

UNITED WISDOM

Sexual Identity and the Right to Self-Determination

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

R-04-N05 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Sexual Identity and the Right to Self-Determination

Epigraph

> *“To thine ownself be true.”*

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, I.3, Polonius addresses Laertes, from the MIT English text. The character's line is not a statement by Shakespeare about contemporary sexual identity.

What this article is about

Imagine a hypothetical conversation: an adult tells someone close that their familiar sexual identity label no longer fits. They are asked when they will finally make up their mind. Recollections of earlier relationships follow, along with speculation about friends' influence and a suggestion to wait before telling others. The listener may consider themselves caring. Yet the right to name one's experience quietly passes to the person demanding sufficient evidence.

Sexual identity involves personal language, experienced attraction, belonging, and ways of being understood. These aspects may connect without automatically producing one infallible account. Our subject is adults' self-determination and a respectful response to it. This article does not explain a particular orientation's origins, diagnose anyone, or offer ways to change it. We consider experience, labels and actions; disclosure and publicity; respect and couple agreements. Philosophical and religious comparisons remain comparisons; practice remains voluntary editorial work with words and boundaries.

I. A label helps people speak without containing the whole person

Identity can express an important part of someone's experience. When a person chooses a label, they communicate the words with which they currently want to describe themselves. Sometimes this brings clarity after prolonged uncertainty; sometimes it begins an exploration. In both cases, the listener receives first-person information. They are not given the authority to inspect the speaker's entire life for compliance with the chosen term, as though reviewing an application to join a club.

Terms can refer to experienced attraction, connection with a community, a relationship history, or a convenient public vocabulary. It helps to clarify these meanings where they affect the

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

conversation. A single label does not automatically reveal which relationships a person wants to build, whether they consent to a particular intimacy, or how they understand fidelity. Different people can use similar words while accepting different agreements. A personal vocabulary does not remove the need to discuss shared actions separately.

The accessible official American Psychological Association explanation of sexual orientation distinguishes attraction, associated identity, and other aspects of sex and gender. We use the definition section that was available to read, rather than a complete research review. This framework helps avoid mixing different questions; it does not allow us to establish a particular person's identity from their behaviour. The labels in the document also reflect its time and purpose rather than exhaust all contemporary terms.

A first respectful response can therefore be very simple: how would you like me to refer to you now? The question does not assume that someone must choose a final category. They can say a particular word fits, that the previous one no longer does, or that they do not yet need a label. An answer about language should be accepted within its actual scope. It promises neither permanence nor access to every intimate detail.

There is a significant difference between a question for understanding and a test of someone's entitlement to a word. The first helps establish what they mean by their description. The second requires them to prove that they have experienced themselves this way for sufficiently long, convincingly, or consistently. It can continue endlessly because the examiner chooses the criteria. Self-determination does not become infallible knowledge about a whole person, but it does not need another person's permission to be their own description.

II. Attraction, behaviour, and an agreement cannot replace each other

Attraction concerns experience, behaviour concerns action, and an agreement concerns what people in a relationship accept together. These levels should not be used as interchangeable evidence. A past partner does not automatically determine someone's entire current identity. A stated orientation does not promise readiness for a particular action. Nor does self-determination silently change previously agreed relationship conditions when an action affects someone else.

Imagine a second hypothetical example. Someone in a couple shares a label for their experience that is new to them. Their partner immediately asks whether this means future infidelity. What has actually happened so far is a statement about self-understanding. A conversation about expectations may lie ahead; the couple's earlier conditions may instead remain. This needs to be discovered rather than inferred from the label. The listener's fear is real as an experience but does not confirm the imagined event.

The philosophical framework in a selected passage of the first chapter of Mill's On Liberty distinguishes personal decision from actions affecting others. We use it as a limited comparison. Mill was not writing a contemporary instruction about orientation or studying changes in identity vocabulary among present-day couples. His political philosophy raises a question about limits to interference; answering questions about specific agreements remains their participants' task.

The editorial implication consists of two independent forms of respect. A person retains the right to describe themselves, and their partner retains the right to decide which relationships to participate in. Recognising a self-description does not mean agreeing to any future model of partnership. A mismatch of expectations provides no right to challenge identity as punishment. When these tasks are separated, compatibility can be discussed without turning a personal label into a weapon of mutual pressure.

