DEDICATION

To the hundreds of counseling clients I’ve been working with since opening my private practice in 2008.

Yours are the faces and stories that inspire me to continue forward on my mission: to support and guide those who are transgender and gender non-conforming, and to educate and enlighten those who are not.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As long as I can remember I have been a “solo artist,” working alone to guarantee complete and total control over everything that I create. Thankfully the process of writing this book has taught (and continues to teach) me to get my head out of my arse and learn to embrace the help of others.

As I slowly but surely turned to others for guidance, insight, creative contributions, and encouragement I realized what a beautiful experience it can be to create something as a part of a team instead of all by my stubborn lonesome self.

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To the hundreds of teens and adults who learn about my work through the magic of the internet—it is because of your feedback, questions, and insight that I am able to answer the all-important question, “How can I help?” This book is a direct result of the communication that exists between you and I. Thank you for trusting me. Your refusal to give up in your search for your answers is my inspiration to continue doing what I do.
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Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

—C.G. Jung

How am I not myself?

—Brad Stand, “I Heart Huckabees”
INTRODUCTION CONTRIBUTORS

ZINNIA JONES is a trans feminist writer, video blogger, and activist based in Florida. Her web series, “Gender Analysis,” offers a research-oriented and experience-based inside look at issues of gender in society and their impact on trans people. She focuses on topics including community outreach, gender self-realization, healthcare, and the history of trans science. You can find her videos, publications, and media appearances at zinniajones.com.

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ZANDER KEIG, LCSW is co-editor of the 2011 Lambda Literary Transgender Non-fiction Finalist Letters for My Brothers: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect, co-editor of the 2015 Lambda Literary Transgender Nonfiction Nominee Manning Up: Transsexual Men on Finding Brotherhood, Family & Themselves, co-author of “Transgender Veterans Are Inadequately Understood by Health Care Providers,” and is featured in the 2014 award-winning illustrated documentary “Zanderology.” Zander works as a US Navy Healthcare social worker with active duty military personnel in the San Diego area. Zander’s website can be found at www.zanderkeig.net.
Gender feels fundamental to the self, and seems as if it should be the most obvious thing in the world to us. Instead, some of us find this occluded by a dense fog of uncertainty, misconceptions, anxieties, and stereotypes—animated by self-doubt and amplified by harmful cultural messages about what’s expected of different genders. For those who find we can’t comfortably fit within a given gender assignment, there is a strained relationship between our selves and the world: we’re given so little exposure to the conceptual, metaphorical, and literal language needed to recognize and describe who we are. Who could be expected to look at the crude caricatures and shallow sensationalism that represent the world’s understanding of gender variance, and see themselves in these depictions? In a very real way, we find ourselves unable to speak. It’s this starvation of understanding that continues to deny us such a key element of our selves—and when we’re still so uncertain of who and what we are, how can we find our place in the world?

For me, the distance from myself—from the world—took on an almost physical presence. Straining to hear my own thoughts, I often found nothing but static. It was impossible to visualize my own form or mentally place myself anywhere. Even my skin felt as if its surface were unstable, flickering, somehow ill-fitting, forcing a blurry-edged separation from reality itself. Such an alienation from life exacts a heavy toll on us as we simply try to continue existing in this world.

You’re likely reading this book because you have questions about yourself that are significant enough that you’re prepared to work at finding the answers. You’ve been giving serious thought to your experience of gender, its role in your life, and how this may need to change. In terms of value in clarifying such questions and providing meaningful direction toward self-understanding, Dara’s book is revolutionary. Most media depictions emphasize the most physically striking outcomes of gender questioning: visuals of applying makeup or shaving, of hospital beds or operating theatres. They offer little in the way of education about the necessary steps that precede this—the introspection and deliberative self-exploration that’s far less flashy and photogenic, yet absolutely fundamental to everything that may follow. This book is an ambitious endeavor designed to facilitate achieving a basic realization of one’s gender and deciding what should be done with it.

Dara’s comprehensive guide presents a detailed walkthrough of the process of more firmly establishing your gender: breaking through the fears that can cloud your self-perception, taking a clear and thorough look around the current landscape of your gender, and determining where to voyage outward from there. It is one of the most complete collections of such advice that has ever been compiled. Techniques for gender exploration have typically been scattered across the internet, circulated by individuals and communities offering a listening ear and a helping hand. I’ve personally been contacted by hundreds of gender-questioning people who simply wanted someone to help them clarify their thoughts and hopefully find a new coherence in their selfhood. It’s an experience I’ve been through myself, seeking out other trans people and scraping together as many insights as I could find from those who had worked through this before.

This hard-won awareness and the activation of a new understanding of the self is of the utmost importance to those figuring out their gender. With an impressively detailed toolkit of exercises, Dara’s book has the potential to streamline and accelerate this process in an extraordinary fashion. This is the book I wish I had on hand when I felt helpless in the face of my
anxiety about my changing body. I wish I had this book when I was struggling to come to grips with the reality that my intimate relationships only ever worked when I could be a woman. And while I’ve always regretted not having the time and resources to work with everyone who’s asked me for help with their gender, I believe this book is exactly the resource that all of them deserve to have.
When I started my gender journey, no one gave me permission to be uncertain or afraid. And further, no one told me what I should do if I was. I started exploring my gender without a guide, without comfort, and without a clue—and as you can imagine, I felt like a queer fish out of water.

A lot of questions ran through my head. If this is my truth, why am I so unsure? If I’m transgender, why am I so scared? If this is the path I’m supposed to be on, why do I feel so confused?

If this sounds like you, let me be the first to tell you this: *Everything that you’re feeling is not only okay, but it’s also completely normal.*

Examining your gender—something we’re told we should innately know—can be an overwhelming process, especially when you feel like you don’t fit the “mold” of what someone who isn’t cisgender should feel or look like.

But no matter how sure or unsure you are, I promise, *this book is for you.* You can be young or old or anything in-between; you can feel like you’ve been questioning for a long time or have just started wondering about it yesterday. You can have a vast vocabulary for your identity, or you can cling to the only word you know: “questioning.”

Whether you feel like you’re living a lie and you’re ready to embrace your truth, or you’re simply unsure of what’s been pulling at your heart, this book is for anyone who wants to explore their gender more deeply—regardless of what your gender may be or how far along you are.

You are not required to have any certain experience, any kind of feeling, any particular desires, any sort of history—all you need to begin this book is a little curiosity.

This is important, above all else: *All you need is curiosity.*

Looking back at the beginning of my gender journey, I wish someone had reminded me to be curious. To be joyful. To remember that exploring who we are doesn’t have to be a painful, dramatic, gut-wrenching experience.

Gender is beautiful, mysterious, and even strange, and we’d all be better off by embracing the mystery.

This is your adventure. This is a time to be playful, to ask questions, to open up and peer inside your heart. This is a time to let the possibilities surprise and delight you. This is a time to imagine what could be, to daydream about your own becoming. And while all of this may be, in its own way, scary—it’s also beautiful.

If I can give you any advice as you begin this book, it’s this: *Allow yourself this happiness.* With every new discovery, celebrate the journey. With every new question, embrace the enigma. Get wrapped up in the puzzles, the surprises, the affirmations, the discoveries. Get lost in everything this book has to offer you—and I promise you, there’s a lot.

And remember: If you focus too much on the destination, you’ll miss all the amazing stuff in-between.
I wish a book like *You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery* had been available when I began to question my gender identity back in 1997. Had I been exposed to the concepts found within these pages back then, I might have been spared some of the intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles that ensued. I have been trans identified for nearly 20 years, and medically transitioned for 11 years, yet I was still able to gain more insight into my gender identity and transition process as a result of reading this thought-provoking guidebook.

I first publicly disclosed my trans identity to the world in my essay “Are You a Boy or a Girl?” written in 2000 and published (under my former name Gabriel Hermelin) in the anthology *Inspiration for LGBT Students & Their Allies* in 2002. However, it was in 1997, while attending college in Denver, Colorado and working as the Outreach Coordinator in the Lesbian Gay Bi and Trans Student Services Office, that I was introduced to and began using the term “trans” to refer to transgender and transsexual people.

Over the years I have used many terms to describe my gender identity: tranny, intergender, genderfluid, virago, genderqueer, trans, male, trans male, female to male (FTM), trans man, transsexual man and man. Each term I used matched a particular level of awareness and understanding I possessed about my own trans identity at the time. For instance, early in my social transition, prior to starting testosterone (T), I used the term *intergender* to communicate that my gender was somewhere between conventional notions of female and male. Soon after starting T, I used the term *virago* (mannish woman) and even facilitated a workshop on that identity at Gender Odyssey (2006) in an attempt to distance myself from the stereotypical notion of masculinity and maleness. It was during this time that I realized that being seen as a masculine female vs. a man was an entirely different experience and it was quite eye-opening. Needless to say, not everyone responded favorably to the ways I chose to self-identify.

As Dara points out in “Clearing Up A Damaging Myth” (p.20), many of us are told there is only one-way to be trans and/or to transition. I definitely heard that message from trans men much further along in their transition on a number of occasions when I was pre-transition. As a matter of fact, the first time I spoke with another trans man about the possibility that I was trans, his dismissive response resulted in me delaying my medical transition two years. It also caused me to be reluctant to discuss my thoughts and questions with others out of fear that I would again be dissuaded in my attempt to assert a trans identity. Thankfully, I persisted. I also became involved in the FTM community as a support group facilitator in an attempt to provide a more affirmative perspective to the many attendees questioning their gender identity or early in transition. I remained in that role for three years. It was then that I realized that my own development into a man was unable to progress as I was entirely focused on being helpful to others and not paying attention to my own needs and wants.

As a licensed clinical social worker, I am very familiar with and attentive to the concept of Self Care (p.25) and agree wholeheartedly with Dara that it is not only an essential component to a gender transition, but it is a useful lifelong practice for placing importance on defining for yourself
what you want and need in the moment and going forward. Setting boundaries around who you will and won’t spend time with, which activities you will and won’t participate in, and steps you will and won’t take to live an authentic life are necessary to ensure the path you elect is right for you and not influenced heavily by others’ persuasions. In my experience of being dissuaded and persuaded regarding medical transition, it dawned on me that my own ideas about my life, body and role were so open to challenge from those who either disagreed or agreed strongly with my intentions. I needed to assert my intention to transition in my particular way and become the particular kind of man I was to be. It was a freeing and frightful journey I was to pursue.

In addition to the kinds of repressed fears Dara mentions in “Peering Into the Trunk” (p.36), I feel the many messages communicated via the media about men being dangerous and testosterone being responsible for men’s violence and aggression directly contributed to an eight-year delay in medically transitioning. My two primary fears centered on “Would testosterone make me angry and violent?” and “Would I ever actually look and sound like a man?” My first fear was put to rest while attending a workshop presented by a medical doctor with at the time 12 years of experience working with trans patients. It turned out I wasn’t the only person in attendance with fears concerning testosterone and violence. The physician assured us all that there was no direct correlation between healthy hormone levels and violence. The second fear would take longer to quell. Because I was nearly 40 years old when I started my medical transition, the physical changes happened more slowly. As a matter of fact, I was two and a half years into my medical transition when a “friend” remarked, “You still look like a dyke.” I am happy to report that starting from the three-year mark until now, eleven years on testosterone, I am never misgendered.

