

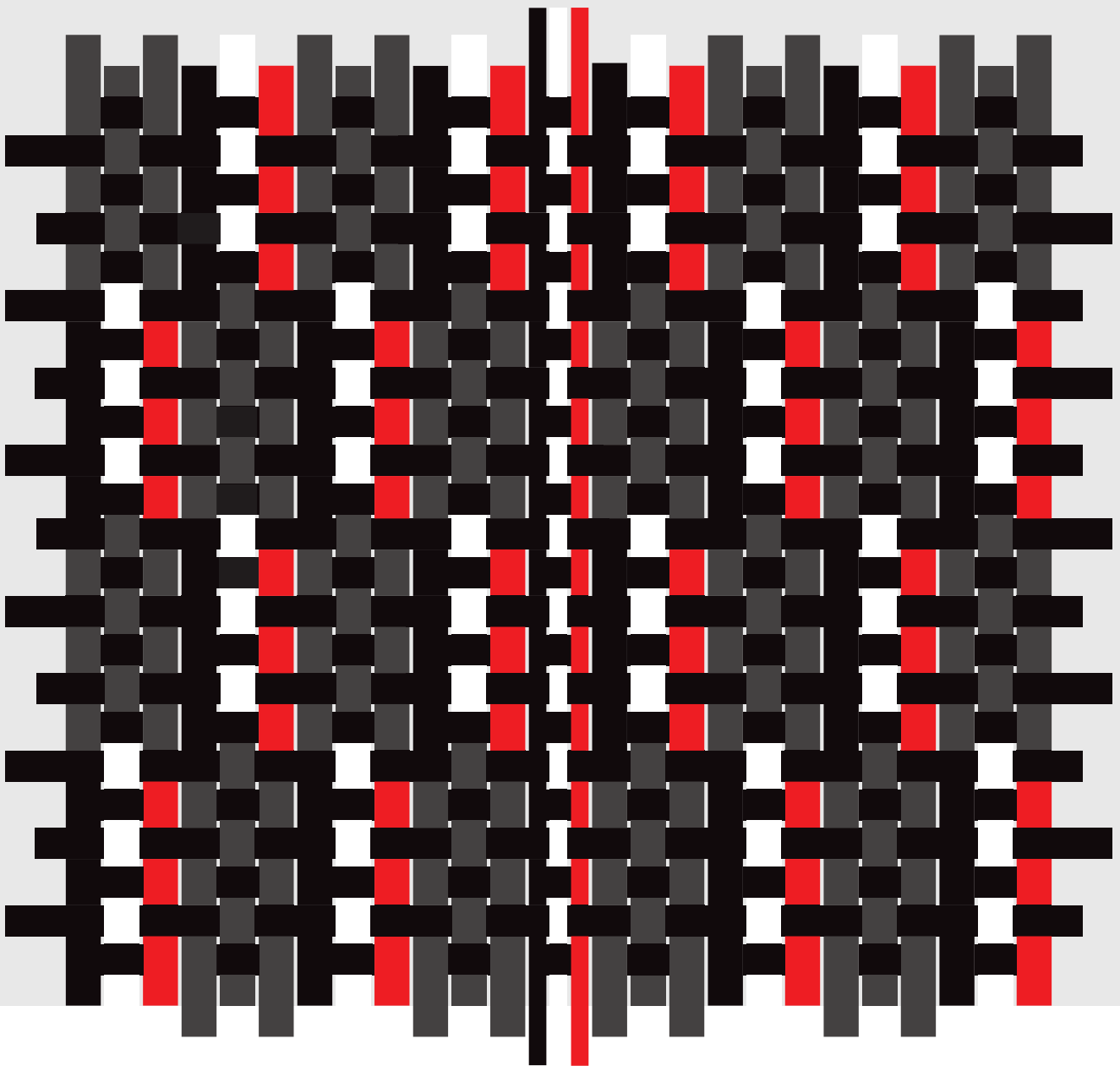
# Kaiparahuarahi

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 3 NOVEMBER 2024

## Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality

PART 1 OF 6

**Tāngata Whenua perspectives**



# Kaiparahuarahi

**Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality.**  
Tāngata Whenua perspectives

**Edited by Tyler Ngatai, Kahukura Ritchie and Rod Baxter**

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# Contents

4	<b>Editorial</b> Kahukura Ritchie, Tyler Ngatai and Rod Baxter	17	<b>Embracing Identity in Youth Work: A Journey of Empowerment and Understanding</b> Amanda Smith
6	<b>Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work</b> Tyler Ngatai and Kath Harrison	20	<b>Kotahitanga i te Rereketanga – Unity in Diversity</b> Matt and Rachel Renata
14	<b>The Impact of Identity on Influencing Young People: Embracing Uniqueness and Navigating Challenges from a Te Ao Māori perspective</b> Atarau Hamilton		

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## Dedication

Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherewhero VII, naau teenei huarahi i para, maa maatou e whai kia tuutaki i te kotahitanga mo te aao katoa. Moe mai raa me te moohiotanga ka kawe tonu to iwi Māori i to whakakitenga o te kotahitanga, ka arahi tonu to maatou Arikinui Kuini Nga wai hono i te pō Pootatau Te Wherowhero VIII i a maatou i too ngarohanga. E te Kiingi o te Kotahitanga, Paimaarire.

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# Editorial

*‘Kotahi te koohao o te  
ngira e kuhuna ai te  
miro maa, te miro pango,  
te miro whero.’*

(Pootatau Te Wherewhero)

**E rau rangatira mā, nau mai ki tēnei  
kohinga mātauranga e pā ana ki tēnei  
kaupapa o te kotahitanga.**

**In this very special edition of  
Kaiparahuarahi, we explore this idea  
of intersectionality, and what that  
means for Youth Work in Aotearoa,  
with an intersecting focus on what  
intersectionality means from a  
Tāngata Whenua perspective.**

**This is the first of six mini editions which will explore  
six of the many sectors of Youth Work. However, through  
the work of this collective of contributors you will see  
a natural intersection of various other youth identities  
and communities.**

Youth Work is such a broad profession woven together by one overarching commonality: young people, all of whom come from diverse backgrounds. Such diversity means that, despite the sector of Youth Work we primarily work within, be it faith-based, Pacific, Māori, Rainbow, immigrant or refugee, or many other communities, many of the young people we work with may belong to several communities.