It is also necessary to distinguish reported information from someone else's assumption. If a person said a new word fits them, that is what is known. Without a separate conversation, we do not know whom they love, what they intend to do, or what support they expect. Clarifications should concern only what matters to the shared situation and what they agree to discuss. Excessive interrogation often disguises itself as interest despite having no defined purpose or endpoint.

III. Self-determination does not have to become a final examination

The right to self-determination does not require someone to explain their entire future life in advance. A person can name themselves confidently and later change their language. They can be certain about one distinction while remaining unsure about another. This does not establish a lack of seriousness. At the same time, the possibility of revision does not mean others may treat every current statement as a temporary mistake until it has survived an invented testing period.

The hypothetical listener in the opening scene demands a final determination. Behind this may be a wish for clarity: they do not understand how to speak from now on. Yet clarity about the present moment is not a guarantee extending for years. They can agree to use the word currently chosen and accept the possibility of correction. Many human descriptions work this way: they suffice for present interaction without becoming a promise never to learn anything new about oneself.

Shakespeare's Hamlet, I.3, provides an uncomfortable counterexample. Polonius advises his son to be true to himself and then regulates his daughter's relationship with Hamlet in the same scene. These speeches belong to a character and a play's action rather than forming a simple

authorial code. The literary comparison shows how easily people can state a principle of independence and apply it selectively, trusting one person while treating another as unable to understand themselves.

A contemporary conversation therefore raises an editorial question: do we recognise independence only when its outcome pleases us? A person need not arrive at the description others expect to be regarded as sufficiently adult. Independence allows complexity and corrections. It does not exclude asking for help, but help ceases to be respectful when it knows the sole acceptable outcome in advance and accepts only answers leading to it.

Openness to change should not be imposed either. Sometimes a word has fitted someone for a long time, and they do not want to explain repeatedly why it still does. A requirement to doubt can be as controlling as a requirement to decide immediately. Respect takes account of the actual degree of certainty the person expresses. It does not impose a mandatory search, mandatory stability, or an obligation to turn one's life into educational material for other people.

IV. Another person's curiosity creates no obligation to disclose

Speaking about one's identity and announcing it to an entire audience are different decisions. A person may confide in someone close without wanting to tell family, colleagues, or the public. They may share different amounts of detail in different circumstances. This does not automatically justify calling them insincere. Privacy concerns who receives information and in what context, rather than only whether it is true.

Even a well-intentioned retelling can cross this boundary. Someone wants to prepare relatives in advance so that a meeting goes smoothly and tells them about their partner without agreement. The aim may be caring, but the right to choose the audience has already been taken away. Intention does not turn a disclosure into an agreed one. The particular question before retelling matters: may I speak about this, to whom, in which words, and in how much detail?

On WHO's page of working definitions of sexual health, respect and freedom from coercion belong to its well-being framework. We use it narrowly, rather than as a legal opinion about a particular country. The page's sexual-rights definition has its own qualification: it contributes to discussion rather than representing an official WHO position. Our conversational rules are editorial ethical reasoning.

A person can answer the question about audience before explaining the content. For example, they may be willing to speak one-to-one but not in a family chat. Or they may ask that the chosen word not yet be used publicly. This is an independent condition of interaction that cannot be replaced with a suggestion to be braver. Becoming more visible may be a personal

goal; pressure toward visibility does not become support merely because disclosure is thought to be liberating.

The right not to answer an intimate question need not require conflict. A boundary can be stated briefly without a biographical report. Yet a gentle manner is not an obligation for someone whose boundaries are being crossed, and it does not guarantee that the listener will stop. If the conversation is unsafe, this article does not propose disclosure to test the response. Keeping information private is an acceptable outcome rather than an inadequately completed exercise in trust.

V. Support begins by asking which role is needed

On hearing a loved person's self-description, someone may immediately want to help: find a label, explain it to relatives, locate a community, suggest a professional, or draw up a plan. Yet help responds to a request, and the request has not been established. Sometimes a person needs only to be heard, sometimes to clarify how they are addressed, and sometimes to discuss a specific difficulty. Automatically moving toward correction turns an identity statement into a statement of a problem.

