

SOCIAL TRANSITION

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From clothes to haircuts, piercings to names, society genders human beings in a multitude of ways, beyond the physiological. For many transgender people, transition involves actively intervening on these traits. Sometimes, people may want to adopt a gender expression which will facilitate acceptance of their gender by broader society. Others might deliberately adopt a nonconforming gender expression which befuddles gender norms. The choice is deeply personal and is motivated by considerations such as gender identity, sexual orientation, race, culture, religion, interests, political beliefs, age, and more. Some trans people do not socially transition in any way, whether because they have no desire to, or because external factors made them choose not to. The collection of ways in which individual trans people alter their gender expression is often referred to as social transition. Social transition can exist alongside or independently from medical transition.

Aspects of gender expression that one changes in social transition are not inherently gendered but are instead gendered through social processes. Nothing makes pink, for example, inherently a “girly” color and its gendered perception varies across time and cultural groups. Nonetheless, it is widely perceived as feminine in Euro-American cultures and this can have implications for trans people’s choices: A trans man might abstain from wearing pink to avoid being misgendered, and another might deliberately wear pink to challenge gender norms and be read as gender nonconforming. There is no good or bad choice in social transition,

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only choices which are well-suited or ill-suited to unique individuals based on their wants and needs.

The notion of social transition can be particularly challenging for nonbinary and gender non-conforming trans people, as past conceptualizations have tended to focus on hegemonic gender roles, which are often binary and tightly regulated. One of the points of tension is the emerging distinction between expressing one's gender and producing a certain impression or image of gender for others. Those two aspects do not always converge, and many people may find themselves wanting to authentically express their gender in ways that will produce a gendered perception of them, which they may at times simultaneously resent. This may be all the more challenging, given the variations in gender norms across space, time, and communities. What's considered feminine in San Francisco will not be the same as in New Delhi. What was considered masculine just twenty years ago is not the same as what is considered masculine today.

I. DEVISING YOUR SOCIAL TRANSITION

There is no cookie-cutter social transition, and the process of figuring out when to transition and what socially transitioning will include is deeply personal. Some begin socially transitioning with a clear idea of what they wish to change, whereas others do not and happily figure it out along the way. Nor does having a clear idea preclude future changes: Feelings and identities are never foreclosed, and some might find both their gender identity and desired gender expression evolve over time in a way that will have implications for how they present themselves. Ultimately, social transitioning is about figuring out what works for you.

A. Feeling Gender

Gender dysphoria and gender euphoria are commonly used guides to social transition. Many trans people are uncomfortable

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presenting a certain way and are overjoyed when specific pronouns are used for them. For instance, trans women frequently experience happiness being called “she” and distress being called “he.” Sometimes, it will be clear which way gender dysphoria and or euphoria are pointing towards. Yet other times, it can be difficult to know exactly what best suits us, because the feelings can be complicated or because they may fluctuate or vary based on context. For some, this may indicate gender fluidity, whereas for others, it may be a very conscious strategy to navigate transphobia in different contexts. Still for others, it means that further introspection may be necessary to figure out what suits them best.

How we feel is not always concordant with societal expectations. Gender dysphoria and gender euphoria are in a sense indomitable: They feel however they feel, and although social norms may play a role in defining their contours, they can also fly in the face of social norms altogether. It is possible for someone to have, say, euphoria from being called “he” yet be perfectly happy with a traditionally feminine name. Others may be most happy when their gender presentation confuses others.

Sometimes, navigating social transition is a more creative process. For some people, socially transitioning is more of an artistic process where you arrange various components to make yourself into the gendered person you want to be. Your person is the most wonderful canvas for painting your gender. Just because you don’t have gender dysphoria or euphoria about certain things doesn’t mean that you don’t have preferences and feelings about how to best (re)present yourself.

Finally, socially transitioning can be even more mundane. Picking names, pronouns, appearances, etc. doesn’t have to be grounded in gender and how you feel about gender. Maybe I’m just wearing a loose band t-shirt because I really like that band. People have preferences and interests of all sorts and those can be just as helpful in figuring out how to present.

B. Blending In and Clashing Out

We are always in relationship to others, and how others perceive us or dictate social norms inevitably influences how we approach social transition. Being visibly trans or gender nonconforming can be hard in society, and many people understandably wish to minimize being identified as such by others for safety, to facilitate social interaction, or because the thought of others knowing makes them dysphoric. Because of this, some people tailor their social transition around the aim of being generally perceived as a cisgender person.

The desire to blend in with cisgender society is elevated to the status of a norm in some trans spheres. It is important to remember that there is nothing wrong with being readily identified as trans or gender nonconforming and that it doesn't make you less valuable, less important, or less lovable. Other people deliberately clash with norms of gender expression. This can be done for a wide range of reasons including political commitments, personal beliefs, or just because they feel good that way.

C. Modelling and Trying On

When trying to figure out how we want to socially transition, it can be helpful to look to others. Role models are all around us, be it within our communities, families, friend groups, or in media. Trans communities hold great wisdom. We can ask elders from our communities or people who have been out longer how they navigated social transition. Fictional characters can also inspire. Even just going through fashion magazines can be helpful in figuring out how one might want to present.

There are also many archetypes in the social imaginary. In reading the words high femme, butch, goth chick, suspenders hipster, or bear, you probably have images popping into your head. For many, socially transitioning is not just about expressing gender, but also expressing it in a specific way that matches an archetype

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that speaks to us. Some trans women are butch lesbians. Some trans men are bears. Figuring out your social transition can also mean figuring out which “style” best fits you.

