



Sex, gender & orientation high use terms

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Coming out

Definition

The process through which a person discloses their gender, sexuality, or sex characteristics. Most people first come out to themselves before sharing this information with others. Coming out is a lifelong process for many rainbow people, rather than a one-off event.

Example of usage

When students are asked to write about themselves, some may be faced with the decision about whether to come out or not.

Key points

This is different to **outing** which is the process through which someone discloses a person's LGBTQIA+ Takatāpui MVPFAFF identity without their permission.

Outing someone can put the person's safety at risk and can have negative effects on their employment, education, housing and family situations, as well as their emotional wellbeing.

Sources

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

Gender

Definition

We are assigned a **gender**¹ at birth based on our sex characteristics, but not everyone's gender aligns with the one they were assigned. Gender is understood differently across cultures and throughout history.

Three common, yet separate, aspects of gender are **gender identity**, **gender expression** and **gender role**.

Gender identity means a person's internal sense of being feminine, masculine, something other, in between or agender. A person's gender identity may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression² means the external presentation of one's gender. This can be expressed through one's:

- name
- clothing
- behaviour
- hairstyle
- voice, or any other way.

Gender role means a culturally and socially determined set of expected behaviours, attitudes and characteristics based on concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Example of usage

The gender pay gap is a broad indicator of workplace culture and conditions, based on the difference between women's and men's hourly pay rates.

My gender expression has a variety of feminine and masculine elements, but comes out 'masculine' overall. This does not change the fact that my gender identity is nonbinary.

Key points

Gender is distinct from sex.

Gender expression does not necessarily match gender identity. A 'tomboy' or woman with masculine presentation and interests is still a woman if that is her gender identity. People often conflate sex and gender, or wrongly assume that a person's sex always determines their gender identity and gender expression.

¹ How we identify and describe ourselves based on the roles, expectations and assumptions we are socialised into.

² A person's gender expression may or may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically associated with being either solely masculine or feminine.

Sources

[Britannica.com](#)

[Gender Pay Gap](#) (Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland)

[Gender Transitioning at Work Guidelines](#) (Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland)

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

Gender marker, sex marker

Definition

Gender markers, or **sex markers**, are the letters or words representing a person's gender or sex recorded on their official identity documents such as birth certificates and passports. Typical markers are F, M, and X.

Example of usage

After I transitioned, I needed to update the gender marker on my passport.

A patient with an "F" sex marker reporting pain is at risk of being taken less seriously, as clinicians may assume her symptoms are emotional rather than physical – leading to delayed or inadequate care.³

Key Points

Gender markers on official identity documents may not necessarily match the gender identity a student or staff member has disclosed to the University.

Sources

[Glossary of Gender Related Terms and How to Use Them](#) (Gender Minorities Aotearoa, 2020)

[Passports, citizenship and identity](#) (New Zealand Government)

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

³ Further reading on medical sexism can be found in an [open access review published by Samulowitz et al.](#) in the journal Pain Research and Management.

LGBTQIA+

Definition

Agender describes someone who has an internal sense of being neither a man nor a woman, nor another particular gender, meaning 'without gender'.

Aromantic, Aro describes someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction and/or a lack of interest in forming romantic relationships. This identity exists on a spectrum, with people experiencing different degrees of aromanticism. Aromantic people can experience sexual attraction.

Asexual or Aromantic people may experience other forms of attraction such as

- platonic
- spiritual
- aesthetic
- mental attraction

Asexual, Ace describes someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction and/or lacks interest or desire for sexual relationships or activity. This identity exists on a spectrum, with people experiencing different degrees of asexuality. Asexual people can experience romantic attraction.

Bisexual describes someone who is sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender, or their own and other genders. Bisexual people can have differing levels of attraction for different sexes or genders.

Gay describes someone who is attracted to people of the same sex or gender as themselves. Gay is also commonly used by some people as an umbrella term that encompasses diverse sexualities. Gay is also used as a homophobic slur and some people within rainbow communities avoid the term.

Homosexual describes someone who is attracted to people of the same sex as themselves.

Intersex⁴ describes someone born with natural variations of sex chromosome characteristics, as well as characteristics that may be present at birth or develop during puberty such as

- reproductive anatomy
- genitals
- hormones

There are up to 40 different intersex variations.

Lesbian is a term historically describing a woman who is exclusively attracted to women. This term was often used as a political identifier, and its definition has expanded over time. Some non-binary people assigned female at birth who are attracted to women, identify as lesbian.

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and additional sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics.

