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Gender Through Time and Culture

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Honors Program Capstone 2022

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Introduction

What is gender really? The answer you'll get is going to depend entirely on who you're asking. Some might say that gender is simply what you're born as, some might say that gender is a fluid expression of oneself. In a western context gender is viewed in a certain way. Traditionally it's seen as a binary concept, male or female. However, in recent years there's been a push for acceptance for other gender identities. Celebrities are coming out as non-binary or gender fluid and many who identify as cisgender are breaking down stereotypes in how they present and act. To many this may seem outrageous, as if society is straying from the ideals of the past. This simply isn't the case. Many different gender identities used to be celebrated and well known in different cultures across the globe. These identities existed long before the gender binary. An idea that did not exist until European colonization. This paper will highlight unique gender identities within different cultures, how colonization almost destroyed them, and why the colonizer mindset was so set on erasing alternate genders.

Definitions

Many terms in this paper are used to give a western comparison to different culture's ideas of gender. This does not mean they match exactly; rather they are similar to something known today. These terms, they that the multiple views didn't disappear and are instead still around today. These identities and expressions have survived time and stigma and often are found in different cultures as well as our own (Figures 1 and 2).

Gender	Refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity
Gender Identity	A person's deeply felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender neutral) that may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics. Since gender identity is internal, a person's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others
Gender Expression	The presentation of an individual, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behaviors that express aspects of gender identity or role. Gender expression may or may not conform to a person's gender identity
Cisgender	An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity and gender expression align with sex assigned at birth
Transgender	An adjective that is an umbrella term used to describe the full range of people whose gender identity and/or gender role do not conform to what is typically associated with their sex assigned at birth

Figure 1: Definitions by the American Psychological association that are used in this paper. (American Psychological Association 2015).

Sex	Refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex. There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs and external genitalia (<i>Resolution on gender and sexual orientation diversity in children and adolescents in schools</i>).
Intersex	A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (<i>what is intersex?</i>).
Non-binary	A person who identifies as non-binary does not experience gender within the gender binary. People who are nonbinary may also experience overlap with different gender expressions, such as being gender non-conforming (<i>Types of gender identity: Types and definitions</i>).
Genderfluid	A person who identifies as genderfluid has a gender identity and presentation that shifts between, or shifts outside of, society's expectations of gender (<i>Types of gender identity: Types and definitions</i>).
Genderqueer	A person who identifies as genderqueer has a gender identity or expression that is not the same as society's expectations for their assigned sex or assumed gender. Genderqueer can also refer to a person who identifies outside of how society defines gender or someone who identifies with a combination of genders (<i>Types of gender identity: Types and definitions</i>).
Gender roles	The expected role determined by an individual's sex and the associated attitudes, behaviors, norms, and values (<i>gender role 2013</i>).

Figure 2: Definitions of terms used in the paper from different sources, cited in the figure itself.

Transgender and cisgender are western terms, but the idea inherent in them has been around long before the English language made words for them. In fact, the terms transgender and cisgender are seldom ever used in other cultures' context to describe their own gender identities. These terms are based mostly on someone's assigned sex at birth. The indicators of biological sex are sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia (*Resolution on gender and sexual orientation diversity in children and adolescents in schools*). Traditionally one's assigned sex at birth would indicate how one should act or present themselves to the world. However, this doesn't account for individuals who are intersex. Almost 2% of the world is born intersex, and often doctors do surgeries on babies to fix their outward genitalia to fit into what is expected for their assigned sex (Compton 2018). The use of cisgender and transgender can create assumptions, one of which is that there are only two genders, male or female. Cisgender means someone's gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth, someone born female who still identifies as female for example. Transgender means someone's gender identity does not match their assigned sex at birth, (female to male or male to female). Gender identity is on a continuum, and it can often change (American Psychological Association 2015). People should be able to present themselves to the world in a way that makes them feel most comfortable, and this may change with time. There are certain stereotypes and ideas of how each gender should act and feel, and this doesn't always align with how someone wants to be seen.

