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Intersectionality in Rainbow Inclusion Work: Emerging Organisational Practices Within Aotearoa New Zealand Workplaces

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Abstract
This article examines how the concept of intersectionality can serve as a useful lens and be incorporated into Rainbow inclusion practices within Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces. While research has demonstrated the compounding disadvantages experienced by Rainbow employees with multiple marginalised identities, organisational responses to Rainbow inclusion continue to operate predominantly through a single-axis lens, addressing Rainbow inclusion as separate from other identities and overlooking intersectional complexity. Drawing on data from Rainbow Tick-certified organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, this article identifies emerging practices that demonstrate an intersectionally sensitive approach to Rainbow inclusion. The findings show that intersectionality can be integrated into four key areas of organisational practice: (1) policies and guidelines, (2) education and training, (3) event planning and organisation, and (4) external engagement. These practices move beyond a homogenising view of Rainbow communities and recognise the distinct experiences that arise at the intersection of Rainbow identities with Indigenous, racial/ethnic and disability identities. While the emergence of these practices is encouraging, this article also identifies their limitations and highlights the need for deeper reflection and action to move beyond symbolic recognition. By bridging theory and practice, this article addresses a gap in the literature on organisational responses to intersectional inequalities and promotes intersectionally informed approaches to workplace inclusion.

Keywords: intersectionality; workplace; inclusion; Rainbow; organisation

Introduction

This article aims to explore how the concept of intersectionality is applied in Rainbow inclusion efforts within Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces.[1] *Intersectionality*, as explained by Davis (2008, p. 68), refers to "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power". While a growing body of literature has documented intersectional inequalities in the workplace (Rodriguez, 2024; Thatcher et al., 2023), including those experienced by Rainbow employees (Calang & Sunanta, 2026; Epper-Hattab & Steindórsdóttir, 2025; Jaramillo et al., 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024; Sarı, 2026; Vallellano et al., 2025), limited attention has been paid to how organisations can implement intersectional approaches to address these inequalities (Sim & Dillard, 2025; Woods et al., 2022). This article

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1 *Rainbow* is used as an umbrella term for gender and sexual identities that fall outside heterosexual and cisgender norms. It is a commonly used term, both officially and unofficially, in Aotearoa New Zealand. This article adopts the term to reflect its widespread use in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. When referring to other research, however, the terminology used by the original authors is retained in order to respect their linguistic choices.

addresses this gap by examining the enactment of intersectionality in organisational practices aimed at fostering Rainbow inclusion. Specifically, it asks: How can organisations recognise and address the needs and experiences of Rainbow employees with intersectional identities, and what do intersectionality-informed Rainbow inclusion practices look like in practice? In doing so, the article examines intersectionality both as a framework for recognition and representation and as an approach to advancing more equitable organisational outcomes.

This study draws on data collected from Rainbow Tick member organisations as part of the Rainbow Tick accreditation programme, which is designed to certify Aotearoa New Zealand organisations as Rainbow-inclusive. Although intersectionality remains insufficiently addressed across many Rainbow Tick member organisations, this article identifies emerging practices that demonstrate an intersectionally sensitive approach to Rainbow inclusion. The findings suggest that an intersectional approach can inform a broad range of organisational activities, spanning internal processes such as policy development, training and event organisation, as well as external engagement. In contrast to the single-axis approach to Rainbow inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces identified in existing research (Cui, 2026b), this article highlights organisational practices that move beyond this limited focus and attend to the intersections of Rainbow identities with other social identities, including race/ethnicity, disability and Indigenous identities. The article does not aim to offer flawless or comprehensive templates for organisations to replicate—these examples are neither exhaustive nor without limitation—but rather to prompt critical reflection on opportunities to apply intersectionality in practice. In doing so, the article seeks to address the limited research on organisational responses to intersectional inequalities (Sim & Dillard, 2025; Woods et al., 2022), bridge the gap between theory and practice, and promote intersectionally informed approaches to Rainbow inclusion in the workplace.

In what follows, the article first explains the concept of intersectionality and reviews its application within work and employment studies, particularly research on Rainbow employees with intersectional identities. In doing so, it identifies a significant gap in understanding how organisations respond to the intersectional inequalities experienced by Rainbow employees. Aotearoa New Zealand. Next, the methodology is outlined, with particular attention paid to the Rainbow Tick programme, the data sources used in the study, and the ways in which the research is informed by the researcher's positionality. The findings section presents emerging organisational practices that incorporate intersectionality into Rainbow inclusion efforts across four areas of organisational practice: (1) policies and guidelines, (2) education and training, (3) event planning and organisation, and (4) external engagement. Finally, the discussion and conclusion critically examine these findings, identifying both their strengths and limitations, and outlining implications for organisational practice and future research.

The concept of intersectionality

Originally rooted in Black feminist thought, the term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her seminal text on Black women's experiences of injustice within the judicial system *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*. Crenshaw introduces this concept to challenge the single-axis framework that dominates antidiscrimination law and shapes both feminist theory and antiracist politics. She demonstrates that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and distinct from those experienced by White women and Black men; they may face forms of oppression that arise specifically at the intersection of race and gender—"not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women" (p. 149). The failure to acknowledge such complexity and the compounded nature of oppression prevents a full understanding of the specific ways in which Black women are subordinated and further marginalises those who are multiply disadvantaged. Crenshaw thus advocates for centring the lives of the most

disadvantaged at the intersection of power structures and for pursuing a politics that aims to "facilitate the inclusion of marginalised groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter'" (p. 167). This understanding—that social identities interact to produce distinct experiences at their intersections—has gained wide traction, making intersectionality a remarkable success in contemporary feminist scholarship.