Exploring gender is something one can do through social transition. If a person is not sure whether a name, pronoun, or clothing style will suit them, there is nothing wrong with trying it out. People often go through multiple names, pronouns, and styles before finding the ones that suit them best. Depending on context and social support, you can choose who to involve in your exploration and how many different options to try out. Maybe you want to try out a name and pronoun combinations with a friend for a day or two, or maybe you want to try it out in all spheres of your life for an extended period. Even if a combination doesn't end up working out for you, any trying on or exploring that helps you figure out how to be most comfortable is a success.

D. Life Circumstances

Various external factors play a role in how and when people elect to socially transition. Each of us come to social transition from a different place. Family, age, race, culture, religion, gender assigned at birth, geographical location, social class, finances, disability, and a plethora of other factors intersect to shape an individual's access to a healthy and safe transition.

Disability plays a significant role in shaping the contours of social transition. Because social transition may include clothing (which must be changed), makeup (which must be put on), packers, breast forms, binders (which must be put on, and which can significantly compress your chest), demeanor (which must be adopted), people who have a more limited range of movement or manual dexterity than average or who experience pain or difficulties breathing from binding may have to plan their social transition differently.

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Support from family, friends, and communities is one of the leading determinants of wellbeing and frequently one of the foremost concerns of people considering social transition. Dependence on partners or parents for financial or immigration reasons, for instance, may make it difficult to socially transition at the time and in the manner desired. These factors intersect with race and culture. For instance, Black people and many other communities of color are often subject to increased scrutiny and judgement, which can complicate social transition.

Because safety can vary across communities and geographical locations, some people wait until they can move before socially transitioning. These factors may also impact how people choose to socially transition as some approaches may be more conspicuous than others.

Social transition can be expensive and job security, social class, and income are factors that often come into play when people think about socially transitioning. Not everyone is in the position to undertake a full wardrobe change and although alternatives exist — such as clothing exchanges, some specific to trans people — it isn't always easy to find clothing, makeup, binders, packers, etc. for free or cheap. The threat of unemployment is a challenge, with low-paying jobs often being the ones with the highest risk of discrimination, especially in jurisdictions where anti-trans discrimination is legal. Many trans people also report a sense of being put “on hold” after they come out in the workplace, with employers being reluctant to promote trans people or help them advance in the company because socially transitioning is perceived as time of instability and unsettledness that is antithetical to capitalist productivity. These assumptions are typically wrong and reflect an underlying cisnormativity (or transphobia).

The idea of “trans time” refers to the different relationship that trans people have to time; much of transitioning occurs in waiting: waiting for hormones, waiting for surgeries, waiting for employers to get used to us being trans, waiting for birth certificate changes to go

through, etc. Trans time, to some, might mean waiting to socially transition until being able to medically transition as well, including waiting until being able to move or obtain insurance coverage, whereas others will be comfortable socially transitioning before or without medically transitioning.

II. COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL TRANSITION

A. References

i. Names

Names identify us, represent us. Because names are gendered in many cultures, trans people are often uncomfortable with the name they were given earlier in life. Choosing a name that fits you can be an important part of social transition, and you can take as little or as much time as you need to find it. It will be easier for some — you may already have a favorite name, you may have already used a different name in the past, your name may be unisex, or maybe your name can be re-gendered satisfyingly by changing just a few letters. Others may take a long time and go through various names before finding one that they really like. Getting used to your name can take a while and not everyone experiences an immediate connection to their chosen name.

There are many ways to find a name for yourself. Some people who have good relationships with their family might ask them to rename them or ask what name they would've been given had they been assigned a different gender at birth. This approach reproduces the dynamic of name attribution experienced by many cisgender people, although you will likely have the option to reject a name that you dislike. Asking friends and family for suggestions is also a possible way of finding inspiration.

You may want to pick a name which reflects your cultural background. Gender is part of our identity but so is ancestry, race, and culture. Changing your name can be an opportunity to keep or

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make visible other parts of your personal identity. Taking the name of a deceased family member can be a way of honoring their memory while reasserting belonging in a long line of men or women. It's important to keep in mind that taking a name from a culture you don't belong to may be disrespectful.

The Internet is replete with lists of male-coded, female-coded, and unisex names. Going through those lists can help narrow down possible names. Looking to other trans people can also be a way of finding a suitable name. For those who have a publication record, using a name with the same first letter can help maintain publication continuity since many citation styles only use the first letter of your first name.

Keep in mind that cis people don't have perfect names and having mixed feelings about your name is normal and doesn't necessarily mean it's an ill-fitting name. The perfect name might not exist. Part of life is giving a meaning to your name by experiencing the world with it. Overthinking your choice can lead to unnecessary distress.

II. Pronouns and gendered labels

Perhaps the most common way in which people are gendered is pronouns. English, like many other languages, has gender pronouns: he, she, they, ze. Some of those pronouns are part of standard English and widely recognized. Some, like 'they', are increasingly recognized as valid, while others like 'ze' are only common in some nonbinary and genderqueer spaces. Because pronouns are strongly associated with gender, trans people often want others to change theirs. Trans women commonly favor 'she' and trans men 'he', whereas nonbinary people vary wildly in the pronouns they use: 'he', 'she', 'they' and other pronouns are all common. Some repudiate pronouns altogether, asking that people use their first name or a monosyllabic nickname instead.

Like names, finding pronouns that suit you is a deeply personal endeavor that may involve trying on many pronouns. Which

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pronouns you wish to use may change over time. It is common, especially among nonbinary people, to use different pronouns in different contexts or spaces, or give people multiple options either for their ease or because you are comfortable with multiple different pronouns. Gender-neutral pronouns other than ‘they’ remain uncommon, and outside of nonbinary spaces it may be unfortunately difficult to have them respected.