Gender roles

Gender roles are the expected behaviors and norms that people assume based on someone's presented gender. These roles may be similar depending on time and

location. In contemporary societies, people have begun to stray from the gender roles of the past. In western countries some of the gender roles are that in a marriage, men are supposed to be the breadwinners while women should be a stay-at-home mom and take care of the kids. Gender roles also give the idea that men are supposed to be aggressive, competitive, and confident while women should be gentler, passive, and nurturing. In turn these are used to define masculinity or femininity. Those who deviate from this (working mom and stay-at home-dad for example) are seen as wrong as they are disobeying their assigned roles (*gender role* 2013). At very young ages, children begin to realize what is expected of them and they begin trying to fill that role. Though Western ideas surrounding gender roles are important to recognize, non-western gender identities reflect different views.

Assumptions

Our own western views on gender and gender expression can skew our predictions about the past. The use of predetermined gender categories uses the assumption that being male, or female meant the same thing now as it did before (David 2018). It also implies that the only possible categories were cisgender male or female. These misinterpretations have been applied to stories, myths, excavation sites and so much more as historians investigate the past and try to determine what was happening. Often the only remaining record of most of history was written by the people in power at the time. This can lead to identities being misinterpreted in different accounts of the same telling. The knowledge we have now is because of the individual cultures' records, not from European texts of the time.



Figure 3: The locations highlighted in this paper are seen in color. Places on different continents with no real way of having had contact. Each place developed their own sense of gender to connect with how their people felt, with no influence from each other (World map).

Native American

Research has shown that over 150 different pre-colonial groups acknowledged third genders (Powell 2021). Many Native American cultures have an identity often known as two-spirit. Two-spirit was both recognized and revered in many Native American communities. It had different meanings across locations and groups. Each place had its own language and its own terms, not all of which are translatable between communities. Two-spirit is an umbrella term and was often seen as a traditional third gender for Native American groups (Carlson-Ghost 2019). It was highly offensive to ask

a two-spirit person to perform the traditional role of their biological sex. Some communities believed that people could only be a true two-spirit if they were intersex while others believed that it was an identity for those who had both male and female spirits within them. In some communities, children wore gender neutral clothing until they were old enough to express their own identity. This practice allowed children to explore without boundaries. In these communities' people were valued for their contributions to the tribe, not for how they presented or whom they loved. Alternate identities were seen as natural.

Navajo People

The Navajo people recognized four or five genders depending on the period and were a matriarchal culture (Paige 2020). The older viewpoint used four gender identities. The first of these was the asdzáán, which was defined as a feminine female. This would be analogous to a cisgender woman. Hastiin, or a masculine male, would be most closely compared to a cisgender man. The other two were the nadleehi and the dilbaa. Nadleehi can be directly translated into English as 'changing one', while the dilbaa doesn't have an English translation. The nadleehi captures a wide variety of expression and is similar to feminine men, transgender women and many intersex variations. But all are very fluid in their expression. The dilbaa was their fourth gender, which referred to a female born individual with a masculine spirit. It's analogous to butch women and transgender males while still being expressed very fluidly.

More recently the Navajo split the term nadleehi into three subcategories, the nadleeh, the masculine female, and the feminine male (Powell 2020). The nadleeh are individuals who demonstrate characteristics of the opposite sex or who are fluid in their

expression. A masculine female, also referred to as female bodied nadleeh, is a female born individual who occupies roles usually associated with men and presents masculine. A feminine male, also known as male bodied nadleeh is a male born individual who identified with gender diversity and typically performed work that was also performed by their feminine female counterparts. These identities were in constant transformation. Those who identified as nadleehi were seen as very spiritual and often given roles of priests and caregivers. The nadleehi appeared in many Navajo creation stories. The first woman and first man were twins, and both were nadleehi (*Navajo cultural constructions of gender and sexuality 2010*). Many of the culture's achievements were attributed to the nadleehi as they were able to see both feminine and masculine perspectives and find a middle ground. They were highly valued and often seen as having the ability to bring wealth and good fortune to any household they were a part of.