In our hypothetical scene, one participant has prepared a long answer about the origins of attraction, while the other only wanted to say how to refer to them now. Their conversations diverge in subject. The listener can ask what would be useful now: listening, practical help, or no further questions. This choice need not be presented as a menu or made immediately. The right to say help is not yet needed leaves the speaker in charge of their own conversation.

In the Epistle of James, 1:19–27, attention to listening connects with religious responsibility for speech and deeds. This is a Christian instruction rather than a contemporary inventory of identities. In our comparison, it helps us ask whether a caring word matches subsequent treatment of the person. An approving response loses practical meaning if the listener then shares private information or again calls the person a label they have rejected.

Support does not require pretending to know everything. You can acknowledge that a term is unfamiliar and independently read available general information without assigning the speaker the role of a permanent teacher. General information does not, however, replace their own meaning of the word. If it matters to how they are addressed, one relevant clarification is enough. Searching their description for a hidden correct version that they supposedly do not yet understand is a different task and a different relationship.

Help should not become management of the outcome. Offering support in a direction a person has chosen differs from trying to return them to a former label because that makes others more comfortable. In particular, changing orientation should not be offered as a necessary price for acceptance. This article includes no such methods and does not ask how to obtain a

more convenient identity from someone. Its subject is respectful communication where experiences actually differ.

VI. Faith and culture do not speak with a single voice

A person's relationship with sexual identity can intersect with their religious life. Yet membership of a tradition does not reveal how they personally understand its norms, which community they belong to, or what role faith plays in their decision. Conversations about religion easily replace a particular person with a general portrait: a believer supposedly necessarily condemns, while someone outside religion must be free of pressure. Neither conclusion follows from membership.

Nor can we declare that all spiritual traditions long ago confirmed today's system of self-determination. They arose in different societies, used different concepts, and addressed different tasks. Where a text does not discuss contemporary identity, its silence is not agreement. Comparison is legitimate when the shared question and its limits are clearly named: for example, how someone is treated, declining to push, or responsibility for one's own speech.

In chapter 67 of the Tao Teh King, translated by James Legge, gentleness has a place in a Daoist normative framework. The selected passage of James gives behaviour a Christian grounding. Mill reasons about social freedom. These texts can participate in our question about not claiming another person's voice, but they do not constitute a common doctrine of sexuality. Their similarity has been editorially selected here; their historical unity has not been established.

A person can retain a faith that matters to them while setting a boundary to others' interference. They may reconsider their beliefs, need not do so, and should not have to prove loyalty by abandoning a self-description. The other participant also retains their own beliefs. Respect concerns how they act beside the person: whether they recognise their answer, preserve privacy, and stop applying pressure. Like-mindedness is not a necessary prerequisite for these actions.

If a difference in worldview matters significantly to a couple, it can be discussed as a specific condition of shared life. Examples include which public forms of address are acceptable, which family meetings suit both people, and which commitments each accepts. A general statement about incompatible cultures does little to clarify the decision. It makes the difference immense and impersonal. A precise description leaves room to recognise both shared grounds and boundaries that cannot be reconciled without one person abandoning their own position.

VII. A partner's response matters without determining identity

One person's self-determination may change how the other understands the relationship. Their partner may have questions, sadness, confusion, or doubts about the future. Respect does not demand immediate joy or prohibit speaking about personal feelings. Yet the response remains theirs. It gives no authority to declare the statement mistaken, assign a probationary period, or require a former label for the sake of peace.

In the opening hypothetical scene, the listener recalls the speaker's previous relationships. Perhaps they seek a continuous account that would explain the change. But a biographical counterexample does not always disprove a current self-description. Someone may understand their past differently, not want to analyse it in detail, or see no contradiction. A conversation does not require one agreed official history. It is enough not to use memory to deprive another person of a voice about the present.

Separating the tasks does not make the situation painless. One person may understand themselves clearly while the other understands that they do not want to continue the partnership under new conditions. This decision requires a discussion of compatibility rather than a reassessment of worth. Identity is not a warranty that must preserve everyone's former comfort. At the same time, one person's right to self-determination does not cancel another's right to leave a relationship without humiliating or punishing them.