A year into my transition, I was fortunate to encounter FTM pioneer Jamison Green, while attending a community meeting. Like Dara encourages, I had recently begun to think about needing to have a mentor (“Finding a Mentor,” p.51), someone that I could ask questions of and glean some wisdom from. I was happy to encounter Jamison’s story in 2000, when I discovered the FTM international web page while doing research for a class on violence prevention and intervention in graduate school. I was writing a paper on trans violence and wanted to learn more about the impact of violence on the lives of trans men. Between 2000 and 2005 I read Jamison’s memoir *Becoming a Visible Man* (Green, 2004) and learned we had similar histories. We were both previously lesbian identified, both had an interest in knowing the history of our communities, and both started our medical transitions at age 39. Because of that, I felt a connection with him prior to even meeting him in person. I then met him in person in 2006 at the Compton Cafeteria Commemoration Committee meeting and mustered up the courage to ask him if I could walk with him to catch public transportation and during that walk I asked him if he was available to be my mentor. His response was thankfully “yes” and he told me that he was working on a project to get archival material from FTM international organized and offered that if I came to his house once a month and helped him with the archiving project, that I could 1) get a chance to look at and read all of the archival material to learn about the FTM community around the world, and 2) I could listen to him tell stories about his involvement in the community and the role that trans man pioneer Louis Graydon Sullivan (1951-1991) had in founding an international network of FTM groups. It was enriching so early in transition not only to be exposed to those ideas but peer into the hearts and minds of the men who came before me and made it possible for me to do what I would end up doing over the course of the last 10 years. One of the significant aspects of our time together was being able to read hand typed letters from the ‘80s between Lou Sullivan and other trans men seeking support, friendship, and advice. Reading those letters was the inspiration for my book, *Letters for my Brothers: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect* (ed. Rohrer & Keig, 2010).

Once others began to see me as a man and treat me like a man, I found myself asking the question, "What kind of man do I want to be?" It was through the wisdom of hands-off mentors that I was able to answer those kinds of questions and delve more deeply into those issues. I was
doing a lot of research online, looking for examples of positive masculinity, good men, kind men, generous men, references to a type of maleness that I could relate to, and discovered that there was a whole field of men’s studies and texts written by men about the male experiences and perspectives regarding relationships, emotions, trauma, and bonding. In the search for that information, I landed on the blog *The Art of Manliness*, written by Brett McKay, which is “dedicated to uncovering the lost art of being a man.” Through this blog I learned about the myth of the “normal” testosterone level and read mini biographies of great men in history such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry David Thoreau. As a social worker working almost entirely with men, I was also very happy to come upon their series “Leashing the Black Dog,” all about men and depression. Another hands-off mentor I find invaluable is *Men’s Journal*. This magazine is chock full of stories written by men for men about male experiences, which are vastly different from the stories I was raised on and fed through the media about who men are, what men want, how men love, where men seek refuge and when men need help. I am forever grateful to the insights I gleaned from the pages of these hands-off mentors.

In an effort to “Build My Support Team” (p.56) I reached out to other transgender and transsexual men and women. I was astonished to learn that some individuals thought I did not have the “right” story to be a transsexual. I did not know that there was a “right” story. It turns out that some trans and non-trans people believe that to be a “true transsexual” one must feel compelled to transition, and if unable to do so feel that suicide is the only alternative. I did not feel my desire to transition was that dire, nor urgent. It turns out that many trans people do feel that way. However, that does not mean that we all do. I discovered that there were other trans men and women who shared with me a similar understanding of being trans, and they soon became my go-to network of friends. From them I learned about the local trans community resources. Through these connections I was able to meet gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual transsexuals. It never occurred to me that I would be perceived as a straight guy. It made sense, since my partner was female, but I had just never considered the implications of transition on my social life. So much of my attention was focused on the physical changes brought by T. The other straight trans men I met helped me to come to terms with and navigate the new ways I was experiencing the world. If you have access to a local in-person trans support group, I highly recommend attending. You may not resonate with every person there and/or topic presented, but the friends you make there may be the friends you call on years later. I know I do, and my life is all the richer as a result.

The journey you are about to embark on may or may not be similar to the tale I just told. Dara’s book gives you the opportunity to write your story in your own way. In a nutshell, I found Dara’s book to be a relevant resource that will support people questioning their gender identity, new to transition, and folks like me: a ways down the road.
INTRODUCTION TO
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY:
A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

BY DARA HOFFMAN-FOX, LPC

In the Spring of 2013 I had what mythologist Joseph Campbell would describe as my “Call to Action.”

Call to Action: When the protagonist in a story is offered the chance to embark upon a great adventure that will challenge them in epic ways.

You can accept this call, or you can choose to ignore it.

You wouldn’t be holding this book in your hands if I had ignored mine.

Just before I had my Call to Action I was going on five years of seeing transgender and gender nonconforming clients through my private practice as a mental health counselor. Although I was satisfied with the work I was doing, I knew there was a bigger purpose I was meant for that I had not yet discovered. In fact I had spent most of my life with this frustrating and unsettling preoccupation of not knowing what bigger “purpose” I had, wanting desperately to figure out how I could make a lasting and impactful contribution to this world.

My Call to Action finally made itself known through a series of events happening in quick succession during the Spring of 2013, which included giving a well-attended workshop at a national transgender education conference and winning the “Health and Wellness Champion” award from my local Pride Center.

The big “ah ha” moment came as a result of an interview I had with my local newspaper about a transgender six-year-old named Coy Mathis. Coy was denied access to the girls’ restroom at her elementary school, which prompted her parents to file a complaint with the Civil Rights Division of Colorado, citing discrimination. This local story quickly made it’s way around the globe. A reporter from our town’s newspaper was interested in learning more about how it is that someone so young can be aware of their gender, and the Colorado Springs Pride Center let her know I was a reliable source to speak to about this topic.

As I stopped at the convenience store down the street from my office to pick up a copy of the paper, I was noticed I was shaking. Did the reporter write compassionately about Coy and her family? Would I be quoted in such a way that would increase the readers’ understanding of what it means to be transgender?

I was surprised and delighted to see the story made front-page news. There was a beautiful picture of Coy and her dad playing in the snow, accompanied by a large headline which proclaimed: “Experts: Gender Awareness Starts at an Early Age.”

I was then astounded to see that the “expert” they referred to in the first sentence of the article was me.

I began to tear up as I stood in that convenience store, reading the rest of the article. I then experienced something I had only heard about from others and deeply longed for, but never believed it would end up happening to me.

I was filled with an overwhelming sense of discovery, knowing, and purpose. After so many years of searching for it, my Call to Action had finally arrived. The Call said: “You must do more.”
Nine months later, while delivering the keynote address at my local Transgender Day of Remembrance event, I made mention of my Call to Action, declaring, “Tonight, I find myself giving birth to what was conceived that morning in that convenience store. Much in the same way as a new parent feels about their newborn child, this public declaration of my commitment to do more for the trans and transgender people of this world is filled with curiosity, trepidation, feistiness, and hope.”

I followed the words “You must do more” as my mantra over the next year and a half. I created a website with transgender and gender nonconforming resources (darahoffmanfox.com), a Facebook page (“Conversations with a Gender Therapist”), and a YouTube Channel (“Ask a Gender Therapist”).

As my reach grew I began to receive messages from people across the world thanking me for providing them with information, education and encouragement. This reassured me that I was on the right track—that I was indeed “doing more.”

In December of 2014 I found myself face to face with my first true “Ordeal” of my journey.

**Ordeal: When the protagonist in a story encounters a challenge which reveals to them their deepest fears; the “hero’s crisis.”**

It felt amazing to use my experience as a gender therapist assist so many people across the world. Yet there was a certain topic being brought up by with a startling frequency that I found myself struggling to answer. Each person’s story was unique, but the theme they all had in common was painfully clear:

“Dara—Please help me figure out my gender identity.”

The more I read these pleas, the more I wrestled with how to respond. I knew I couldn’t provide individual attention for those who needed guidance unpacking something as complex as gender identity (as a therapist in Colorado, USA I am restricted to only seeing clients who live in the same state in which I practice). Additionally, I am only able to see a certain number of clients each week, which keeps the number of people I can effectively help on a one-on-one basis to a realistic number.

The cry for help continued to grow louder and louder until the task seemed insurmountable. I was left in a state of confusion and uncertainty. Hence my Ordeal: “How can I ‘do more’ for those in need of guidance, answers, and relief?”

Eventually the answer began to emerge in the form of advice I heard on one of the many “online business” podcasts I turn to for mentorship and ideas.

*Ask your audience what it is that is causing them pain.*
*Figure out why you can help with easing this pain.*
*Then, create something that helps to ease their pain.*

I spent the following year and a half creating that certain something: *You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery*. It’s a book containing practical tools and exercises for gender-questioning individuals to use during their self-discovery journey called.

This guide is my way of being with you as you embark upon this journey, listening for your own Call to Action, and walking beside you as you encounter your own Ordeal along the way.
THE INS AND OUTS OF THIS GUIDE

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

I created this guide for anyone who has questions, curiosities, doubts, confusion, struggles, or concerns about their gender, their gender identity, and how this contributes to who they are as a whole.

In its simplest terms it really comes down to this: you were assigned a sex at birth (male, female, or intersex) based on an observation of your genitals, and this also became the gender you were assigned at birth. At some point in your life you began to realize you were not entirely comfortable with that assigned sex and gender. There are many reasons why this could be the case which you will explore throughout this guide.

Having questions about your gender identity can confuse and complicate your entire understanding of who you are. When gender identity is a missing puzzle piece every area of your life is strongly impacted. This can create stress, brooding, uncertainty of your place in the world, interpersonal difficulty, not having a solid “sense of self,” and many other issues.

This is why it is so important and you need to be able to explore this.

If you have found yourself intrigued by the title of this book and are wondering if it might hold answers to the questions you have about yourself…keep reading.

“CAN I JUST PUT THIS OFF? WILL IT MAYBE JUST GO AWAY?”

These are questions that frequently arise in those who are wrestling with their gender identity. It’s also common for someone to test this theory out, waiting to see if the confusion surrounding their gender does indeed subside or disappear over time.

In the end, one’s instinctual need to be true to themselves will make itself known one way or another.

Choosing to give in to this drive to become your authentic self can be nerve-wracking and full of risks. Nonetheless, the suffering that can result from not doing it can feel worse than any of the possible consequences that would result from doing it.

The rewards of increased self-awareness are oftentimes difficult to describe until one has actually achieved this state of being.

I asked my Facebook community (“Conversations with a Gender Therapist”) what they learned about themselves once they had a better understanding of their gender identity.

“Realizing this allowed me to better understand myself, express myself, and most importantly accept myself.”

“Not knowing who you are is terrible, empty and cold. You're lost. Knowing now who I am has helped me feel like I’m finally alive—that I exist.”

“I understand now that what I was asking was not ‘Am I transgender?’ but ‘Is it ok to be me?’ And it is.”

“It helped to break down the walls of isolation.”
“As I reconciled my feelings toward myself of fear, self-loathing etc., they melted away and comfort took its place.”

“Now that I have the words to describe who I am, a world of information is unlocked.”

“I now have a better, more truthful sense of identity, as well as clarity.”

“The answer helped me find balance in my life.”

“It was like hearing a voice that said ‘What you feel exists and you are not alone.’”

Is this something you would like to experience as well?

*Keep reading.*

**CLEARING UP A DAMAGING MYTH**

I have heard a disturbingly high number of individuals say they think there is a certain way they *must* experience their gender identity in order to be taken seriously. This belief can be so damaging that it convinces people they shouldn’t even bother to attempt exploring this any further.

