

## Some Definitions

The following definitions may be useful in schools as they work to make their environment safe and welcoming for LGBTI students, staff and whanau.

### ***Bisexual***

Used for a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted both to members of their own sex and to members of the opposite sex.

### ***Coming Out***

Sometimes called 'coming out of the closet', this refers to the process of accepting one's own lesbian, gay or bisexual sexual orientation and developing a healthy sexual identity based on that sexual orientation. It usually involves telling someone else about one's sexual orientation, but begins with acknowledging it to oneself. The expectation still in many parts of our society that everyone is or should be heterosexual is why lesbian, gay and bisexual people 'come out' while heterosexual people do not. 'Coming out' is a lifelong process for non-heterosexual people, who are continually deciding whether to 'come out' to particular people and in particular situations. They will usually make these decisions based on how safe they feel to do so.

'Outing' someone is when a person reveals the sexual orientation (usually a non-heterosexual one since in the absence of being out, it is assumed that a person is heterosexual) of another person without their consent to a third person, or to the public, e.g. through the media. Being 'outed' can be very frightening for a person who has decided that it is not safe to reveal their sexual orientation to others, and anyone who is 'in the closet' in all or part of their lives is at risk of being 'outed' either vindictively or simply by accident. Until all parts of our society are completely safe for them, issues about being 'out' will continue to loom large for many non-heterosexual people.

### ***Fa'afafine***

This Samoan word means literally 'to be like a woman'. It focuses on gender definition rather than on sexuality, and is used for Samoan male transvestites (who may or may not be 'drag queens') and for Samoan male to female transsexuals. "Any man who shows too much interest in 'female' activities or fails to conform to the 'male' social attributes risks being labelled as a fa'afafine..." (Phil Parkinson). "Samoan men who identify as gay do not generally describe themselves as fa'afafine, although the word is increasingly used by others to mean gay. Samoan gay men call themselves mala." (Karl Pulotu-Endemann).

### ***Gay***

Usually this word is used for men who have a primary emotional and sexual attraction to other men, but sometimes lesbians use it for themselves also. Some historians have tracked this usage of the word back to the Middle Ages, and Judy Grahn, author of *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay World*, suggests that it may have come from the name of the ancient goddess Gaia, whose priests and priestesses were often gay and lesbian people.

### ***Gender identity***

Gender roles refer to the clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc that are considered appropriate or inappropriate for members of each sex. Gender identity refers to what a person thinks of as their own gender, whether they think of themselves as a man or as a woman, irrespective of their biological sex. Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from their biological sex, or at least their sex at birth. Societies prescribe, to a greater or lesser extent, gender roles, and anyone who does not fit into the role prescribed for their sex may be targeted for mistreatment ranging from not being included in a circle of friends, through to verbal harassment, assault, rape and even murder. Most, but not all, societies recognise two genders, male and female, but some societies recognise a third gender that can provide an identity for people who are uncomfortable with the gender that fits their biological sex.

### ***Heterosexism***

Heterosexism is a form of prejudice, the belief that heterosexuality and heterosexual people are superior to and more valuable than homosexuality and homosexual people. It is a learned behaviour, comparable to sexism and racism, and includes discrimination and harassment because of the belief.

### ***Heteronormative***

The perception that heterosexuality is normal, and other forms of sexuality are perceived as abnormal.

### ***Homophobia***

Homophobia is the fear or loathing of homosexuality, homosexual people, lesbian, gay and bisexual identity, and the values and behaviours which express this.

### ***Homosexual***

This was coined as a medical term in the 1860s. It generally has a narrow meaning related to sexual activity between men, and has a very technical sound to it, unlike the word 'gay' which takes on a wider meaning including emotions, lifestyle and politics. This is why many people prefer the word 'gay' to describe men whose primary sexual and emotional attraction is to their own sex. Increasingly the word 'gay' is used for lesbians as well.

### ***Intersex***

Some babies are born of gender which is indeterminate in some way, but the exact medical condition can vary significantly. This happens about once in every 1500 births, or about forty births per year in New Zealand. Often a decision is made soon after the birth to assign the child to a male or female gender but there is significant debate about whether this is appropriate. The process may involve surgery, hormone treatment, psychological treatment and social conditioning, and is a lengthy process. The decision is usually made by doctors in consultation with family, and happens long before the child is able to be involved in the decision. The surgery can be very invasive,

and the assigned gender does not always feel right to the person as they grow up. Significant numbers of intersex people seek to change their gender identity as adults. Some intersex people have begun to assert that they are neither male nor female, and have defined their gender as intersex. (There are a number of cultures in the world which do not limit themselves to two genders, so their position is not without precedent.) Intersex people may identify as homosexual or heterosexual.

### ***Lesbian***

This term, which came into use in the nineteenth century, is used to describe women with a primary sexual and emotional attraction to members of their own gender. It comes from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos, which in Classical times was a favourite haunt of the lesbian poet Sappho.

### ***Sexuality***

This describes the characteristics which are apparent in our emotional and sexual relationships with others. Our sexuality is shaped by our sexual orientation, gender identity and personality. It is about who we are, how we see ourselves, how we think others see us and how we express ourselves in our relationships.

### ***Sexual behaviour***

What a person does sexually. Our sexual behaviour does not always match our sexual orientation or identity because of pressure to conform to a perceived heterosexual norm (see heterosexism).

### ***Sexual identity***

Sexual identity is about our sexual self-concept, which begins to develop before or during adolescence and is how a person evaluates their sexual feelings and actions. Lesbians, gay and bisexual people often feel pressured to develop a heterosexual identity, but this clashes with their sexual orientation and causes confusion and anguish.

### ***Sexual orientation***

Defined by the sex of the people to whom we are primarily emotionally and sexually attracted, i.e. whether it is people of the same sex as us or different.

### ***Takatapui***

The traditional meaning of this word is 'intimate companion of the same sex' and did not necessarily imply a sexual relationship. Maori gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Maori communities have adopted it to describe themselves.

### ***Transgender***

An inclusive word for people who change their gender, either by dressing and identifying as the other gender, or through medical and surgical intervention (transsexual). Transvestites e.g. 'drag queens', men who dress up as women, and 'drag kings', women who dress up as men, often to entertain others, are not necessarily transgender.

***Transphobia***

Transphobia is the fear or loathing of, and/or hostility towards, people who are transgender or who otherwise transgress traditional gender norms.

***Transsexual***

Used for people who change their physical characteristics to those of the other sex, e.g. male to female. This is achieved by a combination of surgery, hormone therapy, electrolysis and other treatments. Their sexuality may be heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian or bisexual.

***Transvestite***

A person who consistently or occasionally wears clothing commonly associated with the other gender, such as a man dressing up as a woman, often known as 'cross-dressing'. Transvestites may be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual in their sexual orientation and behaviour.