



Internship Report

on

**How can the consideration of  
sexuality and gender diversity  
improve outcomes in the SDGs and  
for queer communities in Aotearoa-  
New Zealand?**

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Since 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set the United Nations (UN) development agenda for addressing inequalities. The 17 SDGs build upon the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),<sup>1</sup> and if nations can successfully fulfil them, then poverty, conflict and environmental destruction will be largely diminished.<sup>2</sup> As a member of the UN, the government in Aotearoa New Zealand (referred to as Aotearoa herein) has signed up to work towards fulfilling the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the intentions of the SDGs to “leave no one behind,”<sup>4</sup> they contain no mention of sexuality or diverse genders, and no SDG pertains to the difficulties that the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Queer Intersex Asexual Plus (LGBTQIA+ referred to as ‘queer’ herein) communities globally face.<sup>5</sup> This essay will examine how the lack of consideration for queer communities in the SDGs may limit the capacity of Aotearoa to fulfil the goals, and therefore may further marginalise queer communities. Firstly, I define possible queer communities in Aotearoa, and why the term ‘queer’ has been chosen as an umbrella term for these groups. Then I discuss the specific inequalities that queer communities face, and how these inequalities link directly to the aspirations of the SDGs. From this, I argue that if Aotearoa is to successfully achieve the SDGs, it is necessary for our institutions, organisations and civil society to include a focus on our queer communities. This consideration is vital if we want to achieve the SDGs for all New Zealanders.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Mills. *‘Leave No One Behind’: Gender, Sexuality and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Evidence Report No 154 Sexuality, Poverty and Law). Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 2015, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. “Sustainable Development Goals.” *New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade*. Accessed on 03/12/2017. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/work-with-the-un-and-other-partners/new-zealand-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Mills. *‘Leave No One Behind’: Gender, Sexuality and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations. “Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform the World.” *United Nations*. Accessed on 04/12/2017. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Prior to furthering this discussion, it is important to note the limitations of this research. The scope of this paper is not to address the complexities and challenges that queer communities face in Aotearoa. This essay makes no claim to understand all of the intricacies of the queer experience beyond my own personal experience of being queer, but draws on broad perspectives from various sources. Although the term queer has been, in the past, used as a derogatory label, it has been reclaimed by members in the LGBTQIA+ communities since the 1990s, and especially in academia.<sup>6</sup> Not all members in these communities will identify as queer, and many may not appreciate being labelled as such. However, for the purpose of having a brief investigation of the implications of the SDGs upon a group of minority New Zealanders, queer has been chosen as an umbrella term. In Aotearoa, there are many groups who may fall under this category such as takatāpui, pansexual, transgender, intersex, fa'afafine, fa'afatama, genderqueer, fakaleiti, leiti, akava'ine, and non-binary, to name but a few<sup>7</sup>. Please see the references for sources which may provide more information in this area.

Even by using queer as an umbrella term to include a diverse group of people, there are limited statistics available regarding queer populations, and there is no section in the New Zealand Census targeting diversity in gender, sex and sexuality.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the nature of gender, sex and sexuality being such an intimate aspect of a person's identity means that not everyone who is queer will be 'out', or identify as such publically.<sup>9</sup> However, current estimates based on the available data collected suggest that

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<sup>6</sup> Lauren Guy. "The Question of Reclaiming the Word Queer." *University Times*. 26/01/2017. <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2017/01/the-question-of-reclaiming-the-word-queer/>

<sup>7</sup> Outline NZ. "Glossary of terms." *Outline NZ*. Accessed on 27/12/2018. <http://www.outline.org.nz/glossary>

<sup>8</sup> Moira Clunie. "Suicide prevention and the rainbow population." *A submission on A Strategy to Prevent Suicide in New Zealand 2017: Draft for public consultation*. New Zealand: Multiple Contributors (2016). Accessed on 01/12/2017 from <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/policy-advocacy/Suicide-prevention-and-the-rainbow-population-submission-to-the-draft-NZSPS-26062017.pdf>, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lynne Alice and Lynne Star. *Queer in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2004, 134.

between 6-15% of Aotearoa's population are queer.<sup>10</sup> This means that Aotearoa has roughly between 287, 000 and 712, 000 queer people based on the current overall population.<sup>11</sup> The average of this estimate is approximately 500, 000 New Zealanders. Therefore, within the 17 SDGs, which were devised as a holistic framework for beneficial outcomes for all groups,<sup>12</sup> it is possible that approximately half a million New Zealanders are not having their needs considered within these goals.