The hope then, is that as these editions of *Kaiparahuarahi* are released, they will provide the foundational information for anyone working with young people from within these communities, provided first-hand by experienced youth workers within each sector.

Last year Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherewhero te Tuawhiti enacted Te Paki o Matariki, from which followed the Hui aa Motu where Tāngata Whenua and Tāngata Tiriti from across the country came together to wānanga about kotahitanga as a response to the current Government's divisive attacks against Tāngata Whenua. This collective response inspired us to think about kotahitanga as the framework to understanding what we hope for when working with intersectional consciousness.

We are living in a world where division is used as a tool to marginalise the vulnerable and empower the privileged. Young people have often been used as a tool to create division, gain power and misdirect people from focusing on the underlying issues within our society. We saw this in the most recent election with a huge focus on youth crime, rather than the underlying issues of poverty, failing education systems, disconnection from community through individualisation, systemic racism, and the list goes on...

As youth workers, we have the opportunity to influence young people with minimal obligation to those systems - therefore we have the potential to create kotahitanga for the young people we work with. With that in mind, it is crucial that we understand the vast ecosystem that is our sector. Our hope is that these mini editions focused on intersectionality can provide a grounding understanding of Youth Work in its many layers, so that we as youth workers can work towards kotahitanga.

It is our belief that kotahitanga should be the foundational aspiration for intersectionality, something we should be striving for within Aotearoa. As a sector, it is vital for our mahi.

Ngā mihi nui,

**Kahu Ritchie, Tyler Ngatai and Rod Baxter**  
November 2024



# Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work

Tyler Ngatai and Kath Harrison

Whakataukī

*He waka kōtuia kāhore a tukutukua ngā mimira.*

*A canoe that is interlaced will not become separated  
at the bow – in unity there is strength.*

(National Iwi Chairs Forum, n.d.)

He mokopuna ahau ō Ngati Ruanui,  
Ngati Porou me Ngai Tahu  
Nō Kotirana me Airangi ōku tīpuna  
Nō te hapu ō Araukuku Tuwhakairiora  
Arowhenua Awarua hoki  
Ko Tyler Ngatai tōku ingoa.

Ko Airihi oku tipuna me ko Tangata Tiriti ahau  
Ko Liverpool toku kainga tūturu me no  
Ōtautahi toku kainga inaianei  
Ko kaiako tauwhiro toku mahi  
Ko Kath Harrison toku ingoa.

‘Intersectionality’ is one of those buzz words that’s having a moment right now, but it’s a term that’s been around for 35 years and has a whole lot of history and literature behind it. So what does this term mean to us here in Aotearoa and how is it relevant to Youth Work? We’ll explore this, as well as the concept of ‘kotahitanga’ – a potential reframing of ‘power’ as an unconditional force available within communities, rather than a resource that’s selectively accessible from external sources.

The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, American civil rights academic, who pointed out that “because of their intersectional identity as both women and of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of colour are marginalised within both” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1244). Crenshaw used this example to highlight “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1245).

Rather than creating exclusion and marginalisation as many believed, Crenshaw saw the exploration of difference as “the source of social empowerment and reconstruction” and that “ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). Similarly, as symbolised in our opening whakataukī, the waka provides a metaphor for ‘kotahitanga’, acknowledging and weaving together diverse peoples to create “co-operative co-existence” (Chant, 2011), unity and strength (Iwi Chairs Forum, n.d.), and promote the common good (He Puna Mātauranga o Te Tiriti, 2006).

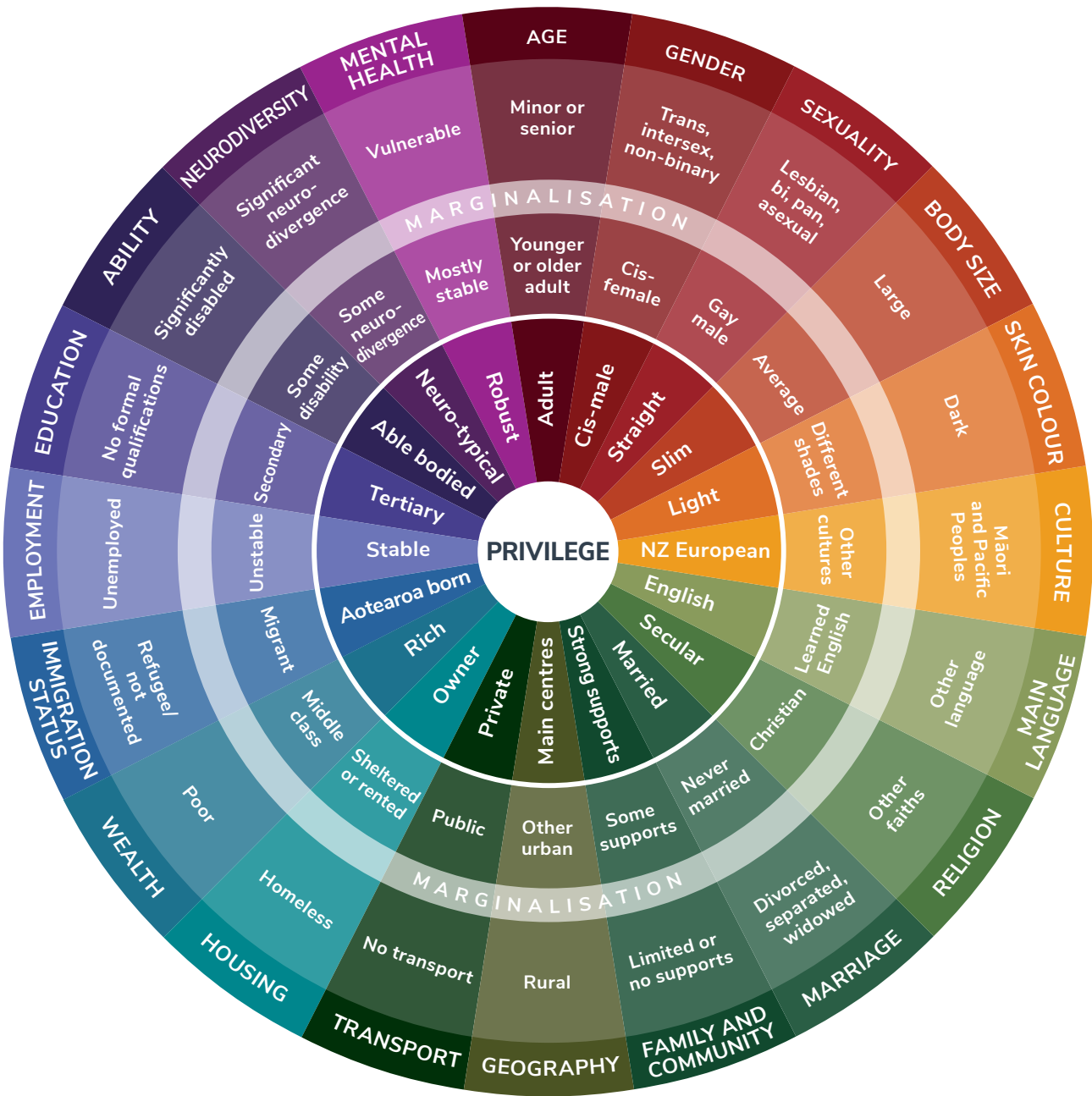
*‘Diversity’ can be understood in terms of any number of identity categories, and ‘kotahitanga’ in the coming together of different identity groups, such as the collaboration of Tāngata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti in the writing of this article. Intersectionality, however, recognises identities as cumulative and intersecting with power structures, leading to diverse experiences of privilege and oppression within identity groups. To effectively embody ‘kotahitanga’ then, we must create space for many diverse views, experiences and identities to influence the way forward.*

