

Gender fluidity

Gender is being recognised as a spectrum rather than a binary choice. Gender diversity is becoming more common and accepted, but discrimination and abuse can still be common. Non-binary people often suffer from higher levels of anxiety and distress, and may participate less in sport.

What we're seeing

"Don't put us in a box"

Transgender refers to people who identify as the opposite gender to their birth sex. Non-binary and gender fluid people may identify as both female and male, or neither.

Increasing visibility of gender diverse identities reflects the more general trend of recent decades in recognising greater social diversity.

Millennials (born between 1980–2000) has been dubbed the gender-fluid generation, but that is more a reflection that a label was created, rather than such gender identities not being present previously.¹

More people identifying as non-binary

Gender-fluid characters are now more prevalent in books, films, and on TV. And more celebrities are describing the flexibility or fluidity of their gender.² The fashion industry is also emphasising gender fluidity.³

A 2017 survey in the US reported that 20% of millennials identified as LGBT (compared with 7% of "Boomers"), and 12% described themselves as transgender or gender non-conforming.⁴

In NZ, 4% of adults identified as LGBT+ in 2020, with 0.8% of the population estimated to be transgender or non-binary. The LGBT+ population tend to be younger than the non-LGBT+ population, with more than half under 35.⁵

Discrimination can be common

Reports of discrimination against LGBT+ people are increasing, despite growing acceptance. This may partly be due to better reporting of discrimination or abuse.^{6, 7, 8}

In some regions there is an increase in anti-LGBTQ legislation.⁹

Transgender and non-binary people often suffer from higher levels of bullying, distress and anxiety.^{5, 10}

But acceptance & support is increasing

More support groups for transgender and non-binary people are emerging.¹¹ It is becoming easier for people to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate.¹² The benefits of, and initiatives to support, non-binary people in businesses are being recognised and encouraged.¹³

Evolving acceptance in sport

Acceptance of more gender diverse athletes in sports is mixed. Some studies show there is good support.¹⁴ While others find high levels of homophobic and transphobic language or actions.¹⁵

In 2021 Laurel Hubbard was the first transgender athlete to compete at the Olympic Games, but not without controversy.¹⁶

Later in 2021 the International Olympic Committee issued new transgender guidelines, which ends sex testing, among other requirements.¹⁷

Potential implications

Create

- Increasing acceptance of individuality and varying identity
- New social dynamics of younger and older people

Relate

- Work with the individual, not a stereotype
- Risks of increasing tensions between conservative and liberal views

Consume

- Marketing & outreach programmes focus on diversity and inclusion
- Governments and businesses supporting expressions of diversity

Degrade

- Moving away from social rigidity and simple classifications
- Be alert to and oppose bullying and discrimination

Connect

- Language and how it is used influences interactions
- Increasing recognition of the benefits of diversity

Define

- Increasing complexities in how people define themselves

More information (links)

¹ [The gender-fluid generation](#)

² [Time magazine - Beyond He or She](#)

³ [BBC - The beauty of fluidity](#)

⁴ [2017 GLAAD survey](#)

⁵ [Stats NZ Household Economic Survey 2020](#)

⁶ [GLAAD Accelerating Acceptance 2021 report](#)

⁷ [Spate of attacks sparks fear](#)

⁸ [FBI hate crimes report](#)

⁹ [Unprecedented wave of anti-LGBTQ Bills](#)

¹⁰ [Counting Ourselves 2019 report](#)

¹¹ [Gender Minorities Aotearoa](#)

¹² [NZ govt increases support for those wanting to change registered sex](#)

¹³ [Companies can't ignore shifting gender norms](#)

¹⁴ [Out In Sports Study](#)

¹⁵ [Outsport European Survey 2019](#)

¹⁶ [First transgender athlete to compete at Olympics](#)

¹⁷ [IOC transgender guidelines a significant moment in history](#)