You may grow tired of explaining which pronouns people should use when, and simply take the easier path by letting people use whichever pronoun they want or electing to use a pronoun that people will more readily respect even if it’s not your favored one. If your gender presentation doesn’t match what people expect those who use your pronouns look like, misgendering can occur more. Using a pronouns pin can help, although misgendering is often unavoidable.

It is important to consider how you want to communicate your pronouns to others. If you’re unsure which pronouns feel the most comfortable, trying on different ones with close friends, partners, or family members can be a good way to explore your feelings. If you’re considering adopting gender-neutral pronouns, it’s important to think about how these pronouns will make you visible as trans or nonbinary, which you may or may not be comfortable with. If you are uncertain about which pronouns best suit you, it’s helpful to think about how people around you will react if you do change again; while your close friends might be supportive, your workplace might not be. This doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t try different pronouns, but your decision should take into consideration the unfortunate risk of negative reactions if you change your pronouns or name multiple times.

In some languages, adjective and verb endings, or even second-person pronouns are gendered. This creates many more opportunities for both gender recognition and misgendering. A trans person who speaks Spanish at home and English at work or school may find it easier to change their pronouns in one of the two

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contexts. Some multilingual trans people may find that different pronouns resonate with them in different languages. For people who are not speaking their first language, switching pronouns at the request of a trans or nonbinary person may be more challenging than if they were speaking their first language.

Pronouns and names are not the only way we are gendered. Gender labels (e.g., man, woman, genderqueer, agender, etc.) are obviously gendered, but so are a wide range of terms. Some of those terms are obvious, such as ‘prince’, ‘princess’, ‘lesbian’, whereas others are more subtly gendered: ‘handsome’ and ‘pretty’ are mostly applied to men and women, respectively. Preference for those gendered terms can be more difficult to communicate than pronouns. Our comfort with them might be context-dependent too: Cis gay men often call each other ‘girl’ and a queer trans man might be comfortable with called ‘girl’ in gay male spaces yet be deeply uncomfortable being called ‘girl’ elsewhere. Like all other aspects of social transition, there is no right or wrong way to feel about gendered terms. Although you may feel a pressure to figure out your gender and how you feel about different gendered terms, it’s perfectly fine to be comfortable with uncertainty. Many people are perfectly comfortable not knowing how to name their gender or themselves.

III. Getting misgendered or deadnamed

When someone uses gendered terms that differ from those you want them to use, they are misgendering you. Commonly, this takes the form of using pronouns or gendered terms associated with the gender one was assigned at birth. Whether intentional or accidental, it can be invalidation of trans people’s gender identities. For nonbinary people, misgendering frequently means being put in a binary box based on appearance. Closely related to misgendering is the phenomenon of deadnaming, which involves calling someone by a name they no longer use and which often clashes with their current gender identity.

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Some people don't really mind being misgendered or deadnamed, while some are really distressed by it. Being misgendered by those we care about and love the most can be particularly upsetting. It's even more upsetting that those people can have the hardest time respecting our pronouns and name because they are more used to our previous name and pronouns.

Thinking about how we navigate being misgendered is important. Correcting people can be seen as rude, and correcting others can be intimidating or tiresome. Being angry is a reasonable reaction, but can exacerbate interpersonal tensions. One way to teach people to respect your pronouns is describing how it makes you feel and telling them how you expect them to react if they catch themselves misgendering you or if you correct them. Obsequious apologies are rarely appreciated, especially in public spaces. Interacting with people who repeatedly misgender you can be distressing, and it is important to take the time to take care of yourself. Setting limits and clearly explaining how you will respond to future misgendering can help your mental health.

Having strong allies correct others can be extremely helpful. If you know people who can play that role for you, it may be helpful to tell them whether you want them to correct others or not, whether you want them to do so when you are there and when you are absent, and how you want them to correct people. Having them correct others by saying 'they, not she' or 'she, not he' will often have a stronger impact than simply repeating the right pronoun, though having friends simply model the right pronouns usage can be powerful, too.

If you are particularly worried about being misgendered or people identifying you as trans, your reaction might be to blame yourself and despair at the possibility of it reoccurring in the future. In those moments, it is healthy to take a step back. Cis people also get misgendered and with the increase in trans visibility, many cis people get misidentified as trans. It's important not to set up unattainable goals in terms of (in)visibility and find a balance

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between being comfortable with ourselves and in the world. Don't put too much pressure on yourself.

B. Appearance

Our appearance is often the first basis on which people gender us. Our appearances can serve to express our gender as well as manage how others perceive it. It's often one of the first things that people want to change as part of their social transition. For some, this means adopting a strongly feminine or masculine presentation, whether because it's the style that suits them best or because it makes others recognize their gender more readily. Others might adopt a more casual style or carefully craft a more androgynous appearance for themselves.

It's not uncommon for people to adopt styles because they used to feel off-limits in their youth. Many trans women who grew up in the '90s and '00s didn't get to experience the trend of chokers, emo, or scene subcultures and want to revisit them once they socially transition. Our gender expression can also be a way of processing grief towards the life we didn't get to have when we were younger.

As your confidence and comfort with your gender increases over time, you might find that your relationship to your appearance changes and becomes less motivated by gender than by personal stylistic preferences. Medical transition can also make it easier to avoid misgendering despite a less starkly gendered style. Your appearance is not something you have to commit to for the rest of your life. Feel free to experiment with different styles as you try to find a home for yourself.

