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Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

NON-BINARY AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

"Non-binary" is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression* doesn't fit within the man/woman gender binary—people who are non-binary*, agender*, genderfluid*, genderqueer*, and more. Note: Many non-binary people consider themselves trans but not all do.

While not a perfect fit, this factsheet also includes gender-diverse* people who fall outside Eurocentric concepts of gender and sexuality (e.g., Two-Spirit, hijra, māhū)—more on these cultural and/or Indigenous identities in our *Expanded Glossary*.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Non-binary and gender-diverse people face significant erasure onscreen, making up less than 1% of series regulars in the 2021-22 TV season. Existing portrayals often center cisgender (or "cis") characters who are confused by non-binary people. These depictions suggest non-binary and gender-diverse identities are illegitimate when, in fact, they've existed—and been revered—throughout history. This erasure also perpetuates discrimination, resulting in harmful policies and a lack of protections for non-binary people (e.g., bathroom bills, limited gender options on documents). Non-binary and gender-diverse people deserve to see themselves onscreen, and mindful representation of these identities can lead to a safer, more inclusive world for all.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Someone can be non-binary regardless of their pronoun(s), name(s), gender expression, or medical history. As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves.

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Misgendering Missteps:** Cis characters mocking the idea of gender identity (e.g., "I identify as a helicopter") and/or panicking or joking about pronouns (e.g., they/them, ze/zir, she/they) without rebuke or correction. These depictions lead to real-world harassment, violence, and micro-aggressions against non-binary people.

- **Gender Interrogation:** Characters asking invasive, insensitive questions about a non-binary person's identity, body, and/or gender expression (especially in medical, first responder, education, and workplace settings). This teaches viewers that this disrespectful behavior is acceptable.

- **Always Androgynous:** Non-binary characters, often assigned female at birth, who *only* fit an "androgynous" look (e.g., small-framed, short haircut, masculine clothes). This erases the many other forms of gender expression among non-binary people, who can have any expression (e.g., masculine, feminine, a combination of both).

- **Binary Only:** Storylines and dialogue that reinforce the false gender binary (e.g., "ladies and gentlemen," boys vs. girls storylines, baby gender reveals). These depictions, however small, ignore the existence of non-binary people.

- **Non-Human Non-Binary:** Supernatural, genre, or fantasy beings depicted as non-binary. These portrayals paint non-binary people as inhuman, perpetuating the lie that they're "abnormal."

- **Reduced To Pronouns:** Non-binary characters whose *only* trait is their use of they/them pronouns. This reduces the non-binary community to one particular characteristic when the experiences of non-binary people are more diverse and nuanced.

"Non-binary and gender-diverse people deserve to see themselves onscreen..."

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Varied Identities:** Nuanced portrayals of different kinds of non-binary people (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, older, trans), allowing their identities to shape their beliefs and behaviors. Depict characters with a range of gender expressions, identities (e.g., agender, genderqueer, genderfluid), and pronouns.

- **Cultural Diversity:** Gender-diverse characters representative of the many culturally specific gender identities around the world (e.g., South Asian hijra, Native Hawaiian and Tahitian māhū, Thai kathoey, Samoan fa'afafine/fa'afatama, Native American Two-Spirit). Explore their history (e.g., erasure due to white, Christian colonization; spiritual/religious roles in communities) *and* tell stories set in modern day (e.g., characters reclaiming these identities).

- **Everyday Inclusion:** Stories with non-binary and gender-diverse characters in everyday professions and roles (e.g., teacher, nurse, teammate). Show non-binary people, especially as protagonists, with stories told through their own POVs (e.g., in friend groups, navigating careers, pursuing hobbies).

- **Toppling The Binary:** Storylines that call out gender discrimination against non-binary people (e.g., activism, in everyday conversations). Depict an inclusive world (e.g., gender-neutral sports teams, sex education, bathrooms), and show all characters modeling inclusive behaviors (e.g., sharing pronouns, parents practicing gender diversity with children).

