Zealand in which knowledge was shared of their experiences and understandings of family, community and intimate partner relationships and safety in these relationships.

For the online survey, respondents were invited to be involved in the study through social media sites, word of mouth, or advertising on researchers’ networks. Purposive and snowball sampling were used for getting in touch with participants for the qualitative component of the study. Initial contacts were made with queer and gender diverse persons and their partners who expressed interest in the research.

For the online survey, respondents were asked to give between 10-15 minutes of their time to answer the questionnaire. Respondents were anonymous and consent was given through completion of the questionnaire. They did not have to answer any of the questions they did not want to answer. After completing the questionnaire, respondents could choose whether or not to submit the questionnaire. If they decided not to submit the questionnaire, their answers were not saved and were not available to the researchers. The quantitative component of the study used the survey tool Qualtrics to collect responses to the online questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using SPSS.

Qualitative data was gathered through face to face, semi-structured conversations/ interviews with rainbow ethnic young people in Auckland and Wellington, with most of the participants (36) based in Auckland. Participants for the interviews gave consent to be interviewed by completing a consent form. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to three hours depending on the stories and knowledge that the participants wished to share. Most of the conversations took place in coffee shops which seemed to be the preferred venue for the participants. A participant information sheet outlining the research was given to potential participants. Potential participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and to have these questions answered. It was possible that participants may have experienced a level of discomfort recalling experiences of unsafe family, community and intimate partner relationships. Every effort was made to conduct the 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 for whatever reason with being questioned. Participants had the option to include their partners in the research study. Only one of the participants brought their partner to the interview. Participants had the choice not to answer any questions or questions that they believed would disclose their identity. The report does not identify any of the participants. The knowledge shared was guided by the participants.

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The participants that had requested it, were sent a draft copy of the report for their feedback which informed the revisions made to the final report.

Researchers discussed the research prior to commencing with members and organizations of the rainbow ethnic community. These conversations 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 Rainbow Youth, 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.
Findings - Rainbow/Queer ethnic young people and ‘coming out’ - Letting in/closing out

Introduction

This report focuses on how queer ethnic youth deal with their queerness within themselves and among others. The term ‘coming out’ is used to describe the process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation and gender identity to others who may not have known or even opening up to oneself. It also connects to a sense of liberation for the queer person and that there is no longer a need to hide or to pretend that one is ‘straight’ or heterosexual. Although coming out may give that sense of freedom to live one’s life as authentically as possible and as freely and openly as one would like to, this freedom and liberated self may not exist the same way for everyone. For queer ethnic youth in Aotearoa, coming out as described in these and other ways in the literature, is in many ways different for them. Coming out may actually be about staying in, letting go, letting in, closing, keeping or shutting out, coming out again and again, opening up conditionally, compromising out and trading in. The many intersectional spaces of queer ethnic youth make this coming out process as complex and as varied as their identities. The stories of ‘coming out’ by those in Pākehā queer society often were not their stories and it may be time for queer ethnic young people to tell their stories in their own words and in their own way.

The participants in this study have described a diverse range of experiences about coming out, the responses from family and community to their queerness and the responses that they perceive they will receive if family and community were to know of their queerness. The queer ethnic young people also shared the advice they would give to queer ethnic youth who are not out or who are dealing with the prospect of coming out.

This report focuses on the research questions relating to ethnic youth and their coming out experiences and perspectives. The first part of the report describes the findings in three sections: i) ethnic young people’s perspectives on coming out ii) family responses to their children’s queerness iii) community responses to their members’ queerness. The second part of this report describes the findings on i) ethnic young people’s advice to queer ethnic youth on coming out ii) ethnic young people’s advice to family whose children are queer iii) ethnic young people’s advice to community whose members are queer.

The words queer, rainbow, gay, lesbian, non-binary and the pronouns him, her, they were used in the interviews depending on how the participant wanted to be identified.
Part 1 - Ethnic young peoples’ perspectives and experiences of ‘coming out’ and community and family responses

Ethnic young peoples’ perspectives and experiences of ‘coming out’

A number of themes were drawn from the conversations with queer ethnic young people on their experiences and perspectives on coming out and indicate the emphasis given to these subject areas by the young people. The themes are:

- Letting in rather than coming out
- No obligation to come out
- It’s not our culture
- Coming out again and again
- Sense of obligation to remain silent out of respect for family
- Expectations around family and marriage and children

Most of the participants’ views could be seen as to how they facilitated the ‘letting in’ of family, friends and community into their queerness. Whether this was through deciding not to ‘come out’ or realizing that they were not obligated to come out or being confronted by the tension between their queerness and their culture, these realities represented the letting in process for many rainbow ethnic young people.

Letting in rather than coming out

Participants said they chose who they wanted to let into their lives and to whom they disclosed their queerness. For reasons of maintaining the relationships, avoiding conflict, and acknowledging the importance to their family of community status, participants were selective about who they came out to and when.

Woxi: And then so seven months ago, my mother and I were having lunch together, like this year. It's like such a rare experience that my mother and I both like, laughing together. And so I was like, wow, maybe this is a good time and so we were like 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 like a glass wall come up between us in the car. There's no glass wall but you know, you could like feel the tension. And it's like silence for the rest of the ride.

Hii: I have been having interesting discussions...where people have been talking about letting people in rather than coming out.

Participants saw the disclosure of their sexual orientation less as a coming out and more of a breaking through a world of expectations and stereotypes that was built around them. They said that ethnic young people were less likely than non-ethnic people to define themselves in terms of their sexuality.
Minee: *I didn’t think of it as coming out. I thought of it as like breaking through something that was built around me at birth...we don’t necessarily define ourselves as much around sexuality as people who are non-ethnic.*

**No obligation to come out**

Coming out to oneself was, for some of the participants, a greater challenge than coming out to family as they realized that they had to own their own truth before anyone else could.

Lema: *(Coming out) is I think at 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.*

Coming out was not seen as being a process or a journey for everyone despite a common belief that it is a way of getting mainstream acceptance of queerness. For many, coming out depended on the kind of family and community you had and your social environs including workplace, church, and schools. The risks of coming out to a hostile family needed to be weighed against the expectation or desire to come out.

Fuga: *Coming up is not for everyone. 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, it's gonna be risky for them maybe 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.*

Jiko: *Makes me feel tired when just even hearing the words coming out. It's a construct - the idea of coming out or having to come out. I would like it to not be a necessity and for all gender identities and sexual orientation to just be valid without having to kind of like situate yourself as other from one normalised kind of identity.*

Coming out, for many under the ‘rainbow umbrella’, was the hardest thing for them. Participants wished that they did not have to do it and simply wanted to live their lives and be who they wanted to be, something that seemed to be the privilege of straight persons.

Efu: *Coming out? It's difficult, a difficult thing. I wish we didn't have to go through that. I wish we were just as any other straight person who live their life and all they do is be themselves. But we not, we have to come out to people. So coming out that is the most hardest thing for gay people or lesbian or transgender or anybody within the rainbow umbrella.*

Most of the participants expressed their dislike for feeling that they had to come out, though some said it gave their parents the opportunity to reconsider their views of the world.

Yezu: *I don’t like that we have to do it...coming out kind of gave my parents this opportunity to totally re-evaluate how they saw the world and they did.*
Participants said that, on reflection, many of their family and peers had figured that they were queer long before they had, perhaps because they had yet to come to terms with it.

Abe: When I came out, everyone was like ‘duh’. I was like ‘you guys had this figured out before me?’...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’. And I'm like, this is an interesting talk from my mom.

Participants said that it was just as important to share the ‘non-story’ of one’s coming out experience because everyone’s story is different and just as valid.

Uvea: My coming out story is I never came out. So 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.

Some participants rejected the idea of coming out as they believed that it was not anyone’s business but their own and that too much power was given to the labelling around coming out. One participant who had expressed that view to another queer person had that view challenged.

Peqa: I never really thought about the concept of coming out. I remember having a conversation with (a friend). I was like ‘why the fuck do people have to come out? Like, why can't we just be ra ra ra?’ And then she said to me, “think about it like life”. She was like, “you're speaking from a quite privileged position and saying those things because some people do come out to normalize it. And people come out because they want to be honest. So it's like we need those labels in order to figure out, like what it is that we're fighting against or fighting for”.

Not coming out though, was said to place greater pressure on individuals as they then had to deal with what they had internalized for much longer.

Rossi: That's their choice. They don't have to be (out). If they want to... we should have correct adequate support for them, but that they don't have to be (out). Life is harder when you're out for sure. But life is also harder when you're not out. So you have to come 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 like an awareness of that, that you will have to do the work. Just not now. You're just putting it off till later. But not for everyone, it's not safe.

Some participants said people assumed they were heterosexual if they had not openly identified as queer. Some did not get much support from their family after they disclosed their queerness, perhaps because of cultural values.
Zara: People say you don't have to come out to be who you really are right, but if you don't come out you are automatically assumed to be straight anyway.

Researcher: Is it harder for queer people of colour to come out?

Zara: Yes I think. The majority of people of colour I have met have had a lot of problems with their family to come out. They have not been well supported by the family to come out...their cultural values have made their values transphobic and homophobic. They might be resistant to progress. Remember when the gay marriage bill passed in New Zealand? That might have helped mainstream society, white people more. It certainly helped my friends, but I really don't think that was transferred over to our ethnic community.

It’s not our culture

For many queer ethnic young people, there was fear and apprehension about coming out in a society perceived to be homophobic or coming out to the diasporic community that had brought their homonegative prejudices with them to Aotearoa.

Noio: I never had the opportunity to really come out to my mom but I think I still have some level of fear or like apprehension around that because I would imagine that she would be concerned for me in the context of being (ethnicity). So I think there would be a lot of pressure for young people from immigrant background.

For some, religious ideals had a strong influence on their family’s views on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Minee: Things are restrictive you know, like (religion). In my family on the other side, it’s just crazy how rigid they view sexuality.

Family expectations around marrying and having children also influenced how parents and community responded to queer ethnic young people and their coming out. For one participant, the community had stopped them from being with other young family and community members as they perceived that they would ‘recruit’ them into the queer community.

Efu: I only know one (ethnic) girl, she is (nationality), who is out and proud. She is the only one I know...because that expectations that she needs to be a woman, she needs to have children. Coz that’s the other thing, my family are like "but you are a man, you need to have children, you need to have a wife". When everybody found out (I was gay), then I decided to be free, and you know there is nothing I can change or do. I used to do teaching, dance for little kids, (ethnic) kids, teaching them (national) dance and teaching them (the official language of the country). It was all about teaching the culture. None of them wanted to bring their kids anymore because (they thought) I will recruit them into gay, gay-ism that sort of thing.