In the realm of Youth Work, embracing intersectionality is paramount for creating inclusive and effective support systems. Understanding that young people embody a multitude of identities — ranging from race, gender, sexuality, ability, and more — underscores the necessity of a holistic approach. Intersectionality urges us to recognise and address the unique challenges faced by each individual, acknowledging that their experiences are shaped by the intersection of various social factors. By fostering collaboration and cooperation among diverse perspectives, Youth Work can better serve the needs of all young people. This collaborative effort ensures that interventions and initiatives are not only inclusive but also responsive to the complex and intersecting realities of young people today. Through a collective commitment to intersectionality, youth workers can create spaces where every young person feels seen, heard, and supported in their journey towards personal growth and self-determination.

Many attempts have been made to articulate the intersectionality of different identities and their relationship to power and privilege. One of the most widely recognised is Burnham’s (2012) Social GRRRAACCEESSS - an evolving acronym representing gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality. Identities of significance to Aotearoa, and their relationship to power and marginalisation in the current context are depicted in the wheel over the page (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

AOTEAROA WHEEL OF POWER AND MARGINALISATION



The closer to the centre of the wheel, the more power and privilege each identity marker tends to hold within our dominant systems. Conversely, the closer to the edge of the wheel, our systems tend to create more marginalisation and exclusion. Any given person's cumulative experience will be impacted by multiple identity markers and the significance of those markers to systems of power.

Systems change refers to the comprehensive transformation of interconnected structures, policies, and processes within societies or organisations to address underlying issues and achieve sustainable outcomes. These systems encompass various dimensions, such as economic, social, political, and cultural, and often operate in complex, interdependent ways. Examples of systems include healthcare systems, educational systems, criminal justice systems, and economic systems. Each of these systems involve a network of people, rules, norms, and resources that shape individual experiences and outcomes within society.



When multiple aspects of marginalisation intersect within systems, they can intensify the challenges faced by certain groups, leading to what can be referred to as double discrimination. For instance, within the healthcare system, individuals from already marginalised communities, such as Māori, Pasifika and/or LGBTQIA+, may encounter additional barriers to accessing quality care due to other intersecting factors, such as socioeconomic status or ability. Similarly, in the education system, ākonga who are marginalised due to both their age and neurodiversity, for example, may face systemic barriers over and above those faced by their peers, hindering their academic achievement and limiting their opportunities for advancement.

*Addressing systems change requires a holistic approach that acknowledges and confronts the root causes of inequality and injustice. This entails not only reforming specific policies and practices, but also challenging underlying power dynamics and ideological frameworks that perpetuate systemic marginalisation. By fostering inclusive decision-making processes and centering the voices and experiences of marginalised communities, systems change efforts can promote greater equity, justice, and resilience within societies and organisations. Ultimately, by dismantling oppressive systems and fostering more equitable and inclusive structures, societies can create pathways for transformative change that benefit all.*