Although Crenshaw's work is most widely cited for the concept of intersectionality, she did not actually invent the idea. Rather, she provided a highly influential term for analysing forms of oppression that Black feminist scholars had been developing for more than a decade. As Collins (1986) points out, the interlocking nature of oppression is a characteristic theme in Black feminist thought, where Black feminist intellectuals draw on their "outsider-within" status to produce distinctive forms of Black feminist knowledge. The term intersectionality provides a metaphor that names the structural convergence of intersecting systems of power. While intersectionality is not a theory of identity, many scholars and activists interpret it through this lens because it is frequently employed as a heuristic for understanding identity (Collins, 2020). More significantly, intersectionality contributes to a fundamental paradigm shift in thinking about intersecting power structures and social inequalities (Collins, 2020). This paradigm shift has fostered a growing body of scholarship in work and employment studies that applies intersectional analysis at different levels and through different approaches (Rodriguez, 2024). These include, for example, systemic analyses that investigate how intersectional inequalities are (re)produced (Healy et al., 2011), individual-level analyses that examine how multiple social identities shape workplace experiences (Atewologun et al., 2016), and conceptual analyses that define and develop approaches to "intersectional equality"" (Woods et al., 2022).

Initially centred on the intersection of gender and race, intersectionality has since been broadened by scholars to encompass a wider range of overlapping forms of disadvantage in the workplace. This body of literature has revealed how various combinations of individuals' social identities—including gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, age and neurodiversity—shape their professional lives (Calvard et al., 2026; Thatcher et al., 2023). Within this broader scholarship on intersectionality in workplace contexts, the experiences of Rainbow employees with multiple intersecting identities have emerged as a distinct and increasingly prominent area of inquiry. This includes qualitative studies of, for example, Rainbow employees who are also ethnic minorities (Jaramillo et al., 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024), transnational migrants (Calang & Sunanta, 2026; Vallellano et al., 2025), refugees (Sarı, 2026), or older workers (Epper-Hattab & Steindórsdóttir, 2025). By qualitatively examining Rainbow employees' experiences alongside a range of social identities and capturing the intersecting complexities that shape workplace dynamics, these studies demonstrate the theoretical and empirical value of intersectionality as an analytical framework.

The intersectional experiences of Rainbow employees have also been examined quantitatively by scholars using survey-based approaches (Cech & Rothwell, 2020; Köllen, 2015; Sears et al., 2025; Stats NZ, 2025). For example, Köllen's (2015) study of gay and lesbian employees' identity management in Germany finds that having a transnational migratory background is associated with a lower likelihood of being explicitly out at work, as well as higher levels of covering and passing. Cech and Rothwell's (2020) study of LGBT employees in US federal agencies shows that racial and ethnic minority LGBT employees report more negative workplace experiences than their White LGBT counterparts. Similarly, Sears et al.'s (2025) study of Black LGBTQ employees in the US shows that Black LGBTQ employees reported higher rates of adverse workplace experiences compared with White LGBTQ employees, and generally similar levels of adverse workplace experiences to LGBTQ Latinx and Asian employees. While qualitative studies of intersectionality can examine multifaceted experiences in greater depth, quantitative intersectionality research is effective for identifying broader patterns in larger samples and demonstrating how combinations of identity categories interact in ways that produce compounding effects.

Research on the intersectional Rainbow experience in the workplace clearly demonstrates the necessity of adopting an intersectional approach to organisational responses, particularly when addressing the needs of Rainbow employees who are most marginalised at the intersections of their multiple identities. However, much like other organisational DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) initiatives that focus primarily on race, gender or disability, efforts aimed at Rainbow inclusion typically engage with the Rainbow community through a single-axis lens rather than recognising and responding to the complex interplay of intersecting identities. This single-axis approach to Rainbow inclusion often centres the experiences of the most privileged group members—namely, able-bodied, cisgender, White gay men—while marginalising those who are multiply disadvantaged. As Crenshaw (1989) argues in her critique of the conventional antidiscrimination approach, the single-axis focus centres privileged group members, erases intersectional experiences, and produces a distorted analysis, because understandings of oppression are "grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon" (p. 140). It is the acknowledgement of differences—even within a community often treated as uniform—that makes intersectionality valuable, as it confronts the overlooked and often painful experiences of marginalisation and exclusion that arise when those very differences go unrecognised. Therefore, how an intersectional perspective can be incorporated into Rainbow-focused initiatives aimed at promoting workplace inclusion warrants scholarly scrutiny. Yet little is known about intersectionality-informed approaches to Rainbow inclusion in organisational contexts—a gap that this study seeks to address.

The Aotearoa New Zealand context: The limit of Rainbow inclusion

This study is situated in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, a nation internationally recognised for its leadership in advancing Rainbow diversity and inclusion. This progressive reputation is underscored by its milestone as the first Asia-Pacific nation to legalise same-sex marriage, in 2013, and further strengthened by the release of the world's first national standard for Rainbow-inclusive workplaces in 2015. Titled *"Rainbow-Inclusive Workplaces: A Standard for Gender and Sexual Diversity in Employment,"* the standard is voluntary in its application, yet its very existence signals that Rainbow inclusion is both an essential dimension of workplace equity and a clear expectation from the New Zealand government (Standards New Zealand, 2015). In addition, Aotearoa New Zealand protects Rainbow employees through the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Employment Relations Act 2000, both of which make discrimination based on gender or sexuality unlawful in the workplace. Despite Aotearoa New Zealand's generally supportive and progressive legal protections for Rainbow employees, recent research presents a more complex and nuanced picture of their professional lives. While Rainbow employees report positive perceptions of workplace climate, facilitated by organisational policies, Rainbow visibility in the workplace, and Rainbow-inclusive interpersonal relations (Cui, 2026b), even organisations that publicly champion Rainbow inclusion often remain deeply entrenched in cis-heteronormative norms (Cui, 2025). Rainbow employees continue to face challenges across multiple levels (Cui, 2026a), including organisational tokenism, the persistence of cis-heteronormativity in everyday interpersonal interactions, and, in recent years, a broader global conservative backlash against DEI initiatives and Rainbow identities (Fitzsimmons et al., 2026).