The attitudes and perceptions of ethnic communities about homosexuality varied from seeing homosexuality as contagious to a person dying because they were gay.
Ophu: I actually had a cousin that died couple of years ago, maybe like ten years ago, and after she died, the rumour was, “oh she may have been a lesbian”. And then it was like, that’s probably how she died. Clearly you don’t die for being a lesbian, queer or gay.

Homosexuality was seen by parents and community as part of western culture, and parents blamed queer ethnic young people’s adoption of western culture and the denial of their own traditional heritage and customs as reasons for their queerness. Participants believed that parents needed to reflect on religion as a legacy of colonization. They knew that homosexuality was rooted in their traditional histories and societies, unlike the religion that they currently observe.

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.

Cedro: Coming out means telling them that you are different.

The ostracization of queer ethnic young people from their families and community in Aotearoa felt more pronounced as it seemed to be such a small community, not just for blacks but for those that were both black and queer.

Viwe: I think it has to do with like the size of the community you know, like being black and queer in New Zealand. So black is minority, queer is minority, so being black and queer is even more like of a sub-culture where like I can name the people on my fingers who I know that are black and queer.

Participants said that what they were taught about their historical and cultural background prevented them from openly acknowledging their sexual orientation or gender identity as they felt shame for being different. The pride that they saw Western people show in being queer was unfamiliar to them as feeling pride in being queer was not common for Asians. For many, their parents believed that their queerness was a result of being in a westernized society and parents lamented the fact that they had allowed their children to leave for places such as the USA.

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 like, stops you. You regard yourself as a shame, as something as a different from others. And I mean, pride culture is really a Western thing. Like for Asians, they never find themselves proud of being queer.

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”.

Coming out for queer black women was said to be particularly difficult given the intersectional oppressions of those identities, and this resulted in a further sense of isolation and unbelonging.

Peqa: I think as well, like in a place like New Zealand, where it's like in the mainstream culture you are a minority when you go to work. Everywhere you go, even to put gas in
your car, like you're the only one usually. So it's like you kind of find solace in like 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.

Flige: Yes, with my siblings, they know. But it's like we don't address the elephant in the room. But it's the siblings from my mom and dad, not my half siblings. But they can literally be homophobic among their friends, but they know better than to say anything in front of me because I would literally drag them down. But my mom she will say, I'll just pray for you, I'll just pray for you. But after I got my current boyfriend, she was like so happy about it because she thinks like I'm cured. And even then she thinks like having a boyfriend is better than having a girlfriend. But my mom really literally does not talk about it, literally doesn't talk about it. The only time really we were talking about it, we had an argument and she called me all those homophobic slurs, but then she felt really sorry about it. She was really shocked about it. I came out to her last year, not long ago, but I was planning to think I wanted to fix my relationship with my entire family. I didn't like the fact that I was a completely different person to my family even though I don't really hide it. And I told my mom I really wanted to fix the relationship but I said to her “unfortunately, I think your love is conditional and if I don't be who you want me to be, then you will not love me”. And she said that is not true and then she said I'm like this, I'm like that, and I let it out to her all at once. And not only did I come out to her sexually but I came out to her that I was not really religious. And that is the worst thing, like if you said you weren’t religious, like they think you are an infidel. She came around. She fully accepts me and loves me and reminds me of that.

**Coming out again and again**

For many participants, coming out was an ongoing process. At times, it was because parents and families refused to or had difficulty accepting their queerness, or believed that it was just a particular phase in their lives, or when they reminded them in subtle or not so subtle ways of their expectations that they should be married to someone of the opposite sex. At each of these times, participants felt as though they were coming out all over again. For some, it was about to whom and in what situations they would come out or those from whom they kept their sexual orientation or gender identity undisclosed. For every new encounter, there was a necessity to ‘read’ the environment to determine if this was a safe space in which they could express themselves as they wish, or trust those involved to accept them for who they were. It was less about wanting the approval of others and more about not being vulnerable and feeling a sense of ease and belonging. This was a stressful and tiring process and one with which, the participants observed, straight people did not have to engage.

Abba: I feel like it’s a repetitive process because it’s like every time you meet someone like, it’s the same thing like, “oh do you have a boyfriend” and it happens not daily but like 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, so that's before I move to New Zealand. But then when I moved to New Zealand, it's like whole new process of coming out again to new communities that you meet, like new workplaces, new education settings, and you know, coming out to members of your own community like (nationality) community. I like to think that I'm very out but it stills feel like, every time I enter into a new space, it's like 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 kind of reveal that part of identity that maybe puts you in a vulnerable way or slightly vulnerable position, especially in communities that I'm part of, maybe like 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.

Bacce: And yeah, coming out. It's definitely something that you do. It's not just like one time you do it and then it's done. It's like you kind of constantly have to come out of your, you don't have to but you're kind of constantly coming out if you identify as queer, I guess.

**Sense of obligation to remain silent out of respect for family**

The loyalty that participants felt towards their family influenced the degree to which they disclosed their queerness. Participants knew the risks of disclosure included homelessness or being ostracized and talked about by the family. They were also aware that the reputation of their family would be harmed by the rest of the family or community knowing that a family member 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. Like they knew but like 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.

Participants were concerned at the discomfort and shame that families would feel. Some chose family over intimate partner relationships and sacrificed romantic love for family. Others felt that if they had a partner they were wanting to commit to, only then would they come out to their family.

Thu: It’s a little bit hard for me. I think coming out for me is not, it’s 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 I think, 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. So I think for me, if I came out to my family, excluding my father, 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 understood that their parents had sacrificed a lot for their children by moving to Aotearoa and wanted them to succeed. The participants saw their queerness as a betrayal of those sacrifices and that it was not the vision that their parents had for them.

Thu: *I think it’s hard because your parents, like so my 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 like 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.*

Although some parents accepted their children’s queerness and acknowledged their children’s partners, they did not do so in the presence of extended family or the community.

Uvea: *You know like, she (mum) loves my partner more than me. Now, whenever I go to her house, she’s like, "Oh, you didn’t bring Elita with you?" and I’m like, Well, okay. So I feel good on that front. But if my mom has friends over, she would refer to my partner as my friend. Right? So it’s a lot, I think, still, yeah being afraid of what other people are gonna think. And protecting me from them, rather than, maybe that’s a parent thing? Maybe I don’t, I don’t understand it. But yes, it doesn’t feel still, like in the climate of queerness, it doesn’t feel still that mom is still so embracing of me.*

Some parents used guilt in an attempt to ‘stop’ their children from being gay.

Peqa: *That means you have to keep stuff that’s happening within your family and everything else to yourself…that breeds respectability politics. Then people start living for the image or whatever of their families…you know someone’s mom will be like "Oh my God! God has cursed me because my son is gay. Oh! Oh, my goodness! Why are you trying to kill me?" because you’re a lesbian!*

Xylo: *There’s like certain personalities that can handle coming out and then like, it differs from family to family, but generally speaking, it’s frowned upon. Like, I know my dad…I had to come out to him actually, when I was 19, so not too long ago, and what he told me was, "that’s fine, as long as you don’t do it in front of me".*

Some participants chose 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, right. 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 like being able to be slightly straight passing in some environments that I'm in. In the context like especially, not just like some of the community, sometimes like especially the (ethnic) community. When I'm in those spaces, like the people who simply don't have ability or who are not perceived to be straight, coz it's a perception from the outside, like the treatment you get from the community is quite different. So like once, once like the sort of straight passing facade kind of wears off, like obviously in a more conservative setting, it's the treatment you get is different. So when I say privilege, is 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.

For many, coming out was not something that they would think about doing because their parents quite simply would not allow it as they considered it forbidden. Although participants were aware of the greater inclusivity around LGBTQIA+ issues in Aotearoa, this did not take into account being queer and ethnic in Aotearoa which, for queer Pākehā presents differently than for ethnic queers. It is not a phenomenon that can be easily dismissed just because one is living in Aotearoa. Negative and harmful perceptions and beliefs around queerness persisted among ethnic families despite their residing in Aotearoa.

Participants said that their parents had asked them not to disclose their sexuality to the wider community.

Hii: My parents told me not to tell anyone, so the church community don't know.

Participants were also concerned at losing the love of their family if they came out and it was not a risk worth taking or a love they wanted to lose.

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. Yeah...I just worry like, if they just don't talk to me anymore and I just worry about this. I'm not well prepared for that. And I'm not strong enough to you know, like, face this as like as easy situation. I can't, I can't accept if my parents they just like leave me and no contact with me. I can't accept this... That there's a kind of like, a sick, like a mental problem of things like that, is crazy things like that.

Expectations around family, marriage and children

Participants who were financially dependent on their parents were waiting until they had secured employment to enable them to live alone or manage economically on their own before living openly as queer. They knew their parents would be concerned and embarrassed at the gossip that would result from their neighbours and the community finding out that they had queer children. Participants also knew that their parents expected them to have children and they saw being queer as compromising their opportunity to be grandparents.

Sito: When I have a job and I can live and not rely on parents coz my parents are paying tuition fee for the university. So if we had a fight, they can just...away to live my own, yeah. Like my parents have said to me...they hates me and hates me to be gay and we are just break. Because based in (nationality) culture when you like, you early twenty-something, your family will push you to get married and to get children coz they want grandchildren.
And LGBT people cannot have their own children so that they think if I'm gay I'm not having children and they can't have a grandchildren. So they'll think that's not cool and neighbours and other people most will talk about it behind them and is also not fair.

Guhe: And then the other thing is, I think of like if I come out to them, how do they explain that to someone around them because I can really be like selfish in telling them all this who I am. I need to think of what kind of stress they’re facing in there. Because it's really, like 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. Like currently I'm in the age group, they will push me harder and want me find someone to get married with them. And then I'm the only child.

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

Bacce: My mother had very traditional ideas of how it was to be a female and she taught me a lot of those ideas. So like growing up, it was the woman was always the domesticated one. And she would marry a man and then tend to the husband. And that was just kind of the way it is. And that was the way she was raised and coming from like a small (nationality) village. And, yeah, it was never a concept in her or my parents minds that I would be with anyone other than someone from the opposite gender...Because I kind of knew inside that that was the complete opposite of how I viewed my life and it just felt very confining.

