

# SUPPORTING TRANS & NONBINARY CLIENTS IN EXPERIENCING GENDER EUPHORIA

While gender dysphoria among transgender and nonbinary (TNB) people is a widely researched and documented experience, the same cannot be said for gender euphoria. This tip sheet, based on a recent [qualitative study](#) by Austin, Papciak, and Lovins (2022), defines gender euphoria, provides real-life examples from participants, and outlines how behavioral health practitioners can help their TNB clients experience affirmation, confidence, and joy around their gender identity.

## What is GENDER EUPHORIA?

*Gender euphoria* is a term often used by members of the TNB community to give voice to a range of positive feelings including, but not limited to comfort, confidence, certainty, satisfaction, and joy in response to numerous gender affirming experiences (Austin, Papciak, & Lovins, 2022).

Narratives of gender euphoria emerged from within the TNB community to counter the one-sided narrative that TNB individuals' lives are focused exclusively on experiences of distress and gender dysphoria.

### GENDER DYSPHORIA:

*In addition to the use of Gender Dysphoria as a diagnostic label (APA, 2013), gender dysphoria represents the complex and nuanced psychological, physical, and emotional suffering emerging in response to the internal and external (e.g., social/societal) experiences which highlight a disconnection between one's internal understanding of self and one's external presentation of self (Galupo et al., 2020, & Austin et al., 2022).*

## GENDER EUPHORIA STEMS FROM GENDER AFFIRMING EXPERIENCES

Instances of gender euphoria seem primarily linked to gender affirming experiences. A gender affirming experience refers to one that validated, enhanced, or supported an individual's authentic gender identity and led to positive thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors related to the gendered self (Austin et al., 2022). Affirming thoughts or positive self-talk clients may have about their gender affirming experiences (e.g., "this is what I've been trying to achieve", "this is exactly how I want to look", "I look like a girl") can further contribute to the positive feelings inherent in gender euphoria. This is significant for TNB individuals because these positive thoughts and inner dialogue about gender affirmation can lead to positive emotions and fuller engagement in life.

“You also have gender euphoria when you get that like actualization of how you actually feel and it matches your presentation and just your, your physicalness. It creates this just wonderful aspect of gender recognition and you feel complete and whole... You see your image in the mirror... this is how I see myself and everyone else sees me... it's a gender euphoria.”

– Study Participant

# PARTICIPANTS REPORTED FEELING GENDER EUPHORIA WHEN THEY:

- ★ Were seen and/or treated by others in a way that matches how they view themselves (e.g., correctly gendered by strangers)
- ★ Felt and/or saw their own physical changes (e.g., getting a haircut that aligns with their gender identity, wearing a binder, seeing changes from hormones, hair removal, or gender affirming medical procedures)
- ★ Participated in activities aligning with their gender identity (e.g., skateboarding for trans masculine individual, clothes that fit their gender expression for a genderfluid individual, getting a pink bellybutton ring for a trans feminine individual)
- ★ Engaged with others, physically and emotionally, in a manner that felt consistent with their gender identity (e.g., nonbinary individual having their appearance complimented by others when presenting in clothing and accessories that highlight their gender fluidity, trans woman being supported when sharing the softer, more vulnerable side of herself, trans man being invited to a “boys’ night”)

Importantly, for nonbinary or genderfluid individuals who do not feel affirmed by participating in traditionally masculine or feminine activities, having the freedom to express gender outside of the binary was key to developing the sense of authenticity and self-determination that led to gender euphoria (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). One example of contradictory gender expression that elicited gender euphoria in a nonbinary participant was wearing feminine clothes along with a beard and thick body hair (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022).

## TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS

**Facilitating gender affirmation for TNB clients is integral to experiences of gender euphoria and overall well-being. The following are five key recommendations for practitioners:**

1. Engage in a comprehensive approach with TNB clients which explores their experiences of BOTH gender euphoria and gender dysphoria in early and ongoing assessments
2. Support clients in removing barriers and increasing access to the full spectrum of gender affirming experiences
  - **Medical:** access to affirming primary care providers, endocrinologists for hormones, and gender-affirming surgeons
  - **Social:** access to local or online TNB peer groups or searching for a hairdresser that is affirming for client
  - **Emotional:** actively and continuously expand your skills as an affirming practitioner
  - **Legal:** assistance with name/gender marker change processes and obtaining a new passport, ID, or birth certificate, as well as legal guidance on safely transitioning at work/school.
3. Use affirmative cognitive and behavioral strategies to help clients acknowledge their gender affirming changes with positive self-talk rooted in self-compassion and self-affirmation (e.g., “I love how soft my skin is starting to feel as a result of estrogen,” “My body is a vessel that allows me to live authentically,” “This short haircut really makes me feel confident, people can finally see me now”)
4. Foster an affirming therapeutic relationship in which a range of gender affirming experiences take place (e.g., use of correct name and pronouns, validating experiences of gender euphoria, celebrating transition-related milestones, from ones as simple as a new dress to starting hormones)
5. Help clients identify the ways gender affirmation and experiences of gender euphoria have helped them embrace life in a way that was previously inaccessible (e.g., going out socially with friends, being comfortable and present in one’s own body for activities like yoga, sports, exercising, etc.)

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“This was one instance where I went out with some co-workers and we did yoga together. And yoga I found was really helpful in me being able to find a way to be present in my body, because that’s not something that that felt safe for a long time. And so being able to do a practice where I was able to be in my body again, and feel presence, and have some sort of mindfulness about what that felt like was really strange initially. But then being able to feel powerful, knowing I could do certain positions or moves was incredibly empowering and healing at the same time.”

– Study Participant

## REFERENCES

Austin, A., Papciak, R., & Lovins, L. (2022) Gender euphoria: A grounded theory exploration of experiencing gender affirmation. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 1-21. DOI: [10.1080/19419899.2022.2049632](https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2022.2049632)

Jacobsen, K., & Devor, A. (2022). “Moving from gender dysphoria to gender euphoria: Trans Experiences of positive gender-related emotions.” *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies*, 1(1-2), 119-143. <https://doi.org/10.57814/ggfg-4j14>

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To learn more about how to be a gender affirming practitioner, visit the Center of Excellence on LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity at <https://lgbtquequity.org/>