By only using terms such as man and woman, and with no mention of diverse sexualities, the language and guidelines of the SDGs erase and de-prioritise queer populations. Without any explicit measures to include queer populations, the SDGs and their targets therefore implicitly privilege those who are not queer. The SDGs by default assume that the target populations are cisgender and heterosexual<sup>13</sup>.

Cisgender people are those who identify with the sex and gender that they were assigned at birth based on the gender binary, as only woman or man.<sup>14</sup> Examples of queer people who may not be cisgender include intersex and fa'afafine people, for example.<sup>15</sup> Heterosexual people are those who are attracted to those with the opposite gender to their gender, based on this woman/man binary.<sup>16</sup> Queer individuals who are not heterosexual include those who are pansexual or takatāpui, for example.<sup>17</sup> The lack of acknowledgement of queer groups (who may not be cisgender or heterosexual) highlight the way

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<sup>10</sup> Moira Clunie. "Suicide prevention and the rainbow population." (2016), 2

<sup>11</sup> Statistics New Zealand. "Population." *Statistics New Zealand*. Accessed on 05/12/2017.

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/population>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations. "Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform the World." *United Nations*

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Mills. "Gender, sexuality and the SDGs: An evidence-base for action." *Institute of Development Studies*. 20/10/2015. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/opinion/gender-sexuality-and-the-sdgs-an-evidence-base-for-action>

<sup>14</sup> B. Aultman. "Cisgender." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. 1, 1–2. (2015), 46.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399614>

<sup>15</sup> Outline NZ. "Glossary of terms," 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Commission NZ. *Born Free and Equal* [Guide, 978-0-478-35643-4]. New Zealand: Human Rights Commission NZ. Accessed 01/12/2017. [https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/4314/2427/4895/BornFreeEqual\\_for\\_Web.pdf](https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/4314/2427/4895/BornFreeEqual_for_Web.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Outline NZ. "Glossary of terms," 2018.

that queer communities exist at the peripheries of what society deems normal.<sup>18</sup> It illustrates the hegemonies of cisnormativity and heteronormativity – that is, that people who are cisgender and heterosexual have an unchallenged and widely accepted dominance in society and by extension, in institutions such as the UN. There is an institutionalised naturalisation of the gender binaries of women and men, and an expectation within this that sexual attraction will occur mutually only between the two.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising that the SDGs do not mention queer populations in their targets.

However, if queer people deviate from what society deems acceptable and expected in terms of gender relations, and the SDGs aim to “leave no one behind”, then there is arguably more impetus for the SDGs to be especially inclusive towards queer populations.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned above, the SDGs are not legally binding, and it is for specific nations themselves to determine how they wish to ensure that the goals are fulfilled. It is up to Aotearoa as a nation to decide how the SDGs can and should specifically be fulfilled, based on New Zealander’s specific needs.<sup>21</sup> If Aotearoa does not wish to leave any New Zealanders behind, then we need to ensure that our fulfillment of the SDGs is mindful of the specific needs of our queer population. It could be suggested that the experiences for queer people in Aotearoa are not as dangerous or as difficult as they are in other countries. Counter arguments to the idea that queer people need to be re-prioritised in the SDGs may focus on the progress that has already been made in laws on homosexuality and same sex marriage.<sup>22</sup> Certainly these measures allow a degree of equality before the law between queer New Zealanders and other New Zealanders. However, because

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<sup>18</sup> Sally Hines. “Feminism” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. 1, 1–2. (2015), 85.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399614>

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Beattie Jung, and Ralph F Smith. *Heterosexism*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 105; Amy Lind. “Governing Intimacy, Struggling for Sexual Rights: Challenging heteronormativity in the global development industry.” *Development* 52.1, (2009), 34. doi:10.1057/dev.2008.71

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Mills. ‘*Leave No One Behind*’: *Gender, Sexuality and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. “Sustainable Development Goals,” 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Commission NZ. *Born Free and Equal*. 2017, 3.

cisnormativity and heteronormativity are so pervasive, these laws can still be exclusionary and are not enough to ensure that queer communities will be properly considered in the fulfillment of SDGs in Aotearoa.

