

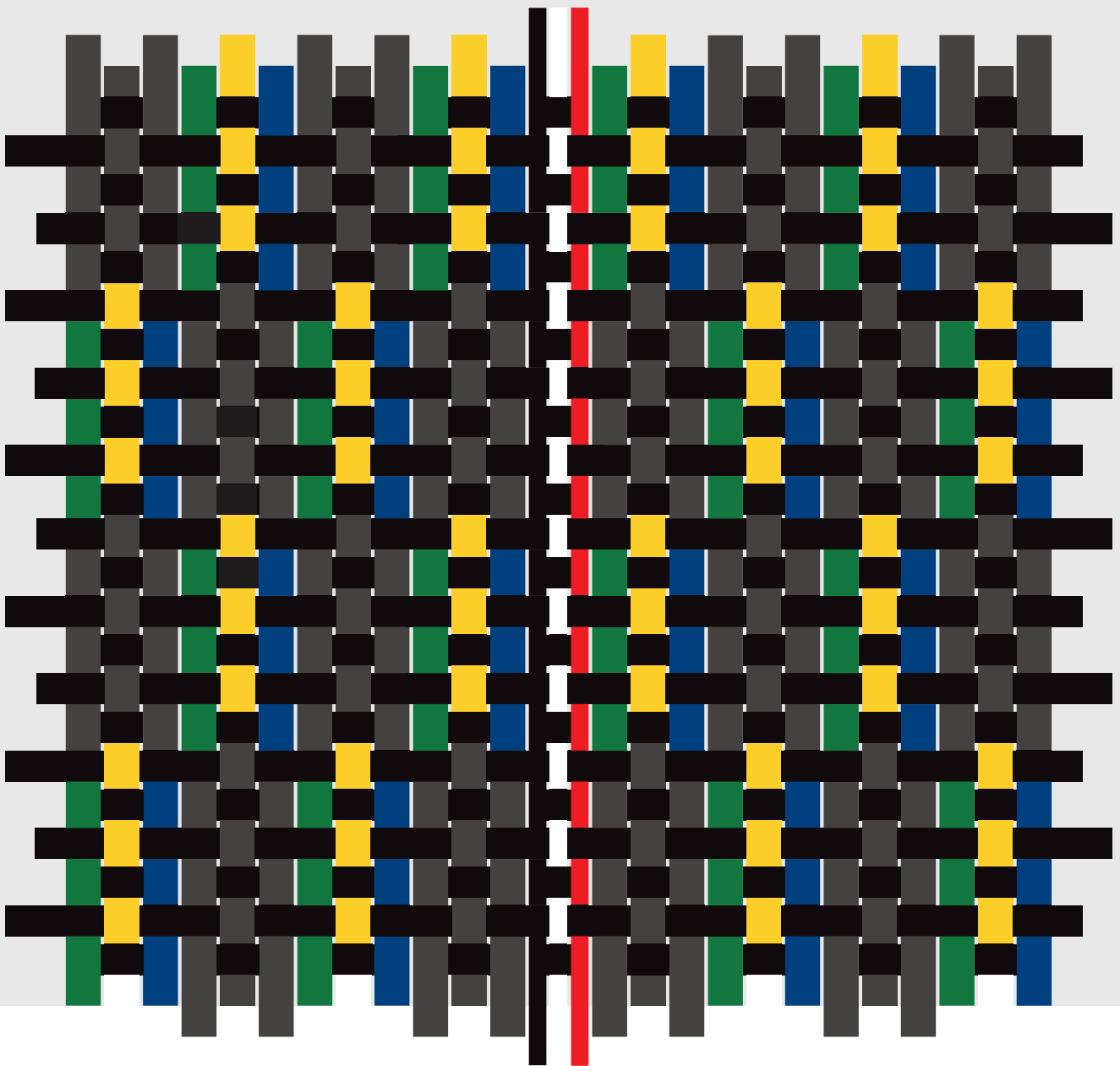
# Kaiparahuarahi

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 3 DECEMBER 2024

## Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality

PART 3 OF 6

**Ethnic Communities perspectives**



# Kaiparahuarahi

**Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality.**  
Ethnic Communities perspectives

**Edited by Sakhr Munassar, Rod Baxter and Kahukura Ritchie**

ISSN Print: ISSN 2537-8422

ISSN Online: ISSN 2537-8430

Volume 2 Number 3 December 2024

**Published by Ara Taiohi Inc.**

Ara Taiohi, PO Box 6886

Marion Square

Wellington 6141

Aotearoa New Zealand

Phone: +64 4 802 5000

Email: [admin@arataiohi.org.nz](mailto:admin@arataiohi.org.nz)