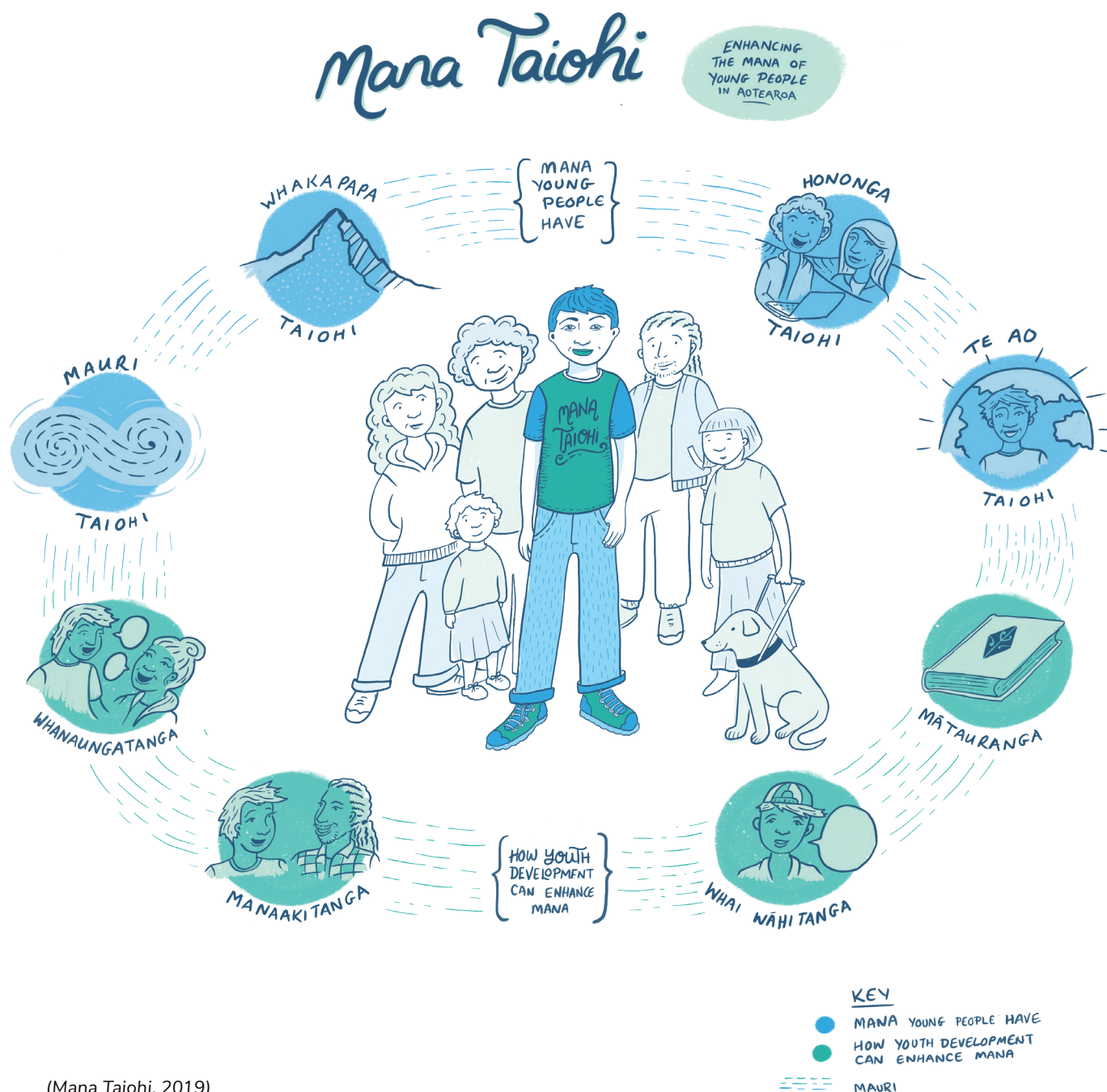
Due to the adult-centric world in which our power structures are located, the impact of 'age' on experiences of marginalisation is often overlooked. This is particularly significant in the context of Youth Work. No matter what other identities you hold, a youth worker's age will often afford you relatively greater power than those with whom you engage, despite young people's rights being enshrined in the United Nations' (1989) Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, despite making strides in fostering youth participation, amplifying young voices remains a challenge. According to a 2020 report by the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD), only 28% of young people aged 12 to 24 years felt their opinions were valued in decision-making processes (MYD, 2020). This sentiment is echoed in a study conducted by the University of Auckland, which revealed that less than half of young New Zealanders believed they had a say in matters that directly affected them (Roy et. al., 2021).

Structural barriers such as limited representation in political spheres and insufficient platforms for meaningful engagement hinder youth from effectively influencing policy and societal discourse. As a result, there is a pressing need for concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and community leaders to create inclusive spaces and mechanisms that empower young voices, ensuring their perspectives shape the future of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Proactively dismantling oppressive power structures may well be beyond the remit of most youth workers, however recognising and minimising the impact of these systems on our rangatahi is absolutely within reach.

The role of youth workers in understanding and responding to intersectionality can be seen woven throughout Mana Taiohi (2019):



(Mana Taiohi, 2019)

## Mauri

“Mauri is the life spark inherent in all young people... Fuelling that life spark means young people are seen, recognised and valued for who they are... [and supported] to actively construct their own identity... [and] stand in their own truth.”

## Whakapapa

“Acknowledging the whakapapa of young people means, in their own way and in their own time, exploring how these histories influence their lives right now. Young people are supported to embrace the journey to find their turangawaewae, their place to stand.

## Hononga

“When we understand hononga we recognise all the connected relationships in a young person's world (whānau, peers, school, the community), and the places and spaces that support these. Young people are supported to identify and strengthen these connections”

## Te Ao

“Te Ao Taiohi is the world of the young person... [and] is impacted by big picture influences such as social and economic contexts and dominant cultural values... Awareness of Te Ao Taiohi ensures actions are not judged purely on the surface, but with an understanding of systemic influences that affect young people.”

## Whanaungatanga

“Whanaungatanga is about relationship... [and] a sense of family connection. It relates to all relationships in a young person's life... When we prioritise whanaungatanga we invest in high trust relationships... [and] Young people are supported, with a strong foundation of belonging.

## Manaakitanga

“Young people are supported, with a strong foundation of belonging... Young people who experience strong manaaki have a safe and empowering space, and feel accepted, included and valued.”

## Whai Wāhitanga

“Acknowledging mana, whai wāhitanga recognises young people as valued contributors to society, giving them space to participate, assume agency and take responsibility... rather than privileging the voices of a few. Young people are supported to choose their level of engagement in decisions that affect them.”

## Matauranga

“Mātauranga refers to knowledge, wisdom, understanding and skill. It includes research, individual experience... held by young people and their whānau. We can strengthen mātauranga by weaving together these different forms of knowledge and making them relevant to the decisions facing young people and their whānau...”

Exploring intersectionality and kotahitanga in Youth Work in Aotearoa is essential for fostering a bicultural and inclusive environment that reconciles the tensions between divergent cultural concepts of power. Intersectionality, which acknowledges the overlapping and interconnected nature of social identities and their impact on experiences of oppression and privilege, aligns with kotahitanga—a Māori principle emphasising unity and collective action. Integrating these concepts into Youth Work helps bridge the gap between the Māori worldview, which views power as belonging and interconnectedness, and Western perspectives that often emphasise control and individualism.