Minee: I think the most important thing for my (ethnic) side was that I would just have children. That I just have children that was the main. Everybody was fine I think but the main pressure that I felt was children. But that’s still possible and once most people realize it’s possible, they were like cool, no worries. But on the black part, it has been more complicated because it’s not just something that’s talked about.
Community responses to young family members coming out

Queer ethnic young people valued the cultural traditions that existed within their ethnic community. The culture and traditions gave them a sense of belonging and roots with which to ground themselves. They knew the acceptance that came from within the communities for community members that were not part of the mainstream or dominant Pākehā culture in Aotearoa. Although there was understandable contention around the word ethnic, participants appreciated being part of an ethnic group with recognized cultural practices and histories. Often, however, the community and its perception of these cultural practices were at odds with the community members’ sexuality. Participants found themselves having to join communities where their sexuality was more likely to be accepted or formed their own small communities of like-minded persons.

The themes that were emphasized in the community responses to queer ethnic youth were:

- Finding and immersing themselves in a supportive community
- Community expectations
- Rejection by the community
- Silencing their queerness in the community
- Reassuring boundaries

Finding and immersing themselves in a supportive community

Participants had varying degrees and types of communities. They found it safer and more satisfying to have community with those whose values were similar to theirs and who they identified with in areas other than their sexuality as these were things that held them together rather than other factors that might have kept them apart.

Minee: I have always been in a community with people who reflect, to the most part, where it reflects 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, you know, especially people who I grew up with, they were overly friendly with queer but is because we share more than just sexuality in community, so because we are (ethnicity) or we grew up in 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.

The queer community is where many participants found support though less so among white queers or the Pākehā queer community. Their own ethnic community seemed to have a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy, so there was little option when seeking support from them and there were not many people to whom they could go who would not view their sexuality negatively. For queer ethnic young people from countries where there were larger and more visible queer communities, coming to Aotearoa was a lonely venture as there were few queer people of colour. Those that they did meet were usually not open about their sexuality or had not disclosed their queerness and so one could not know to whom one could turn to find community. Participants said they surrounded themselves with those whom they believed would accept them.
Lema: *Queer community, I guess they understand the struggles, you know, like the pain, and they sympathize.*

Ophu: *They (community from country of origin) were very accepting but mostly because I chose to surround myself with people that I knew would accept me for me. So I knew that my family wasn't accepting... I knew I couldn't go to talk to my family for advice... I wanted to make sure that people who are surrounding me will be accepting me for me and not question, not judge anything that I did.*

Finding and immersing oneself in a supportive community, whether that was online or elsewhere, was important so that queer ethnic young people had someone with whom to share experiences, discuss concerns, and navigate the wider queer spaces. Participants sought communities where no one questioned their orientation, gender, sexuality and did not limit themselves to those aspects of the participants but saw beyond that.

Peqa: *But this is the older generation. With the younger kids, I don't really see that. They're freer like all the kids that I have access to. I've realized that because I don't go to church and I don't really engage with them. I suppose with the mainstream (ethnic) community, I only spend time and have access to the kids that are the youth that are more like myself. If I say, "oh, my God, that girl is so cute!", like they won't think anything of it. The next time I see them, they'll be like "Oh my God, so did you text her?". And like no one ever ask and say, "oh, I thought you like guys".*

Participants thought about who else in their community were feeling isolated and whether there was anyone else like them as they were constantly being told in their places of worship that being queer was a very un-(insert religion, culture, ethnicity) thing to do.

Peqa: *There's only literally a handful of us that are on the fringes. I also wonder how much repression is going on, because I'm like, if I feel like this and I'm me, I wonder how many other people are out there who are in these churches, who are in these - I keep referring to as the mainstream (ethnic) community - who actually are queer, who just keep it behind closed doors? It's like, "Oh no, being queer is very un-(ethnicity)!" which is odd.*

Hii: *Well my activist community are all good. Like most of my activist community are also queer and (ethnic)... I can kind of taken it for granted actually but I think it does make a difference in feeling comfortable in a group.*

Bacce: *It took me a very long time to properly be open about it and like come out or anything. Because I was afraid that people wouldn't accept me and I wouldn't belong, so I just kind of live under wraps and didn't really explore that side of me. But since then, since I was like open about it when I was 18/19, everyone I know, all of my communities have been accepting.*

Participants’ families seemed to support their sexuality while they lived in New Zealand but were less likely to do so if the children returned to their country of origin. Whether this was because they were concerned for their children’s safety in their home country or for their own status and reputation was not clear. Participants were also more likely to find a supportive community here in New Zealand.
Guhe: But my girlfriend, I mean, we come out to her family already and everyone is supportive to us.... we have similar cultural background but not the same. Like she, because she comes from a (religion) country, that will be another thing and that’s why she come to New Zealand. Because she has even harder situation if she stay in (country).

Situ: Yes, I have come out to my friends here. I think like, since we study in New Zealand and New Zealand is like diversity society, like is more acceptable. So I told them I'm gay and they are totally fine I think.

Abe: It was celebrated coz all of them were queer. My friends from (country), she was my closest friend at the time and she came out just before me. And when she came out, I was like, "Okay, I can do this". Like, I'm just gonna start casually dropping this in conversation, which is what I seen her doing. And yeah, and all of our guy friends were gay. They were all brown, so it was like, “Okay, finally, Abe has told us what we already knew because she’s been here with us for two years”. So yeah, it was just nice. It was a nice experience but I've never come out to my family, like to the full family that I grew up with. And I don't really intend to because I'm not very close to them. My grandparents would be like scandalized.

Community expectations

The different communities in which the participants were involved had different expectations of and responses to participants’ queerness. There were spaces where participants knew their queerness would not be questioned and simply assumed, and there were those times where participants opted for letting into their space, those who they knew would accept them for who they were. Within the LGBTQIA+ community spaces, a particular identity or wish to identify specifically may prompt a person to ‘come out’ as a specific gender orientation. Closing out the community made it difficult for queer ethnic young people to live the life that they wished to live but the pressure of expectations to engage in and live a heterosexual existence prompted young people to close out their community and let in only those with whom they could be themselves.

Zara: So at the start, I was really scared to come out, even to people I thought would be OK with it, like my best friends, flatmates. Like, just because nobody at that time I knew had done this, so I was really worried and when I did come out it was huge, huge relief. And my friends, they accepted me for who I was it. It wasn't a big deal for them. Like if you walk into a queer space, it's already accepted that you're queer. You don't need to come out unless you want to come out a second time like if you are trans rather than gay, if you want to use labels. But in terms of the queer community, you don't really need to come out unless you want to acknowledge that you are something.

Hii: I think it varies. Some people cannot come out, like don't feel like...it's probably like international (nationality) people who can't come out to their families so they just live their lives here. And I encourage people not to do it... cause somehow it's not worth it. Then it might make it harder for you to be able to live your life....And some of them like even though they are in a queer relationship now and in the future might consider like finding a husband and someone else also obviously to get married to eventually, like these are
families...cause there is social expectation of heterosexual relationship and marriage and the kids.

Peqa: If we're talking about the (ethnic) community at large, I don't even think they think about the concept of coming out. To them, it's like you must a doctor, or engineer, accountant and you get married and you have kids. And then we terrorize your kids and we ask them the same things if they're doctors, accountants, lawyers, you know?

Rejection by the community

Participants recalled the rejection and humiliation they received from their high school peers, teachers, and the school community that made them feel ashamed 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 like find out, like teachers would stalk the classes that I wasn't in to like 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, yeah, kids would like make up horrible rumours. And like, my school community was just awful.

Participants perceived that their parents’ rejection of their queerness was their way of protecting them from homophobia and from a world that would not be accepting of them, and where they would not be safe. Some participants also interpreted the rejection as a way for their parents to hide their fears for their safety. Parents believed that their children could come to harm if their sexuality was exposed. Other participants, however, saw homophobia as a fault in the values of the community and did not waste their time focusing on or engaging with such communities.

Cedro: Community - it's like don't ask, don't tell policy. They just tell that I am going to marry a woman and get married. And I have one worker here when I was working at petrol station. The fact that I told him, he still saying "ok when are you gonna married to a girl?" Or like he did not get it, or also like saying that “why are you putting yourself in a very difficult situation? Why not just marry a woman and then that's it. Why are you putting yourself more harm done than not?”

Uvea: If I walk out in the world and you don't like who I am coz you're homophobic, that's fine because you're low value to me.... but it would be different if the closest person to me rejected me, then...it would be a lot more scary and heart breaking.

Silencing their queerness in the community

Many rainbow ethnic young people found communities outside their ethnic community that that did not have 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. This criticism and shame to the family’s reputation because of their queerness was very effective in silencing the open expressions of their queerness or any discussions on the subject.

Lema: Well so, there's the (ethnic) community, the queer community and then my close circle of community friends’ thing. (Ethnic) community, I haven't been very, I don't know,
what is the word, discreet. I haven’t been very like vocal about it in the (ethnic) community just because, just in fear of like getting more unnecessary, more criticism about my own, about myself. And some of my mum’s friends, you know, they think I’m going through, actually most of the people that my mum is friends with think that I’m going through a phase.

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 said that she was like dating girls and stuff like that, 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, so yeah. I don’t know what I would do if someone reacted like that to me, so I guess I’m still scared of that... It makes me scared, like it makes me very scared and conflicted 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).

Xylo: I didn't come out to any community. I didn't disclose it. I feel like if they can identify, then good on them. Yeah, I just don’t feel like they need to know that.

Reassuring boundaries

Participants talked about the discomfort that came with telling their friends whose prejudices around queerness were reflected in their attitudes and comments and behaviours. Participants surmised that there were occasions where rainbow ethnic young people were reluctant to come out if they were going to be perceived as having an interest in their straight friends. Explaining to friends that their letting them in did not suggest an interest in them was something the participants said they had to deal with and that it was embarrassing and insulting.

Deo: I came out to friends that I had from a separate school which is a public secular school, before I came out to my friends from my own high school which was a (religion) high school because of that fear of stigma attached to religion. And then when I came to New Zealand, it’s like I almost stayed in a closet with these new friends even when my family knew. When I came to New Zealand it actually took me over six months to come out to some of my first friends I made in New Zealand because I was in the process of kind of not knowing whether they would be okay with it or not.

