



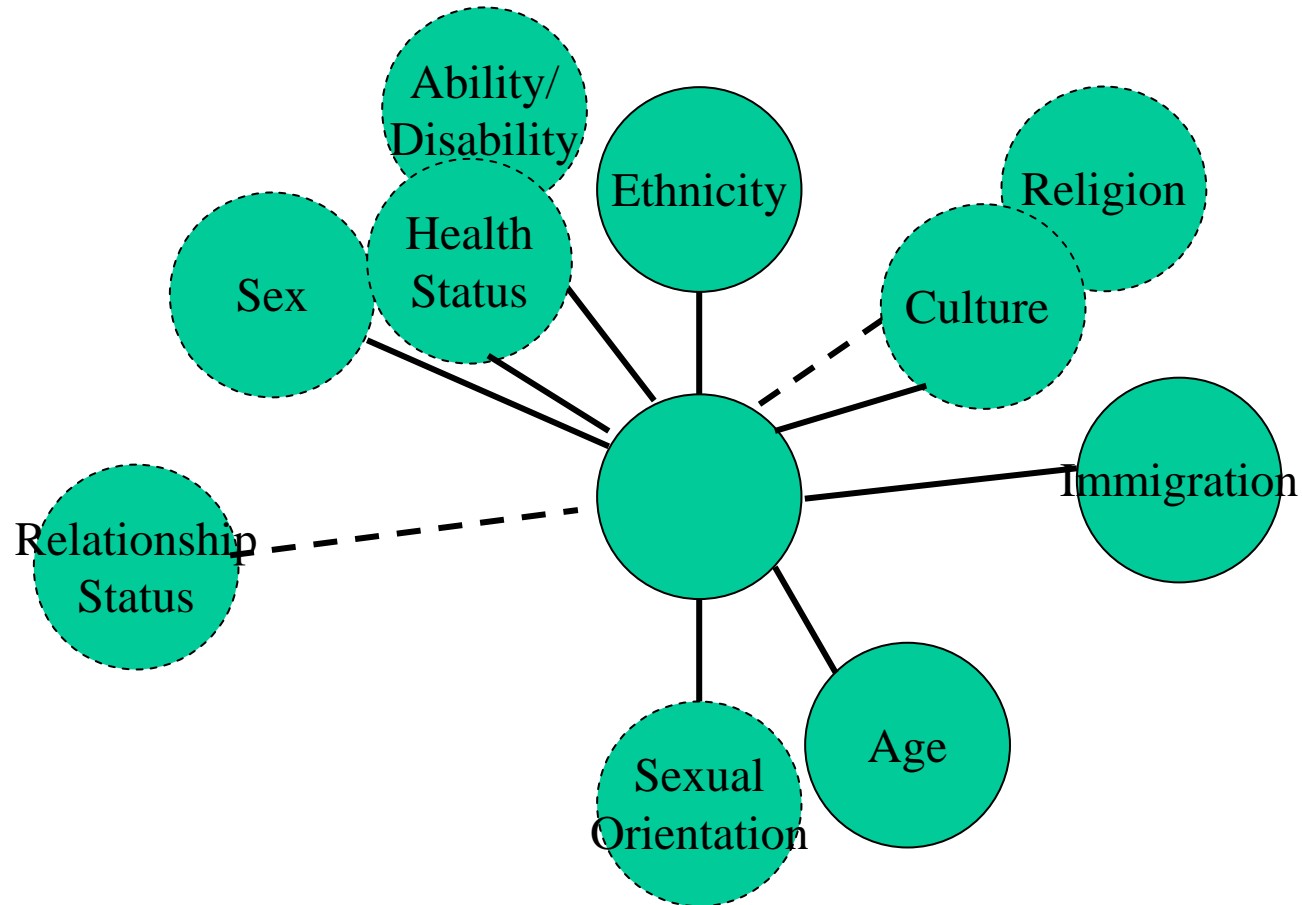
# **The Significance of Diversity for Suicide Prevention Initiatives**