By embracing indigenous and bicultural approaches, Youth Work in Aotearoa can promote a more holistic understanding of power dynamics, ensuring that all young people feel valued and supported in their journey towards personal and community development. This alignment fosters an environment where diverse cultural perspectives are respected and integrated, ultimately leading to more effective and inclusive Youth Work practices.

## Belonging

In many marginalised or indigenous cultures, power is often seen as something inherent within the community or nature itself. It's about connection, relationships, and harmony with one's surroundings. Power is intrinsic among one another within the community and is often tied to spiritual or natural forces. Decision-making is typically collective, with emphasis placed on consensus-building and cooperation. This perspective views power as something to be shared and used for the well-being of the community as a whole.

## Control

In contrast, Westernised or dominant perspectives often conceptualise power as a form of control or domination. Power is frequently centralised and hierarchical, with authority vested in specific individuals or institutions. Decision-making tends to be top-down, with a focus on individual agency and competition. This perspective often seeks to maximise individual autonomy and achievement, sometimes at the expense of community cohesion or environmental sustainability.

These two perspectives reflect broader cultural differences in how societies organise themselves and understand their place in the world. The belonging approach emphasises interconnectedness and collective responsibility, while the control approach prioritises individual agency and achievement. Understanding and reconciling these differing perspectives is crucial for fostering inclusivity and promoting sustainable development that respects diverse ways of knowing and being.

Fostering a sense of belonging and enabling participation among young people is essential for shaping systems that impact them, particularly when considering the intersecting identities and experiences they bring to the table. Empowering youth from diverse backgrounds, acknowledging their intersecting identities, and ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes leads to more comprehensive and representative solutions.

*Promoting ownership over the systems that impact our young people not only builds resilience but also acknowledges the complexities of their lived experiences. By investing in the belonging and participation of young people through an intersectional lens, we not only promote social cohesion and long-term engagement but also create more inclusive, responsive, and equitable systems that honour the diverse needs of all individuals within society.*

Intersectionality emerges as a potent superpower rather than a suppressive force when we recognise the importance of Youth Work in creating inclusive and accessible systems. By engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds, we sow the seeds of understanding, empathy, and activism early on. Youth Work becomes a crucial avenue for nurturing inclusive mindsets and empowering future generations to challenge systemic inequalities. Through mentoring, education, and community engagement, young people learn to embrace intersectionality as a tool for social change and acceptance. They become advocates for inclusive policies and practices, driving progress towards a more equitable society. By integrating Youth Work into our efforts, we not only amplify the voices of marginalised youth but also cultivate a generation of leaders who champion diversity and inclusivity. In doing so, we harness the full potential of intersectionality as a force for positive transformation, where every individual is empowered to thrive authentically and together.

*"Kotahitanga refers to an underlying spiritual unity between all beings... all groups coming together with unique identity, for a purpose, working together while recognising and celebrating our differences. A process of respecting and celebrating others difference and right to self-determination of expression and involvement."*

(Joyce & Llewellyn, 2017, p.105)

**This is 'Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work'.**

Ngā mihi nui

Tyler and Kath

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Tyler Ngatai (Ngati Ruanui, Ngati Porou, Ngai Tahu) is the dynamic Practice Lead for Ara Taiohi with a strong commitment to the professionalisation of Youth Work, and Mana Motuhake for youth workers who whakapapa Māori.

His expertise in understanding the complexity and beauty of intersectionality is a koha to the youth sector.

Kath Harrison is a neurotypical, able-bodied, cis-woman, committed to Indigenous rights and upholding her responsibilities as Tangata Tiriti.

She is a mother, social work educator, activist and professional supervisor based in Ōtautahi.

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# The Impact of Identity on Influencing Young People: Embracing Uniqueness and Navigating Challenges from a Te Ao Māori perspective

Atarau Hamilton

Ko Titirangi te maunga  
Ko Waiau te awa  
Ko Takitimu te waka  
Ko Ngati Kahungunu, Ngaa Rauru,  
Ngati Raukawa nga iwi  
Ko Ngai Tamaterangi te hapu  
Ko Rangiahua te marae  
Ko Merewaipaopao te tipuna  
No Heretaunga ahau.

Influencing young people is a challenging and significant responsibility. It involves recognising that your identity places you in a position of influence and adopting a posture that acknowledges this role.

Every identity brings its own uniqueness, and my innate whakapapa (genealogy) allows me to connect deeply with young people, embodying the enduring spirit of my ancestors. However, this position also comes with challenges and discomfort, particularly when my appearance affects the level of influence I can exert.

Acknowledging externally imposed limitations on identity is crucial, especially for those with intersectional identities that lack substantial power. It's essential to combat these limitations and help young people navigate this difficult space. Sharing my experiences openly with young people often elicits shocked reactions, as they are unaccustomed to hearing about these struggles. Turning up honestly and demonstrating strength is vital, especially when working with young Māori navigating a blend of evolving cultures. This honesty showcases the resilience and leadership inherent in our culture, regardless of the challenges they might face.

## Embracing Māori Identity

Being Māori means the world to me. It is a privilege that connects me with a rich cultural heritage, something that is often beyond the understanding of those outside our culture. My journey with my Māori identity has been marked by battles and moments of reluctance to fully embrace it in certain spaces. However, recognising my influence and the significance of my background has strengthened my resolve. My struggles with Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) have made me confront internal and external influences that once hindered my full expression as Māori.

*The most profound realisation is that being Māori is a superpower. It provides a sense of belonging and connection, no matter where I go. Our foundational values, rooted in whānau (family), hapū (sub-tribe), and iwi (tribe), create a strong sense of home and community.*

## The Achievements of the Next Generation

The previous generations laid a strong foundation for us by establishing institutions across Aotearoa, fostering deep cultural connections. This groundwork has enabled a stronger understanding of our culture, allowing individuals to embrace their unique identities. Māori culture appreciates diverse leadership styles and theories, recognising different ethnicities and personal leadership mentalities.

Reflecting on my childhood experiences, I remember being encouraged to pursue various interests, from creative and performing arts to kapa haka (traditional Māori performing arts) and language learning. This exposure allowed my generation to grow with a robust understanding of our Māori worldview, distinct from a Western perspective.



