

Mana (they/them): Whakapapa

Mana's kōrero

Mana's journey has stretched from one identity to another. Taking pride in who they are, they have been able to draw on the strength of their multiple identities: Māori, Pākēha, non-binary, manga enthusiast! Mana has been passionate about how these perspectives weave and clash, and they have studied and researched queer indigenous identities in their own time.

While their journey ahead is still beset with challenges, they are able to stand firm in their story, lending their strength and wisdom to others walking connected paths. Mana has worked hard for something that so many seem to have so easily – to be seen for who they are, and not discriminated against.

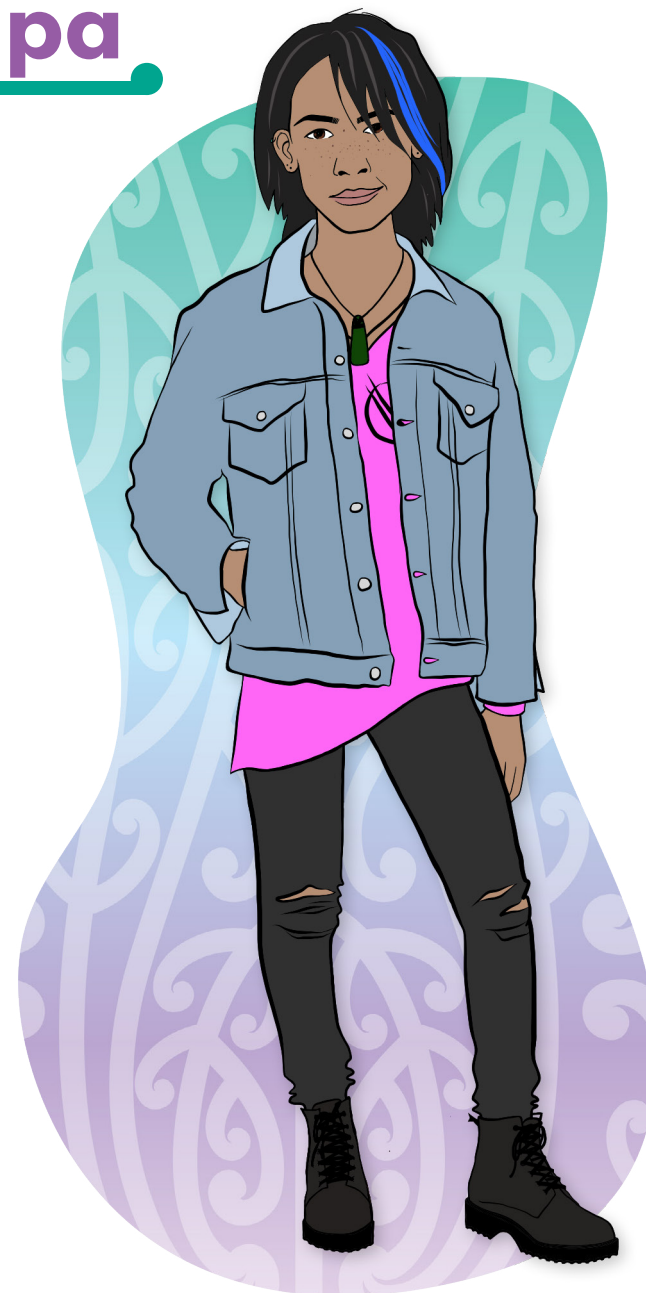
In searching through historical and modern contexts, they have connected the whakapapa of queer indigenous peoples around the world. This knowledge offers Mana a better understanding of themselves; a queer indigenous whakapapa.

This shone through at the wānanga, where they were able to connect, add to and illuminate the group's learning together, especially as it related to the trans community – they are a born leader. What made the wānanga transformative is that they were able to share it with a member of their whānau, and their Dad was able to see Mana thrive in this space. They were able to be vulnerable together, taking a long walk and sharing their hearts with one another. This is whakapapa thriving.

Family relationships, lineage, contexts, history

A lot of Māori stuff is actually pretty binary - the guys do this, the girls do that. So I'm not sure how comfortable I am with that because I don't know which one I would be more comfortable with. Like kapa haka, I never was able to fully want to do that because I don't feel comfortable in either of the gender roles...and I don't want to make a big scene about it.

- Mana



Whakaaro

Mana has turned their knowledge of queer indigenous identities into action, and is a passionate advocate for takatāpui rights in their school and at home. They have been a powerful voice for identity-affirming pronoun use in their school. They work to build their understanding of who they are, in spite of the fact the formal curriculum offers little at times.

As so many system and cultural norms are binary by design, Mana is repeatedly forced to choose between options that leave no space for their non-binary identity. Wear the female school uniform or the male one? Take the male or female role in kapa haka? Submit to a binary gender to receive medical treatment, or try to educate yet another doctor? This constant othering is complex and exhausting.

Whakapapa is dynamic, especially in the takatāpui space. It encompasses biological and chosen families. Whakapapa can grow from collective groups in the community, friendship groups as well as wider or immediate family. All of these whakapapa groups give rangatahi takatāpui a place of belonging, in the past and for the future. When they are activated and affirmed, the nature of the connection can be transformational.

Relationships and perceptions can be transformed when rangatahi takatāpui are given safe space to challenge their classmates, teachers, doctors and whānau. This can be achieved by ensuring rangatahi takatāpui feel valued, affirmed, and listened to. For many schools, systems and cultural norms, this is a disruption to the 'business as usual' approach and requires intentional action.

Whaiwhakaaro

- Leave space for rangatahi takatāpui to identify in ways that are authentic to them, and ensure you learn from them and respect the knowledge they trust you with.
- Whakapapa, whānau and relationships are dynamic; recognise that belonging and kinship has many forms.
- The process of acceptance and understanding is specific to each relationship and needs support, time and space.

Pātai/Whakapātaritari

1. Do you normalise the use of preferred pronouns in the ways you speak and in the systems in which you operate?
2. In what specific ways do you make your school inclusive of gender diversity?
3. How do you work with whānau of takatāpui rangatahi? In what ways do you value, challenge, and support them?
4. Where there is whānau conflict, how do you keep rangatahi takatāpui safe?



Supporting quotes

It's not as easy as it looks being takatāpui. I think sometimes people get the idea that things aren't as bad as they are because there's takatāpui they know that seem to be doing fine. But just because we have gay or even transgender politicians, we still live in a country where conversion therapy is legal. That just seems so backwards to me.

- Mana

I'm almost constantly changing my GP because I never find the right one. I'd feel a lot more comfortable if the doctor didn't just assume and maybe asked what my pronouns are when we first meet. Just knowing that the doctor's is a safe place is what I want.

- Mana