Although intersectionality as an analytic lens has expanded across the social sciences for several decades (Collins, 2020), scholarly inquiries into Rainbow experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand through an intersectional perspective remain markedly limited. Little is known about how intersectionality is experienced and negotiated by Rainbow communities in this Pacific nation. In recent years, however, a growing body of qualitative scholarship has begun to examine the experiences of Rainbow people who hold multiple disadvantaged identities within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Although still limited in scale, this emerging work has started to illuminate the intersectional experiences of groups long marginalised and often rendered invisible both within Rainbow communities and in wider New Zealand society. This

includes research on young ethnic queer people (Nakhid et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2024, 2025), Chinese queer international students (Cui & Song, 2024, 2025), Chinese and South Asian gay and bisexual men (Adams & Neville, 2020), and Asian Rainbow young people (Tan et al., 2024). Findings from these studies show that the intersection of identities such as sexuality, ethnicity, age, nationality and migration status produces distinct lived experiences and specific challenges that are not captured when these identities are considered in isolation. For example, Chinese queer international students in Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary education institutions experience what Cui and Song (2024, 2025) term the "ethnic closet"—a form of dual marginalisation arising from the intersection of their sexuality and ethnicity. While the emerging body of literature outlined above has provided valuable qualitative insights into how intersectional identities shape Rainbow experiences in social, educational and community contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand, little is known about how intersectional Rainbow experiences are qualitatively shaped within Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces.

Despite the absence of qualitative studies on intersectional Rainbow experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces, a recent report based on the 2023 Census—released by Aotearoa New Zealand's official data agency—has provided important quantitative insights into the intersectional work experiences of Rainbow people in Aotearoa New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2025). For example:

- Across life-cycle age groups, disabled LGBTIQ+ people who were employed were less likely to work full time and more likely to work part-time than non-disabled LGBTIQ+ people.
- Both disability status and LGBTIQ+ status were associated with higher unemployment. Individuals who belonged to both the disabled population and the LGBTIQ+ population experienced higher unemployment rates than those who belonged to only one of these groups, or neither.
- Across ethnic groups, the proportion of unemployment among LGBTIQ+ people was higher than among non-LGBTIQ+ populations, with the highest rates observed for LGBTIQ+ Māori.
- Across ethnic groups, transgender and non-binary people within the Māori ethnic group experienced the highest unemployment rates, followed by those in the Pacific Peoples ethnic group.
- For ethnic groups with lower average incomes, there was a compounding effect for those who belonged to the LGBTIQ+ population. LGBTIQ+ Pacific Peoples earned less than LGBTIQ+ people in other ethnic groups. (Stats NZ, 2025)

These findings clearly demonstrate the compounding disadvantages in employment faced by Rainbow people, arising from the intersectionality of multiple identities, including sexuality, gender, race/ethnicity and disability. The heterogeneity of experiences and the differing levels of disadvantage within the Rainbow communities highlight the insufficiency of a single-axis approach to Rainbow inclusion and strongly justify the need for an intersectional approach.

However, intersectionality remains an under-addressed concept and a rarely applied practical lens in Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces, whether in the national standard for Rainbow-inclusive workplaces or in the organisational practices of Rainbow Tick member organisations. Notably, the criteria in *Rainbow-Inclusive Workplaces: A Standard for Gender and Sexual Diversity in Employment* contain no explicit reference to intersectionality and provide no guidance on how to adopt an intersectional approach to Rainbow inclusion (Standards New Zealand, 2015). The only elements in the criteria that could be interpreted as acknowledging intersecting identities are: 1) the acknowledgement of takatāpui, though not named explicitly, through the LGBTTQI abbreviation used throughout the criteria, and 2) the attention to Māori culture in

the section on complaint management. As the standard explains: "For the purposes of this standard the abbreviation LGBTTQI is used as it is known in New Zealand and has the benefit of acknowledging Māori forms of sexual diversity" (p. v). In the criteria on complaint management, it states that "Māori shall be afforded the right of consulting a kaumatua for guidance on tikanga and kawa" (p. 11). This limited acknowledgement of intersectionality falls well short of engaging with it as an empirically grounded concept and as one of the guiding principles for inclusive practice, thereby constraining the standard's capacity to inform understandings and practices of Rainbow inclusion as shaped by interlocking social hierarchies.