IV. Clothing

One of the easiest ways of playing with gender expression is through clothing. The type of clothing you wear, its color, and its cut are all gendered aspects of clothing that can be taken into consideration when choosing how to dress. Whether a piece of clothing is masculine or feminine depends on fashion trends and

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perspective. Crop tops could be perceived as feminine or feel like an '80s retro masculine piece of clothing. Awareness of fashion trends and what people wear where you live is helpful when deciding what to wear.

The easiest way to find clothes you like is simply to look around. Everyone wears clothes, even mannequins! Gathering the clothes and arranging them in a coherent style is often the more challenging part. Clothing shops are unfortunately very gendered which can be a challenge. Knowing how sizing works, how shops divide clothes by gender and by style, and whether the shop has different fitting rooms for men and women can help appease the anxiety of shopping.

If you are afraid of shopping in a physical store, online shopping can be a relatively anxiety-free alternative. It's important to become familiar with clothing sizes, with male-coded and female-coded styles being sized differently and varying wildly across brands. Buying a tape measure can be of help with online shopping, as many websites have sizing charts. Still, you might have to return items and may want to avoid final sales unless you are familiar with that brand's sizes.

Finding your bra size can be challenging. Many cis women also struggle with it and wear the wrong sizes. If you are sufficiently comfortable, employees in lingerie stores are often happy to measure you for bra size. If you are undergoing estrogenic hormone replacement therapy, it may be best to err towards a larger size rather than smaller one, as your chest may continue to grow.

Many trans people are afraid of shoppers' and employees' reactions when shopping at a physical store. Bringing a friend along can help appease some of that anxiety, though it can also increase scrutiny, especially for people of color. Discuss with them how you want them to approach advocating for you if staff is reluctant to allow you to use the changing room that you are most comfortable

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using. Cis people have diverse appearances and shop for many reasons. You may not stand out as much as you think.

Although shopping at thrift stores is more work, it's cheaper and often less uncomfortable. Staff may be less intrusive, and since people often go to thrift stores for costumes, they're much less likely to be judgemental about your clothing and shopping choices. Many trans community organizations and online groups organize clothing exchanges where transfeminine people and transmasculine people can trade their old clothes. Although these can be hard to find, and sizes can make it more difficult, few spaces are as accepting of gender identity as trans-led ones.

Finding your size can be difficult, especially when it comes to shoes. Specialty stores exist for larger sizes, and salespeople can often order them if carried by brand. Many shoe brands go up to size 12 in women sizing. Discount stores are often organized by size, which can facilitate shopping. For smaller sizes on the masculine side, it can be difficult to find suitable work shoes, but many kids' brands carry formal footwear. There are almost certainly cis people who wear the same size as you and they do manage to find clothes: it's a matter of finding out where.

Accessories are an important part of clothing, and a practical reality. Feminine clothing tends to either have no pockets or much too small ones, making purses and bags a necessity. The presence or absence of pockets is a surprisingly common topic of discussion and bonding among women. For people who opt for more masculine clothing, accessories like larger wallets, keychains, ties and belts are part of the fashion landscape. Learning to tie a tie can be challenging but achieving a dapper look can be highly rewarding.

V. *Makeup*

Using makeup can be exciting and daunting. Doing it well is a knowledge-intensive endeavor and many transfeminine people weren't taught how to use it growing up. The makeup artistry subculture is very large. Websites explaining how to use makeup

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and which products to get abound. Makeup YouTube videos can be of immense help in learning how to use makeup. You can also visit specialty stores and ask staff for help. They are knowledgeable about makeup and will happily do your makeup for a fee, which is often reduced or waived if you buy products.

Makeup is expensive. With some help, you can find good quality makeup at the pharmacy at a lower price. Friends and family may also have products that they don't use and are willing to give away. You should nonetheless consider getting your own concealer and foundation, since they must match your skin tone.

Increasingly, workshops are being held specifically to help transfeminine people learn makeup. They can be helpful to learn trans-specific tips like softening sharp facial features and applying color correction to beard shadow. You can also find tips and help online. These tips can help you avoid standing out too much due to what some consider "mistakes", such as using bright colors instead of matching colors to your skin tone or using a dark eyeshadow that makes your eyes look deeper.

Although people who opt for more masculine gender expressions often shy away from makeup, it can be used to accentuate masculine features. Many trans men and nonbinary people also use makeup in more feminine styles; the choice is highly individual and people of all genders should feel free to use makeup if they so desire.

VI. *Hair*

Hair styles are another gendered and culturally mediated aspect of our appearance. In many cultures, longer hair is perceived as more feminine, and shorter hair as more masculine. In some indigenous cultures, hair length may carry significant meaning but is not a gender signifier. Beyond length, the cut itself matters, as short hair can be further subdivided between masculine cuts and 'pixie' cuts which are more feminine. Some haircuts are more flexible than others in terms of gendered perception and will be perceived as androgynous. When deciding which style you want, you should

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consider how much product and maintenance the hair style will require.

When getting your hair cut short, it can be helpful to specify whether you're looking for a more masculine or feminine cut as it will have an impact on how they shape it. Coming to the hairdresser or barber with pictures of what you want helps them get a better sense of what you want and avoid making mistakes because of mistaken assumptions. You're a client, so don't be afraid to ask for what you want. Hair salons are unfortunately often strongly gendered with different price points based on gender rather than hair style or length; be prepared for this and decide in advance whether you want to challenge them if they misgender you based on the price they make you pay. When growing out your hair, receiving occasional haircuts can help you maintain a more fashionable hair style which grows evenly and avoid split ends, which may be worth the extra time it will take to grow it out.