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

For some participants, coming out to their ethnic community in New Zealand was just as difficult as coming out in their country of origin as they knew that their country held very conservative
views towards homosexuality and that those that had migrated to New Zealand had brought those views and values with them.

Deo: *Here in New Zealand...was even more challenging because I was in a group of other first-generation immigrants and...it was quite like a conservative environment in some ways. And I think we all came from countries with like, a sexuality which made it more challenging to feel upfront about it. And it's like definitely I did have more stigma in learning situations when I first came to New Zealand as a first-generation immigrant.*
Family responses to young family members coming out

Family responses to queer young family members coming out prompted a range of emotions and actions from acceptance to abandonment. The knowledge shared by the participants are reflected in the following themes:

- Educating parents and family
- Understanding and acceptance
- Struggling through it
- Parents’ self-blame
- Non-acceptance and denial

Educating parents and family

Some parents made a determined effort to understand their children and sought counselling. Participants accepted that they needed to give time to the parents to process their children’s queerness.

_Yezu_: I think they felt like maybe their worldview had been rattled, and so they (parents) started seeing a counsellor. And the counsellor kind of helped them. I don’t really know what she said today or whatever, but just giving them a space to talk about it and talk through how they were feeling. Then they kind of came to understand where I was coming from and that their worldview was quite wrong and hostile but they really like took that journey seriously to making that mental shift, being accepting of everything and of choices and of how people are.

_Minee_: When I came out to my dad, it was a big deal because I kind of had to because he was coming over to visit and I was living with my partner at the time. So I kind of just had to tell him because he was gonna be staying with us. And he responded pretty well, and I was impressed with my dad considering how he grew up. He has not been over the moon but he is taking his time to work through why he feels the way he does, where that comes from.

Understanding and acceptance

Some participants had one parent who was more supportive than the other parent. Some said their parents showed support by attending pride parades or interacting with the queer community. On the other hand, some parents would advise their queer child not to tell the other parent if they believed they would not be accepting.

_Abbas_: My mom was like “my friend asked if you guys were gay” and I was like what? And my mom was like “are you gay?” And I was like yea I am, but my friends aren’t. Maybe she had a hunch. I feel like moms kinda always know but like it was just a few seconds of silence and she was like “oh okay” and then she’s like “yeah, let’s not tell your dad”...I think that kinda brought them around but also they kinda take initiative. Like we went to their local pride event, and we didn’t tell them that it was pride month. Like they took it
upon themselves to go look it up. So my mom like sends me pictures of her with like a drag queen and like all this stuff.

Jiko: My mom is Pākehā so yeah that plays out I think as well, so I told her a few, maybe three years ago and she was like "oh okay". She was distressed but she said you know, “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". Like obviously she’s been kind of stressing out about it up 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. So I went over and said, "so mum told you about me being or me being with woman" or whatever, and he’s like "yes", and then I said, "is that okay" and he was like "yes", and that was it.

Participants talked about the gas lighting approach adopted by parents to manipulate their children into not telling family about their queerness or sometimes laying homophobia on the other parent. Some parents believed that it was their child’s choice and all they wanted was for their child to be self-sufficient.

Jiko: I do remember him saying, I think it might have been my mom was talking about how she didn’t want the (ethnic) family to know, my dad's side of the family to know, or she was worried about what they would think and he said like “no, I think you, it's up to Jiko, like it's her choice”. And then there was some kind of supportive words that were said yeah.

Viwe: My grandma, my dad's side is dead, but my grandparents on my mom's side, like it's kind of not, like I have never introduced them to a partner that’s female, and I feel into that point I don’t think it's like that important. But pretty much my family knows at this point and I have never really had any problems at all. I have been very lucky.

Parents showed their support in a number of ways. One parent’s perspective was that they were supportive of their daughter being with a woman as the father did not trust men to look after his child.

Abe: I told my dad because my dad was gone from when I was seven and then we got back in touch when I was 20, and I told him right away coz I was like, I had a lot of contempt for him because he had been away for so long. I was just kind of like, he's gonna accept me for who I am or you can just go back to where you came from… So he was really shocked because I was just like, I just want you to know this is how it is. And he was like, “okay, weirdo”....He makes a lot of jokes about it, which is just my dad, like him make a joke about anything. So yeah, he'll bring it up like more often than I do but I know that he doesn't mind. He actually sat me down once, the only time I’ve seen him drink he sat me down and he was like, "Abe I want you know that I want you to be with a woman”. He was like, “I want you to be with a woman” and I was like, why? and he was like, “I'm never gonna repeat this again. You can't tell anyone I said this but I'm gonna tell you, we are disgusting, we don't deal with our feelings, we never talk about shit, we're secretive”. He was like, “your average man is a piece of shit, your average woman like okay, so I would like, I want you to be with a woman” and I was like, “alright”. So he's fine with it yeah.
Ophu: My dad he doesn't really care. He just want to make sure that I have a good job, like I can afford to support myself. He doesn't care about any actual stuff.

Most participants had siblings who were accepting of their queerness.

Noio: My (ethnic) family are people who are my chosen family and mostly because my mother was who she was, and friends all my aunties and everyone were also queer. I didn’t know this when I was growing up but so for me I felt quite accepted by them.

Minee: Oh no, they are cool my siblings yeah. My sister says to me she can’t imagine she would have been comfortable if I had a long term, male partner.

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, his face just went from this really worried face to this bright smile because he thought, “my baby sister’s not pregnant!” I was 23 or 24.

The support of siblings was a common experience for many of the participants even when parents were not as accepting. This was a great source of strength and relief for the participants. Participants said that the acceptance from their parents was the most wonderful and liberating experience for them.

Peqa: I feel like my mother and my brother would be like "OK cool, we love you, like ok". I think my dad will be the one who would struggle with it quite a bit because it would be me again grinding up on his belief system...he’s conservative. But her (mother) whole thinking over the last couple of years has shifted a lot to "If you’re happy, then I’m happy and I don’t own you". He’s (my brother) been around when my friends have talked about the different partners and that’s my friends who are transwomen, gay, lesbian, non-binary. Yes. So, yeah, he will be easy.

Breci: When I came out of the closet, I thought that my sister would hate me, but then she was really accepting of me and we were crying and it just made, it just took off this huge weight on me and I felt so good. And then there was a time I came out to my dad as well 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 stuff and my dad was like “I love you for who you are but just be yourself” and it's like was the best thing you ever hear. It just feels really liberating and I just hope that everyone can come out like that too I guess.

Jiko: My brother is really surprised, and I think my sister she’s just pragmatic. She’s just like “okay, whatever”.

Woxi: I don’t think (my brother) really cares.

Deo: My younger brother was fine with it.

There was more of a quiet acceptance and understanding from parents who acknowledged in subtle ways the relationships that their children had and thus their queerness.
Hii: Whereas my dad kind of keeps to himself... recently just last weekend he asked about one of ex-girlfriends, and like he asked in a way, he was like, “do white people like...stay friends with you after a relationship or do you become enemies like (nationality) people?”...Yeah, so it was like kind of subtle recognition of like legitimacy of that relationship I guess, and like concern for like, how I'm in relationship with that person.

Sometimes parents and grandparents knew but, according to the participants, they seemed to prefer not to mention it or draw attention to it.

Xylo: So my grandparents don’t know. I was mostly raised by my grandparents, but I'm pretty sure they have like, some idea coz they, you know, they raised me, and in my family there's actually at least five LGBT people, right? So two of my aunts are lesbians. So is my mom, I guess, at this point. My older brother’s gay, and my cousin is also gay...It was amazing. Yeah, It's just easy to talk to, you know, like there's no fear of how they'll react. It's sort of normal to talk about it, like sometimes my aunt sends me like photos of her new girlfriend.

There were certain communities that the participants said were more welcoming of their queerness, for example, the arts.

Woxi: Like in the theatre community, pretty much everybody knows. Because like, I don't hide, I don’t hide away in that community.

Struggling through it

Participants acknowledged that their families especially parents were struggling to cope with queerness among their family members. Parents wanted to maintain relationships with their children and often children believed that their parents still cared about them and thus were willing to give them a chance to show their support.

Yezu: I don't think they really knew what being queer was. And so they kind of at first struggled to understand. You know, like at first thought it was maybe a choice like, you know, you don't have to choose this life, we can choose a different minefield, and then yeah, that changed.

Lema: It's just like your parents, you know, it's their role to become accepting...But the thing is, you know, my parents don't know that...how will they know that if I don't give them a chance. And the thing is they are trying, they don't want to disown me, and they always keep saying that they don't understand it but they keep saying that they love me. And there's a lot of actions that they do not to just show me but, it's very obvious that they still care.

Parents’ self-blame

Some participants said that their parents blamed themselves especially when more than one of the children were queer, or they tried to attribute their fears to something else.

Jiko: My mom struggles with it. She thinks that it's reflection on the way that she brought me and my brother up because we are both queer. And she goes like she has done something wrong and so I think a way of processing it. Plus I think she kind of uses my dad's family,
(ethnic) family as a way of saying, “you know I don't think you should be fully out because I'm worried about what they are thinking”, rather than being accountable and responsible for her own fears around it.

Non-acceptance and denial

Participants said their parents regarded their queerness as a form of rebellion.

Lema: My family, apart from my two cousins and a couple of uncles especially, so all of them...I don't know they are very worried about me that I'm going south and I guess like going haywire, going rogue.

Parents from religious backgrounds often used quotes and interpretations from religious books to reason with their children about what they saw as a lifestyle that went against the religious values with which they had been raised. Having their queerness seen as a problem by the family was quite humiliating for rainbow ethnic young people. For some, it was their own secrecy around their queerness that threatened their relationship with their partner and the partner’s family.

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 but I guess like since like my mum occasionally visits their family or particularly with their mum, it stresses them out. It stresses my then partner... it ended up me not outing myself to mum and then their mum outing me to their mum because she couldn't handle the stress.... My dad wasn't there because he used to work out of town. So, my mum told my dad. My dad broke down in tears. There are other reasons why and then I didn't talk to them for an entire week because there was too much. But 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 bible quotes. And on the day that when we talked, my mum and I sat down at the library, she gave like this solid five minute prayer that, you know, this is a hard time you know I'm going through, bless Lema with your purity and wholeness. And it just made me feel like humiliated and I mean not because someone is hearing it but it was just like this is how my mum is seeing me as like a problem and even now recently yeah.