The absence of an intersectionally sensitive approach is also evident in the initiatives of Rainbow Tick member organisations. Although these organisations publicly demonstrate their commitment to Rainbow inclusion, intersectionality does not appear to be a perspective that has been widely considered. Rainbow initiatives—such as training, events, internal communication and policies—lack visibility of intersectional Rainbow identities and experiences, with Rainbow representation predominantly centred on openly out White gay and lesbian individuals. Such representation cannot account for the diverse experiences within Rainbow communities, particularly those who may be reluctant to disclose their identities due to pressures arising from multiple, intersecting power structures. Potential reasons for the absence of intersectional visibility in existing Rainbow inclusion work may include: (1) many organisations remain predominantly White spaces and lack intersectional diversity, meaning these issues have not been noticed or prioritised by Human Resources (HR); (2) HR practitioners may view the concept as too ambiguous, with no clear-cut definition or specific parameters (Davis, 2008), making it difficult to grasp; and (3) even when its significance is recognised, practitioners may be uncertain about how to apply it in practice. To address these concerns and demonstrate the concept's practical relevance, this article highlights emerging organisational practices from several Rainbow Tick member organisations that have begun taking meaningful steps towards addressing intersectional issues within their Rainbow inclusion efforts. In doing so, this article seeks to encourage organisations to move beyond a solely single-axis framework and integrate an intersectional approach to Rainbow inclusion, thereby advancing the inclusiveness of Rainbow initiatives and more effectively addressing the needs of intersectionally marginalised Rainbow employees.

Methodology

This article draws on data from Rainbow Tick member organisations' submissions for accreditation. The Rainbow Tick is an accreditation programme in Aotearoa New Zealand with a history spanning more than a decade. It evaluates workplace culture for Rainbow employees against criteria aligned with the national standard for Rainbow-inclusive workplaces. The evaluation process has two main components. First, organisations submit evidence demonstrating how their practices align with the accreditation criteria, which cover areas including governance and leadership, organisational development and external engagement. And second, employees' perspectives are gathered through either an online survey or focus groups to further assess the inclusiveness of the organisational culture. Once all data have been collected—including the organisation's submission and employees' perspectives—it is assessed against the accreditation criteria. If the criteria are met, the Rainbow Tick certificate is awarded, accompanied by recommendations to further advance the organisation's Rainbow-inclusion work. If the criteria are not met, the certificate may be suspended or withdrawn, and the organisation will receive guidance and recommendations to support progress towards achieving accreditation. Rainbow Tick accreditation is not a one-off achievement but a sustained organisational commitment that requires annual review. The re-accreditation process evaluates the extent to which recommendations from the previous assessment have been addressed and identifies areas for further development. As of April 2026, 87 Aotearoa New Zealand organisations have achieved Rainbow Tick certification, spanning sectors such as healthcare, government and public services, insurance and financial services, media and communications, information technology, energy and utilities, transport

and logistics, education and training, recreation and sport, construction and infrastructure, legal services and retail.

In this study, organisational practices submitted by Rainbow Tick member organisations during their accreditation process were identified and highlighted as examples of how intersectionality can be demonstrated in practice. Notably, such examples remain uncommon, even among Rainbow Tick-certified organisations that publicly advocate Rainbow inclusion. Therefore, the practices showcased in this article should be understood as emerging approaches that hold significant value. They offer concrete illustrations for organisations that have not yet applied, or continue to struggle with applying, the concept of intersectionality within their organisational practices. This study therefore scrutinises these organisational practices by asking: Which aspects of organisational practice can incorporate an intersectional perspective into Rainbow inclusion efforts? Which identities intersect with Rainbow identities, and how do these intersections occur? What implications do these intersections hold for advancing Rainbow inclusion, and what limitations exist within current organisational practices? Data use adhered to the agreements established between Rainbow Tick and participating organisations, which permit research use provided that no identifying information is disclosed. Although this article aims to showcase positive practices, all organisational names have been anonymised, and some details that could reveal the identity of organisations have been removed or obscured.

Qualitative research is grounded in the understanding that knowledge is partial and situated, and it treats researcher subjectivity as a valuable resource that enriches the research process rather than as a threat to research quality (Braun & Clarke, 2025). This study is deeply informed by the researcher's personal and professional identities, academic training and lived experiences. The researcher identifies as a cisgender gay man and a transnational migrant who moved from China to Aotearoa New Zealand and speaks English as a second language. He brings professional experience as an accreditation specialist with Rainbow Tick, which has provided him with a broad view of organisational culture across Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces and enabled access to relevant data for this research. This study builds on the researcher's decade-long focus on queer issues in the workplace across both Chinese and Aotearoa New Zealand contexts. He has examined workplace climate and the negative and positive experiences of Rainbow employees in Aotearoa New Zealand (Cui, 2025, 2026a, 2026b), and aims to extend this research area in new directions. His interest in intersectionality is informed both by existing scholarship and by his own intersecting identities—initially as a Chinese gay international student, and currently as a migrant worker in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite living in a country celebrated for its Rainbow inclusivity, he often feels like an outsider— within both Rainbow communities and broader society—struggling to fit in and to find a sense of belonging. Intersectionality is therefore not an abstract theoretical construct for him, but something he lives every day. Having experienced marginalisation shaped by the intersections of sexuality, race/ethnicity, migration status, nationality and language ability, he has sought to use his research skills to amplify intersectional perspectives within queer studies. This work proceeds in two directions: first, to illuminate the forms of intersectional marginalisation and exclusion faced by Rainbow people with multiple disadvantaged identities (Cui & Song, 2024, 2025); and second, to promote good practices that adopt intersectional approaches within Rainbow inclusion work. The latter is the focus of the present study.

Findings: Integrating intersectionality into workplace practices

Drawing on practices from Rainbow Tick member organisations, this section explores how intersectionality can be applied in practice to strengthen Rainbow inclusion in the workplace. It presents four approaches to integrating intersectionality into workplace practices and promoting intersectional Rainbow visibility: 1) policies and guidelines, 2) education and training, 3) event planning and organisation, and 4) external engagement.