© Ara Taiohi Inc. [www.arataiohi.org.nz](http://www.arataiohi.org.nz)

Designed by Helen McLaren [eruptdesign.co.nz](http://eruptdesign.co.nz)

*Creative Commons (CC) license*

You are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work under the following conditions:

- Attribution. You must attribute the work in the manner specified by Ara Taiohi Inc. (the originator) but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work.
- Non-commercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to the Ara Taiohi Inc. website: [www.arataiohi.org.nz](http://www.arataiohi.org.nz)
- Any of the above conditions may be waived if you get written permission from the copyright holder.
- Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the authors' moral rights.

# Contents

- |          |  |           |  |
|----------|--|-----------|--|
| <b>4</b> | <b>Editorial</b><br>Sakhr Munassar, Rod Baxter<br>and Kahukura Ritchie   | <b>9</b>  | <b>How Faith, Heritage,<br/>and Authenticity Shape My<br/>Work with Young People</b><br>Wasa Ali |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Empowering Diverse Voices:<br/>A Career Practitioner’s<br/>Experience with Multicultural<br/>Communities</b><br>Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur’an | <b>11</b> | <b>Exploring pathways To<br/>Being Fully Known</b><br>Dr. Lovely Dizon                           |

---

## Dedication

We dedicate *Ethnic Communities perspectives* to all the young people in Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Congo and around the world—those who fight to survive every day amidst global greed and the ongoing disregard for the human rights of brown and Indigenous lives.

This work is especially dedicated to the more than 13,000 Palestinian children and young people who have been massacred since October 2023. They will never have the chance to experience Youth Work in all its beauty or benefit from its support, but their lives and stories remain a call to action for justice, care, and change. Finally, this is dedicated to all the parents, grandparents, and ancestors who were forced to leave their homes in search of a better future for their children. To those who had to figure it out as they went—we see you, honour you, and thank you.

---

# Editorial

In this collection of articles, we explore the profound impact of cultural identity on Youth Work through the experiences of three dedicated practitioners.

Each story highlights the unique yet strikingly similar journeys of individuals who have harnessed their own heritage and personal experiences to empower young people from diverse backgrounds.

*All three authors share backgrounds characterised by a rich history, a story of migration and a youth environment marked by a somewhat forced assimilation. They each broke free by connecting with their communities and reigniting their love for their identities first.*

Navigating such a journey is challenging, especially in a global society dominated by contemporary forms of colonisation, which often translate to white cultural dominance. Through these stories and the remarkable achievements of these writers, we see that diversity and community building are the solutions.

Colonisation, in its historical and current forms, often demands that we adhere to a single way of living and doing, one that prioritises the 'easier and better' approach for all. Although these forms of colonisation are easier to navigate for Pākehā and people in the Global North, they are proving harmful to all, including those benefiting from them, as they strip us of our cultural heritage, ancestral learnings and communal ways of living. Our exceptional writers demonstrate through their work that recognising each person for who they are, with all their intersecting identities, is the way forward for everyone, not just for ethnic communities that are made to feel different and pressured to assimilate.

Our hope is that all youth workers in Aotearoa read these articles with an open invitation to explore their own identities, embrace them and embark on a journey of self-discovery as they learn about every young person they meet. We invite you to be curious about all the identities our young people carry, both those they are familiar with and those they are still exploring. Each one of us is unique and should be celebrated for our individuality.

**Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an** shares her journey from Jordan to Aotearoa, emphasising the significance of her name and cultural heritage. Eman's story highlights the importance of understanding and embracing one's cultural roots to build confidence and resilience in young people.

In another article, **Wasa Ali** reflects on how their identity shapes their mahi with young people. Grounded in their Christian faith and Somali heritage, Wasa emphasises the value of grace, patience and cultural acceptance. Wasa's narrative highlights the power of authenticity and cultural acceptance in building meaningful relationships and fostering a sense of community.

**Lovely Dizon**, in a Filipino researcher's perspective, captures the essence of being an Asian young person in Aotearoa through the words of a Filipino youth: "it's like you belong, but you're also different, you know?" Lovely's personal journey of negotiating her Filipino identity in Aotearoa informs her work, aiming to amplify the voices of Asian youth and destigmatise mental health within their communities.