Here is what is *actually* true about your gender identity exploration:

#1—This is *your* discovery process and no one else’s.
#2—Only *you* get to decide how to describe your identity.
#3—You are allowed to take as long as you need to explore this.
#4—Everyone’s experience is different and is to be respected.
#5—You will figure some things out now and others later.

Re-read this list as often as you need to as a reminder to not let anyone else’s opinion about what the “right or wrong” way is to go about this.

**HOW DO I USE THIS GUIDE?**

This book was designed to help you achieve greater clarity regarding your gender identity by undertaking a “journey of self-exploration.”

The stages of this journey are separated into three sections:

**STAGE ONE: PREPARATION**

Preparation is your set-up for success. The work you do in this stage will prepare you for the following stages, much like a martial artist must undergo intense training before engaging in their first fight. You’ll solidify your motivation for embarking upon this journey, reveal fears that are holding you back (and why they are there), and learn how to build support for yourself during what can be a rewarding and challenging time.

**STAGE TWO: REFLECTION**

This stage will take you into the past to examine hints and clues that may have been present during your formative years. This will help you make sense of thoughts, feelings, and
behaviors that you may not have understood before. This section will also help you become more aware of what beliefs you formed about yourself during this time of your life, as well as any shame or guilt that may have resulted from this.

**STAGE THREE: EXPLORATION**

This stage is full of exercises that will help you actively explore your gender identity. The process of discovering one’s gender identity is oftentimes complicated and overwhelming so we’ll be breaking it down into easier-to-digest pieces. You’ll examine individual layers that make up one’s gender identity and then have the chance to put these together to form the “big picture” of who you are.

**WORKING THROUGH THE GUIDE**

The guide was created with the assumption that you will be working through it in the order in which it was written. However, if you reach an exercise that you feel you are either not ready for or have already explored you should then skip it and move on to the next one.

It is essential that you take your time as you work through this guide. You can start and stop as often as you need or want, whether it is for weeks, months, or even years. Use it as a journal of sorts, recording some of your answers now, and leaving others open for revision and reflection at a later date. It’s also okay to leave things blank when you aren’t sure what to write, coming back to them once you discover your answers.

Think of this book as a compass, map, or navigation system that will act as a guide however long you need it.

Lastly, I highly recommend you have a “workbook” by your side as you go through You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery. This workbook can be either in “hard” form (such as a notebook or blank book or journal) or ”soft” form (such as an electronic version created with a computer or mobile device).

As you read you are going to see the appearance of this symbol through the guide:

![mage]

This symbol indicates that it’s time to write in your workbook. That way, you can keep track of your answers and self-reflections. It will provide you with a record that you can return to for perspective on just how far you have come.

*Note: I created such a tool for you to use specifically with this guide, You and Your Gender Identity: A Workbook to Discovery, which can be obtained at discoveryourgenderidentity.com/*

**CHALLENGES I HAD WHILE WRITING THIS BOOK**

The topic of gender identity is very complex. Conversations around it are constantly evolving so writing a book about discovering your gender identity presents more than a few challenges. Here are the main ones I encountered:

**LANGUAGE/LEXICON**

“Language” and “lexicon” has to do with what words I chose to use throughout the book to describe gender, gender expression, gender identity, etc.
I am constantly monitoring what terms those who are sensitive and inclusive about this subject are most commonly using. Nonetheless, it’s possible I will accidentally offend or leave out someone by certain word choices. You are more than welcome to let me know at darahoffmanfox.com/contact if you come across such verbiage so I can address that in future editions.

Additionally, through the duration of the book I use the pronouns “they/them” instead of “he/his” or “she/hers.” This is done to avoid the cumbersome task of having to write “he/she/they” whenever I am referring to a person, and not as a dismissive gesture to those who use female or male pronouns.

INTERNATIONAL READERS

I receive a large number of messages from individuals all over the world. Although every attempt has been made for the material in this book to be applied as universally as possible, there will more than likely be instances where something is discussed that persons outside of North America will be unable to identify, relate to, or even be put at risk by. I welcome your feedback at darahoffmanfox.com/contact as to how I can improve future editions in regard to this concern.

AGE / GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

I have received messages from individuals ranging between the ages of twelve and seventy-two years old. This brings about the unique challenge of how to creating a book that will be relevant to all ages.

There is an undeniable difference in how someone who is seventy-two has experienced their gender identity over the duration of their lifetime compared with someone who is thirty. There’s also a difference between the experience of those who are thirty compared with those who are in their teens.

In just a few short years the power of the internet, combined with dynamic cultural shifts occurring around the world, have dramatically changed the face of gender identity exploration.

I have endeavored to present the material in this book as inclusively as possible across generations.

A note to those who are in their teens:

Many of you, especially if you are in your younger teens, are unable to access needed resources without the involvement of a parent or guardian. You may have concerns that you won’t be understood or supported by them. This is an understandable fear to be facing!

For further assistance I recommend Real Talk for Teens: Jump-Start Guide to Gender Transitioning and Beyond by Seth Rainess as well as The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity by Testa, Coolhart, Peta, Sallans, and Lev. You can also check out the “Further Reading” section at the end of this book to get ideas as to how you can approach your parents and get support from others. You don’t have to go through this alone!

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

This guide will be helpful to you in many ways. As you progress through it, be aware that many unexpected emotions, memories and realizations are likely to surface.

Faced with the question, “How do I make sure you’re going to be okay on this journey?” led me to the creation of the “Self-Care Checklist” (which you will find on p.25).
Here you will find examples of ways you can practice self-care while you work through this guide. Use them to create your own unique self-care list in your workbook.

I also highly recommend you have a counselor or therapist you can turn to during as you work through this book. If you are unable find a trans-friendly therapist in your area and/or cannot afford one, seek out knowledgeable and supportive persons you can turn to for support, advice, and friendship (we will cover how you can do this later in this guide).

“What’s your gender identity, Dara?”

My audience will oftentimes ask me about my own gender identity, curious to know more about who it is they are turning to for guidance and advice. Honestly, I have found a lot of my own answers through writing this book!

By the time I reached the end of this writing journey this I concluded I connect the most with terms such as “non-binary” and “agender” (both of which you will learn more about in this book) as well as “queer” (which encompasses both my gender identity and my sexual orientation).

Although I’m accustomed to she/her pronouns I am experimenting with using third gender pronouns in certain areas of my life. I’ve also begun to use the prefix “Mx.” in front of my name as a way to express my nonbinary-ness (this is a gender neutral alternate to “Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr”—i.e. Mx. Dara Hoffman-Fox).

Being the first “student” of this guide proved to be an unexpected and illuminating experience. I feel that is a good sign of how it will be able to help you as well!

Final Thoughts Before We Begin

As the title of this book states, this is a “guide to discovery.” The hope is, by the time you reach the end of it, you will be closer to understanding your gender identity, as well as yourself as a whole.

But it will be far from the final finish line.

Growing in self-awareness will help point you in the right direction as to what you might want to do next, which will lead you to the next step, and the next step.

The journey to discover your authentic self is one you will be on your entire life!

We live in a time of increasing awareness about what it means to be trans/transgender/gender non-conforming...but there is still a long way to go (we’ll talk more about this throughout the book).

Self-discovery isn’t easy. Will others receive what you discover about yourself with compassion, respect, and understanding? Will your relationship with your loved ones change because of this?

With these realities in mind, I’ve made sure to include tools in this guide that you can use to help navigate the waters if they grow choppy.

“It takes courage...to endure the sharp pains of self discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives.”

—Marianne Williamson
FOR EXTRA SUPPORT, GUIDANCE, AND ENCOURAGEMENT AS YOU WORK THROUGH THIS GUIDE CHECK OUT THIS PRIVATE, MODERATED FACEBOOK GROUP!

“*You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery Support Group*”

MEMBERSHIP IS FREE!
SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Self-discovery can be a difficult process, so it is crucial you set aside time to take care of yourself as you work through it. Below you’ll find examples of what self-care can look like.

Circle any that you already use for self-care, or that you’d be interested in trying. Then, start your own list in your workbook.

You can add to this list at any point in time—the key is that you actually use it. You’ll be given reminders throughout the book when it would be a good idea to do so.

Note: In Stage One: Chapter Three (p.48) we will look at how there may be items on your Self-Care Checklist that you do to excess, and thus are more harmful than helpful. For now, feel free to list anything that comes to mind, and we will look at that more closely then.

- Listen to music
- Sing in the car/shower
- Karaoke
- Play an instrument
- Yoga/Pilates
- Walking
- Tai Chi
- Stretching
- Weight lifting
- Running
- Martial arts
- Zumba
- Cycling
- Hiking
- Dancing
- Meditation
- Light a candle or incense
- Cook or bake for yourself
- Cook or bake for others
- Watch a favorite TV show
- Watch an old favorite movie
- Watch a new movie
- Play a video game
- Journal
- Creative writing

- Browse the internet
- Social media
- Read fiction
- Read your favorite blogs
- Study a subject you love
- Paint your nails
- Take a bath or shower
- Shop
- Volunteer
- Spend time with your pets/other animals
- Pamper yourself
- Visit a favorite place
- Visit a favorite restaurant
- Visit a favorite coffeehouse
- Knit/Sew/Crochet
- Drink your favorite beverage
- Spend time in nature
- Pray
- Chant
- Garden
- Use aromatherapy
- Scrapbook
- Massage/Reiki

- Time with a friend/friends
- Painting/Drawing
- Organize things
- Take a nap
- Eat something replenishing
- Go for a drive
- Photography
- Do puzzles/brain games
- Crafts
- Tarot cards/I Ching
- Watch or play sports
- Breathe deeply
- Make a music mix
- Write code
- Listen to comedy
- Recite affirmations
- Cry
- Play
- Roleplaying games
- Coloring
- Religious ceremony
- Clean your living space
- Bowling
- Organize things
- Spend time with children
STAGE ONE:
PREPARATION
INTRODUCTION TO STAGE ONE: PREPARATION

“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

– Bilbo Baggins, “The Lord of the Rings”

There is a certain approach to life’s challenges that many have used in the past, and will continue to use for years to come. It’s this:

Our life is a journey...a quest...a story.*

You can apply this concept to the subject matter you’ll be exploring in this stage:

You are on a quest to discover your authentic gender identity.

There are stages in this quest that are surprisingly predictable. This means we can plan ahead for the journey you are about to embark upon.

Stage One: Preparation of this book is here to help you get ready for the journey.

I know you’re anxious to move forward. But before we can do that you must put time in at the beginning to GET READY.

The chapters in this stage will help you in your Preparation by showing you how to:

- Get confirmation that you should even embark upon this “gender identity journey” in the first place
- Gain motivation by looking at why you need to go on this journey
- Name, acknowledge, and own the fears that might come up while you are on this journey
- Gather your “magical elixirs” to help you move forward successfully on this journey

*This inspiration comes from the works of Joseph Campbell, as well as C. G. Jung.
THE HERO'S JOURNEY MEETS THE GENDER IDENTITY JOURNEY

Illustration by Mike King
CHAPTER ONE: “WHY DO I NEED TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH?”

This book has somehow made its way into your hands. More than likely this means you are filled with a variety of emotions in regard to your gender identity.

Whether you are experiencing curiosity or pain or something in between, there’s no more time to waste. There’s a reason you want to take the next step towards understanding your gender identity, and this chapter will help you figure out what it is.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first step towards Preparation is to be sure that this book is the right tool for you at this particular moment in time.