Policies and guidelines

An important way to institutionalise organisational support for Rainbow employees is through dedicated policies and guidelines that clearly articulate the organisation's stance, principles, approaches to support, and expectations for staff. Such documents can play a crucial role in promoting intersectional Rainbow identities and in highlighting intersectional Rainbow experiences within specific cultural contexts. For example, one Rainbow Tick-certified healthcare organisation has developed a dedicated Rainbow-focused policy, *Gender and Sexuality Diversity Policy*, which demonstrates the organisation's prioritisation of Rainbow inclusion within its broader workplace inclusion efforts. This policy not only outlines the organisation's values and responsibilities but also includes an appendix of glossary terms explaining culturally sensitive concepts related to Rainbow identities, including those specific to Māori and Pacific communities such as takatāpui and fa'afafine. As defined in the policy, *takatāpui* is "a Māori term encompassing diverse gender identities and sexual orientations within a cultural context," while *fa'afafine* is "a Samoan term used to describe men who have a feminine social role". Including Indigenous Rainbow terms in a policy appendix presents both possibilities and limitations. While it makes Rainbow identities within Indigenous cultures visible, thereby challenging dominant Western colonial culture surrounding gender and sexuality, this visibility is confined to the appendix rather than being integrated into the main body of the policy, thereby limiting its influence. The recognition of intersecting identities is also not extended beyond Indigeneity to other forms of difference, leaving broader cultural, ethnic and social diversities unaddressed. While the inclusion of definitions and identity categories in policy is important, intersectionality requires more than recognition alone. The policy does not address the intersectional forms of inequality faced by Rainbow people with intersecting identities, nor does it explain how such inequalities might be mitigated in practice.

While organisational policies, which set mandatory rules, may provide limited scope for addressing intersectional issues, guidelines that promote recommended practices offer greater scope both for articulating organisational positions and for educating staff about intersectional Rainbow identities. One example of such a guideline is a multinational retail company's *LGBTQ+ Inclusion Guide*, developed to support employees in understanding and applying Rainbow-inclusive practices. This guide covers a range of topics, including understanding the distinctions between gender, sex, and sexuality; using inclusive language; supporting trans and gender diverse team members; and recognising Indigenous LGBTQ+ experiences. In the section "Understanding Indigenous LGBTQ+ Experiences", the terms takatāpui in Aotearoa New Zealand, "sistergirls, brotherboys" in Australia, and the Pacific identities "MVPFAFF+" are introduced. As explained, *sistergirls* (transgender women) and *brotherboys* (transgender men) are terms used within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe gender diverse people, while *MVPFAFF+* is an acronym used to represent the diverse gender and sexuality expressions and roles found across Pacific cultures. The acronym represents: *Māhū* (Tahiti and Hawai'i), *Vaka sa lewa lewa* (Fiji), *Palopa* (Papua New Guinea), *Fa'afafine* (American Samoa, Samoa and Tokelau), *Akava'ine* (Cook Islands), *Fakaleiti* (Tonga), and *Fakafifine (*Niue). To better guide interactions involving Indigenous Rainbow identities and to minimise the risk of cultural misunderstanding, the guide follows the introduction of these terms with a set of suggested considerations, outlined below.

> Key Considerations: 1) Respect for self-determination: The most important principle is to respect the right of Indigenous people to self-identify and use the terms they prefer. 2) Cultural sensitivity: Approaching discussions of Indigenous LGBTQ+ identities requires cultural sensitivity and a willingness to learn. 3) Avoid generalisations: Avoid making generalisations about Indigenous LGBTQ+ people. Each community and individual has unique experiences and perspectives.

These two examples from policies and guidelines are not isolated. In fact, incorporating Rainbow identity terminology relevant to Māori and Pacific contexts within Rainbow-specific policies and guidelines is a common practice among many Rainbow Tick member organisations that have developed standalone documents of this kind. However, such dedicated policies and guidelines may be less prevalent in organisations outside the Rainbow Tick network in Aotearoa New Zealand. Highlighting this organisational practice has implications for encouraging more organisations to account for cultural and ethnic diversity and specificity in the development and review of their Rainbow-specific policies and guidelines. Such an approach contributes to decolonising dominant Western culture and counters the tendency to portray Rainbow communities as homogeneous or implicitly White. Instead, bringing a decolonising perspective into Rainbow inclusion work recognises cultural and ethnic difference within Rainbow communities and brings greater visibility to Rainbow individuals with Indigenous backgrounds. This recognition underscores the need to avoid conceptualising identity—or generalising Rainbow experiences—on the basis of a single dimension of identity, as well as the need to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches in the development of organisational support practices.

Education and training

Compared with official documents, education and training provide broader scope, greater flexibility and more interactive engagement, allowing for more personal and detailed insights into the operation and manifestation of intersectionality. Intersectionality-informed education and training can help employees deepen their awareness of the lived experiences of Rainbow people who hold multiple disadvantaged identities, and build a clearer understanding of how systems of power interact to produce distinct forms of marginalisation. For example, a Rainbow-focused workshop was organised within a Rainbow Tick member organisation, a disability healthcare provider offering personalised support for people with disabilities to live independently. This workshop was delivered internally by one of the organisation's support workers to all staff, ensuring that Rainbow-inclusive care is embedded in practice and that support approaches meet the needs of Rainbow disabled clients. The workshop highlighted the double discrimination that Rainbow disabled people often face due to both ableism and cis-heteronormativity. It also outlined strategies for supporting these clients, including using inclusive language, respecting correct names and pronouns, protecting client confidentiality, creating an affirming environment, and offering tailored support plans.