These articles collectively highlight the transformative power of culturally responsive Youth Work. Their stories remind us that understanding and valuing cultural identity is essential in fostering a sense of belonging and success for all.

**Sakhr Munassar, Rod Baxter and Kahu Ritchie**  
December 2024



# Empowering Diverse Voices: A Career Practitioner's Experience with Multicultural Communities

Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an

## Ko wai au? Who am I?

**My full name, Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an, holds deep significance within my cultural heritage.**

**In Jordanian and wider Arab traditions, names are more than mere identifiers: they signify family, tribe and ancestry. My first name, Eman, meaning 'faith', was chosen by my parents, while Ahmad and Abdallah represent my grandfather and father. Ghandour is my family name, and Qur'an marks my tribal lineage, rooting me in the village of Al-Taibeh in northern Jordan. Each part of my name reflects layers of identity that connect me to my ancestors and inform how I engage with those I support.**

For the past ten years, I have dedicated my career to helping migrant and refugee youth transition to and thrive in Aotearoa. Over the last two years, I have focused on career counselling in my role as a Future Student Advisor at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). My work primarily centres around South Auckland, one of the most diverse areas in Aotearoa. Here, I guide students from Pacific, Māori, and migrant or refugee backgrounds. My passion for career development has led me to establish Khawat, meaning 'sisterhood' in Arabic—a network that supports women across New Zealand in understanding their careers holistically. Khawat provides a platform for discussing critical issues such as bridging the pay gap, applying for advancement or leadership programmes, recognising our unique skill sets and lived experiences, and fostering meaningful connections while celebrating our cultural heritage.

## Beauty in the complexity of our identities

My identity as an Arab woman, navigating life as both a migrant and a New Zealander, deeply shapes my work with young people. After arriving in Aotearoa from Jordan at the age of 11, I understand first-hand the challenges of balancing cultural expectations and adapting to a new society. This has allowed me to connect with young people from multicultural backgrounds. My own journey of finding a sense of belonging in Aotearoa, rooted in learning about Te Tiriti and embracing te reo Māori, has taught

me that cultural identity is central to self-confidence and empowerment. This realisation guides my approach, as I aim to create spaces where young people feel both their cultural roots and unique perspectives are respected and valued.

As a proud Arab woman with roots in Jordanian culture and a career focused on supporting ethnic communities, my identity influences my personal and professional practices. My Islamic Jordanian heritage is a constant reminder of my ancestors and cultural values. Love, respect, relationship building, integrity, collectivism, giving and volunteering are guiding principles I draw on from my identity. These principles influence the way I work with young people, fostering a sense of community and identity among the young people I support. For instance, my roles as a Future Student Advisor at AUT and as the founder of Khawat reflect my desire to provide young people, especially women, with a platform and the tools they need to advocate for themselves, access opportunities and feel empowered by their heritage, rather than isolated by it.

## Ethnic young people – an intersection of history, cultures and a new home

The young people I work with are incredibly diverse, representing a range of ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds, including Māori, Pacific, and migrant and refugee communities. Each young person brings a unique blend of identities and experiences, influenced by their heritage, generational status and social dynamics within their communities. Intersectionality plays a significant role, as many students must navigate multiple layers of identity and balance expectations from both their cultural communities and wider society. When working with young people in my community, there is a need to understand the diverse realities of each individual, rather than painting people or groups of people with one brush stroke.

Both as a career advisor and through my platform Khawat, I'm always inspired and humbled by the young people I come across. Supporting these young people isn't just about providing academic or career guidance, as conventional approaches to career development might promote. The young people I work with bring a multitude of intersecting identities and lived experiences that need to be respected and valued when discussing their future aspirations. Often, young people from my community are the primary

caregivers for their families, working several jobs to provide for their household, sometimes all while navigating the pressures of being the first in their family to study.

This means carrying enormous pressure to succeed and do well academically, often at the expense of their wellbeing. I recall a time working in a space where the young people I was supporting were asked what hobbies they had. Seemingly an innocent question, but many young people I work with do not have the time or the resources to enjoy hobbies, particularly if they are the primary caregivers for their families. Part of my work to date has also been about bridging these inequities by facilitating and creating spaces where young people can play sports or enjoy a new hobby they normally wouldn't have the resources to do.