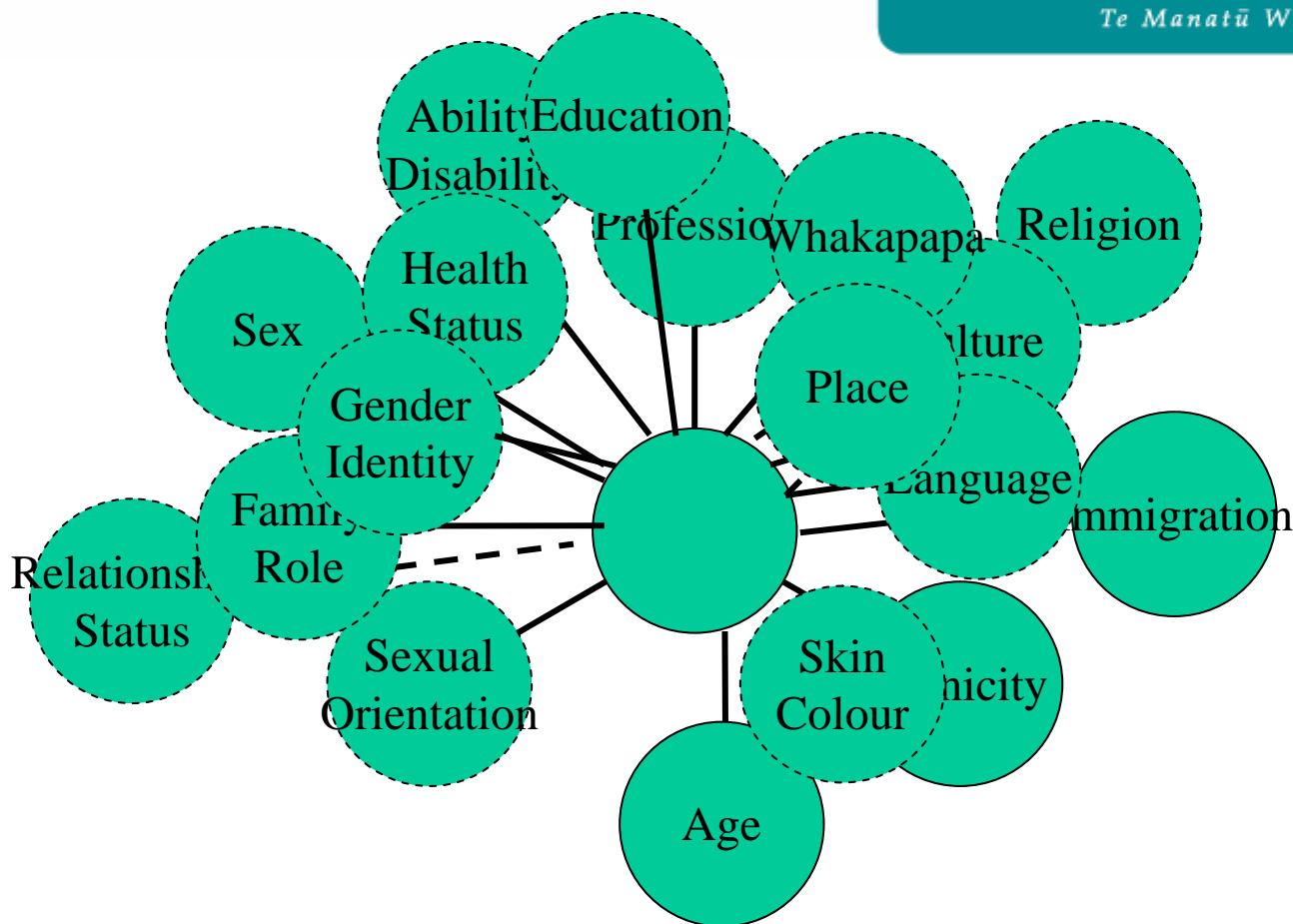
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**Social Inclusion & Participation**

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# Multidimensional Identity





Every person is a unique and complex interplay of identities.  
Diversity = many differences – and commonalities - between people



*“I believe access to mental health services is incredibly poor if non-existent. My only free psych care was after a suicide attempt... I’m one who has hidden, we tend to break down and come out in our 40s. Coming out then is very dramatic and sudden and [we have] lives that we’re in the process of tearing down, and you need help... I really needed help initially to survive and function and then I guess I needed help to come to terms with and learn to accept myself for who I was”*

(Trans woman, submission to the Human Rights Commission Transgender Inquiry, 2007)



# Three approaches

- Generic approaches, inclusive of diversity
- Tailored initiatives within broader generic initiatives, to meet the needs of specific groups
- Initiatives specifically targeting marginalised groups



# ‘GLBTI’ people

- Rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, and mental health problems associated with suicide are between 1.5 and 12 times higher for GLB people than for heterosexuals in NZ (eg Fergusson et al. 2005, Skegg et al. 2003, Fleming et al. 2007 )
- Transgender and intersex people also have higher risk of psychological distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviours (eg Fitzpatrick et al. 2005, Johannsen et al. 2006)
- Many people are aware of same-sex attraction by age 13, but few disclose this to anybody before leaving school (eg Le Brun et al. 2004)
- Most GLB youth who attempt suicide have not ‘come out’
- Many GLBTI people are reluctant to access health services or ‘come out’ to professionals for fear of a negative response (eg Semp 2006, Fish 2006, Myers et al 2005, Meckler et al. 2006, Neville & Henrickson 2006)
- There are also plenty of happy, healthy GLBTI people (eg Henrickson et al. in press)