If you want longer hair, you might be interested in buying a wig. This is common for those who have baldness patterns influenced by hormones. Wigs come at different price points depending on their quality and type. Cheaper wigs can be an opportunity to try out different styles before buying a higher quality one. There are many online resources which explain the different types of wigs and advantages and disadvantages each have. If you can afford them, wigs made from human hair look the most natural. Nevertheless, there are many wigs made from synthetic hair which look natural, and not everyone cares or wants hair that looks natural. Shopping for wigs in a physical store, even if you don't plan to buy any, can help you get a sense of the elusive elements that make a wig feel and look natural, and employees at the store are often knowledgeable about the benefits and disadvantages of different models. Like wigs, hair extensions and weaves come in many styles and materials, each with unique benefits and drawbacks. You can get them professionally installed at a salon or do them yourself, and the Internet is replete with information about them.

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Hair style isn't just a question of gender, but also intersects with questions of sexual orientation and race. Hair with atypical colors like blue, pink, or purple is often read as a sign of queerness, which you may either want to avoid or deliberately adopt. The natural texture of hair varies based on race, making hair styling a political matter. Black people routinely face discrimination for adopting hair styles which best suit their natural hair texture such as dreadlocks, cornrows, hair twists and afros, and Black women and other women of color face strong pressures to straighten their hair and treat them chemically with hair relaxers. Afros and dreadlocks have become associated with political movements like Black pride and can stand as a form of rebellion against white supremacy for Black people. Adopting them if you are not Black is widely understood as disrespectful. Beyond these political aspects, the natural texture of hair also impacts how you should take care of your hair. If you want to have healthy hair, it is important to know your hair texture and how to care for your type of hair. Charts are available online to determine your hair texture. These charts typically divide hair between 12 textures ranging from 1a to 4c, each corresponding to their own care and styling considerations.

VII. Packers, stand-to-pee devices, and breast forms

Packing refers to the practice of wearing padding or other items in one's underwear to create a crotch bulge. Soft packers, which can sit loosely in briefs, are usually made of a soft silicone material and emulate the size and shape of a penis and testicles. Hard packers are worn with a harness and can be used for penetration. Cheaper alternatives like rolled up socks also exist.

Stand-to-pee (STP) devices can come in the form of a penis-shaped prosthetic that doubles as a packer but there are many portable devices that can be carried in pockets. Medicine spoons can be altered to make an STP device. One DIY option is to cut a flat disc from a plastic yogurt or coffee lid. To use, roll it into a funnel and place at the opening of the urethra. This can be easily carried in a

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back pocket and is easy to dry after use. Before using an STP device in public, practice in the shower. Once you've mastered peeing without spills, practice with your home toilet. Soon, you'll be ready for public stalls and urinals. Many tutorials can be found online.

Transfeminine people often use breast forms or stuff their bra to give the appearance of larger breasts, especially if they are not undergoing estrogenic hormone replacement therapy or find their breasts too small. Padded bras can help give off the appearance of larger breasts as well. Filling water balloons with seeds, gels, or powder can be a good way of stuffing bras. Many people simply opt for socks or tissues. It's also possible to buy breast forms designed specifically for that purpose online or at lingerie stores. They are worn under bras or directly on the skin.

viii. Binders

Binders are a type of snug-yet-stretchy compression undergarment used for the purpose of flattening the chest. Chest binding has been practiced throughout history by a variety of different cultures and certainly has a long history among transmasculine people. Binding techniques each have their upsides and downsides. When initiating binding, there may be some trial and error involved. People who have dysphoria towards their chest often report feeling more comfortable, especially in public, when binding. A good binder can smooth out the chest even beneath a t-shirt and can be worn comfortably for up to 6-8 hours. Some people find binding can increase their awareness of their chest, especially in the beginning. Most people eventually get used to the binder, while others may not and choose not to bind. Some see binding as a necessity until they can access to top surgery, while other people only bind on occasion. Whether you view binding as a necessity or a choice, ensuring that bind safely and comfortably is essential.

Binders come in a variety of types, styles, colors, and sizes. Some binders resemble an undershirt, tank top, or sports bra, while others are styled more like crop tops. Some are plain and made to hide like

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an undershirt, while others are colorful and noticeable. Some can stretch past the hips and be tucked in, while others are shorter and extend only to the waist. Choosing a binder is less about chest size than body type and personal preference. They can be bought online or in physical stores. Most websites list size charts, so it's good to know your measurements. If you have worn a bra before and remember your bra size, it can come in handy. Otherwise, measure the circumference of your chest at the widest part, over clothing, with a tape measurer. Write this number down and then take a second measurement underneath the pectoral area where the crease is. Add those two numbers together and divide by two. This number should work with most brands of binders. It may be tempting to get a smaller size for a tighter fit, but this risks being extremely uncomfortable and, in some cases, unsafe.

Binders range in cost and not everyone can afford buying a new one. Some people give their binders away after getting top surgery and many community organizations offer them for free or cheap. Some binder vendors also organize binder buybacks for people needing binders.

Use of tights, leggings, or control-top pantyhose as binders can be a more affordable option for some. Simply cut the legs to the desired sleeve length and cut a hole in the crotch where your head will go. These range and price too but start much cheaper. As with binders, it's important to find the right size for you. If the compression is too tight, breathing can be affected, muscles can become sore, and skin can get irritated. Other DIY options like ace bandages and duct tape are not usually considered safe. They can cause bruising, skin irritation, and other health problems.

