

DAVIDE COSTA

Beyond the Binary

Connecting Medical Humanities and
Healthcare for Inclusive Transgender
and Gender Diverse Experience

preface by Raffaele Serra

UNIVERSITÀ

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con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata, compresa la
fotocopia, senza l'autorizzazione
dell'editore. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

*This essay is dedicated to all those who dare to be
different, who have the courage to say NO... and
above all, to those who rise, again and again,
undaunted by life, by circumstance, by anyone.
To those who keep moving forward – always,
despite it all!*

We are all different, which is great because we are all unique. Without diversity, life would be very boring.

Catherine Pulsifer

I'm a real rebel with a cause.

Nina Simone

When you say 'yes' to others, make sure you are not saying 'no' to yourself.

Paulo Coelho

I want to break free.

Queen

Table of contents

p.	13	Preface by Raffaele Serra
	17	Introduction
21		Chapter 1
		<i>Contours of Diversity. Gender, Health, and the Social Fabric of TGD Lives</i>
	1.1.	Introduction, 21
	1.2.	What Is Diversity?, 27
	1.3.	Diversity and Health, 38
	1.4.	Diversity in Gender: Who Is a Transgender and Gender Diverse Individual?, 47
	1.5.	Intersex Individuals and TGD People: Distinctions and Overlaps, 55
	1.6.	Health Concerns Among TGD People, 62
	1.7.	Underground Pathways to Gender Affirmation: The Irregular Commerce of Hormone Therapy and Silicone Injections Among TGD Individuals, 70
	1.8.	The Medicalization of TGD Health: Some Reflections, 76
	1.9.	A Deepening on The WPATH Files, 83
	1.10.	How Can the Social Sciences Study the TGD People?, 91
	1.11.	Conclusions, 101

p. 109	Chapter 2
	<i>The Role of Social Capital on TGD Health</i>
	2.1. Introduction, 109
	2.2. The Foundations of Social Capital: Theoretical Origins, Core Dimensions, and Public Health Relevance, 113
	2.3. Bonding Social Capital and Health: The Power of Close Ties in Shaping Well-Being, 120
	2.4. Bridging Social Capital and Health Equity: The Role of Weak Ties in Expanding Access and Resources, 128
	2.5. Linking Social Capital and Institutional Health Access: Navigating Power, Policy, and Public Services, 137
	2.6. Social Capital and TGD Health: Some Considerations, 146
	2.7. The Relationship Between Bonding Social Capital and TGD Health, 149
	2.8. The Relationship Between Bridging Social Capital and TGD Health, 154
	2.9. The Relationship Between Linking Social Capital and TGD Health, 160
	2.10. Queer Social Capital and Chosen Family: Alternative Networks of Survival and Belonging in the Lives of TGD People, 165
	2.11. Conclusions, 170
175	Chapter 3
	<i>TGD Health Between Barriers</i>
	3.1. Introduction, 175
	3.2. What Are the Barriers to Health? The Main Theories and Models on Health Barriers, 179
	3.3. The Main Barriers for TGD People: An Overview, 185
	3.4. Macro Level: Health System Barriers, 187
	3.5. Structural Barriers, 189

	3.6. Meso Level: Social Barriers, 194
	3.7. Micro Level: Individual Barriers, 200
	3.8. Some Useful Tools for Health Policies: A Taxonomy of Barriers and a Conceptual Framework, 205
	3.9. Critical Reflections, 216
	3.10. Conclusions, 229
p. 233	Chapter 4 <i>The Health of TGD People in Italy: Theoretical and Empirical Aspects</i>
	4.1. Introduction, 233
	4.2. Key Elements of Gender Affirmation for TGD People in Italy, 238
	4.3. Exploring Gender Affirmation Pathways in Italy: A Legal Focus, 244
	4.4. Facilitating Gender Affirmation in Italy: Insights into the Infotrans Portal, 249
	4.5. The Complexities of Gender Affirmation in Italy: Problems and Social Effects, 252
	4.6. The Empirical Studies Begin With a Premise, 258
	4.7. Italian Healthcare Professionals' Competence in TGD Health: A Quantitative Study, 259
	4.8. Critical Reflections, 284
	4.9. Exploring the Healthcare Experiences of TGD People: A Qualitative Analysis of Their Perspectives, 294
	4.10. Critical Reflections, 308
	4.11. Conclusions, 316
323	Chapter 5 <i>Framing Identity. A Visual Approach Through a Photographic Gallery of Interviewees</i>
	5.1. A Methodological Premise, 323

p. 331	<i>Picturing Life Stories: A Visual-Quotational Approach to Research with TGD People</i>
375	Chapter 6 <i>Drawing the Threads Together: Between Inclusions and Conclusions</i>
387	References

Preface

In an era marked by rapid demographic changes, increasing social complexity, and growing demands for equity in public services, world health systems face a pressing question: how can they effectively respond to diversity without reproducing exclusion and inequality? This book by Dr. Davide Costa, “Beyond the binary” represents a bold and necessary contribution to answering that question.