It comes down to one simple question. Answer it quickly, with your first gut instinct. No one else has to see it but you.

Are you uncomfortable with your assigned sex at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES                MAYBE                NO

In other words, when you were born (or for some even before you were born!) certain people examined your external genitalia and saw a penis, a vagina, or a variation of both (for those born intersex). Based on this observation it was then declared that your sex* was that of male, female, or intersex.

This subsequently resulted in you being perceived and raised as the gender that “corresponds” with that assignment of sex.

Record your answer in your workbook. If you answered YES or MAYBE, keep reading.

*Sex refers to a person’s biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia. (The Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients, adopted by the APA Council of Representatives, February 18-20, 2011).
“WHY DO I NEED TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH?:
CREATING A LOGLINE

In this section you will be creating your personal “logline” to help identify the main reasons you want to answer your gender identity questions as soon as you possibly can.

In the film and television worlds a logline is a brief summary of the story that tries to be catchy and memorable. It’s what the movie-preview voiceover person says to grab your attention. The logline usually goes something like this:

“The main character’s ‘regular’ life is like (this). Then (major event or realization occurs) and the main character is changed forever because of it in (these ways).”

Here are a few examples of this from well-known storylines:

**Star Wars**: Luke Skywalker has a quaint, although fairly boring and uneventful existence at the beginning of the film. There’s no reason for his life to change at all...until his family is brutally murdered.

**The Hunger Games**: Sure, life sucks for the people in this post-apocalyptic world, including for the eventual hero, Katniss Everdeen. At least she has her mom, her sister, and a cute guy to go hunting with. Katniss has no idea what the future holds as she becomes the face of the revolution against their tyrannical government.

**“Orange is the New Black”**: Piper Chapman is a hot, white, upper-middle class gal with a big secret in her past. Just as she’s about to start her new life with her fiancé she’s arrested for exactly what she hopes to escape. While in prison she realizes how much she has been pretending to be someone she isn’t, gaining true freedom through reaching new depths of self-awareness.

Take a moment to think of your favorite film, book, or TV show and see if this same storyline structure can be found in it.

What story are you thinking of? How would you describe its logline?

Now let’s break the logline down into its parts:

#1: The main character is dealing with a certain “stirring” within them. It might be experienced as painful and troublesome. It might also be experienced as mysterious and intriguing. The character could also be unaware (at least consciously) that there is something within them that needs to be expressed and explored.

#2: Then something happens to reveal just how much is really going on beneath the surface for the main character. It’s at this point they realize their life will continue to stay exactly the same unless they do something about it.

#3: The main character embarks on a quest (which can be internal and/or external) searching for answers to these questions, hoping to create a life that feels more authentic to who they really are.
#4: The main character’s illusions are revealed, helping them see the world through different eyes. As their “old selves” fall away they question everything they had previously believed to be true.

You’ve probably figured out by now that you are the main character and this is your story that we’re talking about. Your search for answers about your gender identity is your quest.

Your logline will become your mission statement, beacon, and guiding light.

“THIS IS YOUR LIFE”

The first step towards creating this logline is to take a look at your life as it is right now. There has to be some sort of explanation why you (the main character) are feeling unsettled, perplexed, unhappy or curious, or all of the above!

STEP #1—THE OPENING SCENES

Think about yourself and your life as if you were watching it as a movie. What do you see? How would you describe what you see during the “opening scenes”? Keeping in mind that you are the main character, use the following prompts to help you flesh this out:

- **Describe the main character** in the third person (using they/them or he/she pronouns). How old are they? What is their perceived gender? What do they look like? What’s their personality like? What are their interests and hobbies? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

- **Describe the physical world of this character.** In what country, state, town do they live? What type of dwelling? What does it look like?

- **Describe where this character spends time.** What are these places/scenarios? How much time do they spend in each? (ex: home, work, school, local bar, the gym, hangouts, friends or relatives houses, in the car commuting, in combat, in isolation).

- **Describe how the character spends their time.** How much do they work? Do they go to school? What’s their family like life? What’s their social life like? Are they frequently alone?

- **Describe the other people in the character’s life.** Who are the important people in their life? What is the character’s relationship like with each of them?

- **Describe what the other characters think of the main character.** Are they well-liked? Are they seen as mysterious and aloof? Are they seen as being challenging or difficult?

- **On a scale of 1 to 10,** with 1 being “not very” and 10 being “very much so,” how content do the other people in the story assume this character is with the current state of their life? (regardless of how content the character actually feels).

Record all of your answers from this exercise in your workbook.
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

STEP #2—ZOOMING IN

Now that you’ve established what the world of the main character seems to be like, let’s zoom in to get a closer look at what’s actually going on. Answering these questions sets up the entire story that’s about to unfold for the main character (i.e. for you).

➢ What does the character do when no one is watching?

➢ What does this character struggle with that no one else knows about? What takes up the most space in the character’s thoughts?

➢ What does this character wish they could do to further explore these thoughts?

➢ What steps have they taken so far to accomplish this?

➢ What do they want to try, but haven’t yet?

➢ On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very” and 10 being “very much so,” how content do you think this character actually is with the current state of their life?

Record all of your answers from this exercise in your workbook.

STEP #3—CREATING THE LOGLINE

Follow these steps to create your logline:

1) Create a several-word description of yourself (example: “A highly intelligent, charismatic software engineer...”).

You can use these adjectives and nouns to get you started:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>College student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nerdy</td>
<td>Athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music loving</td>
<td>Military/Former military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>Your role(s) in your family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Your job or career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Geek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially awkward</td>
<td>Recovering alcoholic/addict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattooed</td>
<td>Survivor of ______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Nationality</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Culture</td>
<td>Political party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Sexual orientation</td>
<td>Religious affiliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write this description in your workbook.
2) Create a phrase that describes your current state of being.

Examples:

“...is tired of hiding their true self.”
“...is bursting with newfound self-awareness they are ready to share with the world.”
“...can no longer stand turning to (fill in addiction) as a way of running from their true self.”
“...is delighted to be learning things about themself they had never expected to learn.”

Write this phrase in your workbook.

3) Create a description of what the possible solution might be.

You can make this as obvious or as mysterious as you’d like.

Examples:

“...by facing the truth about their gender identity...”
“...by exploring possibilities about themselves that they never thought existed...”
“...by challenging the assumption that they are a man/a woman...”
“...by no longer hiding the truth from themselves, and from others...”

Write this possible solution in your workbook.

4) Create a phrase that describes what the cost might be if you don’t do this.

Examples:

“...a disturbing feeling of never truly becoming themselves...”
“...an existence filled with the same ole same ole...”
“...a lifetime filled with regret over ‘what could have been’...”
“...the chance at missing out on the peace of being fully self-aware...”

Write this phrase in your workbook.

5) Combine these phrases to create your final logline.

Description of yourself +
Phrase that describes your current state of being +
What the possible solution might be +
What the cost might be if you don’t do this =

YOUR LOGLINE

Be sure your logline hooks you emotionnally. You’re going to be turning to it throughout your journey as a reminder of what you are doing and why.

Write your logline in your workbook.
STEP #4—USE YOUR LOGLINE

Come up with ways you can use this logline as a handy companion throughout your journey (note: modify the following ideas if you need to be discreet).

BE CREATIVE:

- Use a photo editor to give it a design (such as quotescover.com, picmonkey.com, and a wide variety of free apps which are available).
- Make a collage with photos, or cut items out of magazines.
- Set it to music. Use a song pre-existing song and create your own lyrics...or create a new song entirely!

PUT IT WHERE YOU CAN SEE IT:

- Home office corkboard
- Bathroom mirror
- In your vehicle
- On your computer or tablet
- In your wallet, purse, or bag
- On your refrigerator
- As the wallpaper for your phone
- As the wallpaper for your computer
- As your social media profile picture or wallpaper
- Write it on your body (you may want to wait for the tattoo until you’re farther into your journey)

✍️ Write down the ideas you would like try out. Follow through with one of them right now!

In the coming days be sure to return to your logline for motivation and inspiration:

- Go back and read it on the days you are feeling defeated, afraid, or frustrated.
- Memorize it! Make it your mantra. Do whatever you must so you can remember it, repeat it, and relive it!
- Send it to a trusted person who will remind you when you need it the most (kind of like a “Gender Identity Sponsor”).
CHAPTER TWO:  
“HOLD ON, THIS IS NERVE-WRACKING!”

“Named must your fear be before banish it you can.” —Yoda

Congratulations! Take a moment to be proud of yourself for getting this far.

Embarking on the journey to discover your gender identity might be one of the most important challenges you take during your life. Understanding why it is so challenging can help it become more manageable, simpler, and less overwhelming.

FEAR... WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE THERE??

We all hide (i.e. “repress,” as we psychotherapy-types like to call it) essential parts of ourselves that we have been taught to be ashamed and/or afraid of. Our unconscious takes care of repressing these aspects for us, and it is really good at it! That’s because our unconscious thinks its main job is to keep us from harm.

When we were children our unconscious helped us push down anything we believed to be too shameful or wrong about whom we really were. We did this by tossing these thoughts, feelings, and memories into a heavily padlocked trunk that resides in our psyche. We then threw it into the deepest ocean we could find. We thought if we got rid of the trunk and everything in it, then somehow our lives would become easier and everyone would like and accept us.

Here’s the thing: the ocean that you threw the trunk into is your unconscious.

This means the trunk and all of its contents have been with you all along.

You may or may not remember creating this “trunk of secrets.” You may have begun the process of filling the trunk at a young age, or you may have been older. You might have just a few things in it, or it could be completely stuffed.

Regardless of your story, it’s very likely there’s at least something in that trunk that needs to be looked at. It could be causing you anything from confusion and uncertainty to paralyzing fear and distress.

The presence of fear means you are getting closer to discovering something about yourself.

This is because we oftentimes fear the unknown, and it is unknown what you will be discovering about yourself!
“Hold on, this is nerve-wracking!”: Calling out your fears

The “trunk secrets” you will be uncovering through the use of this guide are the ones having to do with your gender identity. This doesn’t mean other trunk secrets won’t come spilling out during this process, but it’s less overwhelming to focus on one at a time.

In Stage Two: Reflection we’re going to look at when you first began to feel conflicted about your gender identity, what happened as you became more aware of this, and why you ended up having to put those thoughts and feelings into that trunk.

For right now, let’s reach into that trunk and nudge that secret—just a little bit.

STEP #1—PLAN FOR SELF-CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist from the beginning of the book. Find an activity to do before you begin to work on this exercise, and an activity to do after you have finished this exercise.

✍ What will your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity be?
✍ What will your Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity be?

The point of this is to train you to make self-care a regular part of your life. Working through the questions you have about your gender identity can be stressful at times, so it is important you are kind to yourself as you do so!

STEP #2—PRE-EXERCISE SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Put aside the guide and do your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity. Return back when you are finished.

STEP #3—PEERING INTO THE TRUNK

Find someplace private where you won’t be interrupted. You’re going to be starting a dialogue with yourself, so choose a method that works best for you. Examples of this are journaling, visualization, drawing, meditation, doing this exercise while walking, or talking aloud.

Imagine you are slowly lifting open the lid of the trunk. Rummage around the trunk until you find anything having to do with your gender identity. Once you find one of those “hidden gems,” ask this part of yourself a question:

“What are you afraid of?”