Mill's question about limits to interference is useful as a philosophical examination of this crossroads. Where does my ability to decide about my own life end and an attempt to govern another begin? Not every painful response can be mechanically equated with coercion. Someone can feel confused without demanding a change. But repeated conditions for acceptance aimed at abandoning a self-description change the nature of the conversation. Action, rather than a convenient assessment of someone else's feelings, makes the distinction visible.

A pause may suit both people. It should not become an indefinite wait during which someone must conceal themselves for another's comfort. The subject of the pause can be clarified: I need time to understand my expectations of the partnership; I will use your chosen form of address and not share the information. Uncertainty about the relationship's future then does not swallow already clear conditions of respect in the present. Some boundaries can begin to apply without every question being answered simultaneously.

VIII. Belonging does not require conformity to a ready-made image

A person may find language, support, and opportunities to be understood within a community. But belonging does not make a particular appearance, speech style, public activity, or relationship structure compulsory. Pressure from outside can be followed by pressure from within: to prove oneself a sufficiently authentic representative of the chosen identity. The criteria change, but the person's voice is once again under someone else's control. Self-determination loses meaning if it is accepted only alongside a predetermined package of behaviour.

A hypothetical example: someone chooses a label but does not want to discuss it at work or participate in a public event. Friends interpret this as a failure of self-acceptance. That explanation may be their hypothesis rather than an established fact. The reasons may concern privacy, circumstances, interests, or simply a lack of desire. The person does not need to disclose all those reasons for their choice to remain valid. Support does not demand equal visibility from every participant.

Polonius's line in Hamlet reminds us of the risk of recognising independence selectively. In a contemporary comparison, we can ask whether someone is granted freedom only until they cease to fit the group's image. Yet the play does not prove social mechanisms in present-day communities. The hypothetical scene here was created editorially rather than presented as a case from a study. We consider the logical distinction between belonging and an obligation to perform a role.

Not choosing a label does not mean lacking a worthy description either. Some prefer ordinary words about attraction and relationships; for others, it is enough for now to say that they no longer want the previous category. Another person may use a label in one language and a more general explanation in another. These choices need not be ranked by developmental level. Language serves understanding and belonging but should not become a compulsory passport without which respect is withheld.

It matters to avoid the opposite error: treating every category as a restriction from which someone must liberate themselves. A chosen label can be accurate and valuable precisely for that person. The editorial principle is not to abandon words but to leave the right to use and revise them with the speaker. Nobody has to remain undefined for the philosophical beauty of open experience or become defined for the convenience of others.

IX. Repair begins with a particular way of addressing someone

A wrong label, a disclosure, or an intrusive question can occur even in relationships people wish to preserve. Repair requires naming the action rather than stopping at assurances of good intentions. Someone can acknowledge that they shared information without consent, used a rejected term, or tried to prove the self-description invalid. Then further actions become discussable, rather than only the correct judgment of their character.

An apology does not oblige the person affected to teach, soothe, or return to openness immediately. They can state which form of address now fits, who should not receive information, and which questions are no longer to be asked. The listener can clarify what is unclear but should not turn a correction into an endless conversation about their intentions. What matters is whether subsequent action changes. A repeated violation does not disappear because each instance is explained at length as awkwardness.

James connects word and deed within his own religious framework; our comparison concerns consistency in treatment. Shakespeare's dramatic language shows another aspect: a beautiful rule can coexist with controlling behaviour. These references are not a measured programme for restoring trust. They help formulate a more precise editorial question: what has changed in the relationship after the mistake was acknowledged? The answer should concern available actions rather than a promised final maturity.

Sometimes the previous degree of trust cannot be restored. This article imposes no obligation to reconcile, preserve the relationship, or disclose information again. Someone can accept a correction to a particular way of being addressed while keeping some subjects private. They can decide that further conversation does not yet suit them. Self-determination includes the right to set a limit to communication; it does not demand performing openness for someone who has not yet regained their trust.

Returning to the opening conversation now looks different. Instead of asking for a final determination, the listener can clarify the desired form of address and the limits of publicity. If they have questions about the couple's future, they can name them separately. The speaker no longer needs to win an argument about their entire biography to be heard in the present. Complexity remains, but voices are more accurately distributed: each speaks about themselves and participates in agreeing what is shared without appropriating another's description.