Zuni People

The Zuni people begins with a deity that is both male and female. Their origin story starts with a god named Awonawilona. This god was known as the supreme life giver and was referred to as he, she, or they interchangeably throughout stories. For the Zuni, a third gender or a 'middle' gender was a very sacred role. The idea of the middle was extremely important to them, the concept being seen as desirable and stable. Their ancestors looked to settle their people in the middle of the earth, which rested in the middle layers of the universe (Adams 2018). Their gender identities were not tightly bound to biological sex. Young children were referred to as cha'le', which simply means child. Children often wore the same short haircut until puberty when they were able to

begin distinguishing themselves through hair styling and clothing. The culture did value a natural state of ungendered, but anyone who encompassed both was sacred. This role was called Lhamana. The Lhamana were primarily individuals assigned male at birth but lived fully or mostly as women (Adams 2018). There isn't a direct western comparison as the Lhamana simply represented a middle space with a well-defined spiritual role. This identity was important to the community as only Lhamana's were allowed to participate in many religious roles. The Zuni believed that life began with a god both male and female, so anyone with a similar identity had a connection to Awonawilona. This made them supernatural and good luck.

Lakota People

The Lakota recognized three genders, female, male and winkte. Winkte can be translated roughly to 'two-souls-person' (*Winkte... wisca and wiyan*). The winkte were neither male nor female and were seen as an in-between, analogous to non-binary or genderqueer. As they were seen as in between the traditional male or female identity, they were also in between the supernatural and natural worlds. The winkte were otherworldly and put in spiritual roles. The Lakota people were able to differentiate based on how they spoke if they identified as male, female or winkte (Zimny 2016). Men and women and the winkte all spoke differently and used different words while speaking. Their identities were not tightly bound to expression.

Native Hawaiians (Kanaka Culture)

The Kanaka was the culture of the first Polynesians who lived on Hawaii. Here gender identities were very fluid. The Kanaka believed that everyone possessed both

male and female qualities. Kane and Wahine were their terms for male and female (Driver 2022). Māhū was their middle gender and was the expression of a third self. It wasn't a gender identity or an orientation, but an expression. Those who identified with māhū described it is a state of being, it's how one shows themselves to the world and how they act. Often analogous to genderfluid, genderqueer or gender- nonconforming, those who accept the māhū are seen as sacred and their abilities to embrace both sides are highly valued. Kumu Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu identifies as māhū and she is one of the few who speaks publicly about māhū. She has stated that she strives to dismantle western influence and preserve what is left of her Hawaiian culture. Kumu has stressed the importance of understanding māhū from a non-western perspective, stating that "it's clearly oriented to the cultural understanding that is rooted in language, that is rooted in history and that will push beyond the parameters about what we are imposed to knowing, believing and accepting from American culture" (Driver 2022).

Philippines

In Filipino culture, the Tagalog term baklâ encompasses an array of sexual and gender identities. It is most often used to indicate a male born person who adopts a feminine gender expression (Patiag 2019). The term does not translate to western nomenclature and sits somewhere between gay, transgender, and genderqueer. It's a term that encompasses the fluidity that exists in humanity. There are many possible identities and expressions within the baklâ identity. Baklâ is built on cultural practice and is often considered a Filipino third gender. The baklâ were known for being traditional community leaders who transcended the duality between men and women. In this culture, groups of baklâ's developed their own language called swardspeak, a term

coined in the 1970s. Swardspeak combines Tagalog, English, and Spanish and has an often hyperfeminized inflection (Alba 2015). It was often used among gay men and other homosexuals or gender-nonconforming individuals who identified as baklâ to find each other, and to show that certain places were safe. The language gave them a way to communicate without fear of outing themselves to the public. The language itself has no set rules. It's constantly changing and growing with time.

Hijra Communities

The Hijra communities from Hindu culture are primarily in India, but can be found in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal (Goel 2019). The Hijra community has been in recorded history for over 4,000 years and is mentioned in many ancient Hinduism texts. Hijra individuals hold significant roles in many of the most important texts of Hinduism. The most notable being the story of Shiva (a Hindu deity) merging with his wife Parvati and becoming the androgynous Ardhanari. This deity holds a special significance to many Hijra communities, and because of this Hijra were seen as a tie to the supernatural world (Nambiar 2017). The Hijra identity encompasses many different biological, gender and sexual identities, though Hijra typically present as feminine. In modern terms this could include transgender women, intersex individuals, and any gender nonconforming or genderfluid individuals. The identity is neither male nor female, but they are not transitioning either. This community is unique as it's more than just an identity. To be truly considered Hijra, one must be ritually adopted into the community in a process that can take months to years (*The third gender and Hijras 2018*). Some would even undergo castration, removing their male genitalia as an offering for their gods and goddesses (Goel 2019). The Hijra community often live

together in groups and were seen as mythical with the special ability to bestow blessings for weddings, births, and other special occasions. The community was so important to the Hindu religion that if a Hijra wasn't present at a special event, the event wasn't recognized in the eyes of their gods. Elders would teach the hijra way of life generations after generations, keeping their knowledge and lessons alive.