## Understanding Power and Privilege

At its core, privilege equates to power. It involves having advantages that others do not, enabling succession planning for future generations. Privilege means having systems established in advance, providing a foundation upon which to build.

Systems change involves examining the structures around us and identifying how they confine us, particularly in terms of identity. It requires thinking beyond these confines to leverage our strengths and influence. Systems flexibility comes from recognising immovable constraints and focusing on areas where we can exert influence. For me, appearing Pākehā (non-Māori) but being Māori allows me to navigate and dissolve barriers within the system.

## Intersectionality from a Māori Perspective

*Intersectionality, for me, places my Māori identity at the forefront. It is a collective identity traversing various contexts, from iwi to whānau. My identity as an indigenous person intersects with broader contexts, highlighting the complexities of multiple identities. Intersectionality often feels like a shrinking circle, where various aspects of identity intersect and impact experiences.*

Introspective thinking is crucial for understanding oneself and aligning with personal strengths. I encourage young people to reflect on their experiences and identify areas for growth. For instance, during a conversation with a young person focused on faith, the Mana Taiohi framework helped me recognise and respect our differing views. This framework promotes empathy and self-reflection, emphasising the importance of understanding and respecting others' perspectives.

In traditional contexts, leadership was tied to experience rather than age. Experience meant a level of development and innovation, not just time spent on a task. However, in modern contexts, age can limit development, imposing arbitrary markers that hinder natural growth. Recognising this distinction is crucial for supporting taiohi development.

## Impact of Social, Economic, and Cultural Systems

My understanding of social class and the impact of different capitals—cultural, economic, and social—began in high school. Transitioning from kaupapa (Māori-focused) education to mainstream education revealed the disparities and challenges faced by Māori students in navigating a system that values economic and social capital over cultural capital.

Different systems affect young people at various life stages, influenced by their social environment. Stereotypes and classifications based on age can reinforce societal limitations, restricting young people's ability to express themselves fully.

A strong sense of belonging is crucial for young people, particularly those moving away from home or traditional support systems. My experience in kōhanga reo (Māori early childhood education) highlighted the importance of community and cultural connection, which mainstream education often lacks. This loss of belonging can hinder young people's ability to reflect on their growth and development.

## Enabling Participation and Understanding Systems

Encouraging young people to participate in their communities enhances their understanding of systems and their roles within them. Engaging young people in civic activities, like voting, helps them recognise their influence in larger systems. Metrics that focus solely on failure miss the successes within the system, limiting young people's ability to give fully informed consent.

Success should include more opportunities for failure, allowing for quicker adaptation and continuous improvement. Young people's resilience and willingness to try again after setbacks are valuable traits that society should harness. Learning from small failures can lead to significant changes over time.

A Te Ao Māori perspective encourages exploring diverse approaches to life, drawing from history, whakapapa, taiao (environment), and pūrākau (stories). My journey with intersectionality involves questioning assumptions and beliefs, understanding the privileges within my narrative, and using them to create opportunities for others. Recognising and nurturing these privileges can lead to a more inclusive and equitable future for our taiohi.

---

Atarau Hamilton (Ngati Kahungunu, Ngaa Rauru Kaitahi, Ngati Raukawa) Atarau Hamilton is a visionary leader in Youth Work, known for bridging cultural understanding and fostering authentic connections with rangatahi across diverse communities.





# Embracing Identity in Youth Work: A Journey of Empowerment and Understanding

Amanda Smith

## How does your identity influence your work with young people?

My identity as a Pākehā Māori deeply influences my work with young people. Growing up, I often felt caught between two worlds, experiencing a sense of deficit because I didn't fully belong to either. However, this unique blend of cultural experiences has become my superpower in my work with rangatahi (young people). My whakapapa (ancestry), innate gifts, and personal journey resonate deeply with urbanised rangatahi, many of whom are several generations removed from their traditional roots.

Being able to bring my lived experiences into my work helps young people feel normal and understood. I understand their struggles and triumphs from a place of lived experience, which builds trust and rapport. My journey of acknowledging, grieving, and loving my identity allows me to support rangatahi in their own journeys towards self-acceptance and empowerment. This shared understanding creates a bridge that fosters authentic connections and meaningful growth.

## How does *who you are* influence *what you do*?

Who I am is integral to everything I do in my work with young people. My identity and personal experiences drive my commitment to social justice and equity, especially for those who, like me, exist in a unique space between cultures. I am passionate about creating a space for rangatahi where they feel they belong and are valued for their unique identities.

This passion manifests in my dedication to nurturing, caring, and loving the young people I work with. My internal compass, shaped by my experiences and values, guides my practice, ensuring that I remain authentic and true to myself. This authenticity is crucial in Youth Work, as it allows rangatahi to navigate their own worlds through their lenses, feeling supported and understood by someone who has walked a similar path.

## Tell us about the diversity and intersectionality of the young people you are currently working with?

The rangatahi I work with are incredibly diverse, reflecting a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and personal backgrounds. Many are urbanised and several generations removed from their traditional roots, creating a unique blend of identities and experiences. This intersectionality brings both challenges and strengths to our work, as we navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and self-acceptance together.

## What is it like working with your community's young people?

Working with my community's young people is both rewarding and challenging. It is a privilege to support them as they navigate their identities and find their place in the world. The sense of connection and understanding that comes from shared experiences is powerful and creates a strong foundation for growth and empowerment. However, my mahi also requires a deep commitment to addressing the unique challenges they face and advocating for their needs and rights.

## Have you noticed changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work?

I have noticed significant changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work. There is a growing recognition of the importance of understanding and addressing the multiple, intersecting identities that young people bring to the table. This shift has led to more inclusive and holistic approaches to Youth Work, where the focus is on supporting the whole person and their diverse experiences.

## What are your suggestions for other people working with young people in this community?

For those working with young people in this community, it is essential to embrace and celebrate diversity and intersectionality. Take the time to understand the unique backgrounds and experiences of the rangatahi you work with and create spaces where they feel valued and supported. Authenticity is key—bring your whole self to your work and encourage young people to do the same.

