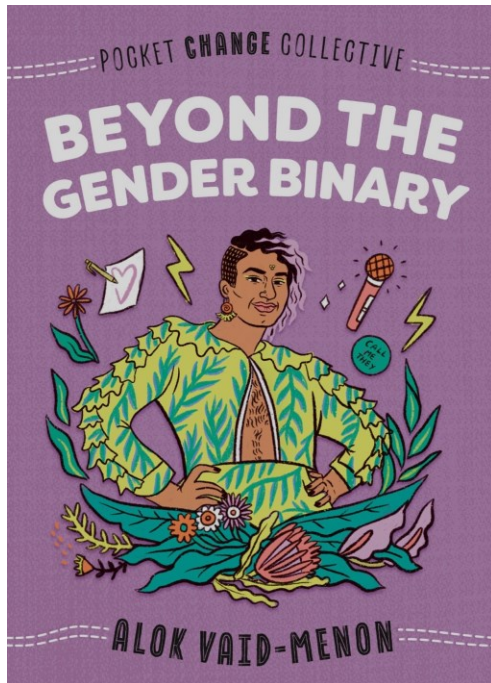


# BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY



*Young Adult*

**By Alok Vaid-Menon**

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## **Book Summary:**

Teaches minors alternate gender ideologies.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains explicit/frequent alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; references to phobia and violence; and controversial cultural, racial, and historical commentary.

**2** /5

**Teen Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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5	<p>The gender binary is a cultural belief that there are only two distinct and opposite genders: man and woman. This belief is upheld by a system of power that exists to create conflict and division, not to celebrate creativity and diversity.</p> <p>...This false choice of boy or girl, man or woman, male or female is not natural—it is political. The real crisis is not that gender non-conforming people exist, it's that we have been taught to believe in only two genders in the first place.</p>
6	<p>The reality that many gender non-conforming people cannot go outside without fear of being attacked is unacceptable.</p>
10	<p>The other day, I left the house wearing a teal dress, purple lipstick, and a full beard.</p> <p>...As I walked down Sixth Avenue, two people started pointing and shouting, "That's a man in a dress! Hey, everyone! Look! It's a man in a dress!" I looked all around me, but I couldn't find whom they were talking about—there were no men in dresses to be found.</p>
11	<p>What people see and how people see it has everything to do with power.</p>
13	<p>Most of this conversation has little to do with the everyday experiences of nonbinary people (people who are neither exclusively men nor women) and gender non-conforming people (people who visibly defy society's understanding of what a man or a woman should look like).</p>
14	<p>In the past few years, we have seen an onslaught of legislation introduced at the local, state, and federal levels targeting gender non-conforming people by attempting to prohibit curriculum about us, banning us from public accommodations, denying us access to legal protections at work, and barring our access to healthcare. On all fronts—from South Dakota attempting to ban transgender athletes in high school sports; to Tennessee trying to bar us from accessing public spaces, including highways, schools, and parks; to Texas proposing financial compensation for reporting us using the restroom; to legislation across the country permitting businesses the right to deny services on the basis of gender—our communities are under attack.</p>
15	<p>Take, for instance, when the Department of Justice announced that trans and gender non-conforming workers are not protected by civil rights law. Or when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention censored the word transgender. Or, in 2018, when the Department of Health and Human Services attempted to define gender as fixed and binary in a memo that was later leaked. Or the overwhelming opposition to the Equality Act just a year later.</p> <p>...Bias and discrimination are not just being endorsed, they are given the green light. This gives many people permission to harass us in public everywhere we go.</p> <p>The situation is even worse for transfeminine people of color. Despite the ongoing murders of Black transfeminine people, and extreme rates of employment discrimination and homelessness, there has been little societal outcry and action.</p>
17	<p>The scrutiny on our bodies distracts us from what's really going on here: control. The emphasis on our appearance distracts us from the real focus: power.</p>
21	<p>The idea here was that if you were a boy who displayed even a hint of femininity, then you were gay. And if you were gay, then you were wrong.</p>
23	<p>That's the thing about being an LGBTQIA + kid—you often don't have the luxury to come into yourself on your own terms because other people have made up their minds for you.</p>
24	<p>Eventually I sat down with a couple of my friends and told them that I knew in my heart of hearts that I was not a man nor a woman and that I was physically uncomfortable with the way that I was presenting in the world.</p>