It is used in a similar way to 'rainbow', but is often critiqued for centring Western understandings of gender, sex and sexuality.

⁴ Though the word intersex describes a range of natural body variations, many people will not identify with, or know, this term or related terms. In medical environments, variations in sex characteristics are known as 'differences in sex development' (DSD), though this terminology is widely critiqued by intersex activities for pathologising natural bodily development.

Non-binary is a gender identity for someone who does not identify exclusively as masculine or feminine. Non-binary is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of identities, including those who identify as both a man and a woman, neither, or a mix of genders.

Transgender, or trans⁵ refers to someone whose gender identity does not exclusively align with their sex assigned at birth. This term is often used as an umbrella term, recognising that people may describe themselves in many ways including by using indigenous terms.⁶

Queer is a reclaimed word that is often used as an umbrella term encompassing diverse sexualities and genders. It can also be used as an individual identity for someone who is either not cisgender or not heterosexual and is often preferred by people who describe their gender or sexuality more fluidly.

Example of usage

The Rainbow Networks welcome all **LGBTQIA** Takatāpui and MVPFAFF+⁷ students.

Key points

Cisgender, cis is a term for someone whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth. Someone who is cisgender is not transgender.

Perisex and **endosex** are both terms for somebody who is not intersex.

The rainbow community is another umbrella term, like LGBTQIA+, describing people of diverse sexualities, genders, and variations of sex characteristics.

Sources

[Rainbow inclusive language guide](#) (Te Kawa Mataaho, Public Service Commission)

[Inclusion of Trans and Non-Binary Students and Staff in Sport and Recreation Guidelines](#) (Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland)

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

[About Asexuality](#) (Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN))

[Endosex](#) (The Trans Language Primer)

⁵ Trans people might describe themselves as transgender, transsexual, trans man, trans woman, gender diverse, genderqueer or non-binary. The term 'trans woman' refers to a trans person assigned a male sex at birth who identifies as a woman. Similarly, the term 'trans man' refers to a trans person assigned a female sex at birth who identifies as a man.

⁶ Indigenous terms to Aotearoa / New Zealand include tāhine for transgender, whakawahine for trans women and tangata ira tane for trans men. Many Māori trans people identify with the umbrella indigenous term **takatāpui** that encompasses all Māori of diverse gender identities, sex characteristics, or sexualities. Pacific cultural terms used by trans feminine people, including in New Zealand, include fa'afafine (Samoa and Tokelau), fakaleiti / leiti (Tonga), fakafifine (Niue), akava'ine (Cook Islands), vakasalewalewa (Fiji), palopa (Papua New Guinea) and mahu (Tahiti and Hawaii). One Pacific cultural term for trans masculine people is fa'afatama (Samoa). Fa'atamaloais also sometimes used as an alternative term.

⁷ See Takatāpui definition on page 10 and MVPFAFF+ definition on page 8

MVPFAFF+

Definition

An acronym used to encompass the diverse gender and sexuality expressions and roles across Pacific cultures. The acronym stands for mahu, vakasalewa, palopa, fa'afafine, akavai'ne, fakaleiti (leiti), fakafifine, and all other expressions and roles are represented by the plus sign. Their meanings are best understood within their cultural context and may mean something different to each person.

The following terms do not have a Western equivalent, but are loosely translated to mean 'in the manner of a woman':

- Fa'afafine (Samoa)
- Mahu (Tahiti/Hawaii)
- Vaka se lewa lewa (Fiji)
- Palopa (Papua New Guinea)
- Akava'ine (Cook Islands)
- Fakaleiti/leiti (Tonga)
- Fakafifine (Niu)
- Pinapinaaaine/Binapinaaaine (Tuvalu & Kiribati)
- Rae rae (Tahiti)
- Haka huahine (Tokelau)

These terms are loosely translated to mean 'in the manner of a man':

- Fa'atama/Fa'afatama (Samoa)
- Māhūkāne (Hawai'i)
- Binabinamane (Kiribati)

Example of usage

The Rainbow Networks welcome all LGBTQIA, Takatāpui and **MVPFAFF+** students.

Key Points

According to the organisation Pride Pledge, workplaces that specified 'MVPFAFF+' in addition to 'Rainbow', 'LGBTQIA+' and 'Takatāpui' had better response rates from their workers from Pacific backgrounds.

Sources

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

[Pride Pledge](#)

Pronouns

Definition

Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone when not using their name. Commonly used personal pronouns in the English language include **he/him**, **they/them** and **she/her**.

In a number of languages, pronouns are gender neutral by default - for example, the te reo Māori pronoun 'ia' or in Mandarin, 'tā.'