Additionally, be an advocate for social justice and equity. Fight for the rights and needs of the young people you work with, ensuring that they have the resources and support they need to thrive. Finally, continually educate yourself and stay open to learning and growing alongside the young people you support.

*Many of the young people I work with face systemic oppression and marginalisation due to their diverse and intersecting identities. These experiences can create barriers to their success and wellbeing, making it crucial for youth workers to understand and address these challenges. By using culturally resonant frameworks and advocating for social justice, we can help dismantle these oppressive systems and create more equitable environments for all young people.*

## Are there any resources, theories, frameworks, or model ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working with these communities?

Several resources and frameworks have been instrumental in my work with rangatahi. The principles of Te Whare Tapa Whā, a Māori health model, have been particularly valuable. This model emphasises the balance of four key aspects of wellbeing: taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha whānau (family health), and taha wairua (spiritual health). By focusing on these interconnected aspects, we can support the holistic wellbeing of young people.

The Mana Taiohi framework has also been vital. This framework highlights the importance of supporting the mana (authority, influence, and agency) of young people by recognising their unique identities, fostering their wellbeing, and promoting their self-determination. Additionally, the practice of manaakitanga (hospitality and care) and whanaungatanga (relationship-building) are central to my approach. These principles guide the creation of supportive and nurturing environments where rangatahi feel a sense of belonging and connection.

The Tohatoha model emphasises the importance of sharing knowledge, resources, and power with young people. It encourages collaborative approaches where youth are actively involved in decision-making processes and have opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Finally, the Positive Youth Development in Aotearoa (PYDA) framework provides a strengths-based approach that focuses on enhancing the capabilities and potential of young people and the environments around them. It emphasises the importance of positive relationships, supportive environments, and opportunities for growth and development.

My identity and lived experiences are integral to my work with young people. By embracing who I am and bringing my whole self to my practice, I can support and empower rangatahi as they navigate their own journeys. Through authenticity, commitment to social justice, and the use of culturally resonant frameworks, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all young people.

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*Amanda Smith (Nga Puhī) working with Te Ora Hou Northland, champions rangatahi Māori spaces by fostering leadership, cultural identity, and wahine focused movements, driving systems change to create equitable opportunities for marginalised communities.*



# Kotahitanga i te Rereketānga – Unity in Diversity

Matt and Rachel Renata

## The Big Picture

As of 2024, the World Population Clock estimates there are nearly 8.2 billion people living on planet Earth. In comparison, the global population was only 3.9 billion in 1974. This means that in just 50 years, the world's population has more than doubled!

This rapid growth highlights how our world is expanding and becoming increasingly diverse and vibrant. Earth now hosts individuals with rich and varied tapestries of ancestries from across the globe, each bringing intergenerational strengths, perspectives, and purpose. This diversity could be a thing of beauty. However, this growing diversity also presents challenges for some.

*Instead of embracing the range of skills, benefits, and wisdom that diversity can bring, some people react with fear and resistance. What should be a source of wonder can become a source of worry. Unfortunately, fear of the unknown, worry, and anxiety can frame diversity as a threat.*

## What About the Youth?

Our young people today are often caught in the crossfire of polarising views, whether political, philosophical, religious, or cultural, leading to hatred towards 'the other' rather than seeking to find mutual understanding through conflict. This type of division becomes increasingly disheartening.

Conflict itself is not inherently negative; in fact, when handled constructively, it can lead to a greater sense of unity and significant transformation. A key issue we face is the growing tendency for individuals to lose touch with their own identity and story, which is intricately connected to the broader, universal story. This includes the heritage, history, values, and beliefs that have shaped them over generations.

Tension can be especially intimidating for young people who fear being exposed, rejected, cancelled, or excluded. They are pressured to decide if they are in or out, left or right, pro or anti, for or against. This fear of not wanting to get it wrong can lead to silence or avoidance. As youth workers, we have a unique opportunity to use these moments of tension as formative experiences for growth, provided we are willing to confront them ourselves.

## What About Hana?!

An inspiring example of this is 22-year-old Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, the youngest MP in Aotearoa. During her 2023 election campaign, she faced harassment and mockery from members of the public. Even after successfully being elected, she continued to experience mistreatment from fellow MPs.

Nevertheless, this young wahine was able to endure such mistreatment from the public and individuals more than twice her age. Without retaliating in kind, she remained composed, secure, and confident, in her whakapapa, in tikanga, in the values handed down to her through the generations, and in her own identity and abilities.

She addressed this harsh criticism with eloquence, education, and understanding. Her resilience exemplifies how we can cultivate strength and resolve conflicts healthily in our own environments.

## Food for Thought

Psychoanalyst Stephen Karpman identifies three primary roles in the unhealthy cycle of conflict – the drama triangle: victim, persecutor, and saviour. These roles can trap individuals in a negative cycle, particularly among young people who are still going through adolescent development, which impinges on their impulse control, leading to heightened tension and rapid escalation.

The alternative roles of affirmation, compassion, and self-awareness are far more constructive. Adopting these roles during tense moments can diffuse conflict and empower young people to navigate disputes more effectively.

Understanding a person's values, language, and behaviour as well as your own creates a healthier conflict-resolution process. This understanding encourages the development of new habits that extend beyond direct interactions with young people, influencing their families, friends, workplaces, and other social circles.

As young people grow and learn more about themselves, they come to view various people and spaces as safe environments for expressing what's really happening for them. This posture transforms their approach from one of fear, struggle, and secrecy to one of curiosity, empowerment, and openness.

When individuals feel secure and supported, they are more likely to engage in meaningful interaction with others, creating mutual understanding and respect. This sense of kotahitanga can bridge gaps between diverse groups, leading to greater unity and collective growth.

## Too Good to Be True

Addressing global issues like war, the climate crisis, inequality, food insecurity, political oppression, and displacement can seem like a near-impossible task, especially when young people are demonised by people in power or by those in the media.

Politicians campaign against youth as ram raiders and criminals, failing to see and address the unresolved trauma that's within them. Sometimes youth are ridiculed because they cry out about their worries concerning the climate crisis, while others face additional layers of stigma and marginalisation when exploring their sexual orientation or gender expression. In such a complex and emotionally charged context, creating a safe space for young people is crucial.