Dr. Costa is a sociologist of medicine, an anthropologist, and a scholar of medical humanities whose academic and research career is rooted in the interdisciplinary analysis of health systems, policy, and social justice. His work spans topics such as sociomarkers, health policy reform, and innovative models of care. Currently serving as a post-doctoral researcher in anthropology and vascular surgery at the Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences at the University of Catanzaro, Italy, Dr. Costa brings a unique lens to the study of health: one that is both humanistic and systemic.

This book reflects the intellectual depth and ethical clarity of his academic trajectory. Through a meticulous literature review and carefully designed empirical studies, it ex-

plores how health systems engage – or fail to engage – with the diversity of those they serve. While the focus is particularly on the experiences of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals, the broader implications of the research touch upon institutional readiness, professional training, and policy responsiveness across the board.

The strength of this work lies in its methodological pluralism. Dr. Costa employs both qualitative and quantitative tools, combining sociological theory with grounded data drawn from the Italian healthcare system. This dual strategy allows him to trace not only the structural and organizational barriers that TGD people face, but also the subtle social dynamics and professional attitudes that shape access to care. The result is a powerful, multi-layered account of the mechanisms that sustain health inequities – and the possible paths to dismantling them.

At its core, this book is a call to reframe diversity not as a challenge to be managed, but as a reality to be embraced – one that requires institutional imagination, policy innovation, and above all, a renewed sense of ethical responsibility. The healthcare systems of several world countries, if they are to remain just and effective, must be able to recognize the complex identities of those they serve, and to respond with structures that are as inclusive as they are competent.

I am confident that this work will serve as an important resource for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike. It combines academic rigor with a profound commitment to human dignity, and it exemplifies the role of sociology and anthropology in shaping the future of healthcare.

With admiration for the intellectual and moral clarity with which this work has been undertaken, I am pleased to introduce it to readers across disciplines and borders.

Raffaele Serra

Chair of Vascular Surgery,
University Magna Graecia of Catanzaro

Introduction

Society is unity in diversity.

George Herbert Mead

In recent decades, the intersection of gender identity and healthcare has emerged as a critical frontier for both academic inquiry and public policy reform. Within this evolving landscape, TGD individuals face systemic inequalities that are deeply embedded in medical, social, and institutional practices. This essay, *Beyond the Binary. Connecting Medical Humanities and Healthcare for Inclusive Transgender and Gender Diverse Experience*, explores the social, cultural, and policy-based dimensions of healthcare as experienced by TGD people. Through a combination of theoretical analysis, empirical research, and visual methodology, the work aims to illuminate the barriers to equitable care while offering pathways for inclusion and transformation. The research is grounded in the fields of social sciences and medical humanities, and is motivated by a core question: How do healthcare systems recognize, respond to, and often marginalize transgender and gender diverse individuals? Drawing from both macro-level institutional analyses and micro-level personal narratives, this essay seeks not only to describe the *status quo*, but to challenge its assumptions, reveal its structural violence, and suggest more equitable alternatives.

The work is organized into six chapters, each of which builds conceptually and empirically upon the last:

- Chapter 1: *Contours of Diversity* introduces the global theoretical, conceptual, and historical frameworks related to diversity, health, and gender identity. Drawing from international literature in public health, social theory, and critical thought, it lays the groundwork for understanding TGD healthcare not in isolation, but within a global system of norms, hierarchies, and social structures.
- Chapter 2: *The Influence of Social Capital* analyzes how different forms of social capital – bonding, bridging, and linking – affect health outcomes for TGD individuals. Drawing on theories from Pierre Bourdieu to Robert Putnam, this chapter demonstrates how alternative kinship structures, such as “chosen families”, play a vital role in buffering the health impacts of marginalization.
- Chapter 3: *TGD Health Between Barriers* examines the structural, institutional, and interpersonal obstacles that impede TGD individuals from accessing competent and affirming healthcare. A layered taxonomy of barriers – macro, meso, and micro – is developed, along with a conceptual framework that can be applied to public health policy.
- Chapter 4: *The Health of TGD People in Italy* combines theoretical reflection with empirical data to explore how TGD individuals navigate the Italian healthcare system. This includes a quantitative study of healthcare professionals’ knowledge and attitudes, and a

qualitative analysis of lived experiences, collected through interviews and narrative accounts.

- Chapter 5: *Framing Identity* adopts a visual-social approach by presenting a photographic gallery of interviewees. This chapter reflects on the ethics and methodologies of visual research and positions visual storytelling as a powerful medium for social recognition and resistance.
- Chapter 6: *General Conclusions* synthesizes the findings, articulates the limitations of the current system, and outlines recommendations for future research and health policy reform. The chapter reaffirms the need to move beyond tokenistic diversity management and toward structural transformation rooted in equity, dignity, and human rights.

Methodologically, this essay employs a mixed-methods approach. It includes theoretical exposition, social modeling, quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and visual approach. The combination of these methods allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the layered realities TGD individuals face. The research prioritizes lived experience without losing sight of structural forces, policy frameworks, and epistemological questions. Ultimately, this essay is not only an academic contribution to the social sciences and medical humanities – it is also a call to action. It argues that any serious engagement with TGD health must go beyond inclusionary rhetoric and address the embedded norms, institutional logics, and clinical practices that continue to marginalize non-normative identities. By centering the voices and agency of

TGD individuals, the work envisions a healthcare system that affirms, rather than erases, the complexity of human gender.