West Africa

West Africa cultures also had fluid ideas about gender. In their society what it meant to be male or female was not rigid. Uganda there were mudoko dako, or feminine males, who were treated as women and could marry men (Elnaiem 2021). There were also chibados, male diviners who were believed to carry female spirits within them. Their feminine gestures were simply expressions of their broader spiritual roles. In these societies there were many woman-woman and men-men marriages. Though these were not known to be lesbian or gay marriages, but one of the two would be the wife and the other the husband. Their assigned sex at birth did not matter as their actions and behaviors, whether that being more feminine or masculine, were more important than biological sex.

Other Locations

Across the globe there's been record of different gender identities and expressions. In Madagascar there is the sekrata, which refers to biological males who present as females (Mason et al. 2020). The sekrata were thought to be both completely natural while also having supernatural protection. These individuals were respected, and often held positions of power as they were believed to be supernatural. In Aboriginal Australia, they used terms like sistergirls and brotherboys which almost

exactly lines up with our idea of transgender women and transgender men. In Indonesia, they had five known and respected gender identities. The makkunrai and the oronae were essentially cisgender women and cisgender men respectively. The calalai or womanish-man and the calabai or manish-women were analogous to transgender man and transgender women. Their fifth recognized identity was the bissu or spirit. This identity was referred to as androgynous or someone who has equal male and female in them, like genderfluid individuals. In Italy, they had a term for a transgender woman being femminiello, and they were believed to be good luck.

Representation

Some of the identities described above can be translated or compared to a western term but not all. Many of these meant more to the cultures than just expression and how they fulfilled their identities differed. Comparisons are helpful as they can turn an unknown into a more known idea. Representation is also important. For those today who identify as alternate genders it's just as important to see themselves represented in media as it is to see themselves in the past. Knowing that something similar to how they feel has always existed and was once well respected is vital. They aren't different or wrong, and the way they feel has been seen through time and place repeatedly. These identities aren't the exact same, but this knowledge may be enough to make someone feel seen. This is just as important.

Colonization

Each of these specific cultures received harsh stigma and backlash as their views didn't fit into western beliefs. The concept of presenting and acting in a way that matched one's born sex was forcibly introduced by colonizers. A concept that we see

throughout time is that people in power believe that they and only they are morally right. Any person or group that disagrees is wrong. In the history of the US, we notably have moments where anything not already known is deemed as 'immoral' and that it was outlandish to even believe to accept it. Looking back on how things were leaves us wondering why it wasn't always allowed. In the future we will be looking back on gender in the same way and wondering why states refused to allow people to live their most natural and fulfilling life's.

In the 1500s colonizers arrived in North America, expecting it to be empty, instead they found many cultures with ideals different from their own (Powell 2021). The Europeans who landed began pillaging and stealing land as well as pushing their own ideology onto the people who lived here. The colonists even criminalized different sexuality and gender expressions. In the 1900s these ideas were indoctrinated to the point that there were no seen or talked about alternate genders in the 6 nations of native communities. Despite there being years of documentation and oral history disputing this. Many historians believed that colonists wanted to eradicate the two-spirit culture before allowing it to go into any history records (Chang 2021). Before the colonization of the Native Americans, all groups acknowledged alternate genders. There was no right way to act or rules one had to abide by to be considered a 'normal' member. The cultural legacy of these people was nearly erased as European colonizers forced their own religion.

We can see the same happen in Hawaii around the 1780s when British colonizers first landed on the island (Driver 2022). The first sugar plantation opened in 1835 and the surviving Kanaka were enslaved on the land they founded. They were

forced to adapt to survive, and risk losing their own cultural identities. In the Philippines around the 1520s the Spanish conquest began (Patiag 2019). Anyone who acted or looked different was prosecuted. The term baklâ began being used as a slur and the group was over sexualized to the point of almost erasing the true significance.