*I see this as such an integral part of my careers and course counselling practice, as working with young people in my community means going beyond seeing their career aspirations or study options as an isolated part of their lives. Rather, it's about finding ways to integrate and embrace our identities and diverse backgrounds to continue breaking down inequities within careers, tertiary education and life. Our young people thrive when they can bring their whole selves to all the spaces they are a part of!*

### **What works for Māori works for my community too!**

There has been a growing recognition of the need to address intersectionality in Youth Work. When I began my career, many support structures tended to overlook the layered experiences that come with being young, being a migrant and navigating multiple cultural worlds. Working within predominantly Western or Pākehā youth support spaces, I noticed that embracing one's cultural background or diverse lived experiences was not as valued. Today, there's a stronger emphasis on understanding how intersecting identities impact everything from mental health to career aspirations. In the context of Aotearoa, the work of Indigenous scholars and practitioners to push for cultural competency and promote kaupapa Māori or ethnic-specific frameworks within Youth Work has helped open the door for a broader, holistic understanding of youth wellbeing and career development. I've found that what works for Māori works for my community. This shift has allowed for a more holistic approach to careers development and has also paved the way for a multitude of ethnic and culturally specific support frameworks, something I embrace wholeheartedly in my practice.

For those working with young people from diverse backgrounds, I suggest adopting a culturally responsive framework that recognises the unique experiences and challenges of each individual.

- Investing time in learning about each community's cultural heritage, values, and language can create a more authentic connection.
- Approaches like a kaupapa Māori philosophy and Te Whare Tapa Whā model, which I use extensively, offer practical ways to understand and support a young person holistically—considering their physical, mental, spiritual and family wellbeing.
- Above all, approaching every interaction with empathy and an openness to learn is essential.

My journey has been deeply influenced by my cultural heritage and personal experiences. By embracing and celebrating the diverse identities of the young people I work with, I strive to create inclusive and supportive environments that empower them to thrive. Through culturally responsive frameworks and a commitment to understanding each individual's unique background, we can continue to break down barriers and foster a sense of belonging and success for all.

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

In my work, I find that combining kaupapa Māori principles (Mana Taiohi) and Te Whare Tapa Whā model is incredibly valuable. Te Whare Tapa Whā, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha whānau (family) and taha wairua (spiritual health), aligns well with the holistic needs of young people navigating complex identities.

Additionally, recognising the unique attributes of the '1.5 generation'—who are bridging the expectations of their heritage and their new homeland—offers insights into the types of support that are most effective. For instance, creating mentorship opportunities where youth can see themselves reflected in leadership roles can help them feel understood and encouraged to pursue their own paths.

---

*Eman Ghandour is a career practitioner and community leader passionate about integrating Jordanian heritage with Te Ao Māori.*

*Through a holistic framework, Eman empowers individuals to navigate their career journeys, blending cultural identity, community values, and personal growth.*

---

*The editors encourage anyone who wants to work with young people in Aotearoa to explore Te Whare Tapa Whā in an expansive way, alongside other kaupapa Māori frameworks and youth development theory such as: Te Wheke, Tohatoha, Ngā Reanga and within the context provided by Mana Taiohi.*





# How Faith, Heritage, and Authenticity Shape My Work with Young People

Wasa Ali

## **Grounded in my identity**

**My identity profoundly influences my mahi (work) with young people, keeping me grounded and introspective.**

**This self-awareness is crucial in my role as a youth worker. By constantly reflecting on my own experiences and values, I can better understand and connect with the young people I work with.**

Being a Christian has enhanced my Youth Work by sharpening my grace, patience and resilience, especially during challenging times. My faith provides a strong foundation that helps me navigate work, especially in difficult situations. Additionally, my Somali heritage has made me culturally accepting and relatable, particularly to young people exploring their native language or identity. Growing up in Lower Hutt, specifically Naenae, I was shaped by my community, which has been instrumental in my development as a competent youth worker. The support and values instilled in me by my community have given me the tools to be a positive influence on the young people I serve.

## **Authenticity and relationships**

At Zeal, my organisation, being celebrated for my authentic self allows me to build deep relationships with young people. This authenticity sets me apart from other adults in their lives, such as teachers, parents and caregivers, making it easier for them to be themselves around me.

*When young people see that I am genuine and true to myself, while being outside their usual circles, they feel more comfortable opening up and sharing their own experiences and challenges. This mutual trust and respect are the foundations of meaningful and impactful Youth Work.*

I work with young people from diverse backgrounds and social classes, diversity that enriches the interactions and learning experiences for everyone involved. I am always amazed by how they form friendships regardless of their backgrounds, thanks to the culture of togetherness we foster. This inclusive environment encourages young people to look beyond superficial differences and find common ground, fostering a sense of unity and mutual support.