- **Exploring Gender:** Characters of all ages exploring their gender and discovering what fits best (e.g., changing pronouns, using puberty blockers). Gender can be fluid or constant, depending on each character's unique life journey.

- **Love Interests:** Non-binary and gender-diverse characters who are desirable without having to conform to beauty standards of the gender binary. Show them in healthy and positive romantic/sexual relationships.

*Denotes a term in the glossary

➡ There was one non-binary series regular character on broadcast TV in the 2021-22 season, representing less than 1% of all series regulars.

➡ ~1.2 million non-binary adults live in the U.S., but only 26% of American adults report knowing someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., they/them).

➡ ~25% of all LGBTQIA+ youth use pronouns other than he/him or she/her.

➡ While someone's understanding of gender can manifest in different ways at any age, most children have a sense of their gender identities by age four, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

➡ 150+ pre-colonial Native American tribes acknowledged third genders (i.e., genders beyond man/woman).

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- Autostraddle: *"What It Means To Call Ourselves Non-Binary: An Autostraddle Roundtable"*

- Electric Lit: *"We Need More Non-Binary Characters Who Aren't Aliens, Robots, or Monsters"*

- Gender Spectrum: *"Some Common Myths About Gender"*

- GLAAD:
  "9 young people explain what being non-binary means to them"
  "New GLAAD study reveals twenty percent of millennials identify as LGBTQ"
  "Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022"

- Human Rights Campaign: *"Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ"*

- Human Rights Watch: *"Transgender, Third Gender, No Gender"*

- PBS: *"A Map Of Gender-Diverse Cultures"*

- Pew Research Center: *"Rising shares of U.S. adults know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns"*

- Smithsonian Magazine: *"LGBTQIA+ Pride and Two-Spirit People"*

- *Them*: *"Inqueery: Indigenous Identity and the Significance of the Term 'Two-Spirit'"*

- The Trevor Project: *"Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth"*

- United Nations Human Rights: *"The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons"*

- University of California: *"Exploring the history of gender expression"*

- The Williams Institute: *"Nonbinary LGBTQ Adults in the United States"*

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GLOSSARY

Agender: A person who doesn't experience or express *any* gender (while most non-binary identities typically do have a gender, just one that isn't binary).

Gender-diverse: A term to describe gender identities, roles, and expressions outside of the binary framework. Gender diversity specifically acknowledges the many ways (e.g., culturally, spiritually) people identify outside of masculine/feminine norms.

Gender Expression: How any person communicates their gender through external means, including makeup, voice, clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. For many people, their gender expression affirms their gender identity, but this isn't always the case (i.e., wearing masculine clothes doesn't necessarily mean that a person is a man or even identifies as "masculine").

Genderfluid A person whose gender identity is fluid, not consistently adhering to one fixed gender. At different times, they may understand their gender to be aligned with a particular gender identity (e.g., non-binary, man, woman) or a combination of identities.

Genderqueer: A person who blurs and/or rejects the boundaries of the man/woman gender binary—seeing themselves as both man and woman, neither, or outside of these categories. Genderqueer people often, though not always, have a queer sexual orientation as well.

Non-binary: Both an umbrella term *and* a specific, individual identity for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression doesn't fit within the man/woman gender binary. Most but not all non-binary people use gender neutral pronouns. Also referred to as "enby."

Please visit our Expanded Glossary for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **androgyny, assigned female/male at birth, bigender, butch, cisgender, fa'afafine/fa'afatama, fakaleitī, femme, gender binary, gender expansive, gender identity, gender non-conforming, hijra, kathoey, māhū, metis, minority stress, muxe, neopronouns, third gender, transgender,** *and* **Two-Spirit**.

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.

glaad
GLAAD.org

Storyline|Partners|
StorylinePartners.com

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
If she can see it, she can be it.
SeeJane.org

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
HRC.org

SRC Partners°
SRC-Partners.com

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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website:
WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

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