Existing research has shown that Rainbow disabled people face unique challenges and experience poorer outcomes across a wide range of life domains—including education, employment and health—compared with Rainbow people without disabilities (Kempapidis et al., 2024). There is also a demonstrated need for service providers and carers to be more responsive to the concerns of Rainbow disabled people by increasing awareness of their care and support needs (McCann et al., 2016). Rainbow-focused training within a disability healthcare organisation can therefore better equip support workers with an understanding of the lived experiences of Rainbow disabled people, enabling them to provide more tailored and responsive services. This kind of education and training is particularly valuable in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, where, according to the 2023 Census (Stats NZ, 2025), Rainbow people were more likely to be disabled than the non-Rainbow population across all age groups. A limitation of the workshop, in terms of workplace inclusion, is that it was delivered primarily to improve services for Rainbow disabled clients, rather than to support Rainbow disabled employees. However, by clearly signalling organisational commitment, the workshop also has implications for the organisation's Rainbow disabled staff—a group that research has shown faces higher unemployment rates and greater workplace discrimination than Rainbow people without disabilities (Kempapidis et al., 2024).

For organisations that do not have the capacity to deliver intersectionality-informed education and training internally, one option is to collaborate with external Rainbow organisations that hold expertise in

this area. For Rainbow Tick member organisations, Rainbow-specific education and training is a requirement for achieving accreditation and a key component in assessing an organisation's workplace culture. Partnering with external Rainbow organisations enables the delivery of a range of online or in-person workshops on topics at varying levels, such as Rainbow 101, Active Allyship, and Intersectionality. Many Rainbow Tick member organisations have participated in the Intersectionality workshop, which introduces the concept and guides participants in applying an intersectional lens to better understand lived experience and strengthen workplace inclusion. Facilitators draw on their own positionalities to illustrate how intersecting identities co-construct experiences of privilege and marginalisation within workplace settings. The workshop incorporates both the US workplace context, where the concept originated, and the Aotearoa New Zealand context, where intersectional disadvantage among Rainbow employees underscores the importance of an intersectional approach to Rainbow inclusion (Stats NZ, 2025).

Event planning and organisation

The concept of intersectionality can also be integrated into the planning and organisation of Rainbow-related events, a practice that has proven effective in making intersectional experiences more visible and creating opportunities for different identities to interact. One straightforward approach is to deliberately invite Rainbow individuals with intersectional identities to share their lived experiences—experiences that are frequently rendered invisible or marginalised within single-axis DEI initiatives. For example, a Rainbow-focused event called "Been, Being, Becoming" was held at a Rainbow Tick-certified government department, where several speakers were invited to give presentations. One of the speakers was an executive from the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, who shared his experience of working for three decades in the public sector as a gay man of Colour. He spoke about the intersecting challenges he has faced, as well as the moments of hope, acceptance and progress that have shaped his journey. Indeed, Rainbow employees who also belong to ethnic minority groups may encounter challenges produced by intersecting systems of power tied to both their Rainbow identity and their racial/ethnic identity, compelling them to negotiate the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing dynamics of cis-heteronormativity and racism. Such in-person events can translate the often abstract and theoretically dense concept of intersectionality into an accessible and tangible form by foregrounding first-hand accounts of how multiple identities interact to shape lived experience. In doing so, they function as powerful pedagogical tools, playing a significant role in cultivating empathy and fostering critical reflexivity among both non-Rainbow people and Rainbow communities.

Another approach to planning and organising intersectionality-informed events is to intentionally involve employee networks representing diverse identities and to design initiatives that enhance the visibility and recognition of intersectional experiences. For instance, in honour of the 50th anniversary of Māori Language Week, a Rainbow Tick-certified media organisation hosted a special bingo event. The bingo was co-organised by the Rainbow Staff Network and the Māori and Pasifika Staff Network, incorporating both Rainbow and Māori elements. This was not a typical bingo game—participants marked Māori words rather than numbers. The word list included Rainbow-related words in the Māori language, such as *takatāpui* and *aniwaniwa* (rainbow), alongside everyday Māori vocabulary. In this way, the event created a fun and engaging opportunity to celebrate the Māori language while also bringing visibility to Rainbow identities within Indigenous culture. In the poster design and room decoration for this event, visual representations of Rainbow and Indigenous elements were intentionally featured and carefully blended, signalling the interconnectedness of Rainbow and Indigenous communities. The Māori component of the bingo event also extended to supporting a local Māori-owned business, Kai Means Food, which provided the catering. Overall, the event demonstrated how collaboration between employee networks representing different identities can highlight and celebrate intersectional identities. By engaging groups with different social identities in the co-design and organisation of an event built around a shared theme and a common purpose,

organisers create opportunities for those identities to interact in meaningful ways. This interaction enables intersectional identities to be recognised and made visible—outcomes that are often obscured in single-axis DEI initiatives, which focus on one dimension of identity at a time and therefore overlook the complex, overlapping nature of lived experience.

External engagement

Organisational support for Rainbow people with intersectional identities can also be clearly demonstrated to stakeholders by purposefully engaging with external Rainbow organisations that possess an intersectional focus or that serve Rainbow communities with diverse and overlapping identities. One concrete way to signal such support is by donating to Rainbow organisations that work directly with intersectional Rainbow communities. For example, a Rainbow Tick-certified transportation company has a dedicated fund of up to $10,000 to support grassroots community initiatives in Aotearoa New Zealand that champion disadvantaged groups, promote equity and inclusion, and align with the company's commitment to social and environmental sustainability. During Pride Month 2026, the company announced its financial support for Moana Vā, an organisation established to provide support and advocacy for Pacific Rainbow communities in the Canterbury region, which is less racially diverse than many other parts of Aotearoa New Zealand. The announcement was shared through the company's LinkedIn page and website. In the photo accompanying the announcement, members of the Pacific Rainbow communities are shown happily holding a banner featuring the words "Moana Vā: Navigators of Pacific Pride". The general manager of Moana Vā was interviewed in the news, highlighting the unique challenges faced by Pacific Rainbow communities due to the intersectionality of Rainbow identity and cultural identity. The announcement emphasised that supporting organisations like Moana Vā reflects the company's commitment to creating inclusive working environments. A link to the company's dedicated webpage on Rainbow inclusion, presented as one of its key organisational DEI commitments, was provided at the end of the news release.