Working in my community reminds me of my own needs as a young person with my own identity and intersectional factors. My advice for other youth workers working with diverse communities is to:

- meet young people where they are;
- take your time building relationships,
- always keep their best interests at heart;
- see them for who they truly are;
- set realistic expectations for your agenda—we are there for them, not the other way around;
- be transparent about what you can support them with, showing them your limits; and
- connect with your community and stakeholders to link young people to other organisations that can help them.

By staying true to our identities and fostering genuine connections, we can make a significant impact on the lives of young people.

---

Wasa Ali: (Somali) Grounded in his love for his community, faith and service. A qualified youth worker and an incredibly humble human whose work is a constant reminder that a different world is always possible.



# Exploring Pathways To Being Fully Known

Dr. Lovely Dizon

“It’s like you belong, but you’re also different, you know?”

In a few words, a Filipino young person had encapsulated the experience of being an Asian young person in Aotearoa.

As a researcher, I’m particularly interested in understanding the experiences of young people and, more specifically, 1.5 and second-generation Asian young people. These are young people who were either born in Asia and moved to Aotearoa between 0 and 12 or were born in Aotearoa with first-generation parents. For my doctoral thesis, I focused specifically on 1.5 and second-generation Southeast Asian (SEA) migrant youth (12–18 years of age), with both parents from the same SEA country.

While these descriptions seem arbitrary, I believe these distinctions are necessary. Asians are often lumped together as one homogenous group that is viewed to have the same experiences, and therefore the same needs.

*This could not be further from the truth. Asian young people living in Aotearoa come from endlessly diverse experiences.*

Some migrate with their parents (who then either stay here permanently or go back and forth); some come as refugees. Some settle into big cities where ethnic diversity is more prevalent, and some end up in tiny rural towns where nobody looks like them. Some come as international students; some were born here. Some hold multiple ethnic identities; some feel strongly attached to one.

These examples only highlight one aspect of diversity, which is migration experience. The complexities continue. Asian cultures have their own distinct cultures, histories and complexities. Then, add to that gender and sexual identities, socioeconomic backgrounds, disabilities, experiences of ill health, and so on – the intersecting

identities are endless. Yet, all these nuances matter, because they have implications for what that young person might need in terms of support. If we want to improve outcomes for our Asian young people in Aotearoa, a simple first step is acknowledging and validating these nuances.

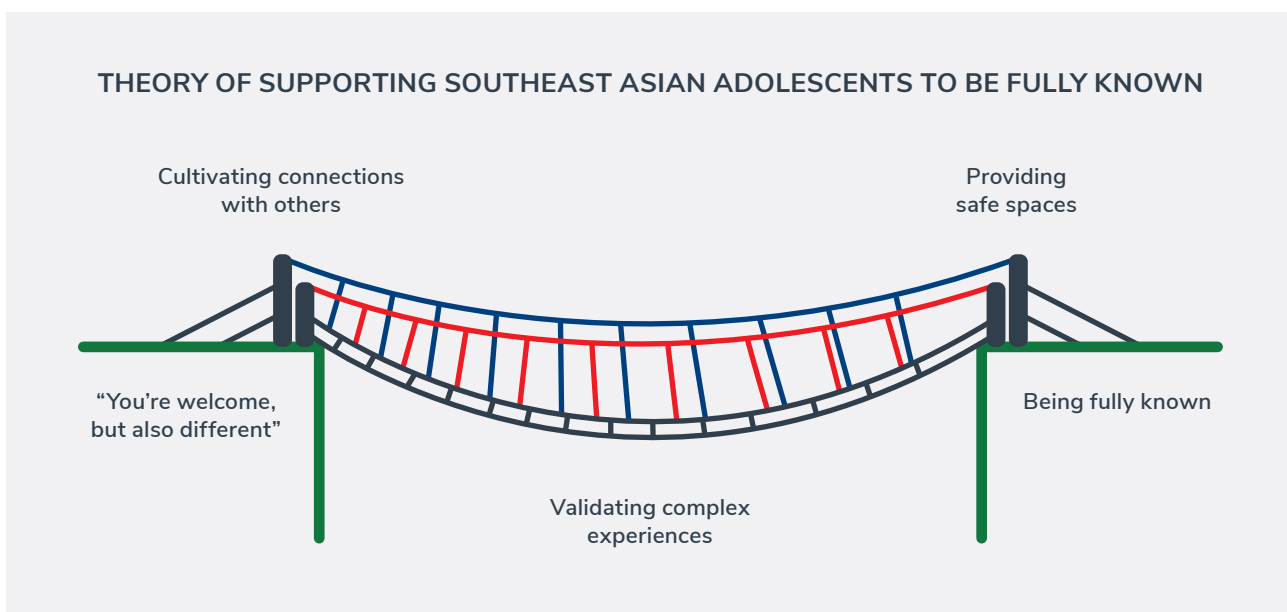
So why a focus on Asian young people? To put it simply, it’s because who I am has massive implications on what I do. In fact, I became so hyper-fixated on figuring out whether I was normal regarding all the shame I felt about not feeling ‘Filipino’ enough nor being ‘Kiwi’ enough (whatever either of those things meant), it ended up being a central focus of my doctoral thesis. I wanted to understand this experience of ‘feeling like you belong, but you’re also different’, and I wanted to see if I was alone in what I was experiencing. And it turns out, many 1.5 and second-generation Asian young people have felt the same way at one point in their lives.