It’s possible you will come up completely blank when you ask yourself this. You also might feel overwhelmed with so many answers you don’t know where to start. This is normal. You may not know what it is you are fearful of, but that doesn’t mean that the fear isn’t there.

This is “Take One” of the exercise, because just asking the question is a big step in and of itself! Before you move on to “Take Two,” read through these examples of fears that have come up for others during this process and see if any of them strike a familiar chord with you:
“What if I don’t like/hate/am ashamed of what I learn about myself?”

“What if my family and friends don’t like what I discover about myself?”

“What if I hurt my loved ones, because of what I discover?”

“What if I think it’s true, but then it turns out I was wrong?”

“What will the rest of society think of me?”

“Will I be able to transition social and/or medically*?”

“What if I get physically harmed by someone who hates who I am?”

“Who will I lose in my life if I do this?”

“What if I lose my job over this?”

“What if I don’t ‘pass’?”

“What if I’m not happy, either way?”

In your workbook, record any of the above statements that feel or sound familiar to you.

STEP #4—PEERING INTO THE TRUNK: TAKE TWO

Again, the question you’re asking yourself is:

“*What are you afraid of?”

Without censoring or judging yourself, start writing down what emerges. Be as specific or general as you want—this is your list.

Fear #1:

Fear #2:

Fear #3:

Fear #4:

Fear #5:

*Transitioning socially can include changing your name, pronoun, documents, gender expression, etc. Transitioning medically can include Hormone Replacement Therapy, and/or a variety of different gender-confirming surgeries.
STEP #5—RANKING YOUR FEAR

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very much” and 10 being “a whole lot,” how much fear comes up for you when you think of each item on the list?

Rank Fear #1

Rank Fear #2

Rank Fear #3

Rank Fear #4

Rank Fear #5

STEP #6—YOUR OVERALL FEAR LEVEL

Add up each number from Step #5 and divide by 5 (or however many fears you ended up listing).

Write down you average in your workbook.

This number will give you a better idea of how much fear you have overall going into this.

☑ SELF-CARE REMINDER!

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It’s time to set this guide aside and spend some time with your chosen activity.
Chapter Three: Feeling the Fear & Doing it Anyway

“A year and a half ago, when I decided to transition, I didn’t have any newfound bravery. I hadn’t worked up ‘the guts’ to do it. What changed was that I found hope. I saw what gender dysphoria had done to my life and how miserable I was... I found hope there could be a happy version of me out there somewhere...”

— Amelia

Repeat after me.

“My fear is still going to be with me, and may even increase, as I move forward on this journey to discover the truth about my gender identity.”

It is the foundation for any good story line. The main character almost always has tremendous reluctance to take on whatever challenge they are being faced with. How many times in The Lord of the Rings did Frodo say he wasn’t meant for this type of adventure? How many times in The Hunger Games series did Katniss throw down her bow and arrow (both literally and figuratively) and try to walk away from her destiny?

This chapter will provide you with tools you can use to prevent your fear from paralyzing you as you move closer to the truth about your gender identity.

You may end up using all of these tools, or maybe just a few. That’s why there is a variety to choose from, since not everyone will connect with each idea.

Think of your fears as being unwanted guests in your home. They aren’t leaving anytime soon so you need to come up with a plan to deal with them. The more you get to know them, the more you’ll know what to do about them.

By examining the root of your fears you’ll shift from feeling as if they are controlling you and you feeling more in control of them. This mastery comes from having awareness and understanding of your fear, and then using this knowledge to break its hold on you.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”: LEARNING TO WORK TOGETHER WITH YOUR FEAR

What follows is a visualization exercise to help you gain a different perspective on the role of fear in your life. Through this shift you’ll learn how to work together with this fear, as opposed to letting it overpower and paralyze you.

**STEP #1—INTRODUCING...YOUR BODYGUARD**

Picture a bodyguard. Someone you would like to have as your bodyguard, for those times when you are feeling threatened and unsafe.

What do they look like? What’s their name? They can be human, animal, mythology, whatever you most connect with.

_write this description down in your workbook._

For example, I imagine that my bodyguard is Samuel L. Jackson’s character “Jules” from “Pulp Fiction.”

**STEP #2—WHY DO YOU HAVE A BODYGUARD?**

_write the name of your bodyguard in the blanks below or in your workbook._

Imagine that _______________ has been with you since you were born. It’s inevitable that we will encounter threats in our life and this bodyguard is there as a psychological defense to keep us safe.

As you move through your childhood, adolescence, and teenage years, _______________ is highly alert to what it is that makes you feel hurt, sad, or afraid. Therefore they are going to do whatever it takes to keep you from feeling that way.

In theory, this sounds great! Who doesn’t want to avoid those feelings?

But the problem is _______________ is hyper-vigilant. They take the job of protecting you very seriously.

So, even though _______________ means well, there’s a downside to this called “over-protection.” Anytime someone is over-protected they risk:

- Being unable to experience life to the fullest
- Stunted growth
- Hiding “scary” truths from themselves

For example, _______________ saw you pry open your “repression trunk” in Chapter
Two p.35). Their ears perked up as they heard your hidden thoughts and feelings about your gender identity rustling around in there. They looked up and saw you crouched over the trunk, reaching your hand in and beginning to lift that part of you out.

Hoping they could get to it before it was too late, ___________________ sprinted towards you, bellowing out to your trunk, “You there! Close your lid and don’t come out ever again! I won’t allow you to harm my human!”

In the past ___________________ has seen what it’s like when you tried to let that part of you out. They didn’t like what they saw happen to you—not at all! So they grabbed that part of you and put it in the trunk, hoping it was for good.

And anytime ___________________ thought someone (maybe even you?) was getting too close to that trunk for comfort, they would pull out a weapon: a gun, a knife, nun-chucks—whatever they thought might work!

Your bodyguard’s weapon is actually your fear.

___________________________ knows just what to say while holding up that weapon: anything that will keep you from getting closer to that trunk.

“You know I hate to do this, but I can’t allow you to go into that trunk. Don’t you remember how you felt before I locked all that stuff up in the trunk? Do you want to be judged? Hurt? Outcast? Let me remind me what will happen if you take that out of the trunk...”

Your bodyguard is really only trying to protect you and keep you from harm. But your bodyguard does not actually know what constitutes a real threat! This means fear (aka your bodyguard, aka yourself) can mislead you into believing things that may not actually be true.

Additionally, even if there are actual threats for you and your bodyguard to reckon with, you have the right to choose self-actualization over continued repression.

STEP #3—CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BODYGUARD

Although it might take a while for you to recognize when your bodyguard is making their presence known, once you do you can develop the habit of starting a dialogue with them whenever your fear surfaces.

Here are some ways you can do that:

- Thank them for being there for you all of this time.
- Remind them that you know this is going to be scary, but you can get through this together.
- Ask them to continue to let you know when they think you are in danger because this can help you be more vigilant and cautious.
- Encourage them to understand your point of view, and listen to their point of view as well.

Let me give you an example of how this can work.
SCENE: DARA IS HANGING OUT IN HER OFFICE, DEEP IN THOUGHT

Dara (to self): I think I’m ready to get a big tattoo on my right forearm. It’s something that I’ve always admired on others, and I’ve imagined it on myself and really like the thought of it.

Jules (enters the room): Uh, hey Dara, I couldn’t help but notice your line of thinking just now and as your bodyguard I have to say I’m getting a bit concerned about it.

Dara: Hey Jules, what’s up? What do you mean?

Jules: Well, I mean, think about it. When you were a kid you would do some, let’s say, “not-so-feminine” things with your friends and most of the time you got made fun of for it.

Dara: Yeah, I remember that. Like when I’d try to play football at recess with the guys. How I’d want to be Han Solo instead of Princess Leia. How I liked having short hair and wore jeans and t-shirts all the time.

Jules: Right! Do you remember feeling so awkward, and weird, and isolated? I hated to see you go through that! That’s when I told those “not-so-feminine” feelings of yours to f**ck off, because I didn’t want to see you hurt anymore.

Dara: So you see me getting this tattoo as being a “not-so-feminine” thing, huh?

Jules: Not just “yes” but “hell yes”! I’m not saying I don’t think this is a true expression of who you are, or that it wouldn’t be cool as sh*t to have it. But think about the judgment, the looks, the snickering… You’d be labeled as being butchy, or a “wanna-be guy,” you know?

Dara: I can definitely see why you are worried about this, Jules. But don’t forget, I’m forty years old now, not eight. I really do think I’m ready for a step like this. And even if those things happen, I don’t know if I really care anymore!

Jules (swinging his gun around and stomping his feet): Dara, you are killin’ me here! I really do hear what you are saying and am almost convinced that I might be acting overly protective right now. But it just makes me so nervous, I don’t want to see you get hurt, child!

Dara: You’re awesome, Jules, I’m so lucky to have you on my side. Look, let’s find a way to do this, nice and slow, so you can feel a little more relaxed about this. I will always need you to be there to watch out for me!

Jules: Aw... (chuckles). Okay, I’m open to trying that idea out. Now how about we go grab a Big Kahuna Burger? All this serious talk has gotten me starving!

TIP: The next time one of your top fears comes up, take the time to dialogue with your bodyguard to learn more about the roots of your fear.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”:
SETTING APPOINTMENT TIMES WITH YOUR FEARS

If you find yourself constantly interrupted by your Fear List then this exercise is for you.

Fears will often come up without any warning: in the middle of your work day, hanging out with your partner, kids, or pets, or in the middle of a test at school.

They can also slowly seep into your mind when you are more relaxed, and therefore more vulnerable: when you’re driving, showering, doing yoga, or when you’re trying to sleep.

This exercise will help you create a plan for keeping your fears from overwhelming you and interrupting your life.

You’ll learn to do this by setting appointment times for your fears. This puts more in control of your fears instead of letting them control you.

This involves you setting boundaries with your fears, stating to them that: “I’m sorry, but I’m in the middle of something right now. You’ll have to make an appointment and I’ll get back to you then.”

You are the boss. You run the show.

Go ahead, give this a try.

STEP #1—WHEN DO THEY ARRIVE?

Think about a typical day. Are there certain times of day when your fears come up? Are there certain situations that trigger it?

[List these times of day, as well as the triggering situations, in your workbook.]

STEP #2—WHERE CAN YOU MEET THEM?

Now imagine someplace you can go to spend some time with these fears. For instance this could be your car, a room in your home, somewhere out in nature, at a café, the gym.

[List several examples of places you can meet with your fears.]

STEP #3—HOW LONG WILL YOU MEET WITH THEM?

Decide on a period of time you are going to set aside for these appointments with your fears. Start with a small number, such as five or ten minutes, and increase from there as you get the hang of this.

[How many minutes did you decide?]
STEP #4—HOW MANY TIMES PER DAY?

How many times a day will you set these appointments? (eventually you may even be able to change this to “How many times per week?”).

How many times per day did you decide?

STEP #5—WHERE WILL YOU KEEP TRACK OF YOUR APPOINTMENTS?

What is your favorite method of keeping track of things? This could be a notebook, or on your phone, or your computer.

What is that favorite method that you use?

STEP #6—SCHEDULING THE APPOINTMENTS

During your day, whenever a fear comes up, if it is not during one of your designated appointment times to spend with your fears, jot it down in the item you identified in Step #5. Give yourself permission to let it go, knowing you will definitely be meeting with it later.

STEP #7—SELF-CARE BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

When your next “Fear Appointment” arrives go to one of the places you listed under Step #2. Choose an activity from your Self-Care Worksheet to do at the beginning of the appointment. Do the same activity each time, as this will create a comforting and grounding ritual.