Fuga: Maybe three months after or maybe six months after my mom revealed to me that she was actually crying every night. She was actually crying every night since she read the letter. She was praying hard to God to make me straight again. And my sister, she became mad at me because my mom was crying. So, she goes, “Oh, you, you're good at making our mom cry”. And she sent me long as messages of hate. And to say quite honest, I hate confrontations and I know that if I reply to them, the confrontation will be harsher, will be more painful. Because I know I know that I can also say a lot of hurtful words. So instead of replying them through words, I reply, and I reply to them through emojis. I can show you the messages, but I just sent them emojis. And then my sister she replies, “you think this is funny? Why are you replying with Emojis? Answer me, answer me!” I didn't answer her.
Efu: I spoke with my mom on a phone, in fact actually she called me and, it was 2014, I was living in Sandringham, but she called me to tell me that I'll go to hell, that's the only thing she wanted to tell me.

Participants said parents were often in denial about their child’s queerness and would ask about their relationships with persons of the opposite sex or inquire about when they would be getting married or having children, and often not referring to or dismissing their relationship with their same sex partner. Parents, the participants said, often made the situation all about them and were more concerned with what their friends and the community would say if they found out their child was gay. Parents sometimes pretended to others that they did not know the personal lives of their queer children rather than admit that they knew that their child was gay or as a way to avoid talking about the subject.

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 rather than, 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 if 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), so I was with my aunts and you know, 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 she is kind of, I can tell she hasn't accepted. ...Well my grandmother I know was very homophobic, so both my mom and dad are from the south in (country), and my dad’s side, my grandmother she is extremely, she is un-accepting. She is (religion) so anything about LGBT community, LGBT people in general she is very unaccepting of it.

Zara: I came out to my parents when they came to visit me in New Zealand. I had come out to my brother. He's seven years older than me. I told my mother and she was in denial, and she told my dad. He was definitely in denial. He still texts me and says things like “when you getting married?” The implication is like I should marry a man. And my mom, she doesn’t even want to go there.

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?

Participants talked about their family seeking assistance through medical professionals, counselling, healers or homeopathy in an attempt to cure their children of homosexuality. Participants said they lied to their parents about their complying with these treatments.

Cedro: Meaning like it was scary and nervous and 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". I told them it didn't work, it will not work, you can't cure, it is not a problem. So I came out like
last year...they said "we thought you will be single, you don't need to get married and everything". But I said other people get married. ...They are so quiet like, it's still for them it's not normal. So they are still grappling of seeing that, okay our child is not normal, and what other people think it's very important...but I have a good relationship with my brother. Hee is very accepting. ...At that time...I was 20 years old if I can remember, so it was complete silence. 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).

Parents seemed ill-informed about gender identity and held their own stereotypes on this.

Abe: I moved out of my mom's house when I was 17, right after I finished high school, and I've never been back. So we didn’t talk for like, six years, until about two years ago. We talked for maybe four or five months or so, like, over conversation ... and that's how I told her. ...And she was just kind of like, "oh yeah I figured that". But then I was talking to my brother after that, and he was like, you know, mom said that I couldn't date this girl that I was interested in coz she’s bi and mom said that I need to stay away from bi women because they don't know what they want and they would sleep with anyone and blah, blah, blah. So she definitely still thinks that way.

Participants said they often played to the images and expectations that their parents had mainly because of their love for the parents and to maintain the relationship, or to keep the harmony and not bring disrepute to the family or be seen as disrespecting the family or the culture. Despite the many signs (chest binders, photographs, accessories) that attested to the child’s queerness, parents opted to deny or ignore these signs.

Breci: I haven’t told (my mum) yet but I know she already knows. It’s just that she’s really sensitive about things. Like she would tries to, how do I say it, like she would try to avoid certain topics, for example, if we’re talking about something about the gay community, she would avoid the topic and she would like introduce a different topic...Like she doesn’t wanna deal with stuff like that. ...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 at first but then I think she kind of understood what I really wanted and stuff. But then when I was in grade school, she 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 was like, I just looked at her. I didn’t say anything and I just paused the talk and then she chucked the bandage away. And then 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...I’m really sure that my mum found out about me and my ex while I was still in the (country) like coz I had a photo of my girlfriend and then I was kissing her cheek. And then coz I was showing this one photo to my mum and she started like scrolling through my gallery I was like, and she just looked at me and that photo for about 5 seconds and I was like “Oops oh yeah ma, I’m gonna like show you something else”. That was really awkward and I just don’t know what to do. I panicked in my head but I tried to be chill.
It was sometimes more difficult for children whose parents, on the surface, seemed to be accepting of the concept and reality of homosexuality and transsexuality but were reluctant to accept it within their own homes. These behaviours often were a barrier to their children developing and building open and honest relationships with those whom they knew their parents would disapprove of or be less than welcoming.

Peqa: 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 think my dad worked at (organization) and everything. 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 like 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". But 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!", yes. But again, no one in my family has ever publicly come out in conversations to me, I suppose. ...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.

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. At times, parents engaged in gender monitoring their children.

Hii: Like my biggest fear was them disowning me which they didn't do, and I feel like since I actually came out they've been, even though they have not accepted it, like they've been kinder to me. But my mom would also do things like put up photos around the house when I'm longer there to remind me that I'm a girl, and like encourage me to be feminine. Yeah she would always have kind of comments about my hairstyle or haircuts. To be honest, her hair is like shorter than mine, that gender policing yeah.. my dad doesn't really do that.

Often participants preferred to remain silent rather than argue with their family. Many knew that it would take a long time for their parents to accept who they were, if they ever did. For the parents, waiting for and expecting their children to become something that they were not was an unrealistic expectation. It could be interpreted from the conversations that, for bisexual children, the pressures were different as parents held on to the hope that their child could still be ‘acceptably’ heterosexual while denying or ignoring their queerness. For bisexual children, the family referred only to their ‘heterosexual side’ and, to preserve the relationship with their parents, participants resolved to present only that side to them. For some participants, it was more about the connection they felt with a person and preferred not to identify with any particular sexual orientation.

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.
Fuga: I officially, officially, officially came out to them by a letter... And in that letter, I thought that I'm a transman. So then I wrote them a letter and then I sent that letter to my mom. I sent that letter first to my mom then to my sister, my older sister. Oh, and then I think their first reaction was silence. They were really silent and I kind of understand why. Because, you know, it's hard for them to like process it. I think they are aware. I think they can feel that I'm not straight. However, hearing it directly from me, hearing the right terms, the right words, the right definition, I think it was hard for them to swallow it or to digest it... And for the first month of me coming out, I truly felt like maybe it's okay.
Part 2 – Advice to ethnic young people, family and community on ‘coming out’ and queerness

Part 2 of the report looks at the advice that rainbow ethnic young people would give to ethnic young people who were deciding whether to reveal their gender identity or sexual orientation. It also discusses 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

Several themes arose from the knowledge shared by the participants on the advice they would give to queer ethnic young people who were thinking about ‘coming out’ or were contemplating the need to do so or the safety of doing it. These themes included:

- Safety first
- You are valid
- It’s your journey – take your own time
- Find your community, find your support
- Recognize the politics of queerness
- Be yourself

The conversations were not always distinctly focused on a particular theme and showed the intertwined reflections of the participants.

Safety first

Safety was the most important consideration for rainbow ethnic young people who were thinking about coming out. Participants did not see speaking their truth as a priority if it was going to result in being rejected, ostracized or abused. Participants 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 did not respond the same.

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.

Abba: Here, I would say, like if they live here, like their families here, like don’t necessarily create extra stress for yourself, but like also don’t isolate yourself, like try and find a happy medium. And I mean, I think everybody should be like out and proud. But understand, the repercussions for me aren’t the same as other people; move away from family, I don’t know if they’re able if they’re not able.
Participants advised rainbow ethnic young people to recognize that a journey was also being taken by the family in coming to terms with their queerness and that it may be difficult for the family to shift from how they were accustomed to seeing their child or family member and the expectations that they may have had for that person.

Minee: *I would just say make sure you are safe. Make sure you have somewhere to go or safe if things don’t go well, because 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 or whoever for eight years for him to get to the point where he can sort of accepting (person) as my partner. But even then, he’s not, but he’s come a long way. Sometimes those conversations take a while.*

For those who were dependent on their family for financial support, their advice to rainbow ethnic young people was to wait until they had their own means of supporting themselves before ‘coming out’.

Kalu: *I mean, for (ethnic) people it's like, there are lots of advice, like just wait and just don't come out until you are financially independent, until you're totally independent.*

Bacce: *Make sure you have, I guess, like a safe person in your life who you trust, who you can tell all those things to. And don’t rush anything. Like you know, when you are ready, when you can support yourself if your parents can't accept you. But there is absolutely like nothing wrong with questioning your identity at all, and just like take your time and know that there are people like you out there and that there's becoming more and more support. You are valid*

Participants agreed that the decision to disclose their sexual identity belonged with queer ethnic young people, and that no matter what they decided to do, their decision was just as valid as the next person’s. It was important, participants said, for rainbow ethnic young people to put their needs first and to prioritize looking after themselves if they wanted to be able to look after their family.

Lema: *Yea, it's worth effort to take (coming out). Whatever their choice, as long as it's their own, it's valid. They are valid, you are valid. If you do wish to come out, make sure that you are in a safe position to do so and know that whatever situation you are in, it takes time to be in the place you want to be and don't rush it. And also boundaries, give yourself good boundaries. That is important...it's ok to assert yourself, what you think is ok for you, and what is not. It's good to talk about. It's ok to put your needs first...Of cause family is important but at the end of the day, how can you support your family if you can't support yourself first?*

Viwe: *I always tell people that they should try and play safe you know, but ultimately it's better to live truthfully in the long run I think. .... If it's truthfully and safely possible, obviously yeah. And in some circumstances, being queer get people killed. So obviously depending on what a person's situation is but provided they are safe and they are not*
worrying about people's opinions, then I would say it's yeah. If it's not safe, then that's a whole other conversation.

Participants advised rainbow ethnic young people that if they chose to come out that it was for their sake and not anyone else. They needed to see the value of coming out for themselves and were comfortable doing so. Participants emphasized that just because a queer ethnic young person was not out it did not make their queerness any less valid and that it was important to find other queer people that they trusted and people who would support them.

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 like 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. Like 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 about there is value in coming out just for the sake of being out. Like when it comes to a point that you need to be out for you, then do it. But don't let like 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.