India was under the jurisdiction of European colonial powers from the 1500s to 1961 (Nambiar 2017). The European mindset mentioned before was strongly pushed. In 1897 colonists passed a law stating that all Hijra were criminals and were a threat to morality and political authority. The colonists accused the communities of sodomy, prostitution and even kidnapping of young boys who wanted to join them. This led to children being forcibly removed from known Hijra communities and any businesses or inheritance rights tied to them being closed (*The third gender and Hijras 2018*). The communities became skilled at moving around and evading the police as the British forces were set on wiping their existence from the public eye. The cultural significance of the Hijra communities ran deep and many of the communities were able to persist and continued serving important religious roles. But 200 years of stigma and police activities surrounding the communities took its toll.

Colonizer mindset

All through history, we can see records of just how uncomfortable European colonizers were when met with views of gender that didn't line up with their own. As colonizers moved across the globe and set up towns in different places they brought with them religion, ideologies, and certain gender constructs. They expected everyone to fit into these constructs. The gender binary was brought along and nearly everything had to fit into one side or the other. Household jobs and childcare were given to the

women; hunting and working jobs were given to the men. We still see this today; certain toys are branded only to boys or certain jobs are seen as only for girls. The colonizer mindset of the gender binary still survives to this day, and people who don't fit into the designated boxes often receive are stigmatized and harassed.

The patriarchy is another reason that the colonizer mindset created such hate. At the time Europe was extremely patriarchal. A patriarchy brews misogyny. When colonizers encountered feminine presenting males, they thought it was wrong as it didn't fit into their designated binary. However, the hate also came from the fact that femininity was seen as weakness and those who presented feminine or were female were seen as less than. Even those who may have been assigned female at birth but presented or lived as a man were diminished because they were still female in the European view.

Contemporary

By oral history and any remaining records in the cultures these identities still exist. Within their cultures, many are still revered and sacred. However, many still receive backlash from remnants of the colonizer mindset about gender that was pushed so heavily. The gender binary (male or female) that was induced so strongly and so harshly during colonization still exist today. The forced indoctrination to a European mindset has lasting issues surrounding cultural differences.

Native American people were nearly wiped from existence as colonizers stole land, murdered, and exposed them to diseases they hadn't seen before. Today the groups are small and stretched thin, though the two-spirit umbrella is still being used. The number of people who identify with this is far fewer, but the idea was able to survive

and bounce back with time. Two-spirit is even included in the long LGBTQ+ acronym, as it's recognized by both western LGBTQ and native communities.

The Kanaka's in Hawaii make up barely 6% of the population of Hawaii, and there are very few who still practice. But some are still speaking out and trying to teach the next generation their culture and identities. In the Philippines, the baklâ is one of the most known LGBTQ+ cultures in Asia and are looked at fondly. They still fight to take back the term and remove the over sexual connotations that were put on it.

Hijra communities in India are still receiving hate from their neighbors. A once well respected and worshipped community is now being harassed. In 2014 court in India legally recognized the Hijras as an official third gender, giving them legal protections like anyone else in the country (Nambiar 2017). Progress has been slow as many were still being excluded from working and attending school and most communities continued to live in poverty. In 2015, the first Hijra mayor in India was elected in the city of Raigarh. A few years later the city of Kochi hired many hijra to work in their transit systems (*The third gender and Hijras 2018*). The hijra today continue to bless Hindu families even as they must slowly fight back against the years of stigma built around them. Other places could have lost their identities, but many were saved through old records and spoken traditions.

Conclusion

The idea of gender fluidity has always existed. Throughout time, cultures that had no connection to one another all developed their own different identities. Some who believe in outdated values will say 'there is only men and women and it's always been this way' but all the evidence suggests otherwise. It seems that the idea of gender being

fluid has been around much longer than the western traditional view that it's something you're born as. It encompasses different identities, expression, attitudes, behavior and so much more. Gender is truly just an expression of self, one that isn't the same for everyone, nor will it be viewed the same way. So with all the evidence given, what is gender really?

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