Which self-care activity did you choose?

STEP #8—START THE CLOCK

Set a timer (either on a watch, phone or computer) for however many minutes you have scheduled the appointment for.

STEP #9—LET THE MEETING BEGIN

1) Take a deep breath and say (aloud or silently), “So, Fear, what brings you in today?”
2) Then, totally immerse yourself in it.
3) During the meeting you can: dialogue out loud, journal, scream, stomp around, punch the air, dance like Kevin Bacon, laugh in its face, video or audio record yourself, draw, sing about it.
4) Don’t stop until your timer goes off.
5) Take another deep breath and say, “Well, thanks for coming, Fear. See you at our next appointment.”

STEP #10—SELF-CARE AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

Choose a Post-Appointment Self-Care Activity. This can be the same or different from the one at the beginning. Again, do the same one every time, so as to signify to yourself that this appointment is over and you can return back to your life.
Which self-care activity did you choose?

TIP: Start paying attention to when your fears make themselves known. Get into the habit of keeping track of them to tend to later, and create a ritual for when you will be spending quality time with these fears. This will reduce the amount of distraction they create in your life and put you in the driver’s seat as to when they will be addressed.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”: TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH

If you believe in the power of the mind to change a negative to a positive then give any or all of the following pointers a try.

Think of these as “magic elixirs” that you can whip out of your cloak at the first sign of a fear arising and douse it with these tips.

#1—TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH BY REMEMBERING WHY YOU ARE DOING THIS

“People don’t transition to become less happy.”

I heard this at the 2015 TRANSforming Gender Conference in Boulder, Colorado and was struck by its simple yet empowering truth.

We all go through transitions over the course of our lifetimes. We go through them hoping to improve our lives, even if it is totally nerve-wracking while we’re doing it. Whether or not you end up literally “transitioning” in regard to your gender identity, taking a closer look at yourself will more than likely result in a life transition for you.

Go back to your logline from p.32. Remind yourself why it is you are tired of feeling the way you feel, and of living the way you live. Although you may have unhappy moments along the way, your goal is to move more towards happy (or content, or peaceful, or balanced—whatever word works for you!).

Re-write your logline in your workbook. You cannot write, read, or see it often enough!

#2—TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH BY FOCUSING ON THE POSSIBLE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Sometimes it’s hard to know what you are going to end up enjoying about any sort of transition you are making in life. We all fear change, and yet we need change in order to learn and grow.

Right now, take a moment to imagine what your life could be like several years after you have embarked upon your “gender identity journey.” Think about what sorts of positive changes have occurred. Let your mind wander through the possibilities of your “new life.”

List at least five positive changes that you can see resulting from making this “life transition.”

What you’ve written above gives you hope. And hope is one of the most powerful elixirs you can use against fear.

#3—TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH BY EXPOSING YOURSELF TO MORE POSITIVE NARRATIVES

Many of you use social media, reading through the feed on your favorite platforms several times a day.

More than likely you are “friends” with or follow people who are trans, transgender, gender non-conforming, or questioning their gender identity. You may “like” or subscribe to groups and
organizations that share these kinds of stories and experiences.

Next time you are perusing social media pay attention to the type of messages, videos, and stories you are taking in. Let’s use the first 10-20 posts, tweets, pictures, messages, or videos that you see.

How many of them leave you feeling better? Inspired? Motivated? Excited?

Write down this number in your workbook.

How many of them leave you feeling worse? Worried? Defeated? Depressed?

Write down this number in your workbook.

If your “worse” number is higher than your “better” number, then something needs to change. Go through and remove, hide, un-like, un-follow, or block the people and groups that you need to distance yourself from (even if it’s just temporarily) so you can increase the positive number of messages you are receiving and decrease amount of the negative messages.

TIP: Start keeping track of your social media exposure and what it is that makes you feel better and what makes you feel worse. Take this empowering step towards gaining control over the types of messages you are taking in on a daily basis.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”:
BE KIND TO YOURSELF

“As trans people, we are often inundated with toxic ideas about trans identity and, as a result, we
often internalize much of the transphobia* we encounter, whether we realize it or not.”

— Sam Dylan Finch

There’s a good chance you are unaware as to how many negative messages you’ve been taking in over the years having to do with gender and gender identity. These messages create self-loathing and shame, which Fear gladly and hungrily feeds upon.

Therefore we need to minimize how much you might be working against yourself during your gender identity exploration.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF BY PUTTING YOUR SELF-CARE CHECKLIST TO WORK

Find at least one activity a day to do for yourself from your checklist. Preferably more, and sometimes several at the same time!

Continue to add ideas to the checklist as you discover what it is you enjoy in life, what brings you into balance, and what gives you comfort.

If you didn’t receive an adequate amount of “care” during your childhood and/or didn’t have self-care modeled for you this might be difficult to try, and can feel uncomfortable initially. Take it slow and allow yourself to adjust to self-care becoming a regular part of your daily life. Your body and mind will eventually begin to ease into it, so keep at it until it becomes as natural to you as breathing.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF BY CUTTING DOWN ON EXCESSIVE ESCAPISM

You may notice that you indulge too much and too often in certain activities on your Self-Care Checklist. These activities, if done in excess, can become distractions and escapes that inhibit forward motion.

If reading that caused you to feel a little uncomfortable, take a moment to ask yourself, “Is this true for me?”

If so, then this is no easy step to take. These activities have provided you with comfort over the years, protecting you from whatever it is you have buried about yourself.

However, these self-care activities crossed over at some point into an avoidance technique.

* What activities on your Self-Care Checklist do you think you might use for avoidance and/or excessive escapism?

Let’s approach cutting back on avoidance and excessive escapism in your life step-by-step.

*You’ll learn more about transphobia in Stage Three (p.116).
STEP #1—CUTTING BACK A LITTLE AT A TIME

If you’re spending, on average, four hours a day playing online games, cut it down to three. If you watch Netflix twelve hours a week, cut it down to ten. If you’re on social media three hours a day, cut it down to two-and-a-half.

During this “down time” you can:

- Continue to work through more of this guide
- Explore whatever it is that this guide stirs up or inspires in you.
- Journal about the challenges you encounter, what did and didn’t work, and how you are going to stay motivated to keep moving forward.
- Do a different Self-Care Activity that you know is not excessively escapist

Continue to chip away at the amount of time you are in the “excessive zone” with any of the Self-Care Activities. You’ll know you’ve reached your “sweet spot” with these activities when you sense they are helping you recuperate, as opposed helping you avoid.

What else could you do during the times when you are used to doing this activity?

STEP #2—DETERMINING THE “RIGHT” AMOUNT OF TIME

Next time you are over-indulging in one of your self-nurturing or self-care activities listen for that little voice inside that says, “I should probably stop soon” or “Just one more episode/game/chapter.”

Think of this voice as an alarm clock inside of you that has a snooze button. The little voice goes off—you hit the snooze. The little voice goes off again fifteen minutes later. “Time to stop,” the little voice says. This is when you should close down/shut it/walk away and find something else to do.

Document when this happens for you. Is it a certain amount of time, like an hour?

At what point during your activity do you usually begin to hear this voice?

Once you get into the habit of catching this voice when it comes up:

- Set an actual timer for fifteen-minutes, giving you time to “wrap it up.”
- When the timer goes off, stop what you are doing. No matter what.
- Have something else already planned for you to do when you stop.

STEP #3—FIND OTHER THINGS TO DO

The activity doesn’t matter as much as being sure to already have it planned.

One trick is to make this something that you have to do at the time you are supposed to stop what you are doing:

- Tell someone you’ll call them at the time you need to stop your activity.
- Tell someone you will meet them somewhere or pick them up at a certain time.
Have a class, meeting, or gathering you are really motivated to go to.
Promise to meet or pick up a friend or family member.

Activities on your Self-Care Checklist engage a completely different part of your mind, change up your environment, and awaken your other sense can help to break these patterns of behavior as well. This can include physical activity, meditation, cooking or baking, listening to music, taking a shower, sitting in a park, etc.

What activities can you schedule for yourself ahead of time so you can do them once you stop your excessively escapist activity?

BE KIND TO YOURSELF BY CREATING A “NURTURER”

At the very heart of self-care is the ability to receive “nurturing.”

What does the word “nurturing” bring up for you? What do you imagine, ideally, that the experience of “nurturing” would feel like to you?

List these feelings, images, and descriptions in your workbook.

This will be different for everyone. Some people need warm, comforting, and gentle nurturing. Others need nurturing that is wise and mentor-like. Still others enjoy a more playful, enthusiastic, and empowering side of nurturing. There’s even those who connect best with the “tough love” approach of nurturing.

Your Nurturer can also work together with your Bodyguard as a team. I’ve had “meetings in my mind” with both my Nurturer and Jules where I ask them for advice, complain about life, and lean on them for support. I’ve even learned to make it fun, such as joining in with them while they indulged in a “day of pampering” (Jules truly enjoys painting my Nurturer’s toenails!)

So, now it’s time for you to create your own Nurturer. Again, this is someone you can to turn to when you are in need of comfort, guidance, warmth, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and care.

Describe your Nurturer in detail in your workbook.

This is your exercise is for you to do with as you please, so make it work for you! If you want to picture an animal instead of a person, such as a lioness, or a mythical creature, then by all means do so. The only stipulation is they need to be someone or something that you can easily conjure up in your mind when you are in need of nurturing.

Imagine them holding you, preparing you tea or a big lunch, listening to you, giving you advice, or making you laugh. The mind is powerful enough that, if you allow yourself to really sink into these experiences with your Nurturer, you will literally “feel better” afterwards: a reduction of your blood pressure, a slowing of your breathing, a calming of your mind.

TIP: The next time you are in need of comfort call upon your Nurturer for help. This will serve as a reminder to you that your self-care must become a priority, and that you deserve to be treated with care, compassion, and love.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”: FINDING A MENTOR

In many stories the main character has a “mentor” who they can turn to for guidance, support, and encouragement. This archetype has appeared in storytelling for centuries. All mentors have certain qualities in common and at the same time are strikingly unique from one another.

As you can see mentors vary in personality and practice when it comes to how they assist the main character(s) of a story:

- Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda (Star Wars)
- Gandalf and Galadriel (The Lord of the Rings)
- Haymitch (The Hunger Games)
- Mr. Miyagi (The Karate Kid)
- Xena (“Xena: Warrior Princess”)
- Dumbledore (Harry Potter)
- Rainbow Blaze (“My Little Pony”)
- Professor Charles Xavier and Storm (X-Men)
- Alfred (Batman)
- Buffy (“Buffy the Vampire Slayer”)
- Morpheus and The Oracle (The Matrix)
- Rufus (Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure)
- Splinter (“Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles”)
- Tyler Durden (Fight Club)
- Dr. Miranda Bailey (“Grey’s Anatomy”)
- Jack Donaghy (“30 Rock”)

If you are familiar with any of these examples you’ll know that Mentors aren’t perfect or without their own struggles. However they do carry about them a certain air of wisdom. They’ve been on adventures of their own and have returned with advice and knowledge to pass on to others.

There are two different types of mentors you can seek out:

#1—A “HANDS ON” MENTOR

This is someone you can actually interact with on a regular basis.

#2—A “HANDS OFF” MENTOR

This is someone you don’t know personally but, because they have made their wisdom available for you, and others, to acquire.