This example illustrates how external engagement can enable a transportation company to demonstrate support for Rainbow individuals who identify as both Rainbow and Pacific. Such engagement is evident in the financial support provided to a Pacific Rainbow organisation, as well as in the use of a social media platform and the organisation's official website to communicate this support to a wide range of stakeholders, including customers, employees and the broader public. The link at the end of the company's news announcement, directing readers to its internal support for Rainbow employees, helps reinforce the connection between the company's outward-facing initiatives and its internal commitments. This approach not only signals organisational values and commitment—both internally and externally—but also contributes to wider community development and social change. However, a limitation of this approach is that it relies predominantly on external engagement, with comparatively little emphasis on internal engagement with employees—particularly Rainbow employees with intersectional identities. This raises questions about the extent to which such an approach can generate meaningful change *within* the organisation. To address this, organisations would benefit from pairing external engagement with internal communication and tangible forms of support for employees.

Having outlined the organisational practices through which Rainbow Tick-certified organisations may express intersectionality in their Rainbow inclusion work, the final example turns to their partnership with Rainbow Tick itself. Rainbow Tick, which is also known by the Māori name Toitū Takatāpui, has an intersectional foundation shaped by the broader organisational context in which the programme was developed. Rainbow Tick is part of Kāhui Tū Kaha, an Indigenous organisation that addresses social and health inequities experienced by diverse communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, including Māori, Pacific, refugee, Asian and Rainbow communities. The diversity within Kāhui Tū Kaha, together with its Indigenous grounding, informs Rainbow Tick's strong emphasis on intersectionality as a core principle of

Rainbow inclusion. This commitment is reflected across the accreditation, education and consultation services that Rainbow Tick delivers to member organisations. For example, Rainbow Tick actively encourages and guides member organisations to apply intersectional approaches in their Rainbow inclusion work, and this dimension is a key focus within the evaluation and accreditation process for Mature Organisation accreditation—a higher level of accreditation than the standard accreditation. Through their partnerships with Rainbow Tick, organisations across diverse sectors in Aotearoa New Zealand have begun to move beyond a single-axis approach to Rainbow inclusion, working instead to cultivate environments in which the needs and voices of intersectional Rainbow identities can be recognised, addressed and amplified.

Discussion and conclusion

By identifying a range of organisational practices from Rainbow Tick member organisations that embody intersectionality in Rainbow inclusion, this article contributes to a concrete understanding of how intersectionality can be operationalised within workplace inclusion efforts. The analysis demonstrates that although intersectionality is often treated as a theoretically abstract concept, it can nonetheless be enacted in practical and meaningful ways across multiple areas of organisational practice. These areas include policies and guidelines, education and training, event planning and organisation, and external engagement. Examples of intersectional identities highlighted by organisations and showcased in this article include Rainbow individuals who are also Māori, Pacific, Indigenous, disabled or members of ethnic minority communities. The extent of intersectional visibility—both in form and depth—varies across organisations. It ranges from the simple inclusion of terms and definitions in policy appendices, to the purposeful collaboration of employee networks to promote intersectional visibility, to dedicated intersectionality-focused education and training designed to strengthen Rainbow inclusion. It also includes more detailed and personal accounts of lived experience shared through storytelling events, as well as visible signals of organisational support demonstrated through external engagement with Rainbow organisations. These diverse manifestations of intersectionality within Rainbow inclusion work signal a shift away from single-axis approaches that assume and imply a homogeneous Rainbow community in which a one-size-fits-all approach is considered sufficient. Instead, they reflect a growing recognition of the internal differences and varied lived experiences that exist within Rainbow communities.

While the intersectionally sensitive organisational practices showcased in this article have significant implications for workplaces, it is important to acknowledge that they do not constitute an exhaustive account of the possible ways to incorporate intersectionality into Rainbow inclusion work. Intersectionality can be applied in far broader ways, both in terms of the combinations of identities it encompasses and the areas of organisational practice to which it can be applied. The prominence of Māori and other Pacific Rainbow identities in organisational practices informed by an intersectional perspective, as shown in the findings, is not incidental. Rather, it reflects growing efforts within Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces to affirm and engage with Indigenous perspectives, a phenomenon that is not only embedded in the country's unique social, historical and institutional context, but also resonates with the growing global attention to Indigenous employees and broader efforts to decolonise organisations (Adekoya et al., 2026; Walker et al., 2026). At the same time, the prioritisation of Indigenous intersections may obscure other forms of intersectional marginalisation, limiting recognition of the diverse ways in which intersectional inequalities are experienced. Rainbow employees with other intersecting identities, such as ethnic minority migrants (Calang & Sunanta, 2026), refugees (Sarı, 2026), and neurodivergent employees (Calvard et al., 2026), among many others, appeared far less frequently in organisational practices. This suggests that intersectional recognition is often shaped by prevailing understandings of diversity and by the forms of difference deemed most visible or legitimate within organisational contexts, creating blind spots that perpetuate marginalisation. In addition, the areas of organisational practice in which intersectionality could

be incorporated extend beyond those presented in this article (Sim & Dillard, 2025; Woods et al., 2022). These could include increasing intersectional representation in leadership and management, recruiting talent with intersectionally disadvantaged identities and lived experiences, providing workplace counselling services that attend to intersectional needs, offering training for HR practitioners to strengthen their understanding and application of intersectionality, and monitoring and assessing workplace inclusion for intersectionally disadvantaged employees through surveys or other forms of data collection.