Those of us who have been socialised to think of gender in a very binary way are often in the habit of using binary gendered language when referring to people, because we assume that they are a man or woman based on their name, appearance, or physical cues such as their voice. The only way to be sure of the pronouns that somebody uses is to ask them.

Example of usage

Neutral pronouns for an individual are more common than we often realise:

“Oh no, somebody left their phone in the café! I hope they come back for it - I'd be freaking out if I were them.”

Key Points

For people whose pronouns match the ones people assume for them, it might feel uncomfortable or strange to share pronouns at first. However, sharing one's own pronouns can be an effective strategy to show transgender and non-binary people that they are safe to share their own pronouns. Respecting the pronouns that people choose to share is another important strategy.

It is important to not *require* anybody to share their pronouns. If people's pronouns don't match the ones people assume for them, asking them to share their pronouns can force them into having to explain their identity.

Requiring people to share their pronouns can expose them to harassment or discrimination. It could also lead them to misgendering themselves by using pronouns they are not comfortable with rather than disclosing details of their identity.

Sources

[Pronouns](#) (InsideOut, 2021)

[Pronouns](#) (Te Ngākau Kahukura, n.d.)

Sex

Definition

Sex can mean many things, including:

Sex assigned at birth is an infant's sex and gender based on perceptions of their sex characteristics, generally the external genitalia.

Biological sex can be defined by what kinds of gametes a person produces, that is whether they produce eggs or sperm.

Sex characteristics⁸ are often incorrectly termed 'biological sex'.

The term 'sex characteristics' encompasses the range of physical, genetic, and hormonal traits that a person has. Sex characteristics can be innate, or may change over time, including through medical treatments.

Registered sex is sometimes referred to as legal sex. The sex registered on a person's legal identity documents, for example a passport or birth certificate, though these do not always match.

Perceived sex, or social sex is the sex a person is seen as and treated as socially. This can be different in different social contexts.

Examples of usage

It is fascinating to me that while my sex assigned at birth is used to calculate my health insurance premiums, my car insurance cares more about my registered sex.

My medical research on ovarian cancer requires me to collect patient information on sex.

Key Points

Sex has biological components but exists within social frameworks that shape what meaning societies attach to those components.

Sources

[Arnold et al., Nature 629, 37-40 \(2024\)](#)

[Inclusion of Trans and Non-Binary Students and Staff in Sport and Recreation Guidelines](#)

[Glossary of Gender Related Terms and How to Use Them](#) (Gender Minorities Aotearoa, 2020)

[Rainbow terminology](#) (InsideOut, 2020)

⁸ Some people use 'sex characteristics' to refer to 'primary sex characteristics' such as external genitalia, gonads or reproductive organs and fertility, gametes, chromosomes, sex hormones, as well as 'secondary sex characteristics' including breast development, patterns of hair growth such as facial hair and body hair, patterns of body fat and muscle distribution, and voice development.

Takatāpui

Definition

Takatāpui encompasses all Māori of diverse gender identities, sex characteristics, or sexualities.

The use of 'takatāpui' as an identity is a response to western ideas of sex, sexuality and gender, and emphasises one's identity as Māori as inextricably linked to their gender identity, sexuality or variation of sex characteristics.

Example of usage

“**Takatāpui** just unifies everything. I am Māori. I am queer. I am here to stay.”

Key Points

Takatāpui historically meant 'intimate companion of the same sex'. The term was reclaimed in the 1980s and used by individuals who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or part of the rainbow community.

Sources

[Inclusion of Trans and Gender Diverse Students and Staff in Sport and Recreation Guidelines](#)

takatāpui.nz

[Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau.](#) (Kerekere, 2015)

[Te Ara: Hōkakatanga – Māori sexualities](#)

Transitioning

Definition

Transitioning refers to the process a transgender person may take to affirm their gender.⁹ It may involve social, legal, and/or medical steps.

Example of usage

I want to change my pronouns on Canvas to affirm my gender as part of my transition.

Key points

Any disclosure or information sharing around a person's transition should happen on their terms. It is important to create a space where people feel comfortable to share, but they should not feel required to share information about their transition.

Sources

[Term Glossary: What do these terms mean? \(Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland\)](#)

[Transitioning and Gender Affirmation in the New Zealand Public Service.](#)

[Gender Transitioning at Work Guidelines. \(Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland\)](#)

⁹ There isn't just one way to affirm gender. Everyone will find a way that suits them best. There's no specific milestone to achieve or way to present one's gender for it to be valid.