To elaborate further on the importance of considering the needs of our queer populations, we can examine the specific ways that the fulfillment of the SDGs in Aotearoa will need to consider the needs of queer people. A key report from the Institute of Development Studies Sexuality, Law and Poverty Program analysed the fulfillment of the past MDGs and found that queer people were especially disadvantaged because of a failure to ensure inclusive development frameworks. The study related these findings to the current SDGs. These included *Goal 1* (No Poverty), *Goal 3* (Good health and Wellbeing), *Goal 4* (Quality Education), *Goal 5* (Gender Equality), *Goal 8* (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and *Goal 11* (Inclusive, Safe Cities).<sup>23</sup> Although no such review has been undertaken within an Aotearoa context, parallels can be found from examining similar evidence about the experiences of our own queer population.

The intersectionality of both the experiences of Aotearoa's queer populations, and the SDGs make summarising this evidence difficult. The following examples will offer limited evidence of these challenges, despite there being many possible interpretations. Firstly, achieving *Goal 1* of No Poverty is arguably the most aspirational of the SDGs. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the diverse classifications of poverty, but poverty can be equated to social or material deprivation in some definitions.<sup>24</sup> Measuring social or material deprivation for queer populations in Aotearoa requires an

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<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Mills. *'Leave No One Behind': Gender, Sexuality and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Joanna Mack. "Definitions of Poverty: How poor is too poor?" *Poverty and Social Exclusion*. 21/01/2016. <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/definitions-poverty>

awareness of the specific needs of queer New Zealanders, in the first instance. Therefore, if Aotearoa truly seeks to lessen social and material deprivation for its citizens, then the needs of queer communities must be prioritised. Otherwise, it will not be possible for Aotearoa to meet *Goal 1* of the SDGs.

Queer communities face higher chances of mental health issues and suicide than other New Zealanders, as has been found in a number of studies.<sup>25</sup> A statistic reported in these is that 20% of queer youth in secondary school considered suicide in the past year in comparison to 4% of non-queer secondary school students.<sup>26</sup> Queer populations have a higher risk of mental health issues generally over their lifetimes, and higher chances of substance abuse.<sup>27</sup> *Goal 3* (Good Health and Wellbeing) is therefore significantly more difficult to achieve for Aotearoa's queer population, and will need extra consideration from a queer perspective if it is to be fulfilled.

Without considering queer communities, Quality Education (Goal 4) for everyone in Aotearoa will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve. In Gunn and Smith's book "Sexual Cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand Education," many educational practitioners find that often heteronormative and cisnormative practices end up disadvantaging queer people (and especially queer youth) in schools. They discuss the way that teachers and students alike treat queer students and peers differently, and often at the exclusion of queer students.<sup>28</sup> For example, one fifth of transgender youth experienced bullying at least

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<sup>25</sup> InsideOUT. *Making Schools Safer for Trans and Gender Diverse Youth*. Wellington: InsideOUT, 2016. <http://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Making-Schools-Safer-For-Trans-and-Gender-Diverse-Youth-web.pdf>; Moira Clunie. "Suicide prevention and the rainbow population." (2016).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Moira Clunie. "Suicide prevention and the rainbow population." (2016), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandra C. Gunn and Lee A Smith. *Sexual Cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand*. (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015), 2-7.

weekly or more, and more than half of trans students were worried that someone at school would hurt or bother them.<sup>29</sup> Queer students are often unable to access safe spaces in educational institutions, where they would be free to express their identities without any fear of reprehension,<sup>30</sup> and the curriculum around sexuality and gender diversity (which perhaps may offset some of this discrimination), is still widely contested.<sup>31</sup> Curriculum around sexuality is often still seen as a concern for religious institutes, and the teaching of this curriculum is often extremely interlinked with heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions.<sup>32</sup> If Aotearoa wants to ensure that *Goal 4* of the SDGs is fulfilled, then queer communities once again need to be specifically considered.