Binders can take some getting used to. When starting, increasing gradually from one or two hours a day can help your body adjust. In general, it is best to wear a binder for no longer than 8 hours per day. Take it off for sleeping and for physically demanding activities. Sports bras are the ideal substitute when exercising but if it's not enough for you, wearing a stretched out or larger binder

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will be better for breathing than your usual binder. You should be able to breathe normally while wearing a binder during everyday activities. If breathing feels difficult or restricted, the binder is too small.

Listen to your body. If you are fatigued or sore from the binder, try to take a brief “binder break” in the restroom. Massages and stretching when not wearing the binder helps with recovery. Learn to breathe with your diaphragm instead of your chest. In diaphragmatic breathing, your belly expands while breathing, rather than your chest. You can inhale and exhale more fully with your diaphragm, which is especially useful when binding since the binder constricts your chest.

Depending on how often you wear a binder, it is best to clean it daily or every other day when possible, as binders absorb sweat and bacteria which can irritate the skin and aggravate acne. Hand wash your binder with warm water, gentle anti-bacterial soap or gentle laundry detergent and leave it to air dry.

ix. Tucks, gaffs, and hip and butt padding

Tucking involves positioning your penis and testicles in a way that creates a smooth crotch profile. Gaffs are an alternative to tucking, using specifically-designed garment to produce the same effect. Some people also opt to use hip and buttock padding to create the appearance of larger hips and or butt, which is perceived as more feminine.

The most common way of tucking is by pushing the testicles back into the inguinal canals, through which the spermatic cord runs, and pulling the penis between the legs and fastening it. The penis placement keeps the testicles in place. Fastening the penis can be done with tape or tight panties. Many people find that wearing a pair of slightly smaller than usual panties underneath a more comfortably sized pair suffices to keep the penis in place. Others use tape. Shaving helps the tape stick better. Using medical tape is recommended, as duct tape is irritating and can cause skin

reactions. Snug underwear over the tape helps keep the tuck in place.

To find the inguinal canal, put your finger on your testicular skin, pushing your testicle aside, and lift it upwards towards your pubic bone. You should feel an area that is circle-shaped and through which you can slightly push inside your body. This is the entrance to your inguinal canal and where you want to push your testicle. Be careful, though, as not everyone is able to push their testicles inside their inguinal canals, especially if their testicles have not shrunk due to hormones. Pushing your testicles inside your inguinal canals can be uncomfortable, especially at first, but should not be painful. Some people enjoy the practice of tucking since the inguinal canals are full of nerves and pushing the testicles back into them can be a soothing sensation.

Though they don't usually create as smooth a profile as tucking, gaffs, dance belts, and specially designed underwear can also be used for the same purpose. Dance belts can be found in theater and dance shops and are intended for cisgender men. Gaffs as well as underwear designed specifically for transfeminine people can be bought online and tend to be offered in more feminine designs. Padding for hips and buttocks are also used by some trans people. They can be designed to wear under underwear or clothing or be integrated in underwear. They are widely available for sale online or at lingerie stores as many cis women also use them.

x. Voice training

Our voice is another feature that gets us categorized by gender. With factors like pitch, intonation, articulation, and resonance to name but a few, a wide array of factors dictates whether someone's voice is perceived as more feminine and more masculine. For people who take testosterone, the changes to the vocal box and chords can suffice in making their voice sound masculine. Estrogen and anti-androgens, however, don't have a comparable feminizing effect, and

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many people want a more masculine voice without taking testosterone or in addition to taking testosterone.

Although anatomy puts constraints on the sounds of our voice, it is usually possible to attain a significantly more feminine or masculine-sounding voice through training, with or without the help of a speech-language pathologist or voice communication therapist. Most exercises involve learning how to use your head voice or chest voice, for a more feminine or masculine sounding voice respectively, how to shorten or lengthen your larynx — smiling works surprisingly well for shortening — and getting used to speaking at a higher or lower pitch.

If you are interested in voice training, many videos are available on YouTube which explain the underlying anatomical and acoustic principles and offer vocal exercises. Voice training apps are also offered for phones, and often include pitch and resonance analyzers which can provide helpful feedback as you learn how to speak differently.

Although voice training can radically change what we sound like when we speak, it does not have a large effect on our vocal range and thus has a limited impact on singing, although changing your resonance can help make your singing voice sound more feminine or masculine.

xi. Bodily modifications

The role of tattoos and piercings in social transition is often underestimated. Different piercing and tattoo placements and designs can be used to express gender or be read in a certain manner. Flowers, for instance, are coded as feminine and having flowery tattoos can make you appear more feminine. It is common for cis girls to have their earlobes pierced at a young age, and transfeminine people often want their earlobes pierced too. Navel piercings tend to be seen as more feminine, as are lower back tattoos, whereas bicep tattoos are perceived as more masculine.

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Some people choose tattoos that make their sexual orientation or transness visible. The trans symbol (♾) is a common tattoo, as is the sign 't4t' which was popularised by Torrey Peter's *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*. For people who are not read as trans in everyday life, these tattoos can be a way to communicate pride in transness. Double Venus (♀) and double Mars (♂) communicate gender at the same time as they do sexual orientation and can be adopted to affirm the validity of trans folk's sexual orientations in a sometimes-hostile queer dating world.

Piercings and tattoos hold great significance in some cultures. Many Māori women, for instance, proudly bear chin tattoos, known as moko kauae, to represent their family heritage, their true identity, and their connection to the spiritual world. In a world defined by ongoing colonialism, tattooing can be used to politically assert cultural resistance and identity. Given their cultural importance, many trans people find affirmation by adopting culturally-specific piercings and tattoos best corresponding to their gender identity. People outside those cultures should refrain from adopting culturally-specific patterns, as it would be disrespectful.

