Non-binary marker “X”: expanding the concept of gender

As 11 states and counting, currently offer the gender marker “X”, more and more non-binary individuals are able to express who they truly are on their legal identifictions. But for 19-year-old Q Garcia, changing their gender marker to “X” ultimately didn’t impact how they feel about themselves. “I do not need the governments validation to feel valid,” they said.

Garcia came out as non-binary about a year ago and found it difficult to navigate the world with this new-found identity. According to Webster dictionary, a non-binary person is someone “who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female.” For Garcia, their identity influences every aspect of their life including their work and education, they said. “It also changes my social life and how I navigate the dating world.”

After living in D.C. for two years, Garcia decided to get a D.C. driver’s license. In the District of Columbia, according to the National Center for Transgender Equality, if you wish to change your gender marker, all you need is a Gender Designation Form. Only requiring the GDF and a standard driver’s license application, “I thought the process was pretty easy in DC,” said Garcia. “And I didn’t have any problems.”

Arkansas, Oregon, Minnesota, Maine, Utah, Colorado, California, Indiana, Nevada, Vermont, Pennsylvania currently give out non-binary identification cards and licenses with Hawaii and New Hampshire set to do the same starting in 2020, and Washington State not far behind. James Miller, public information officer for the DC DMV, stated that “from January 1, 2017 to July 25, 2019, 265 driver licenses and 137 identification cards have been issued to District of Columbia residents with the ‘X’ identifier.”

The National Center for Transgender Equality released the U.S. Transgender Survey in 2015. A mere 11 percent of respondants stated that their IDs had their preferred name and genders, while 68 percent stated that their IDs did not have their preferred name or genders. They survey collected data and reasons as to why non-binary individuals don’t communicate to others about their identity. The highest being 86 percent that think most people don’t understand so they don’t try to explain it and 82 percent stating that it’s easier to say nothing at all.

“You have to hand over your ID for a lot of things and seeing that F written on there was traumatic each and every time. Even though I know my identity, it still hurts to see a form of identification be wrong,” said Garcia.

A total of 32 percent of survey respondants “who have shown IDs that did not match their presentation reported negative experiences, such as being harassed, denied services, and/or attacked,” with 10 percent of them being non-binary.

“I would like to see a future without gender markers on ID's,” Garcia said. “I believe it is just an opportunity for gatekeeping and harassment.”

Since updating their gender marker, Garcia hasn’t experienced any harassment based on their ID. “I don’t think many people truly look at the gender marker when looking at my ID,” they said. “I hope if they do, they don’t ask any questions.”

Most states, as of now, currently have different procedures when it comes to changing your gender marker. Some states just require a gender designation form, while others, like Colorado, require written consent and approval by a medical physician. Although these processes are relatively easy, Garcia doesn’t like to think of changing their gender marker as integrating into society.

“I personally do not want to integrate into society as it currently is,” they said. “I have no interest in changing myself to fit into society’s boxes.”

Transgender singer-songwriter Shea Diamond lives by the notion of not fitting into societal expectations of what gender and sexuality can be. At the inaugural PRIDE Summit held in Los Angeles, CA., focusing on LGBTQ+ representation in media, Diamond introduced herself to the audience with the pronoun “goddess.”

“Goddesses give power and give life to kings and queens and to hes and shes and theys and theirs and thems,” she said. “Goddess is a representation of not being bound by this thing that they’ve controlled for so long, you know, not male enough, not female enough. I’m beyond that. I’m a goddess.”

“Non-binary people are not some scary entity,” said Garcia. “It is a community of people defining for themselves what gender means to them.”

Often, for most gender identities and sexualities, each experience is different and unique. A recent trend seen in the transgender and non-binary community is individuals not defining themselves by any gender or label at all.

“Gender markers should empower people, not define them,” said Garcia. “People should not have to change themselves to fit onto a form, the form should have inclusive options!”

Whitman-Walker Health in D.C. fights for these options and helps non-binary and transgender individuals claim their preferred gender; they also provide health and legal services. Amy Nelson, director of legal services, issued that “since April 1, 2012  - I see that we have assisted 43 unique clients who identified as non-binary or gender queer with updating GMs on any ID docs.” Of those 43 clients the average age at intake was 28.6 and 80% were US citizens. The dominating ethnicities were Caucasian with 17clients and multiracial with 13 clients.

“The X on my ID means one less place where I am misunderstood. It is one less place I have to see the wrong form of identification for myself,” said Garcia.

For those who aren’t familiar with non-binary or transgender culture, Garcia suggests going online and researching different topics and terms. They say that there is a plethora of social media accounts run by non-binary people.

“Try to expand the circle of who you are around,” they said. “All these things will help clarify what this means and why we should be making a cultural shift into being more inclusive.”

“Though we have a long way to come, I think it is one step closer in the right direction,” said Garcia.