To achieve this, we must first cultivate the courage to balance confidence, compassion, and self-awareness within ourselves. This internal grounding enables us to guide others in adopting these qualities, providing young people with a supportive environment where they can learn, make mistakes, and practice healthy conflict resolution for themselves.

## Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou – Matt's Experience

*'Why do you believe in the colonised God?' This provocative pātai was posed by 'Protect Ihumātao – SOUL' co-leader Pania Newton during a young leadership conference (SWY) in Japan back in 2016. As a young Māori Christian leader grappling with my place in the world, I was initially offended by her confrontational question to me. My first impulse was to retaliate and defend my faith aggressively. However, I felt an overwhelming urge to humble myself and engage in the tense wānanga with her.*

I thank God that I listened to that prompting. Our kōrero not only led to a lasting friendship but also provided me with profound wisdom and insight. Through Pania's pūrākau, I learned about the ancient stories connecting Māori to Hawaiki and gained a deeper understanding of the Creator God in Io Matua Kore, as well as the interactions of our tūpuna with Io. This transformative experience reshaped my faith and worldview in ways I will forever be thankful for.

Several years later, when the police began evicting protestors from Ihumātao on July 23, 2019, my wife Rachel and I dropped everything to support Pania, SOUL, and the whānau of Makaurau Marae. To my absolute shock, Pania asked us to help facilitate all-day Whakamoemiti – a full day of karakia every Sunday with the local churches and faith communities in the region.

Despite feeling inadequate, I needed to embody the functions of affirmation, compassion, and self-awareness. We had to walk humbly and listen to the hearts of the people. We hosted a diverse range of ethnic and faith communities, each with their own denomination and expression of faith: Pai Mārire, Rātana, Ringatū, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Hawaiians, West Papuans, Sāmoans, Anglicans, Baptists and Salvation Army members, among others.

Although we didn't really know what to do or what to expect most of the time, the principles of te ao Māori and tikanga guided us, keeping us safe and establishing kotahitanga with everyone involved. Values such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga were instrumental in helping us navigate the unknown. We returned almost every night for the next several months, an enduring testament to the strength and unity that we built together. Life lessons that I'll never forget.

## Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou – Rachel's Experience

I remember a time when we were travelling with a passionate faith-based group for Waitangi day celebrations. There was a particular enthusiasm in the group as we had Māori who were in different stages of understanding our identities and how to move in both the faith world and tikanga Māori. We also had various expressions of faith as we had gathered from all over the country.

We were planning to attend a significant pōwhiri. Unfortunately, through a mix-up in time management and confusion in group dynamics, we missed our designated time to be welcomed onto the marae. Our group was disappointed as they were looking forward to prayerfully engaging with the process and conversation within the wharenuī.

Suddenly, a few within the group were convinced that we were able to recover the opportunity and skip the pōwhiri process. Entering on their own accord, they felt their faith permitted them to enter without welcome, particularly as they were Māori too. I was uncomfortable and embarrassed as they rushed onto the marae, drawing the rest of us with them.

At that point, I wanted to leave as I felt that we had disrespected tikanga Māori. I had decided that they were the persecutor, and I was the victim. Whether I was right or wrong became irrelevant because the way I handled the conflict was no longer productive. As I moved away from my group, I allowed my frustration to dictate my behaviour. There isn't an elegant way to say that I began to sulk.

As I proceeded to stew while the chaos continued, I turned to one of our rangatira for guidance. I wanted her to be the saviour to my victim. 'You could leave,' she began, 'and you will leave carrying all of the tension and shame, and nothing will remove that from you.' Then she continued, 'Or, you can stay and see this through. You can watch as the issue is discussed in the wharenuī, and through the reflection process, it will be settled. Then you have a chance of seeing it resolved'.

*At that moment, our rangatira drew me from my victim mindset, empowering me to stay in the tension to work through it until its completion. She had compassion for my hurt, but also helped me become aware of the consequences of my reaction. She then affirmed my ability to remain and find an alternate outcome. It's a lesson I have held onto and continue to practice.*

## Tātou, Tātou

If people truly understood their own stories, perhaps diversity wouldn't seem so dangerous. The whakataukī, 'Titiro whakamuri, kōkiri whakamua – Looking backwards to move forwards' reminds us to honour our whakapapa, uniqueness, and history. By doing so, we can better understand each other and move forward together.

Our younger generations should be encouraged to embrace their roots, their stories, and the values that define them. When faced with differences, this grounding will help them approach others with understanding and curiosity, seeing such differences as opportunities for growth rather than threats. Conflicts themselves don't have to lead to division; how we navigate them is crucial.

Imagine a generation of young people who can confidently navigate conflict – whether it's political, religious, cultural, or personal – while simultaneously respecting their own beliefs and exploring others' perspectives. Such skills would empower them in all areas of life: at school, at work, within their families, and within themselves.

Today, our young people face contention from various sources: on their devices, in the news, in their communities, and even within themselves. There is a high demand to know exactly what their stances are on political, social, and cultural issues. Instead of pushing them to align with our personal views, we should support their rangatiratanga, guiding them through these complex situations.

By helping them stand strong in the face of challenges and validating their agency in reaching their own conclusions, we can affirm true diversity of thought and expression in a way that does not create an 'other'. We can achieve true unity by embracing the deep value that comes from diversity, reflecting the power of kotahitanga.

**'Mihi ki te rangi, mihi ki te whenua, mihi ki ngā tāngata, e kīa nei he whānau kotahi.'**

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Matt Renata (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairoa, Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, Ngāti Ruapani) is a trained and experienced youth worker.

His journey in exploring Indigenous theology and Hawaiiki is intertwined with his Māori and Gujarati whakapapa, enabling him to bring unique and rich mātauranga with both generosity and passion.

Rachel Renata is a proud Mama to Mana, youth worker, kaiako, who is of Māori, Japanese and of Pākehā descent.

She is passionate about supporting young people and whānau of all ages to walk strongly in freedom.

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Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality. Tāngata Whenua perspectives

PART 1 of 6