FINDING A “HANDS ON” MENTOR

A “hands on” mentor can be someone you meet with in person. Thanks to the internet, this can also be someone with whom you interact with through email, chat, social media, or a service like Skype.

A “hands on” mentor can help you on your journey by:
Sharing resources that provide additional support and encouragement
Sharing resources related to transitioning (if you end up needing them)
Sharing stories of challenges they encountered and how they got through them
Sharing stories of their successes and what they did to make them happen
Sharing their fears, and helping to normalize the ones you are having
Offering advice (when asked for it)
Challenging you to step out of your comfort zone

HOW YOU CAN FIND A “HANDS ON” MENTOR

☐ Conduct a search for Pride Centers in your state or country to see if they have resources support groups where you can find a mentor.

☐ Conduct a search for Gender Identity Centers in your state or country to see if they have support groups where you can find a mentor.

☐ Use your favorite social media outlets to reach out to individuals you admire.

☐ Seek out message boards that relate to your specific gender identity questions and pay attention to who offers advice and guidance on the boards. Reach out to them either individually or on the message board itself.

☐ Seek out blogs that speak to you and send a message to the blogger to see if they’d be interested in mentoring you.

☐ Seek out video blogs that speak to you and send a message to the blogger to see if they’d be interested in mentoring you.

☐ Find a therapist in your area you can work with (try to find one who has experience working with trans/transgender and gender non-conforming clients). Keep in mind that a therapist will have strict boundaries in place when it comes to the relationship that will limit the type and frequency of interaction you have with them.*

☐ Seek out establishments in your area where you have a higher chance of encountering persons who have been through what you are going through.

☐ Ask around (either in person or online) about whether anyone knows of someone who could provide mentorship to you.

✍ In your workbook, list any of the suggestions you can see yourself following up on.

*See the Further Reading section for help with locating a trans-friendly therapist.
TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SEARCHING FOR A “HANDS ON” MENTOR

BE ASSERTIVE DURING YOUR SEARCH

This will be hard for some of you who have a more reserved disposition. There are always exceptions to the rule, but in most cases a mentor isn’t going to seek you out. You will need to put yourself out there and make your needs known.

BE CLEAR DURING YOUR SEARCH

Have in mind what it is you hope a mentor can help you with, and make this clear when you begin to contact potential mentors.

BE PATIENT IN YOUR SEARCH

You may get turned down several times before you find the right mentor. Don’t give up! Just like any other relationship it can take time to find one that really works for you.

BE WILLING TO OFFER SOMETHING IN RETURN

Although the hope would be you could find someone to offer mentorship at no cost, it’s a good idea from the start to offer something in return. In some cases this will be money, but you could also provide compensation in creative ways as well. Offer to take them to coffee or a meal, or to share a service that you are skilled at, such as “tech,” graphic design, home maintenance, house cleaning, or accounting. Letting them know that you value their time and that you are willing to pay for their service can increase the chances in them saying “yes.”

BE RESPECTFUL OF THEIR TIME

If someone is doing this for you at no monetary cost, be sure to have a discussion from the start to set boundaries around how often you will be in communication with one another. Create a contract if need be that you both can sign, even if its informal. This will prevent your mentor from burning out, and keeps you with a mentor!

REMEMBER, THEY ARE ONLY HUMAN

If your mentor hasn’t been trained how to provide mentorship you’ll need to cut them some slack. They might not always have the right answer for you. They might get grouchy (see the list of fictional mentors for proof of that!), or they might go through a period where they need to take a break. The more understanding you show them the more likely they’ll stick with you for the long haul.

In your workbook, set aside a page where you can keep track of who you would like to seek out as a “hands on” mentor. Take note of when you attempted to contact them as well as your thoughts about whether or not they are someone you desire to be your mentor.
Benefits of Finding a “Hands Off” Mentor

A “hands off” mentor is someone who you won’t be interacting with on an individual or personal basis (unless you are lucky enough to meet them at a conference or convention!). There are several benefits to finding a “hands off” mentor, as opposed to having a “real life” one:

- If you are more of an “I can do this on my own” type of person, studying the ways of others can give you the mentor’s wisdom while not actually having to engage with anyone.
- Since you are learning from your mentor through “self study” it’s completely on your schedule without having to wait for someone else to respond to you when you need them.
- If you live in an isolated area where you aren’t able to connect with a “hands on” mentor in person, you can always find “hands off” mentors through books, blogs, videos, etc.
- For those who are especially uncomfortable with interpersonal communication, it eases you into the world of others who have been through what you have been through without them needing to know you are there.
- There’s none of the awkwardness or potential letdown that can come from negotiating boundaries, communication mishaps, “drama,” etc.
- You can have as many “hands off” mentors as you want!

How You Can Find a “Hands Off” Mentor

- Find people you can follow on YouTube. Be sure to pick those who update fairly regularly, or at least have posted enough videos for you to get a lot out of if they’ve stopped posting.
- Find persons you can follow on Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, reddit, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.
- Listen to podcasts that pertain to what you are experiencing.
- Find books that were written by people who have gone through/are going through what you are experiencing, particularly positive ones you can relate to.
- Find bloggers and/or writers to follow.
- Research well-known persons whose stories you admire and study their gender exploration journeys: musicians, models, filmmakers, politicians, actresses or actors, etc.

In your workbook, list any of the suggestions you can see yourself following up on.

How to Make the Best of Having a “Hands Off” Mentor

Try Not to Get Overwhelmed

There’s a big world out there with many folks you could potentially use as a “hands off” mentor. It’s okay to start with a broad search, then continue to fine tune it as you discover which words and phrases help narrow down your search. Make a list of 3-5 possible candidates, and then do some research on each one. Keep all of them if you want, or trim it down to just one—whatever works best for you!
MAKE IT FUN

Some of you might enjoy having a daily or weekly routine in which you set aside time to learn or seek information from your mentor. What matters is that you feel like they are actually a part of your life to guide and support you with just the right story, quote, or message.

ENGAGE WITH THEM REGULARLY

Since you won’t actually be interacting with this person you’ll need to have other ways of keeping them “alive” for you. Hang up pictures of them; use post-its to display their inspiring quotes; listen to their recordings while you drive, while going for a walk, or when you need a pick-me-up; talk to others who admire them (aka “fans”). As long as you pick someone who will be a healthy influence on you there’s nothing wrong with getting excited about having them in your life!

In your workbook, set aside a page where you can keep track of who you will seek out as a “hands off” mentors. Take note of what information you have gathered about them, including the work they have done that you connect with. Once you have your final list of “hands off” mentors keep track of what you have learned from them, reflecting upon how they are helping you on your journey.

TIP: Having hands-on or hands-off mentors (or both!) can be great additions to your support system. Take some time to explore both options and see what would be the best fit for you.
“FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY”: BUILDING A SUPPORT TEAM

Although it can sometimes come across as a cliché, there’s a reason we oftentimes see the main character of a story assemble a “team” when they are in need of assistance fulfilling their quest.

This approach to problem solving is also used in roleplaying games, where you can have any number of people on a team, each of them fulfilling roles critical to the mission.

This “team assembling” is something we can do in real life as well!

It’s highly unlikely that one person can have all of the talents, skills, and abilities needed to get tackle a project or a challenge. The goal of this exercise is for you to brainstorm who could be on your team, and what steps you can take to find them.

TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR TEAM

- **You can search for all of them at once, or just one at a time.** You can also have more than one of each kind of team member. Everyone is different when it comes to the type of team they need, so follow your gut on this.

- **You can make it one size now, and another later.** You can start a small team now and then add people to it later, or have a bigger team that you can make smaller later. Your journey is going to change course over time, so your team will more than likely need to change as well.

- **Apply the concept of having “hands off” team members.** If you are socially and/or geographically isolated use the concept of having a “hands off mentor” and how you can apply it to the formation of your team.

- **You can use fictional characters.** If finding “real life” team members is unrealistic right now you can use fictional characters to fill these roles. You can engage with these characters through visualization, writing exercises, and other creative methods (see the “Conversation with Jules” on p.42 to see an example of how to do this).

There’s no right or wrong way to go about forming your team. The goal is for you to have companionship on your journey.

HOW TO FIND YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

Some of these tips are the same as when you were looking for a mentor, so use those methods again if they worked for you.

- Think about family members who could be a part of your team. This includes extended family, and those who are “like family” to you.

- Think about those in your friend or acquaintance group who could be a part of your team.

- Think about everyone you encounter on a regular basis: teachers, coaches, pastors, bosses, co-workers, local business owners or employees you see regularly, bartenders, etc. Could
any of them be a part of your team?

- Do a search for Pride, LGBT, or Gender Identity Centers in your state or country to see if they have support groups where you can find team members.

- Use your favorite social media outlets and reach out to individuals you admire to see if they will respond to you personally.

- Seek out message boards that relate to your specific gender identity journey. Reach out to the board in general and then individual members as you get to know them better.

- Seek out blogs that speak to you and send a message to the blogger to see if they’d be interested in being a part of your team.

- Seek out video blogs that speak to you and do the same.

- Find a therapist in your area who you can work with (try to find one who has experience working with trans/transgender and gender non-conforming clients).

- Seek out establishments in your area where you have a higher chance of encountering persons who have experienced what you are experiencing. This could include places in your area that are LGBT owned and operated, gatherings that are progressive-leaning, open and affirming churches, or perhaps traveling to a bigger city within your state.

- Ask around (either in person or online) if anyone knows of someone who could be a part of your team.

PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR TEAM

Your team will consist of the following members:

- The Mentor
- The Comic Relief
- The Tough Love Friend
- The Cheerleader
- The Problem Solver
- The Good Listener
- The Sidekick

THE MENTOR

After completing the last exercise you should already have someone in mind for this, or maybe even found someone to fill this spot on the team.

Who is your Mentor (or Mentors)?

📝 List up to three people in your workbook.
THE COMIC RELIEF

Self-discovery is not for the faint-of-heart. You’re going to need someone who will be there for you when you need to laugh and take things not-so-seriously. This person can point out when you need to take a break and relax and have some fun.

Do you already know someone(s) who can be your Comic Relief? If so, who?

List up to three people in your workbook.

If you don’t know someone(s) who can be your Comic Relief, where can you go in search for them?

List up to three places in your workbook.

THE TOUGH LOVE FRIEND

This is the person who will always be direct and honest with you. They have a “no bullcrap” policy and won’t hesitate to tell you the truth, even though it will be hard for you to hear.

The key is that they speak from a place of caring for you—they truly want the best for you. They show you they care by recognizing how hard it must be to have them point out the truth, and patiently standing by you as you continue to work through your challenges.

You may leave a conversation with them feeling sore and weary. But, like a deep muscle massage, you know you needed to go through it to become healthier.

This friend knows they can be difficult to have in your life, but they also don’t make apologies for who they are in your life.

Do you already know someone(s) who can be your Tough Love Friend? If so, who?

List up to three people in your workbook.

If you don’t know someone(s) who can be your Tough Love Friend, where can you go in search for them?

List up to three places in your workbook.

THE CHEERLEADER

The Cheerleader is someone who will be an uplifting, positive person in your life. They will always try to get you to see the bright side of things and remind you of how awesome you are.

They will have unwavering faith in you, tell you repeatedly how much they enjoy and appreciate you, and that they can’t believe everyone else in the world doesn’t feel the same way. They remind you of how you deserve better in your life.

