

# The Gendered Perspective

Gender identity has become an increasingly complex and tumultuous conversation in the last two decades. The most prevalent construction of gender in the United States is the binary gender system: man and woman, informed by binary biologically assigned sex at birth, male or female respectively. A socially created set of gender norms, roles, and traits are then assigned to this binary. However, these categories are not the only forms of gender identity and expression. Many people identify as transgender, non-binary, agender, pangender, gender-fluid, gender neutral, and many other constructions of gender, often caught under the umbrella terms genderqueer or gender non-conforming. Additionally, intersex individuals, whose biological sex also exists outside of the binary determination, experience similar struggles within the binary system. Because these identities exist outside of the traditional construction of gender, they result in unique social challenges.

Individuals who identify outside of the cisgender binary system are very aware of the effect of gender in their lives and are often impacted more harshly. These identities are non-normative and highly affected by cultural stigmas. Many religious traditions and biological essentialist perspectives result in social discrimination, exacerbating the lack of legal protection for gender non-conforming identities. A culture of shame surrounds gender diversity and dehumanizes its victims, exposing trans and genderqueer individuals to violence, humiliation, and criminalization. Trans and genderqueer people are perpetually vigilant to these risks and fear discrimination due to this lack of social and political acceptance.

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals suffer from layers of cultural stress. Social marginalization creates risk and limits access to proper healthcare, education, employment, and living situations. Legal protections are limited, and often discriminatory behavior comes from both the individual level and the institutional level. Medicalization and pseudo-psychology can result in the maltreatment of trans and genderqueer people while gender affirming care is often inaccessible for financial reasons, insurance coverage issues, and bias from medical professionals. Housing discrimination protections are limited and there are few resources to handle moments of bias. These unique struggles, and the non-normative nature of these gender identities lead individuals to conceptualize alternative social connections, goals, and ways of living, partially due to social stigma and discrimination. These experiences are intimately understood by trans and genderqueer identified individuals; however, they are largely invisible within the binary mode of thought.

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Information gathered from: Lamothe J. C. Perez and R. Friedman's *Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture* (Lexington Books, 2021); Boyd-Rogers C. C. Lefevor, B. M. Sprague, and R. A. Janis' "Health Disparities between Genderqueer, Transgender, and Cisgender Individuals: An Extension of Minority Stress Theory" in *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2019; Cronn-Mills' *Transgender Lives: Complex Stories, Complex Voices* (Lerner Publishing Group, 2014); Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (The Free Press, 1999); Susan Stryker's *Transgender History: the Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017); Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (NYU Press, 2005).