



The Gender Binary Is a Big Lie: Infinite Identities around the World

Lee Wind

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Gender is examined throughout diverse histories and cultures in Lee Wind's edifying book *The Gender Binary Is a Big Lie*.

Beginning by introducing the nuances of gender and sexuality as they're now understood, each chapter is devoted to a specific location, period, and group of people who lived outside of the gender binary. From eunuchs in ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine empires to the third-gender Māhū people in Hawai'i and Tahiti, the roles and expectations of gender are examined from the earliest recorded history onward, celebrating each identity and illuminating how gender nonconformity existed throughout time. Along with profiles of specific gender nonconforming icons throughout history, the book also relays general information about biology, the social expectations of gender, and what it means to be an ally.

Making use of abundant historical sources and references, the book analyzes all types of gender nonconforming people. Wind, a prevalent voice in queer spaces, amplifies gender nonconforming voices from all corners of the world, including Roman emperors in 222 CE and zishu nü—"self-combed women"—in 1950s China. Each chapter also features a profile on a person or group—including castrati from 1500s Italy, brotherboys and sistergirls from modern Australia, and women warriors of 1700s Dahomey—leaving tangible examples of variant gender roles throughout history.

Furthering its educational aspects, the book includes pop-out boxes where complex or uncommon words and phrases need added explanations. Black-and-white photographs of gender nonconforming people and their communities bear evidence of real cultures living outside of gender expectations. And each chapter ends with poignant questions about stereotypes, gender diversity, and gender expectations relevant to its section.

Using examples from various cultural perspectives spanning continents and centuries, *The Gender Binary Is a Big Lie* reveals worlds in which gender nonconformity is celebrated.

ALLISON JANICKI (September / October 2024)

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