Gender Equality (*Goal 5*) aims to better address the specific inequalities and experiences that women face in comparison to men. As feminist theories have become more accepted in development, and in society generally, it has become a normalised notion that women have different experiences to men, and therefore need development frameworks which specifically address these needs.<sup>33</sup> With our recently elected female Prime Minister, it may appear that Aotearoa is doing well in ensuring gender equality. Development policy that focuses on gender equality is called ‘gender mainstreaming’ and the policies work to better ensure representation of women, such as in positions of leadership. “Gender” mainstreaming however is misleading in that the policies that it refers to do not generally seek to tackle the heterosexist and cisnormative tendencies of development’s gender and sexuality assumptions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> InsideOUT. *Making Schools Safer for Trans and Gender Diverse Youth*. (2016), 10.

<sup>30</sup> G. Hartal. “Fragile subjectivities: constructing queer safe spaces.” *Social and Cultural Geography*. (2017), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2017.1335877>

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra C. Gunn and Lee A Smith. *Sexual Cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand*. (2015), 120.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Amy Lind. “Governing Intimacy, Struggling for Sexual Rights: Challenging heteronormativity in the global development industry.” (2009), 34

<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Leckie. *Development in an Insecure and Gendered World: The Relevance of the Millennium Development Goals*. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 1328.

Rather, often the narratives of gender mainstreaming perpetuate the expectations of the heteronormative social order, and do not support more diverse gender identities and sexualities. This does not only harm queer people, but also women and men, as gender stereotypes are still maintained.<sup>35</sup> For example, Georgina Beyer was the first transgender MP in the world, as voted in by New Zealanders.<sup>36</sup> However, at the same time, the recent announcement of our Prime Minister's pregnancy has caused controversy and made Jacinda Ardern only the second Prime Minister to be in office while pregnant, in modern history.<sup>37</sup> This highlights that changes towards gender equality can be achieved in some ways, but not in others. If these intricacies of Gender Equality are considered from the perspectives of queer communities, then perhaps *Goal 5* could be more effectively achieved in Aotearoa.

Decent Work and Economic Growth (*Goal 8*), may also be difficult to achieve without consideration of queer people's needs. Section 21 of the New Zealand Human Rights Act outlines the areas that a person cannot be discriminated against. Gender is one area that is included, as is sexuality.<sup>38</sup> However, gender in this case does not pertain to anyone who has a more diverse gender other than male or female, and makes no consideration for transgender or non-binary people.<sup>39</sup> An Amendment to the Bill to include gender identity as an area that people cannot be discriminated for only reached Select Committee, and

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1338.

<sup>36</sup> Schmidt, Johanna. "Gender diversity – Transsexuals", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Accessed 28/01/2018. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/interactive/28858/georgina-beyer>.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Pearlman. "New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces pregnancy, revealing she found out just days before her surprise election." *The Telegraph, U.K.* 19/01/2018. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/01/19/new-zealand-prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-announces-pregnancy/>

<sup>38</sup> New Zealand Legislation. "Prohibited grounds of discrimination." Human Rights Act 1993. *New Zealand Parliament*. 28/09/2017. <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0082/latest/DLM304475.html>

<sup>39</sup> Alison J Laurie, and Linda Evans. *Twenty Years on: Histories of Homosexual Law Reform in New Zealand*. Wellington: Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand Te Pūranga Takatāpui o Aotearoa (LAGNZ), 2009, 80.

has not been passed.<sup>40</sup> This means that there is no official legal protection against discrimination specifically for transgender or non-binary people in New Zealand. This lack of legal protection can have far reaching consequences in many areas of a person's life, and further undermines the social acceptance of gender diverse people in society.<sup>41</sup> It also means that queer people may be discriminated against in the workplace if their biological sex does not match their self-identified gender, and if the role is sex-specific.<sup>42</sup> Cisnormativity pervades even our human rights laws in Aotearoa as this example highlights. This limits our capacity to be able to fulfil the SDGs generally, but also in specific situations such as work place discrimination. If queer populations were considered in *Goal 8*, then perhaps the altering of this law could be re-prioritised, and queer populations would be better protected from discrimination.

