



Transgender Fashion: Developing a Gender Identity Framework for ‘Transgender’ Identities

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Gender classification has been a basis for segmentation of apparel and consumer goods for department stores. Burns, Mullet, & Bryant (2016) explain that the root of separate, binary gender categories occurred because different types of machinery are used to create men’s and women’s apparel, in addition to children’s wear, accessories, and home fashions. For individuals who identify as queer, the concept of “mens” and “womens” departments is often not ideal and does not intersect. Queer identities have maintained a position in history for many centuries, however, queer politics and culture have been widely challenged and unaccepted until the latter half of the twenty-first century. In the United States, identities such as genderqueer, gender fluid, gender non-binary, agender, transgender or trans, and transsexual have been commonly associated and selected gender options.

The purpose of this research is to explore gender identities and descriptors to develop a gender identity framework to position varying terms describing Transgender identities. As Transgender and Queer identities have becoming increasingly visible, in both a positive and negative light, there has become a need to cater to this understudied and diverse group regarding consumer markets. Issues commonly brought up today are the reactions and attitudes store owners and employees have towards assisting queer people when shopping for apparel (Gordon, 2011; Mazziota, 2016). Providing a trans-accessible fashion market does not just appeal to transgender individuals, but also the entire LGBT community, in addition to non-LGBT individuals that are advocates for the trans community such as friends, family, and allies (Difrancesco, 2017).

The terms used in the proposed framework have been gathered and defined based on literature reviews including sources of trans-academic and gender studies. Comparisons and similarities from the terms used were noted and summarized and placed into a columns based on binary or non-binary orientation. Publications of notable authors such as Siobhan Somerville, Julia Serano, and Judith Butler were also reviewed. Queer theory is the theoretical framework that is used as the basis for defining the following terms used in Figure 1. As used in qualitative studies, Queer theory is described as focusing on individuals calling themselves lesbians, gays, bisexuals, or transgender people. The research using this approach does not objectify individuals, is concerned with cultural and political means, and conveys the voices and experiences of individuals who have been suppressed (Gamson, 2000). Sedgwick (1993) and Berlant & Warner (1995) insist that the parameters of the term ‘queer’ are elusive and broad, and covers an unending range of meanings. Sedgwick (1990) shares that the dialect of society creates an oppressive state because the terms homosexual and heterosexual signify that there are only two sexual identity categories, however in reality there is a “continuum” of identity categories available. Somerville (2007) adds when discussing the increasing visibility of queer culture, “scholars continue to carefully

interrogate the shortcomings and the untapped possibilities of ‘queer’ approaches to a range of diverse issues” (p.191).

Following the analysis of the multitude of transgender identities, they are assembled into three categories, binary identities, non-binary identities, and identities that can be considered binary and non-binary. Figure 1 displays these categories and the terms that follow. The categories are decided based upon apparel classifications of the current apparel retail market. It is suggested that individuals who identify with binary identities may prefer to shop in departments or stores targeting “men’s” and “women’s” sections. While, individuals who identify with non-binary identities may opt to purchase apparel from retailers that offer gender androgynous apparel (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015).

Beginning with the identifying adjective transgender, Susan Kaiser (2012) defines this as an individual grappling with the relationship between their biological sex assigned at birth and an individual’s own identity. Transsexual, as defined by Julia Serano (2007) describes “anyone who is currently, or working toward, living as a member of the sex other than the one they were assigned at birth, regardless of what procedures they may have had” (p. 31).

Cisgender describes individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Gender Non-binary, Gender Fluid, Agender, and Genderqueer are all characteristics and options that do not align solely with binary genders. GLAAD states that Gender Non-binary is used to describe individuals that feel they do not fall into either gender category. The term Genderqueer, refers to people that see themselves as neither male nor female, but as a third gender, or as both genders, or somewhere in between (2018). Those that identify as Agender refer to individuals that describe themselves as genderless or gender neutral, meaning not claiming a gender at all or being neutral to all gender possibilities (2018). Gender Fluidity is “a presentation of self that challenges gender binaries of dress and expression while maintaining one’s gender assigned at birth,” (Alfrey & Twine, 2016, p.32).

By providing this analysis and Figure 1, it is in hopes that those who manage apparel retail operations can better train their employees on the importance of educated communication with individuals of any gender or identity. This analysis also suggests that retailers should consider the idea of incorporating other gender identities into the traditional classifications and labels. Future research in this area also include the addition of new identity options as they surface and evolve. Researchers and industry professionals should also collaborate with individuals in the queer community to understand consumer needs outside of identity inclusion. These needs could include, but not be limited to, apparel and textile needs as well as psychological needs related to clothing.

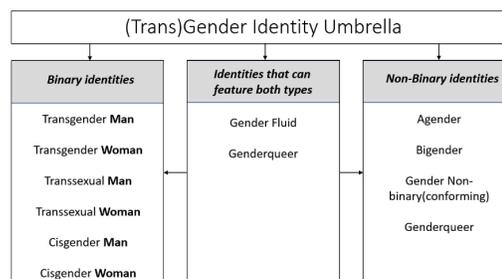


Figure 1. A proposed (trans)gender identity framework

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