It's your journey – take your own time

Fuga: They should take their time. No one should pressure them on coming out. It should be a personal conviction, and if they don't feel safe coming out, it's okay. It's ok. They also have to know that even though maybe their family is hostile or maybe their family is homophobic, I want them to know that there's still a lot of people who are loving. There's still a lot of people who are accepting of them.

Efu: I wouldn't advice anyone to come out and I don't we should have to come out. We should just be as any other human on earth where we don't have to come out. I think people should live their lives people don't need to come out but if you get to the point where you are in a space where you feel you need to come out then its up to you. But you shouldn't come out because you need to come out, it's just when you are ready and to your own accord to, yea people need not to come out I don't think.

Efu: Just the same as straight people don't need to come out to say 'I'm straight', but if they are in a space when they are like, 'okay, I need to tell people I'm gay', as long as they are at the time when they feel safe to do so, and they know they would be happy and that would make them happy and protect them, then by all means they can do it. But if they don't feel like doing it, they don't need to. Only when they are ready.

Participants said that it was important to find a community that would support them when they came out if their parents and community did not. It was also important that other queers left it up to the person to let others in.

Zara: Like take your time, it's your decision. Nobody should force you to come out. If you do come out, there is a community of people, you just have to find them. They're not always that visible but there is always a community of people that will support you and things will get better.
Thu: I think when you’re comfortable you will come out and I think it’s more important to be comfortable when you come out than to rush it and feel like you’ll never be comfortable again. And I think if you’ve found a chosen family, it’s easier then to come out to your biological family because if they don’t accept you, then at least you’ll have found a family to fall back on. Like obviously, everyone wants their biological family to accept them but we know that sometimes that doesn’t happen so you don’t want to come out and then be all alone. Yea I think the most important thing is like not come out and then be left all alone because…I don’t think that ends well for anybody.

Deo: I guess people should take their time coming out. I guess there is this whole pressure…nobody should feel pressured to come out. I feel like a lot of the spaces for queer people of colour should in a way also make it safe for people that are not out. And so I would say that like you should only come out when you feel like you have a network of people who will understand.

Deo: I would also say to my fellow queers, don’t out anybody from our own community that is...not ready to come out.

Participants advised rainbow ethnic young people to find those with similar stories to share as others may have had the same experiences or would have gone through what they may be going through and would understand. They urged queer ethnic young people to realize that they are here for a reason and should not change to fit someone else’s image or idea of who they should be.

Viwe: I would say it’s like not a big of a deal is it, as you make of it. It’s so much better to like stand in your truth than to like hide behind things ... and that there's lots of people who have had the same exact experiences and can share stories and are always willing to help because they know what it's like.

Kalu: Just like no need to shame about yourselves. You exist for some reason. You don't have to change yourself to fit into...

Uvea: You are so brave...you are so brave and you are so amazing. If you feel like it's good for you, if it's the best decision for you, do it. If you don't think it is, don't, like no pressure, like just know that whether you're like out and whatever capacity it is or not, I hope you have people to hold you up, to love you and support you throughout that journey.

Participants wanted young people to know that whatever adversity they were facing, things actually did get better. For some participants, though they knew the journey was a difficult one and in which they felt the loss of love from their parents, they believed that at the end of it all, their parents still loved them.

Zara: It's not always good at the start but it will get better.

Woxi: I would say take your time and regardless of how they would react, your parents will still love you. And like it might not feel like it for a long time but regardless, they will probably...I feel like there is no way, they can like...you can say that you hate somebody right, but like there is a difference between hating them and saying you hate them. 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.

Find your community, find your support

One of the participants said that rainbow ethnic young people should think about what home meant to them when deciding whether to disclose their queerness. If home was a physical space that provided shelter or a feeling of belonging, then it was for the person to decide whether they were willing to lose this if coming out posed such a risk. Participants advised that there were more welcoming and open arms than were anticipated if rainbow ethnic young people did decide to come out and that they were not alone, but they also needed to be open to having those people coming to them and connecting with them.

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. 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 like 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? I know this sounds hypocritical because I haven't pronounced to the world that I'm queer but I think that in the ways that I do move is pretty, pretty like "what's up?" So, yeah, I would say, yeah, just really think about what those things mean to you for you and no one else.

They also advised caution in trusting white queers.

Abe: Find other queer people because a lot of us like have shitty relationships with other young queers. It's like you find a bunch of other queer brown people and they will take care of you and yeah. And not to trust white gays...white queer people just because they are queer.

Participants acknowledged that more support is needed for queer ethnic young people but said there were informal networks where they could find community. It was up to them to find that community although they realized this would be much harder for some than others. It was important though to speak with someone, either a counsellor, a therapist or a friend, and to focus on those that supported and loved them. It was reiterated by the participants that rainbow ethnic young people should not rush the process of coming out; if and when it happened, it needed to be on their terms and at their own time.
Jiko: I guess there is community out there even if it's not kind of formalized. There's lots of us out here and there is support but...I think that there does need to be more yeah.

Cedro: Yea finding 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.

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.

Breci: Be prepared coz...you can’t please everyone. Sometimes some people will hate you, some people will judge you for who you are...but there are many people who will care about you and will love you. So don’t listen to the ones that hate you, just care about the people who care about you and care about yourself.

Recognize the politics of queerness

It was important that rainbow ethnic young people recognized the politics of queerness so that they were not co-opted into a mainstream approach to queerness that ignored the inequalities that existed in the queer space.

Yezu: I think I would wanna tell young people who are starting to think about queerness and what queerness means... . It's not just about queerness, it's part of like a bigger political struggle, and to frame queerness in that way because otherwise you end up with like, the queer people who support the kind of PRIDE parade through the corporations. And like all of that crap who would support the police at the PRIDE parades because they are able to separate queerness from like issues about colonization, capitalism... . Coz then you just end up with like liberated rich, white queers and then the rest of us will still be exploited, suffering all of that, yeah. I think it's so important to help young people frame queerness in a way that situates it within those broader struggles.

Be yourself

Participants said it was important to know and understand who they were before they were able to share that with anyone else.

Guhe: I would say like, don't see outside, see inside to know who you are, to really being supportive to yourself, and then you will find a way to tell people who you are. That's what I think. You need to see yourself first.

Ophu: Stay true to yourself coz it’s harder to pretend to be someone that you’re not than it is to be just who you are, just hard out.

Some participants, however, warned of the mental ill health and anguish that might result from having to hide one’s identity and not being able to live one’s true self.
Xylo: *I think it's something that they should embrace as soon as they can. There's a lot of mental problems that comes with, you know, being uncomfortable. I mean, I've experienced that myself, just having to hide yourself or not knowing where you stand as it affects all areas of your life like, and so yeah, they can try to reach out, you know, look for people who would understand. If their families don't, I'm sure other people would understand. There's always gonna be people, you know, I've just been really fortunate that I didn't have to look for those people. Yeah. I mean, there's nothing wrong with their queerness anyway.*

Participants wanted rainbow ethnic young people 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 colour 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: *Every single community that you belong to, every single space has to reflect every part of you because you are so bigger than all of it...what is so amazing about being queer and about being of colour or whatever, it's that you are way bigger than these spaces that are created for you and you need to think of yourself as that rather than having to stretch yourself off. Get whatever you need from whatever space you are in, whatever way. Don't think if something doesn't match entirely what I think and believe in, that somehow you are wrong.*
Advice to Community on their ethnic young people coming out

Most of the participants had several communities to which they belonged. Many had managed to find communities that were supportive and embracing of their queerness or were part of communities where members were queer. Many did not disclose their queerness to their ethnic communities as they feared the stigmatization and criticisms of what the community saw as a rejection of cultural values and behaviours.

The themes reflect what the participants believed the community, particularly the ethnic communities, needed to do to support their queer community members. These include:

- Uplift, support, listen
- Reflect on your beliefs and behaviours
- See the harm

Uplift, support, listen

Participants’ advice to communities was to embrace their queer members - that it was not good enough simply to tolerate members who were queer. Celebrating who they were as people gave them a sense of belonging in that community. It was also important for communities to just listen without needing to offer solutions, assistance or advice.

Yezu: I guess to find ways of uplifting their queer members and not just, “you are queer”, but like ways of celebrating the queerness that give people a sense belonging, re-affirms them in that community.

Lema: Listen to one another and be more open minded, and respect the others as you would. Love your neighbour as you would love yourself.

Abba: Celebrate everyone's differences, I would say. Because I mean, that's the world, but listen. And I mean, I feel a lot of people don't really need to like be told...like they just need like a sounding board, like they need to literally just say what they're thinking out loud before they truly hear it themselves. Like you don't have to say anything back. Just listen.

Zara: It's the same thing I would tell them (the community). Everyone is acceptable and everyone has a part to play. But I don't think they will want to listen to me.

Cedro: We are not different. We are people. Dis-communication is not solution, you need to hear us. Inclusion is very important.

Reflect on your beliefs and behaviours

Participants said that communities needed to acknowledge the homophobia that their members faced and their own contribution to that through their attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and silence. Communities, they said, needed to see the discrimination that queer ethnic young people were confronted with and that they would need a community to which they could turn. Some participants were not eager to forgive their community’s homophobic behaviours but they were willing to have a conversation with them. Participants said that some ethnic communities faced other types of
oppression and discrimination and should realize how difficult it was dealing with that. They acknowledged that the communities’ and parents’ responses were their way of protecting them from harm, but they saw that as further entrenching a belief and value system that excluded them.

Fuga: First of all, 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, all communities, the LGBT community, have been oppressed, discriminated or whatever 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 have a calm, collected approach because I understand that a lot of us are infuriate, a lot of us are angry, mad, hurt from all the discrimination, all the oppression that we've experienced. But we also have to deliver our message in a firm, non-negotiable way. But at the same time, a kind of approach that is also willing to listen and willing to have a conversation. I’m not saying that we have to forgive them easily, what I'm saying is we have to have a conversation. And then from that conversation, you shouldn't let that conversation end as a conversation alone. But we should come up with solutions. Conversations with intentions. Conversations with solutions. Not just conversations.

Thu: I think yea, it’s harder for a full community to understand. I don’t know why. I think because you have so many thoughts in a community, and so many ideas and everyone thinks they are right. A person is just a person at the end of the day regardless of like their sexual orientation or whatever. You have to just allow them to be there and allow them to be recognized as well. That’s all that anybody wants.

Uvea: We are here for a reason so let us work together.

