

BEYOND THE BINARY:

Gender Identities and Public Administration

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A Growing Body of Literature

Research has steadily increased on the intersection between transgender issues and public administration, but has only recently begun to consider the existence of nonbinary gender identities as part of the overall picture. This is despite the fact that about one third of transgendered individuals self-identify as nonbinary, according to a survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality.^{1,2}

New Understandings of Gender

Individuals with a nonbinary gender identity do not feel that their gender fits into one of the two categories of "male" or "female," commonly referred to as the gender binary. They may have a diverse expression of gender including identifying with both binary genders, neither of them, or even a shifting blend of the two.^{3,4} This has led toward an understanding of gender as a spectrum, "a multidimensional concept influenced by several factors, including cultural and behavioural norms and self-identity."⁵

*"...we know today that not just the X and Y chromosomes but at least 12 others across the human genome govern sex differentiation, and at least 30 genes are involved in sex development."
—Simona Giordano, University of Manchester*

Nonbinary Invisibility

Whether intentional or not, attitudes and mores that enforce the gender binary can lead to the erasure of nonbinary identities.^{6,8} This is especially true in public administration, where public policy is often based on sex designation.⁷ Surveys and tools that do not provide open-ended options for gender reporting effectively render nonbinary identities invisible.^{3,8}

Developing Open-Ended Methods

Today, researchers are working to recognize and document gender identities as part of a spectrum. Tools and methods are being adapted and developed, in order to collect data on the historically invisible population of individuals with nonbinary gender identities.

These include:

- New, inclusive intake & evaluation forms with additional options for reporting one's gender identity separately from sex at birth.⁹
- Survey methods that enable collection of open-ended responses regarding gender identity, including adding additional questions to expand the options for reporting gender, while keeping existing questions about sex at birth to maintain historical continuity of the results.^{3,4}
- Introduction of an additional sex designation of "x" for ID documents in several countries and US states, including Oregon.¹⁰

Public administration is duty-bound to represent all citizens and promote equal access to services. Administrators & researchers must actively work to combat erasure, defining new tools and methods to capture data that accurately represent the existence of nonbinary gender identities.

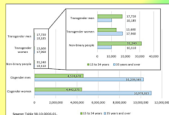


Fig. 1 - Canadian population, by self-reported gender identity
The proportion of nonbinary citizens is revealed by open-ended survey methods utilized during the 2021 Canadian census.¹¹

The above symbol (♿) is designed as a combination of symbols for male, female, and androgyne, and is popularly used as a symbol for gender inclusivity.

Revealing and Enfranchising Citizens

Invisible populations of nonbinary individuals are being revealed around the world, throughout demographic groups and in every location that has been studied to date.^{12,13,14} Methods and tools are being developed by researchers and implemented in public policy, to enfranchise and account for nonbinary people, and recognize them as citizens with equal status regardless of their gender identity.
Though society at large still largely regards gender as a binary, public administration is learning to move beyond the binary—and toward gender-inclusive representation for citizens.

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