What this means in practice

This is a voluntary editorial exercise about self-description and forms of address. It is not intended to find the correct orientation, test someone's authenticity, or change their attraction. It can be done privately; a shared conversation is appropriate only where both want to participate and the conditions are safe. Do not disclose personal information to test another person's response. Under threat, safe support and available local help matter more than completing a written sequence.

Choose one current question rather than addressing your entire identity at once. For example: which word do I want to use for myself now; whom am I willing to tell; how would I like to be addressed; what do I need to discuss separately with my partner? Not all four need answering. The unknown can remain unknown. Self-description should not become a contract with a future self or a defence before an imaginary tribunal of past relationships.

If you are having a shared conversation, state its subject. A message about a label should not silently turn into a discussion of all intimate actions or the terms of fidelity. You can say that forms of address matter to you now and that you are willing to discuss partnership questions separately. The other person can name their own significant uncertainty without disputing your voice. If the conversation turns toward agreement, clarify the specific action, participants, and circumstances to which it applies.

Then name the audience boundary. To whom may information be passed, to whom may it not, and may it be written in a shared chat? Do not leave publicity as an assumed agreement. The listener can restate their understanding and receive a correction. This checks meaning rather than approving identity. One clear answer is enough; the account need not be repeated until it becomes convenient for everyone present.

If you are listening, clarify the role needed: hearing, using a new form of address, helping with a particular task, or leaving the subject alone for now. Do not propose fixing something the person has not called a problem. Unfamiliar general terms can be studied separately while preserving the distinction between reference information and personal meaning. The right to ask questions is limited by their relevance and the voluntariness of the answer. Declining to explain details is not a refusal of honesty.

Finish with a small check: what is now clear, what remains open, and what has nobody promised? In the hypothetical opening scene, only a new form of address and a request not to tell the family may have become clear. The couple's future is still being discussed. That is a sufficient outcome for one stage. Self-determination does not require resolving all relationships at once; respect begins with an available action in the present that leaves a person their voice, privacy, and right to choose further.

Key quotation

> *“The readiness is all.”*

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, V.2, an excerpt from Hamlet's speech, from the MIT English text. The context is the approaching duel and mortality rather than sexual identity disclosure. Here it provides a literary counterquestion: one person's readiness cannot decide for another; the scene is not an instruction to take risks.

Connections between traditions

• Mill: limits to social interference ↔ first-person self-description. The application is editorial; the political text does not study contemporary identity.

• Polonius in Hamlet: truth to oneself ↔ his control of Ophelia's life. A dramatic contradiction reveals the possibility of selective respect rather than a simple authorial code.

• James: listening and action ↔ support as a particular form of address. The Christian framework is compared with a present ethical task without asserting a common doctrine of sexuality.

• Tao Teh King 67: gentleness ↔ declining to impose a final answer. This is a limited analogy rather than an ancient theory of orientation.

• APA: distinguishing components ↔ WHO: a respectful well-being framework. Organizational materials help separate questions; they neither replace a personal answer nor test the exercise.

Primary sources

• William Shakespeare. Hamlet, I.3 and V.2. Selected passages of Polonius's advice, his address to Ophelia, and Hamlet's reply to Horatio were read. MIT electronic English text; the printed basis was not established, and the whole play was not separately reread.

• American Psychological Association. Understanding sexual orientation and homosexuality. Document dated 2008; the available official excerpt from the definition section was read. The tool did not open the full page; the complete text and underlying studies were not read.

• WHO. Defining sexual health. Working definitions and their qualifications; linked reports were not studied. The sexual-rights definition retains its status as a contribution to discussion.

• John Stuart Mill. On Liberty, selected argument in I. Work first published in 1859, Gutenberg electronic edition 34901; a philosophical reference rather than a sexual-identity study.

• Epistle of James 1:19–27, King James Version. The specified passage was read; a religious framework of word and action.

• Laozi, traditional attribution. Tao Teh King, 67. James Legge translation; the selected chapter was read, rather than the whole corpus.

Tags

sexual identity, self-determination, orientation, attraction, behaviour, label, language, privacy, dignity, consent, relationships, partner, belonging, community, publicity, disclosure, boundaries, faith, culture, support, uncertainty, revision, autonomy, responsibility, respect, Shakespeare, Mill, James, Daoism, WHO

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a coauthor of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.