C. Behaviors

Our references and appearance aren't the only way we express our gender and people gender us. Behaviors — what we do, which activities we partake in, and how we do them — also feature in our gender landscape.

xii. Demeanor

Where do I keep my arms? My hands? How do I walk? Depending on your desired gender presentation, you might answer these questions differently. Looking around and doing some respectful peopewatching is a good way to learn how people carry themselves and how it varies by gender. Although adopting a new demeanor may feel awkward at first and require conscious effort, it typically becomes more natural over time.

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Gendered aspects of behavior also show up in spheres that are more traditionally private, such as flirting, sex, and dating. Going for a cutesier demeanor might be a way to express your femininity, for instance. Sexual interactions are deeply gendered and involve sexual roles that carry a slew of expectations and scripts, the gendered aspects of which will vary based on whether you are dating queer people or straight people. Feminine people are often expected to be the receiving partners in penetrative sex, and to be submissive in BDSM contexts, and conversely being the receiving partner or submissive might itself be read as feminine. Ultimately, the choice of conforming to these expectations or not is yours.

xiii. Learning and navigating gender norms

Gender norms are an unavoidable part of the social landscape. Part of social transition might involve learning and navigating new gender norms. Some gender norms are relatively mundane and may be pleasant to follow — for instance, women tend to go to the bathroom in groups and chat — whereas others may be problematic, such as the expectation of emotional and domestic labor from women or the perception that men should be isolated and unemotional, which can make seeking mental health services or emotional support difficult for transmasculine people.

We typically learn gender norms over time. Unlike appearances, they are not visible. Some gender norms are stated explicitly through rules and stereotypes (e.g., men should be providers; women are bad drivers). Others are implicit and rarely stated overtly, existing instead as tacit assumptions that underpin social interactions. This can make them challenging to learn for some neuroatypical people. Having friends candidly accompany us in learning new gender norms and expectations can be a good way to learn, as they can try vocalizing the norms we encounter.

Gender norms are not the same everywhere. They vary based on culture, race, age, and social class. Transgressing the gender norms of one's own community or family may be viewed not only as gender

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transgression, but also as a rejection of culture. Depending on one's cultural values, having the support of your family and community may be especially important to navigating gender norms. Double consciousness or code switching refers to the process by which people of color negotiate the differing cultural expectations between one's neighborhood, community, and family, and those of school, work, or other environments which may be dominated by white, Eurocentric norms. Social transition may require a triple or even quadruple consciousness, as unspoken behavioral norms of another gender within multiple cultural contexts must be learned. Trans men of color may experience more aggression from cis men than their white counterparts, as men of color are subject to stereotypes about criminality and aggression. Learning and adopting the gender norms of one's culture can also be empowering, validating and moving, particularly when it results in greater connection to your community. While some gender norms carry racist and sexist overtones, not all gender norms are inherently oppressive.

It's important to know which gender norms you will be held to, as it can help you decide which ones you want to conform to and which you want to reject or oppose. Awareness can help you set boundaries with others. Gender norms have a relational aspect, and the norms people self-impose vary based on who they are interacting with: for instance, trans women who date men might suddenly find that their partners expect more domestic labor from them once they transition. This is important to keep in mind in relationships, as it can be a source of interpersonal tension and inequity.

Gender norms present a double bind for trans people. If you don't follow them, some people will claim you're not really your gender; if you follow them, they will criticize you for stereotyping. There's no winning in cisnormativity, but each of us can decide for ourselves how we want to navigate the balance between conforming to the norms we want and opposing gender policing.

Beyond behavior, altering thought patterns may also be part of your social transition. Some people feel invalidated by their own

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thoughts. For gender-related reasons, some transmasculine people wish to become more confident, and some transfeminine people wish to become more empathetic and compassionate. So, too, can some transfeminine people be uncomfortable with having sexual arousal patterns centered on visual stimuli rather than emotional connection. The invalidation we feel vis-à-vis our own thought patterns can be particularly challenging because thoughts are difficult to change and make us feel as though we are betraying ourselves. Keep in mind that cis people vary in how they think and that thinking a certain way doesn't make you less of a man, woman, or nonbinary person.

It's important to navigate gender norms in a way that is not harmful to others, and that avoids imposing them (or their rejection) onto others. People are not any less valid in their gender because they refuse or fail to conform to gender norms. Conversely, although it is important to oppose all oppression, trans people aren't more responsible for the world's sexism than cis people, and we should be wary not to impose higher standards on ourselves than on cis people, especially given the dangers of nonconformity for trans people.

D. Spaces and activities

Many spaces and social groups are explicitly or implicitly segregated by gender. Navigating gendered spaces is often a significant part of social transition. Gender-exclusive spaces include restrooms, locker rooms, sports teams, homeless shelters, shelters for people dealing with intimate partner violence, jails, prisons, colleges, clubs, choirs, social groups, and support groups. In some faiths, specific times or areas are designated for different genders to worship. In some countries, public transit may be gender segregated at certain times of day. Other spaces are implicitly gendered. Barbershops, salons, and bars may fall into this category, as do many social groups, board rooms, and cliques. You may be made to feel like you don't belong, even though it won't be stated outright.

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Gendered spaces are often justified by safety, privacy, or comfort, although whether they succeed is debatable. These spaces can be troublesome for trans people, who may feel like they are imposing themselves into the space, or are impostors within them. For nonbinary people, the absence of spaces tailored to your gender can be invalidating and make it difficult to know which option would be best. Trans people unfortunately disproportionately face mistreatment, harassment, violence, and threats thereof within gendered spaces, making them uncomfortable or unsafe. In some jurisdictions, it may be illegal to access spaces corresponding to your gender identity. But on the flip side, welcomed in gendered spaces can also be validating.