Queer communities also should be included during urban planning to ensure that Aotearoa's urban areas are to be Inclusive and Safe Cities (*Goal 11*). It is well established that minority groups need to be considered during urban planning in order to ensure inclusive design.<sup>43</sup> For example, the group 'Women in Urbanism' started this year in Auckland as a way to promote women's issues in Auckland's city planning.<sup>44</sup> In Avondale, Auckland also, a more health outcome focused method of urban design was used in 2005 by including "quiet voices" which included groups such as youth, Chinese migrants and

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<sup>40</sup> New Zealand Parliament. "Human Rights (Gender Identity) Amendment Bill." *New Zealand Parliament*. 23/8/06. [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/00DBHOH\\_BILL6476\\_1/human-rights-gender-identity-amendment-bill](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/00DBHOH_BILL6476_1/human-rights-gender-identity-amendment-bill)

<sup>41</sup> Alison J Laurie and Linda Evans. *Twenty Years on: Histories of Homosexual Law Reform in New Zealand*. 2009, 90.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Petra L. Doan. *Queering Planning : Challenging Heteronormative Assumptions and Reframing Planning Practice*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Jacobson. "Women in Urbanism group aims to elevate gender issues around Auckland's planning." *Stuff Media*. 2/10/2017. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/97351505/women-in-urbanism-group-aims-to-elevate-gender-issues-around-aucklands-planning>

Polynesian women.<sup>45</sup> Despite these measures, and queer groups experiencing similar issues to other gender minorities such as women, queer communities are often still excluded from plans.<sup>46</sup> It can be argued that cities, and the governance of them by the state, are yet another space where heteronormativity prevails.<sup>47</sup> Urban design needs to focus on queer populations in order to avoid this, which may in turn further benefit other groups such as women.<sup>48</sup>

As these limited examples illustrate, the needs of queer communities in Aotearoa need to be considered if the SDGs can be achieved for all New Zealanders. In *Goal 1* (No Poverty), *Goal 3* (Good Health and Wellbeing), *Goal 4* (Quality Education), *Goal 5* (Gender Equality), *Goal 8* (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and *Goal 11* (Inclusive, Safe Cities), queer communities face different issues when compared to other New Zealanders. There are many challenges associated with achieving the ideals that the SDGs entail. However, if we can consider queer communities in our pursuits towards these ideals, then Aotearoa could be a world leader in centering the interests of those who were not properly included in the SDGs. Heteronormativity and cisnormativity are hegemonies which effect all areas of society in Aotearoa, and challenging these structures will be beneficial not only for our queer communities, but for all men and women. For the 2018 Census, sexual orientation or gender identity was not measured again<sup>49</sup> which means there will be no definite statistic about how many people are being impacted. But this omission in itself is perhaps the clearest example that the interests of our queer communities do

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Quigley and Sheryl Burt. "Assessing the health and wellbeing impacts of urban planning in Avondale: a New Zealand case study." *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*. 29 (2006): 165-175. [http://hiaconnect.edu.au/old/files/Avondale\\_Quigley.pdf](http://hiaconnect.edu.au/old/files/Avondale_Quigley.pdf), 166.

<sup>46</sup> Petra L. Doan. *Queering Planning: Challenging Heteronormative Assumptions and Reframing Planning Practice*. (2011), 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Cooke. "LGBTI people will still be invisible on next NZ census." *Stuff Media*. 10/01/2018. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/100456579/lgbti-people-will-still-be-invisible-on-next-nz-census>

need to be addressed explicitly. If we do not attempt to re-interpret the SDGs in favour of all groups in Aotearoa, including queer communities, then we will not be successful in seeking a future of truly holistic sustainable development.

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