Despite this article's intention to showcase emerging good practices that warrant wider promotion across workplaces, it is important to recognise that these approaches to incorporating intersectionality may have limitations in their ability to challenge existing power structures and advance more equitable outcomes. For example, although an intersectional perspective helps draw attention to a range of identity combinations that could benefit from greater visibility, visibility alone does not guarantee, nor necessarily lead to, inclusion. Merely making intersectional identities visible is insufficient to address the marginalisation and exclusion experienced by those most disadvantaged. Symbolic representation should not be treated as the endpoint of inclusion; the more critical task lies in unpacking how systems of power interact and in transforming power relations. Following this line of thought, it is worthwhile to reflect on organisational practices by asking: To what extent do various forms of intersectional visibility—whether in policies, workshops, events or news posts—go deep enough to reveal and interrogate the underlying intersectional power dynamics? When stories are told about intersectional Rainbow experiences, are these narratives presented merely as the sum of separate, single-identity forms of discrimination, or do they genuinely capture the compounded and mutually reinforcing power dynamics at the intersection of identities? Furthermore, when an organisation's signals of intersectional support are directed primarily towards external stakeholders—such as clients or Rainbow organisations—to what extent can this support be translated into meaningful support for its own staff members? If an organisation has not recognised or engaged with the intersectional identities of its own employees, will staff perceive its external engagement as "Rainbow washing" (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2024), whereby Rainbow initiatives are used as instruments of branding and publicity in superficial ways? These questions, which do not lend themselves to easy answers, underscore that Rainbow inclusion work is neither a one-off undertaking nor a practice that can be easily standardised or replicated. Rather, it demands sustained reflection, ongoing critical inquiry, and continuous development (Cui, 2026b).

In Davis's (2008) analysis of intersectionality's remarkable rise as a buzzword within contemporary feminist scholarship, she argues that one of the key reasons it resonates with a broad academic audience is its alleged weakness—its ambiguity and incompleteness. As Davis explains:

> It is precisely because intersectionality is so imperfect – ambiguous and open-ended – that it has been so productive for contemporary feminist scholarship. Its lack of clear-cut definition or even specific parameters has enabled it to be drawn upon in nearly any context of inquiry. The infinite regress built into the concept – which categories to use and when to stop – makes it vague, yet also allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored. With each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light…. Intersectionality offers endless opportunities for interrogating one's own blind spots and transforming them into analytic resources for further critical analysis. (p. 77)

While Davis's (2008) analysis focuses on feminist research and nearly two decades have passed since its publication, intersectionality has maintained its prominence and continues to expand across the social sciences and beyond academia (Collins, 2020; Sim & Dillard, 2025; Thatcher et al., 2023). It has increasingly shaped organisational practices aimed at advancing workplace inclusion and has become a prominent buzzword across popular media platforms focused on HR, DEI and business issues (Casey, 2025; Praslova, 2022). For practitioners aiming to advance Rainbow inclusion, intersectionality—by virtue of its inherent open-endedness—draws attention to the fact that Rainbow experiences are always more complex than

initially anticipated. It fosters a process of interrogation that engages with this complexity and moves beyond conventional approaches that treat Rainbow inclusion as separate from inequalities associated with other identities, and that fail to recognise how individuals may be simultaneously shaped by intersecting power structures. In doing so, it offers the potential to generate more comprehensive, nuanced and reflexively critical insights. This journey of intersectional discovery, as demonstrated in this article, has already been undertaken by several workplaces in Aotearoa New Zealand, and it is one that warrants broader engagement and sustained critical dialogue across both academia and industry.

While this article focuses on organisational responses to intersectional inequalities—an area that is primarily practical in nature—it also carries important implications for future research. First, there is a need to further explore the workplace experiences of Rainbow employees with intersectional identities. Although this is a growing area of inquiry, more empirical evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed to effectively inform organisational action. An intersectional lens on Rainbow experiences is particularly necessary in the Aotearoa New Zealand workplace context, where, as demonstrated in this article's literature review, existing knowledge remains limited. Additionally, analysing the intersectionality of identities could include both disadvantaged and advantaged identities, enabling researchers to capture the more complex, fluid and contextual nature of intersectional power dynamics (Luiz & Terziev, 2024). Second, HR and DEI practitioners' perceptions of intersectionality warrant closer scrutiny, in order to better understand how thoroughly, or superficially, intersectionality is interpreted, the barriers to incorporating it into workplace practice, and the support practitioners may require to more effectively use this lens to inform inclusion efforts. Third, more research on organisational responses to intersectional inequalities is needed to expand our understanding of the potential for intersectionality to serve as an integral framework within workplace contexts, and to support HR and DEI practitioners in recognising its applicability and value when embedding this lens within inclusion efforts (Sim & Dillard, 2025). Advancing this line of work—namely, the development of tangible organisational practices to address intersectional injustice—would also help position intersectionality not solely as a source of vulnerability or oppression, but as a foundation for empowerment.

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Data availability statement

The data from this research are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and in accordance with the agreement between Rainbow Tick and the member organisations.

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