Trans individuals are impacted differently by gendered spaces. Some may only face discomfort occasionally when using public restrooms, while others may experience it persistently while serving in highly-gendered military structures. For binary trans people, the problem is often not that spaces are separated by gender, but that they are only constructed with cis people in mind, as anti-trans “bathroom bills” evidence. Nevertheless, there are many examples of inclusive shelters, gyms, schools, and organizations. Trans-affirming policies and trans-only spaces are becoming increasingly common, and can offer reprieve from cisnormative pressures. While navigating gendered spaces and activities may at times feel like a strenuous aspect of transition, they can also provide affirmation and community.

III. HOW DOES SOCIALLY TRANSITIONING MAKE YOU FEEL?

Social transition makes people feel a wide range of emotions. It’s mistaken to think that if you’re really trans, socially transitioning should only feel joyful or happy. Joy and happiness are common emotions when socially transitioning, but some other feelings are equally common.

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Social transition can involve feelings of uncertainty. Sometimes we feel unsure about what we want or how we're feeling. When confronted with the infinite ways we can socially transition, compounded the process of balancing what we want with staying safe, our whole life might seem permeated by uncertainty. Uncertainty isn't always a bad thing, however, and many people grow comfortable with it. Some even refuse to figure out their gender and aren't worse off for it!

Fear and sadness are also common experiences. People's reactions to our social transition can be polarized. People may wonder who in their lives will be accepting and who will respond with anger or even violence. They may fear losing jobs or apartments. They may fear going into the bathroom that best suits them due to harassment or violence. People fear discrimination. For those who engage in activism, getting harassed or doxxed — people revealing personal information such as your address or phone number — is a worrisome possibility and one that can be hard to protect against despite our best efforts.

It can be frustrating not to be able to blend in despite wanting to. Being outed in background checks or because of your publication footprint can be disheartening. Visibility is context-dependent and comes in degrees, and even those who try hard to be invisible may sometimes get identified as trans. Unfortunately, people often view and treat you differently once they know you are trans. You may feel more vulnerable if you have been mistreated prior to transition, or if you experience other forms of oppression, as transitioning can alter one's visibility, sometimes shifting the frequency and/or severity of experiences of racism, classism, and other forms of oppression.

Frustration can also occur when it's not possible to be the way you want to be due to limitations on your ability to socially transition or because of the gendered codes prevalent in society. Nonbinary people are often frustrated when they get persistently gendered as male or female due to their gender presentation, highlighting the

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possible gap between the expression of gender and what others assume based on looks. Often, society is the problem and there's little we can do about it. One avenue of coping with the frustration is to use it to fuel anti-oppressive work.

It gets tiring to be constantly afraid or angry. It gets tiring to be treated as a trend because of the rising visibility of trans people in the media. But, as time goes on, people often find that their gender identity becomes less and less of a focus in their life, and with this shift in focus, fear, sadness, and tiredness may diminish. Others simply learn to accept these emotions in their life and funnel them into productive activities like advocacy or art.

Although the experience is relatively rare, some experience discomfort with or regret about social transition. This may lead them to return to a gender role corresponding to the gender they were assigned at birth. Most often, this is due to external factors such as fear of discrimination and violence, but for some, it is simply because socially transitioning wasn't for them. If you feel like socially transitioning wasn't the right choice for you, that is a perfectly valid feeling and you should feel free to reverse it if you so desire. Social transition isn't just about the end goal but also about the process. We explore through transition and this means that we might realize it just wasn't for us. Often, people who reverse their social transition report gratefulness at the opportunity to explore their gender, despite ultimately realizing that it didn't suit them.

Transitioning can bring grief. Sometimes, it is grief for a childhood we never had, grief for not transitioning earlier. Other times, it is grief at leaving behind an easier life as a cis person, even if transitioning was the right choice for us. Leaving behind a past identity can also bring feelings of loss. Despite it not suiting them, many people have developed a complex attachment to their past self. People navigate grief in many ways. Some try to hold onto mementos of their pre-transition life, for instance by keeping their previous name as a middle name. Rituals, remembrance ceremonies, and taking time for mourning can also be helpful in processing our

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feelings of grief. If you experience transgender grief, it's important to know that these feelings do not invalidate your gender identity or your transition. These feelings are normal.

Socially transitioning is also finding community. We find love, friendship, laughter, loss, joy. We live the full range of human emotions with other trans people. For many, the community found in other trans people is one of the most positive aspects of transition. Hanging out with trans people can mean feeling understood for the first time, and that feeling can be ecstatic. Social transition is often accompanied by increased recognition of one's gender, by others (e.g. people using your correct name and pronouns, people reading you more as your identified gender). This can be extremely liberating and comforting. It can help clarify questions you had about your gender identity and illuminate feelings about medical transition. Social transition can happen over any timespan and or age. There is no minimum or maximum age to transition.

Despite the difficulties associated with social transition, most trans people would tell you that it was one of the best choices they made in their life. Being happy or content with socially transitioning doesn't mean that we feel ecstatic about every single aspect of social transition. Life is not a love song. Few things only bring one feeling along with them, and mixed feelings is a quintessential part of the human experience. Social transition might mean feeling less at home in the world at times, but typically means feeling more at home in ourselves. The homeliness of the self is an ineffable emotion that transcends the binary of happiness and sadness: I'm finally home.