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26	But maybe we aren't the problem; maybe the whole gender system is.
27	We are led to believe that there are only two genders, "man" and "woman," and these genders are narrow, separate, and opposite. ...At its heart, discrimination against gender non-conforming people happens because of a system that rewards conformity and not creativity. Rather than celebrating people who express themselves on their own terms, we repress them.
28	Years after graduating, one of my most vicious bullies sent me a message apologizing for his behavior, revealing that he had since come out as bisexual. ...People judge gender non-conformity because they are insecure about their identities. ...Gender non-conformity causes such a huge reaction because we're consistently taught that there are only two fixed and universal genders. Seeing other people defy this mandate brings the entire system into question.
32	I wrote about how even though I was attracted to men, I wasn't like gay people.
33	Conforming to the gender binary was about wanting to hold on to power.
34	As a visibly gender non-conforming person of color, a lot of people go out of their way to insult me.
36	Power can be defined as the ability to make a particular perspective seem universal. Control is how power maintains itself; anyone who expresses another perspective is punished. Arguments against gender non-conforming people are about maintaining power and control.
37	For large periods of history, it was "common sense" that Black people and people of color were inferior and that this supposed inferiority justified discrimination, genocide, and slavery.
38	Despite the fact that in 2019 Merriam-Webster added the gender-neutral they pronoun to the dictionary, people are still upset about the use of a singular they. ..."Did somebody leave their phone behind?" The selective outcry over new words to describe gender and sexuality—amidst the thousands of words that are added to the dictionary every year—is about prejudice, not principle.
39	Indigenous people and people outside the Western world have long existed outside of the gender binary: two-spirit among American Indians, hijra in South Asia, waria in Indonesia, muxe in Mexico, just to name a few. ...It's not that these people do not exist, it's that they have been erased to make the Western gender binary seem like the only option, and not a particular and specific cultural worldview.
40	Gender non-conforming people face considerable distress not because we have a disorder, but because of stigma and discrimination.
41	Gender non-conforming people are not opportunistic; we are oppressed.
44	Some gender non-conforming people are nonbinary, and some are men and women.
46	People have the right to self-determine their gender whether it be a man, woman, or a nonbinary gender.
47	For example, when we say that women give birth, we neglect that some women are not capable of giving birth while some trans men and nonbinary people are. The gender-neutral alternative "people who give birth" holds all of these realities just like the gender-neutral "siblings" includes brothers, sisters, and nonbinary siblings.

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48	<p>This is not about science, it's about power.</p> <p>...In 2018, in response to pervasive anti-trans legislation, over 2,500 distinguished scientists released a statement noting that the idea of the gender binary has no biological basis.</p>
49	<p>Biology and culture are yet another false binary.</p>
50	<p>Before then, it was a widely held belief by experts that humans were inherently both male and female. In the nineteenth century, scientists believed that binary sex was only possible in white people, who were seen as more "advanced" than other races. Today, conversations about binary sex erase intersex people who are born outside the binaries of male or female altogether. The fact that doctors still perform non-consensual and non-medically necessary surgeries on intersex people just because they are different shows how binary sex—like binary gender—is a political construction.</p>
51	<p>Second, people of all genders can and do reproduce. Having a father and a mother is only one way to define family.</p>
53	<p>There are nonbinary people who do pursue hormones and surgery, and they are not more authentic. Medical intervention does not make trans people more "real" than others, and it should be a personal choice, not a societal mandate.</p>
56	<p>Trans and gender non-conforming people are actually more likely to be assaulted while using public accommodations, not the other way around.</p> <p>This is a deliberate strategy of using feminist rhetoric as a smokescreen to cover up anti-trans bigotry. Trans and gender non-conforming rights are women's rights because many trans and gender non-conforming people are also women. The irony is, then, that people are misusing the language of women's rights specifically to harm women.</p>
59	<p>The gender binary is hurting us all, and it is time for us to finally put it to rest.</p>