Participants wanted communities to know that there were many different aspects to peoples’ lives and that a person’s sexuality or gender was only one part of the wonderful, whole person that they were.

Bacce: I would say, be respectful and non-judgmental you know. There's no like one clear cut, pigeon-hole way of existing. We are all different, and just like we are all different but all kind of fundamentally the same. So like if you focus on the differences, then you are not really gonna get anywhere so it's just like accept, you know, accept one another. And embrace difference coz I think it's a wonderful thing, and sexuality or gender or whatever, it's just like one part of who a person is.

Xylo: Be respectful, like the way you wanna be treated, right. Golden Rule is the same thing. Don't talk shit, people won’t talk shit, yeah. Respect and keep your hands to yourself, especially if they're not wanted, you know. It’s really is as simple as that. And I don’t get the type of people who try to impose their own expectations of how things ought to be, you know. I think people should learn to accept that everyone's different and that we should respect each other because of that, you know, basic respect.
Participants said that the wider community needed to stop the narratives of blame placed on the LGBTQIA+ community for adverse events and situations that occurred, for example, attributing the spread of the HIV virus to the LGBTQIA+ community. The media, by reporting these stories, enabled people to buy into these narratives and consequently act hostilely towards them.

Guhe: I mean, how hard it is for them to understand what's going but at least don't try to judge people or just put some comment, like before you see the real person, who they are, yeah. And is unfair if you judge those people without knowing actual like, what exactly who they are. I think it's ridiculous like, they would just feel like “ewww, you are so yuck” and things like that. That's not right. I'm still the one you know? I don't change right? And the other thing is really important but in our social, not really social media but in the media, they always blame homosexual people, they are the main problem for carrying HIV. That's wrong, that's why they hate gay people. They think they just, you know, they spread virus in the society. It's unfair to lesbians to be honest. I mean but at least like, all the gay friend I know they don't have the problem like this right, and it's really important the media try to be more fair to us. Don't try to misleading people to something wrong, then the society will be more friendly to us. Yeah I think media is really important.

Participants said communities should take a look at themselves and how they were judging and discriminating against queer community members and whether they would have wanted to be treated in a similarly discriminating manner.

Woxi: I would say like, you know, it's all well and good if you want to live in your tradition and to live in whatever you deem is culture and whatever you deem is necessary. Great. But when what you deem is necessary is making people like they can't exist, or like they can't like live in a community and feel like they are part of that community, you need to think like what you are doing because you won't wanna be in that position. You wouldn't want something that you can't change about yourself to be a reason that people are discriminating against you, so why would you do that to somebody else? Just like take a moment have a cup of tea and think about it. Does it really affect you?

Participants’ advice to communities was for them to think about why they believed what they did, why they felt uncomfortable about queerness and forms of love that were different to what they had been taught, and what made them unaccepting of others who were different. Participants said it was recognizing that queer people love and want to love just like anyone else.

Abba: Try to get them to understand like, it's not a crime. It's...just like another form of love, I guess... . And I guess I'm not even sure, like, why most people have a problem with it. Like, really? They say like, “oh, it makes me uncomfortable”. Well, why does it make you uncomfortable? Like just because it's different or it's unusual or like, do you actually physically hate seeing these people act this way? And kind of like unpack that, and like put pressure on them to like - what makes them unaccepting of it? Like, what don't they like about it and why? And then kind of go from there, because I think a lot of people are just like, lack of experience, like they just don't know. So they just assumed like, “oh, that's weird, that's like this or the other”. But it's like, no, like queer people love just like you. Like we have relationships with our families. We have kids. Like, it's not like, find the
commonalities I guess, and try and relate that to heteronormativity or whatever it is that their family members practice, their community practice.

Participants wanted to advise those communities who used religion to denounce homosexuality and ostracize queer members that this should not be their only source of reference and information. They needed to educate themselves on the patriarchal and racial agenda of those who interpreted religious books. The participants wanted communities to educate themselves more widely on the histories of their societies prior to civilization and religion, and on sexualities, gender, religion etc so that they could see how much more accepting their culture was then than it is now. If parents only coping strategy to try and understand their children’s queerness was to rely on a holy book, then that was what they would use. Parents needed to know that there were other coping strategies available.

Fuga: First of all, they need to understand that the Bible is not the authority, the sole authority, or they need to understand that not everyone in our community believes the Bible and they shouldn’t impose that way. The (ethnic) community is very much diverse when it comes to religious beliefs. I don’t care if majority of the (ethnic) community here is (religion). However, 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. If they don't understand LGBT, they should just watch a tutorial on YouTube, whatever. But what I'm trying to say is, they shouldn't just expect us to spoon feed them. And the point in our history, at a certain point in our time right now, they can't just expect queer people to be calm. They should educate themselves on SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity education) if they're not comfortable hearing or reading cases of abuse, cases of queer people being killed by their people.

Ophu: So there needs to be some education to the communities as to know their actions are impacting these young kids or the youth mentally, and it can lead them to do XYZ. That can impact how they grow up and their mental state so there should be a lot of education to the communities on people that identify as queer or whatever it may be.

Participants advised communities to place their own discriminatory practices in relation to the discrimination they themselves may be facing in society. They warned that the culture that they were steadfastly trying to embrace was not theirs but a legacy of colonization.

Efu: I guess having a conversation that would come from all the community leaders saying "hey we do have members within ourselves and they are part of us, they are humans"...coz within us (ethnic), we have faced struggle around racism, and then maybe coming from the
angle of racism and why it's a bad thing, and then link it with homophobia. That's no difference, it's discriminating somebody for whom they are and denying them the rights.

Peqa:  Fuck you. No, truly. I would say the culture that you're so intent on upholding is not actually our culture. I would say, please stop talking about people that are promiscuous, or young people that are smoking weed, and start calling out the actual problems in our community, which is our ignorance towards mental health, our ignorance towards the queer community, our ignorance towards people who were abusers and predators. I would say it's high time that we started holistically thinking about our community, because our community isn't just straight and Christian or Muslim. I'm just saying get over yourselves as well.

Hiï: I think they need to hear it from religious leaders. I think that's where homophobia comes from.... The (ethnic political party) have these like narratives where it's un-(ethnic) to be LGBT or unsocialist to be LGBT and associate with like the bourgeois, the western capitalism... . Maybe this sense of maintaining...that reproduction is only legitimate through the institution of heterosexual marriage.

Participants warned communities that their members would go underground or leave their communities to seek support and shelter, and this may further endanger them as they seek comfort or a place to belong.

Rossi: I would say to put aside your cultural definitions of gender and sexuality and put your pride aside. 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. Put like make a group, a support group within your community where people can go if, say, their family is asking them (to leave). Where can they go? 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.

See the harm

Participants were critical of what they described as ‘migrant elite communities and organizations’ that held conservative views on LGBTQIA+ communities that were harmful to queer youth. They said that these migrant communities and organizations should be creating safe spaces for queer ethnic young people within the community instead of trying to mirror the status’ achieving behaviours of the dominant society. They believed that the rich, male-dominated sector within their migrant society was perpetuating the harm and discrimination that existed in their original countries. Greater recognition of the harm that their actions and behaviours were causing was needed.

Deo: I do take an issue with, what I call them, migrant elite communities and like organizations which tend to be more male-dominated and kind of more like, conservative. To these, I would kinda say that they are actively harming our queer youth by entrenching
all those things...I would just kind of say that they should respect the need and should encourage the creation of spaces for queer people from within that community to exist. And to like actively support it, rather than to actively oppose it. But I do think there is a sector of minor community, and I can see from other migrant communities where it is like a very money rich, male-dominated, traditional. And those groups, I would say they are actively harming our youth. And I think it's across the spectrum, not just people of color but within our communities here in New Zealand. There is a sector of our own communities that is perpetuating all that harm that we face in our own countries. And to those I would say to re-evaluate how they are operating.

Given the rejection and constant criticism of queerness by their communities, it was not uncommon for many participants to want to tell communities who were not accepting of queer members to “fuck off.”

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. So you can go over there with that.
Advice to Family on their rainbow ethnic young people

Queer ethnic young people saw their decision not to disclose or talk about their gender identity or sexual orientation in terms of the sacrifices they made for the sake of their family and community. They did not see this as a weakness or hiding behind a veil of secrecy. Their relationship with their family and community were strong and often were the only relationships they had. They were not going to risk severing those relationships particularly if their relationships with the wider New Zealand society were impacted by racism and discrimination.

The themes drawn from this section include:
- Choice to maintain or break relationships
- Western influences
- Unconditional acceptance
- Re-learnings and educating
- We love you. Do you still love us?

Choice to maintain or break relationships

Participants’ plea to families was 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. For some participants, it went beyond queerness to the overall judgmental approach that some cultures seemed to have with respect to the achievements of their children.

Yezu: I don’t really know. I mean, 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 like recognize the damage that's happening?

Zara: I don't think it's always related to being queer, like for example, a lot of (ethnic) families, the kids have to be model students. They have to be a doctor or lawyer or something and if they fail, they criticize them for it. So when you say are they aware of the impact that they doing, it's no more than any of the other things that they criticize them for doing.

Western influences

Participants wanted their families to be better informed on what they believed to be the traditional cultural practices and beliefs of heterosexuality when in fact they were colonial values imposed on their societies. Traditional practices and values they said, varied far from and were more inclusive than those they currently held. Parents’ concept of gender as binary was a western concept but this was not how gender was viewed by many traditional ethnic and non-western societies prior to colonization and the introduction of religion.

Yezu: When I think about traditional, like, conservative (ethnic) beliefs on sexuality, so often I wanna give them like a lecture on colonization, how even these beliefs you associate
with traditional (ethnic) beliefs aren't traditional. They don't come from us, they totally imported colonial perspective that you just absorbed. And then in almost every culture apart from western culture, that it's like being a normal thing right. Like there's always been room for three if not more genders. There's always been room for like fluidity and sexuality and that's the same for like pre-colonial (ethnic). You just have to look at like the art to realize.

Jiko: I would want them to kind of take back their own understandings of gender, not kind of western understandings that have been pushed on us...I would just wanna have conversations with them.

Unconditional acceptance

Participants’ advice to parents was to show unconditional acceptance of their child’s queerness, and to avoid pressuring their children to act, dress, or present in a way that conformed to their own or their community’s expectations.

