

# BEYOND THE BINARY

## Essays on Gender

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***Shari Thurer***

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**PHOENIX**  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
*firing the mind*

*For Olga Umansky  
Librarian of the Hanns Sachs Library  
Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute  
2005–2022*

*Wise, patient, always kind  
Without her help, this book would never have been completed  
We wish her well.*

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**Francesca Ely-Spence** went to Barnard College in New York City and studied sociology and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. They currently live in Boston with their rescue pup, Lucy. When

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**Robin Haas, LICSW**, (they/them/theirs) is a nonbinary clinical social worker and certified Life and Emotional Intelligence Coach living and working in private practice in the Boston area. Robin has dedicated their life to becoming happy and helps others do the same by recognizing their full potential. Robin helps people change their narrative so they can free themselves from self-imposed limitations. In addition to doing clinical work, Robin is a speaker and trainer with SpeakOUT Boston. They earned a degree in elementary education from Boston University and an MSW at Simmons School of Social Work.

**Daniel Jacobs, MD**, is a training and supervising analyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, Faculty, and Director of the Hanns Sachs Library and Archives. Among his many publications are *The Distance from Home: A Novel* (2019), *Grete Bibring: A Culinary Biography* (2015), *Edward Bibring Photographs the*

*Psychoanalysts of his Time 1932–1938* (2005), and *The Supervisory Encounter: A Guide for Teachers of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis* (1995).

**Malkah T. Notman, MD**, was on staff and faculty at Beth Israel Hospital, and did her residency at Boston State Hospital and Beth Israel. She participated in Bibring’s pregnancy study and wrote extensively on women’s reproductive issues, menopause, women’s health, development and careers. A training analyst for many years, she trained and taught at Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, and became its president in 1998–2001. An active faculty and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Notman was also an Acting Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Cambridge Health Alliance for four years.

**Lewis Harwood “Harry” Spence, JD** (1946–2021) was Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute board member, affiliate scholar, and Explorations in Mind instructor. Born in Schenectady, NY, Lewis Harwood Spence, known to his friends and colleagues as Harry, grew up in Cranbury, NJ. He received his AB in American history and literature from Harvard College, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1974. He devoted his professional life to helping tens of thousands of people by turning around large-scale failing public institutions. He took on leadership positions for the Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston housing authorities, was the state-appointed Receiver who helped the City of Chelsea emerge from bankruptcy, became the first Administrator to help reform the Massachusetts Trial Court system, was tapped by the Governor to be the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services, was appointed to be the Deputy Chancellor for Operations for the New York City Board of Education, and served as Commissioner of the Massachusetts Education Leadership program. He was working on a book describing his

experiences, and conceptualizing the complex dynamics of those large-scale organizational changes. He also had been a lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School, and a lecturer and Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he was among the original faculty directors of the Doctor of Education Leadership program.

**Rita Teusch, PhD**, is a training and supervising analyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI). She is a lecturer in psychiatry (psychology), part time, at Harvard Medical School, Cambridge Health Alliance. She regularly teaches courses on Freud and Klein at BPSI. Her publications and book essays cover the topics of trauma, eating disorders, the history of psychoanalysis, and social justice. She has a private practice in Harvard Square, Cambridge.

**Shari Thurer, ScD**, is a Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute psychotherapist and Library Committee member, an Adjunct Associate Professor at Boston University, a psychologist in Boston, and the author of many noted publications, including *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1994) and *The End of Gender: A Psychological Autopsy* (Routledge, 2005).



# Introduction

*Rita Teusch*

In the last two decades, clinicians have witnessed a profound change with regard to gender identifications in an increasing number of our patients. Many patients are experiencing and defining their gender and sexuality in much more variable and nuanced ways besides male or female, gay or straight, and some choose to not use these labels at all. This has been especially true of younger patients, who are increasingly rejecting binary gender assignments and asking us to accept their more fluid and nuanced gender identifications. Many of these patients do not see their gender identifications as a source of conflict but rather as an expression of their authentic selves. The greater acceptance of nontraditional gender identifications has also encouraged those who have long been “in the closet” to come forward and share their experiences and suffering due to having been nonbinary all their lives.

In December 2021, the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) voted to affirm their commitment to nondiscrimination against diverse identity characteristics, and the training standards for psychoanalytic candidates regarding diversity were broadened and made significantly more inclusive. A person's gender identity and/or sexual preference is henceforth understood as one identity characteristic next to the identity characteristics of age, religion, race, ethnic background, and socioeconomic and ability status.

It is the policy of the American Psychoanalytic Association that an applicant for candidacy is never excluded or discriminated against on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, race, ethnic background, or ability status.

(APsaA, pp. 9–10)

Candidates are expected to work with cases reflecting a diversity of identity characteristics including, but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, ability status, and socioeconomic status.

(APsaA, p. 11)

These new training standards reflect APsaA's acknowledgment of the significant psychological impact of all identity characteristics on personality development. The expectation is that psychoanalysts become knowledgeable about and sensitized to how these identity characteristics are manifested in a patient and have shaped their psychological development. Furthermore, analysts need to be trained to become comfortable with exploring psychoanalytically how various identity characteristics interact to affect an individual's conscious experience and their unconscious feelings and conflicts.

At the suggestion of the Library Committee, a small group of Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI) therapists

and analysts, led by Shari Thurer, set out a couple of years ago to explore the history of BPSI's and the larger analytic community's changing views on homosexuality. Our discussions soon turned to the rapidly changing views on gender in society and also in our field. Defining gender by anatomical sex alone no longer describes the gender experience and sexuality for many of our patients, and gender is no longer predictable of particular psychological traits. We realized that we were again at a crucial turning point with regard to traditionally narrow, often prejudicial views on gender. We decided that it was important to increase our knowledge of and empathy with the kaleidoscope of gender identifications of fellow clinicians and patients. We believed that it was important that, as a discipline, we avoid doing harm again by being exclusionary and discriminatory and/or pathologizing those who do not fit into our traditionally narrow definition of gender.

The result of our research and writings, conducted in consultation with BPSI candidates knowledgeable in the area of gender diversity, is the following series of essays and personal reflections. We realize that this monograph explores only a limited number of gender-related topics, focusing for the most part on nonbinary gender. Clearly, there is so much more to learn about the gender revolution that is currently taking place, and this is only the beginning of a discussion.

We offer this monograph, the fourth in the BPSI Library Committee Series, as a step in the process of better understanding the lived gender experience and complex gender identifications of an increasing number of our colleagues and patients. Our goal is to open up a conversation to further explore the topic of nonbinary and other genders that is increasingly being written about in the therapy and psychoanalytic literature, often with considerable controversy. An example of current controversial views can be found in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 101(5) (2020).

We invite you to begin to talk with us together or find your own ways to educate yourself further on this important topic.

The following essays are personal reflections by interested clinicians, patients, and BPSI-affiliated academic scholars of various generations. This monograph is by no means BPSI's definitive statement on nonbinary gender. We hope that you will listen with us to the voices of those who were brave enough to share their gender-related experiences. We have found that listening carefully and with an open mind (rather than raising questions immediately) to those whose experiences with and feelings about their gender do not fit into our traditional binary assumptions is a crucial first step to bringing about acceptance and healing.

## Reference

The American Psychoanalytic Association Board of Directors (2021, December 12). Standards and Principles for Psychoanalytic Education. <https://apsa.org/sites/default/files/Standards-PrinciplesForPsychoanalyticEducation.pdf>