I am a 1.5 generation Filipino migrant, a woman, an oldest child. I have had diagnosed mental illness, I have struggled to negotiate my ethnic identity and I have had various experiences of being Filipino in Aotearoa, both in big cities like Tāmaki Makaurau and small rural towns in King Country, Waikato. And all these parts of me are entwined in my work, which ultimately seeks to amplify the voices of Asian young people in Aotearoa and hopefully play a role in helping to destigmatise mental health within our communities. It sounds clichéd, but I try to be the big sister or Ate (a Tagalog word for older sister, pronounced at-teh) that I needed when I was younger.

My doctoral thesis specifically focused on understanding what kind of support 1.5 and second-generation SEA migrant young people wanted as they negotiated their ethnic identities (Dizon, 2023). Through listening to these young people, I felt the relief they had also been searching for. The relief of knowing they were not alone in all the big ways they felt about themselves, their ethnic identity, their personhood. Some Asian young people rarely get a chance to share how they are really feeling. And it might take some time to get to this point. They may not necessarily have the language to accurately express what’s going on for them. When they share their stories, try to soak up every word. For some, it might be the first time they’ve said those words aloud.

Working with Asian young people means working through experiences of racism and discrimination, often occurring through microaggressions, so they are made to feel like it’s not ‘true’ racism.

*It means working through parts of their Asian culture that may be harmful and damaging. It means working alongside family, or managing family, or mitigating negative experiences with family – depending on the young person. At the core of it, working with these young people means we must first validate their lived experiences. They want to know that what they are going through is normal, that there is nothing wrong with them as individuals. They desire to know they are not alone in what they are experiencing.*



As part of my thesis, I developed a theory entitled “supporting Southeast Asian (SEA) adolescents to be fully known”, which I believe summarises some useful ways to work alongside SEA young people, and other Asian young people. The symbol of a bridge highlights the ongoing and everyday experiences of ethnic identity negotiation, where an individual can go from feeling ‘you’re welcome but also different’ to ‘being fully known’. The bridge also highlights the need to provide a common understanding between SEA adolescents and whoever is supporting them, regarding SEA adolescents’ lived experiences.

Without this shared understanding, this validation of experiences, there are going to be significant limits to the kind of support that is provided. Then the power of having meaningful connections with others, as well as having safe spaces to express oneself and to share openly about their experiences, allows Asian young people to feel less isolated - to feel they have a community that understands, accepts and loves them.

Because at the end of the day, isn't that what we are looking for? A place to belong, people who accept and love us, and to experience what it means to be fully known, to ourselves and with others.

---

*Dr. Lovely Dizon (1.5 generation Filipino): a researcher committed to amplifying the diverse voices of Asian youth in Aotearoa, with a PhD in population health.*

*Passionate about creating safe and intentional spaces, community building and communal care, always advocating for greater representation of the often-invisible experiences, needs and strengths of Asian youth in Aotearoa.*

Reference:

Dizon, L. (2023). An invitation to be fully known: A mixed methods grounded theory on supporting 1.5-and second-generation Southeast Asian adolescents as they negotiate their ethnic identity [Doctoral thesis, The University of Auckland].

# Kaiparahuarahi: The journal for Youth Work in Aotearoa

Volume 2 Number 3 December 2024

Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality. Ethnic Communities perspectives

PART 3 of 6