Abba: Be more open because like, people are going to be who they are. And if you want to live authentically, know your child, niece, nephew, cousin that you care and love about, and want them to be their best self and put their best foot forward and bring their best self to the world. So I feel like if they're putting pressure on them, like, oh, don't act this way or don't do that, that's not who they are. I think loving someone is accepting, fully accepting it, whether you agree with it or not.

Families needed to know that their queer children needed 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 colour face within queer spaces so that they see that it's having a support from family first is foundation, they understand it's important.

Cedro: Support the children depending on what interests are, who they are embrace, who they are...Love your children for who they are...in gender identity or sexual identity that's who they are, and they are not based on culture, yea it's everywhere in every country.

Viwe: I think that people are people regardless of their sexuality. Nothing's changed between yesterday and today. If you find out someone's gay, they are still the same person. I think like we get so caught up in like, being queer, being gay as being such huge (thing) when really it's only a tiny, tiny, tiny part of someone’s whole, you know? And it's like even when I do interviews and people wanna talk to me about being a queer (artist), it's like yes, but I'm not talking about it 24/7 coz I like literally have important things on my mind, like things that I'm fighting for. Being queer is like, yes it's a part of who I am but it's not all of who I am. It's only a tiny, it's like a part of all of it. So I think that like for whatever reasons, it seems to be such a huge deal. So yeah, I don't know what I would say to those families. I think like acceptance and diversity is like so good for the world.
Participants warned that parents risked permanently losing the relationships with their children if they chose not to accept their children’s queerness. This was not something that the participants wanted as family meant everything to them.

Kalu: Cherish your life, cherish each other’s lives because life is only once. Because everything becomes different. When my dad passed away, so his life is like, he totally didn't do anything... My dad, like, because he cared too much about other people but he neglect the important people... And then he got cancer and he just died. And it's like, his life is like no true friends…. I don't want to live like that I know. And it's like life is so short and you never know what will happen tomorrow.

Zara: There is nothing wrong with them (your children). Accept them for who they are because you only have limited time with them.

Participants wanted to ask parents how they would feel if they were denied the opportunity to love or to be with the person that they loved. They had not expected that parents would remove their children from the home for loving someone. Some reasoned that many straight relationships were worse than queer relationships and they should be concerned with rectifying their own relationships before trying to find fault with the relationships that others had.

Abe: For straight people to understand when they are dealing with queer people is that like there is no difference between us in the way that we are attracted to people and the way that you are attracted to your people, like there's just no difference. And like so many of us know we are queer from like a really, really young age but I guess it does really make you feel like someone doesn't understand you at all and doesn't understand your queerness. And there is obvious stuff...like not kicking that person out of the house because of their sexuality.

Abe: So just let us be. We are not gonna hurt you. You know, straight relationships are way worse than queer ones. They're always like sleeping with each other partners, they are obsessed with monogamy and marriage...And it's like you guys have enough problems on your own just worry about yourselves, don't worry about us.

Participants wanted to advise parents that it was not important that they understood queer identity as they themselves had difficulty understanding it. The important thing, participants said, was for parents to support their children and love them unconditionally as the child did not choose their parents.

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.

Uvea: Do your job as a parent and love your child. You don’t choose your parent.

Participants said that parents 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. Participants believed that religion, politics or world views should not get in the way of family and that family should always come first.

Bacce: I feel myself as well like, only have children if you are willing to accept them for however they are, however they turn out. And I think like, for a lot of families now, it's like you have these expectations of their children and you put them under a lot of pressure and you kind of expect them to be a certain way. Like yes, you can make sure that the environment is perfect but how they are as individuals...they aren't the only ones. It's like a lot of that is beyond your control and I think just like trying to change that will do more harm than good you know? So I think just being compassionate and being supportive and like giving unconditional love is always the best thing that you can do. Because like if they are queer, whatever, they already gonna be facing a lot of confusion and other obstacles and to have like their safe person or more safety net also pass judgment, it's just like the worst thing.

Xylo: Love them as family. It's as simple as that. They're your brothers or they're your sisters. They're your near family, you know, their children. Like, that's all it really needs to be. For me, there's no need to complicate it with other things. I always find it sad when politics or worldviews get in the way of family. I think family is the most important thing in the world.

Participants wanted to tell parents that even if they could not accept their children’s queerness, they should not push them away. 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; that even though they may have a queer community or some friends, the love, support and understanding of their family mattered most to them. The participants said that if parents loved them before they knew they were queer, they could still love them after they found out because they were the same person and that nothing had changed except the parents’ knowledge of their queerness.

Guhe: I know it’s hard for them to accept us but at least don't push them away...they don't change, they are still the one you love. They are not doing anything harmful to the society. They just love people who they have feeling with and that's all, nothing wrong with it. So...try to just like understand it...I would much appreciate with that coz it's really lonely that you fight alone in this world for yourself. If you love someone important to you..(and you have someone) to support you to fight with someone else outside, it would be amazing.

Woxi: Just like, don't treat them any differently because that will ostracize them and make them feel like they're doing something bad, you know? And like nobody's bad. Just like love them. It's like, 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 being changed. Only your perception of being changed. And that's a huge thing.

**Re-learnings and educating**

Education and educating families about gender diversity and sexuality in different languages and in ways ethnic communities could understand was essential in supporting those that wanted to
understand more. Participants said there were insufficient resources appropriate to the needs of certain communities.

Deo: First generation immigrant parents, for example, just don’t have access to the resources to help them understand issues of gender diversity, issues of sexuality in their own language. And so if I would say to them, like, read more about the issue or try to show understanding. There also needs to be resources for these family members in a cultural appropriate way that would help them understand who this family member is and their identity. I also want...genuine resources for family members to learn about those issues. So I kind of feel like...just be more accepting... I can just tell them you know, harden up and accept your kids for who they are or whatever, yeah. But you know, I would at least tell them, if they can’t accept, then to at least like just show support.

Jiko: I think it would be really good if there could be spaces within those ethnic communities that provided kind of education and awareness in a way that was culturally based and not white-centric.

Communicating with one another was necessary if issues around sexuality and identity were to be addressed. Participants wanted to tell parents who felt guilty about their children’s queerness not to blame themselves or to believe that they did not educate their children in the right way as there was nothing wrong with queerness.

Rossi: Educate yourself. People are afraid of doing the work in any context. Each family is different, and each family has different levels of communication. Some families do not talk about things at all and that is a problem. So that’s the root of this - is just the lack of communication.

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.

We love you. Do you still love us?

Participants wanted their families to know that they loved and cared about them despite the families’ rejecting them because of their sexuality. They said that although their love was not reciprocated, they wanted parents to know that being gay did not stop them from doing their best to be successful and to be the best person that they could be.

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.
Discussion

The findings from this study reveal the considerations undertaken by rainbow ethnic young people when deciding to let people into their lives and with whom they wish to share knowledge of their gender orientation and sexual identity. While western literature focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to queer identity, queer ethnic young people in this research say that this is only a part of who they are, although they are aware that it is what impacts them the most at times in terms of their relationships with family and community. The prominence given to their queerness by family and community detracts from the many other areas of their lives such as being a sister, brother, dancer, researcher, daughter, child, friend, or partner. Many of the queer ethnic young people in this study have used their agency to find secure spaces to be though they lament that these spaces are few, very small and hard to find. 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. 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 youth. Coming out should not be seen as a compulsory, obligatory or universal act but must be determined by the individual’s circumstances including what they feel they may lose or are willing to give up.

Acceptance and unconditional love by parents are essential factors to having a healthy gender variant child and adolescent (Hill, Menvielle, Sica & Johnson 2010). Queer adolescents have to cope, not only with the developmental changes of adolescence but with the conflicting feelings they may have around their sexual identity. Educating and supporting parents and community to understand their queer young people help the young person to explore their gender in a safe environment. Parents can help their children learn how to deal with harassment of their gender, and can themselves avoid enforcing gender stereotypes that could lead to young people feeling shame and experiencing low self-esteem. Parents and communities should be encouraged to advocate for their young people and to resolve whatever shame and discomfort they themselves may be feeling so that they and ultimately those around them could be encouraged to be more supportive of the gender diverse or queer young person. A supportive and loving environment can reduce the level of dysfunction in interactions that family, peers and community have with queer young people. Parents should be supported to accept their children’s sexual identity and gender orientation rather than waiting and hoping for their children to ‘become’ heterosexual.

For some participants, ‘staying in’ to protect the reputation of their family and/or to maintain cultural traditions appears to be more of a priority than disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity which, they believe, may sever the ties that they have with their family. Though they may want understanding and acceptance of their queerness, for many, kinship and loyalty take precedence. 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 under a given set of circumstances. This may appear to western and mainstream society or the LGBTQIA+ community that queer ethnic young people were not living their ‘true selves’ or that they were afraid of the consequences and thus choosing to remain ‘closeted’. This perspective denies the agency that queer ethnic young people have in the decisions that they make and in the choices that they take. Queer ethnic 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. For those living in communal societies, these relationships take precedence over their desire to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity which they may not see as the main or primary aspect of who they are. This does not mean that they deny their sexual orientation or gender identity. They may simply feel that the preservation of familial relationships is more important. The strength of this 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.

**Recommendations**

These recommendations are based on the findings related to the issue of letting in and closing out for rainbow/queer ethnic young people. They may not cover all recommendations that could be drawn from the findings. The recommendations include holding workshops for ethnic families and communities through places of worship, ethnic community organizations, and ethnic events to discuss and present issues pertinent to rainbow ethnic young persons, and to provide education on LGBTQIA+ communities. It is also recommended that a queer ethnic person/s is employed (in an organization like Office of Ethnic Communities or similar) with specific responsibility for identifying and addressing the needs of rainbow ethnic young people through liaising and working with relevant stakeholders and communities. There is also a need for accessible, safe and secure emergency housing options that are both queer-friendly and culturally responsive, and to have available translations and culturally specific resources on LGBTQIA+ issues and concepts. It is also crucial that specialized support services and programmes for queer and trans ethnic young people and LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and refugees are established.

It is recommended that there is an avenue for queer ethnic young people to share their ‘letting in/closing out’ stories which could be made available to the rainbow ethnic communities and to the wider communities; and for a confidential online forum to be set up where rainbow ethnic youth can ask questions and provide perspectives on their journey, expectations, decisions and anything else that they may be experiencing, with or without that necessarily being related to their gender identity or sexual orientation.
References


StatsNZ 2018 Census ethnic group summaries | Stats NZ.