## Risk Factors:

### *Social Norms and Conditions*

- Heterosexism
- Economic and social discrimination

### *Individual Factors*

- Internalised homophobia
- Early same-sex sexual activity &/or self-disclosure
- Parental discouragement of gender atypical behaviour
- Verbal, physical and sexual victimization
- Social isolation
- Depression
- Multiple disadvantage (other marginalised identities)

### *Coping mechanisms*

- Substance abuse
- Social withdrawal

## Resilience Factors:

- Positive social acceptance
- Positive representations of GLBTI people
- Support groups

- Sense of social connectedness
- Support of friends, family and others
- Availability of quality role models
- High self-esteem
- Sexuality education and information
- Feeling safe

- Role model identification
- Support seeking



Lesbian, on coming out to her parents:

*“Shock, anger, concern plus ‘Maybe we should send you to a psychiatrist’ from my father. ‘I would rather you were dead than be one of those’ from my mother”*  
(quoted in Stewart 1993)

Regardless of their actual identity, those whose gender expression is perceived to be non-conforming are frequently targets of homophobic bullying in schools (Le Brun et al. 2004, Nairn & Smith 2003, Carragher & Rivers 2002, Plummer 1999).

Heterosexual woman, on heterosexual males:

*“Oh, guys, they are such a problem. They’re worried that there is going to be some gay stigma, some feminine stigma put on them. They just don’t tell each other these things [i.e. their problems], especially if it is serious”*

(Cathy, 22, quoted in Gilchrist et al. 2007)



# Targeted Initiatives

## Some potential strengths

- Safe from discrimination
- Easy access
- Social acceptance
- Positive representations
- Peer support
- Positive role models
- Empowerment approach
- Expertise

## Some potential challenges

- Reproduction of dominance → *self reflection*
- Stigma → *confidentiality*
- Barrier to access for those not self-identifying → *partnerships*
- Barrier for non-GLBTI friends, whānau & others → *systemic approach*
- Ownership → *community ownership*
- Limited resources → *community development approach*
- One aspect of identity as focus → *holistic, inclusive approach*



# Inclusive Generic Initiatives

## Some potential strengths

- Allows person to define what parts of their identity are relevant
- Social acceptance
- Access for those questioning or not self-identifying
- Access for non-GLBTI whānau, friends & others

## Some potential challenges

- Reproduction of dominance → *self reflection*
  - Fears and assumptions of clients = barrier to access & disclosure → *explicit demonstration of inclusiveness*
  - Stigma → *confidentiality*
  - Staff prejudices → *diversity training*
  - Lack of expertise → *recruitment*
  - Heterosexist staff, concepts & structures → *referrals*
  - Ownership → *tools, guidelines*
  - Heterosexist staff, concepts & structures → *quality criteria, analysis & monitoring*
  - Ownership → *tailored services*
- *partnership & collaborative models*



*“When Annie and Meredith kissed, it set off a storm of screams in my university Hall of Residence in Dunedin. But it was there for all to see. Being gay wasn’t invisible anymore – even though the gay characters did have an odd habit of being written off to live in Dunedin.”*

(Forde – on the television series ‘Shortland Street’, quoted in Busch & Beaumont 2005)



## Diversity:

Starting point: Complexity of each individual & their social world

To contribute to suicide prevention and support those affected by suicide, we need to

- combat *all* forms of discrimination
- affirm and foster strength & belonging  
to build self-esteem and  
to develop strategies to respond to discrimination & other stresses
- be actively inclusive in all generic areas of work AND  
support specific targeted initiatives
- ensure that targeted initiatives are also inclusive within their target population



To be inclusive we need

- critical self-reflection
- explicit indications marginalised groups are welcome and safe
- specific factors and issues taken into account
- diversity competence
- awareness of our own limitations
- participation of marginalised groups
- to think outside of the square
- ...



*“I’ve been on the street, and I’ve been on the benefit, and I’ve had my arse kicked a few times for no good reason other than I was a poofter, trash, and my spirit rejected that. It came from a sense of pride, of mana”*

(Georgina Beyer, quoted in Hutchings & Aspin 2007)

Please contact me with any questions, suggestions or feedback and/or to share your knowledge:

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