They will do this for you even if they are having a bad day, or if they have a lot going on in their life.
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

(in fact you might need to keep an eye on this for them, so they don’t burn themselves out being your Cheerleader!). They absolutely love being this type of person in your life, especially if they know they are that person to you. The Cheerleader can also help provide a balance to the role your The Tough Love Friend plays in your life.

**Do you already know someone(s) who can be your Cheerleader? If so, who?**

eña List up to three people in your workbook.

**If you don’t know someone(s) who can be your Cheerleader, where can you go in search for them?**

نة List up to three places in your workbook.

**THE PROBLEM SOLVER**

This is the team member you turn to when you need someone resourceful, organized, and detail-oriented to help you move to the next step of your journey.

Although this team member is not the best at listening, they are excellent at being “put to work” if asked. Give them a task to get to the bottom of, and they will delight in doing so for you.

For example, if you haven’t formed your entire team yet, ask The Problem Solver where you can go in search for them and they will come up with a list of websites, clubs, and organizations for you to start with.

You may not take every bit of advice from The Problem Solver, but chances are you will end up using enough of it to make this person an essential member of your team.

**Do you already know someone(s) who can be The Problem Solver? If so, who?**

نة List up to three people in your workbook.

**If you don’t know someone(s) who can be The Problem Solver where can you go in search for them?**

نة List up to three places in your workbook.

**THE GOOD LISTENER**

The Good Listener does just that—they quietly listen. They won’t try to offer advice, or try to fix things for you, or tell you what you want to hear, or trash-talk whoever is upsetting you.

They share space with you compassionately, attentively, kindly, and without judgment. After talking with them you’ll have a feeling of, “Wow, I feel better being able to let that all off my chest—thank you!”

The Good Listener is of great benefit to someone who gets a lot out of processing things out loud,
and can come to their own conclusions by doing so. It’s like writing in a journal, or talking to
yourself, but with a flesh and blood human being there to keep you company while you do.

Do you already know someone(s) who can be The Good Listener? If so, who?
☞ List up to three people in your workbook.

If you don’t know someone(s) who can be The Good Listener where can you go in
search for one?
☞ List up to three places in your workbook.

THE SIDEKICK

This team member always has your back and will be on your side, without fail! They have very
strong opinions about those who hurt you, and are unapologetic when it comes to how protective
they are of you.

Their enthusiasm for your well being may be overwhelming at times, but their consistent loyalty to
you makes it well worth it.

Although this unwavering devotion may sound a lot like The Cheerleader, The Sidekick is going to
have more of an “edge” to them.

For example, if someone says something to you that is upsetting The Cheerleader might say, “Don’t
listen to them, they are taking their own crap out on you. You’re awesome!”

The Sidekick would be more likely to say, “What??? Where are they, I’ll kick their ass!”

Do you already know someone(s) who can be The Sidekick? If so, who?
☞ List up to three people in your workbook.

If you don’t know someone(s) who can be The Sidekick where can you go in search
for one?
☞ List up to three places in your workbook.

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF HAVING A “SUPPORT TEAM”

➢ Keep this list handy so you can turn to it easily when in need.

➢ Be open to listing someone more than once if they are able to take on more than one
role.

➢ Tell the people on this list that they are on your team, and which role they represent.
Chances are they will feel flattered, and will take their responsibility as that team member
quite seriously.
Remember to thank your team members for being a part of your journey.

Sometimes your team members might need a break, or will even ask to be released from the team. Although this may be difficult to hear, it's important to respect their boundaries and give them the time and space they are requesting.

You are more than likely a team member for someone else in your life, or will be at some point in the future. Think about which team member you would be, and see that as a unique strength that you have to offer others.

TIP: Use this idea of building a “support team” in such a way that makes the most sense for you and your journey. Be open to changing your team along the way, based upon your needs and the needs of the team.
SUMMARY OF YOUR RESPONSES
STAGE ONE: PREPARATION

Nicely done, you made it through Stage One: Preparation!

You’ve done a lot of work to get this far. Let’s reflect and remember what you have accomplished so far.

✍️ Take a few minutes and go back to your answers from each part of this section and consolidate them onto 1-2 pages of your workbook.

This will give you:

✓ An overview of what you’ve worked on so far
✓ A chance to revise anything, now that you’ve had some time to reflect on your answers
✓ A quick and easy way to look at your game plan for greater success on this journey

CHAPTER ONE: WHY DO I NEED TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH? (P.29)

Are you uncomfortable with your assigned sex at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES MAYBE NO

CHAPTER TWO: HOLD ON, THIS IS NERVE-WRACKING! (P.35)

➢ What is your logline?

CHAPTER THREE: FEELING THE FEAR AND DOING IT ANYWAY (P.39)

➢ What are your fears?
➢ Who is your “Bodyguard?”
➢ What days/times do you have set aside to meet with your fears?
➢ What are the ways you can take a positive approach to your gender exploration?
➢ In what ways can you be sure you are being kind to yourself throughout your journey?
➢ Who is your “Nurturer?”
➢ Who is your mentor(s)? (Either “hands on,” “hands off,” or both).
➢ Who are your team members, and what roles do they play?
TIP: Remember, your recorded answers from this stage of the journey is a living document of your personal history. This means you can go back and change your responses whenever you want, as well as fill in any exercises you were not ready or able to complete.
STAGE TWO:

REFLECTION
INTRODUCTION TO STAGE TWO: REFLECTION

“Study the past if you would define the future.” — Confucius

The tools you acquired from Stage One: Preparation will increase your chances of making it through this journey in one piece.

In Stage Two: Reflection it’s time to start the “digging in” process and see what we discover.

In this stage you will:

✓ **Explore the origins** of your understanding of gender, how you expressed your gender, and how others reacted to you when you did this.

✓ **Examine the challenges** that arose during your adolescent and teenage years and how they affected your ability to understand your gender identity.

✓ **Expose any shame or guilt** you are carrying with you as a result of the experiences you had during this time period.

At one point in your life, you were YOU. This was the YOU that existed before the influences of society and human nature came in with their rules, fears, and uncertainties.

There are parts of “you” that were hidden away during this time. That “you” is still there, has a lot to say, and is hoping you are ready to listen.

These exercises will help establish a direct line of communication with this “you,” revealing important information that is essential to your journey.
TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND DURING STAGE TWO: REFLECTION

- **Continue to practice self-care.** These exercises might be difficult. Be sure to follow all suggestions for Pre- and Post- Activity Self-Care.

- **Make note of any issues that come up.** Difficult memories might be stirred up while you’re going through these exercises. Make a list in your workbook of any items you know you will want to revisit with a counselor, a friend, or on your own.

- **There are no “right” responses.** This is your story. It is just as valid as the experience of anyone else who is working through *Stage Two: Reflection*.

- **Don’t worry about “meeting criteria.”** Today’s model for “gender identity” is far more about discovery, exploration, and affirmation than it has been in the past. There are physicians, surgeons, and therapists with a “gender affirming” approach who understand there’s no simple checklist that determines someone’s gender identity. As you work through this section stay vigilant to any “black and white” approaches that might disrupt your discovery process. Remember to let go of labels and diagnoses, at least for now, and give yourself some room and freedom to explore.

- **Try not to compare yourself to others.** You may have encountered individuals who claim, “You have to have felt certain things in certain ways at certain times in order to truly have an issue with your gender identity.” *This is completely untrue!* Comparing yourself to them or anyone else will only bring up unnecessary doubts and confusion.

- **Be patient with yourself.** Remember your Bodyguard from *Stage One: Preparation? (p.40)* They are beginning to pace nervously up and down in front that trunk in your unconscious. It’s going to take a bit of prodding to convince them to let you open it. Go back to Stage One, as well as your Self-Care Checklist, to remind your Bodyguard why...

  *...now is the time to open the trunk.*
Chapter One:
You & Your Gender Identity:
Childhood (Ages 3-11)

In many ways you were a “blank slate” when you arrived in this world. However, immediately after your birth you began to be influenced by those around you.

Were these “good” influences or “bad” influences? This doesn’t matter as much as accepting the fact that it happened (at least for the purpose of this exercise). Not only does everyone go through the experience of being influenced by those around them, but you are an influence on the lives of those around you as well!

Keeping this in mind will help you focus on the task at hand for Stage Two: Reflection:

You will discover who you were meant to be before those influences began to take over.

This version of “you” goes back to whenever you were old enough to think, communicate, and connect a few dots. You developed “self-awareness,” and with that came preferences, likes, dislikes, and the ability to make choices.

I conducted a survey of my Facebook community (“Conversations with a Gender Therapist”), which includes a wide range of persons who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. I posed the question, “How old were you when you can first recall having questions about your gender identity?”

Take a look at some of the responses:

Around three, I believe. I recall I thought “it” looked like a snail, and seeing my grandfather salt snails and slugs to be rid of them, I sat on a pile of rock salt to be rid of “it”.

It was when I was about eight that I cut off all my hair and tried to act like a totally new person at school named Jake. Of course I fooled no one and it wasn't well received.

When I was around eight is when I started playing online games and realized I could be whichever gender I wanted, and even have no gender sometimes! Even though I didn’t know what it meant at the time, I remember it being really cool to be able to do that.

Very first time—three. I vividly remember wondering why I couldn’t dress like boys or go to the bathroom standing up. There’s even pictures of me sitting on the toilet the “wrong” way!

I was 4 years old when I knew something didn’t match up.

I remember how much fun it was, when I was young, to be able to dress up for Halloween as whatever or whoever I wanted. Once I hit puberty it seemed like there was more pressure to dress up as “my gender.”

I think I began questioning gender-roles, at the very least, when I was 3 or 4.
I do remember being 7-8 and praying and asking God to make me a girl by morning when I woke up.

I definitely remember being in grade school, probably around 7 or 8 years old and finding myself disagreeing with people when they said I was a boy or when my teachers separated us into girls and boys.

As you can see, the memories can date back to as early as three years old. Although they may not have known what was going on or what to call it, at the very least they knew they felt a certain way.

Now it’s time for you to journey back and remember how you felt.

💡 TIP: Keep these suggestions in mind as you begin You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood (ages 3-11):

- **Everyone is different when it comes to how far back they can remember childhood**, therefore it’s okay if you aren’t able to remember these earlier years. Do the best you can—it’s possible other memories will resurface later as you look at your adolescent and teenage years. You can then return to this exercise and fill in any blanks.

- **Some of you may have gone through childhood without realizing** there was something “up” with your gender identity, only to realize it later in life. This is a completely valid experience as well! If you don’t connect with the exercises in this chapter it’s okay to skip them.
PREPARE FOR SELF CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter, and an activity for afterwards.

🔍 Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?
🔍 Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

#1—At this time do your “Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity.”

#2—When you are finished, turn the page to begin the first exercise.
"YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: CHILDHOOD (AGES 3-11)"
UNDERSTANDING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER IDENTITY IN CHILDHOOD

As a child you began your self-discovery process *tabula rasa* (as a blank slate), going about life as if there was nothing else but just “being yourself.” You may have been aware of your gender during this time, or perhaps even had a “genderless” feel to who you were (a.k.a. the feeling of having no gender).

Eventually you started to notice there was something beyond just your own “personal world” in which you existed: a “bigger world” with certain rules, traditions and beliefs for you to learn and, eventually, adopt.

The following exercise will walk you through examples of these rules, traditions and beliefs for the purpose of pinpointing which ones you were exposed to.

YOUR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO “THE BIGGER WORLD”

Read through the items listed below. Which of these rules, traditions, and beliefs were you exposed to between the ages of 3-11?

☐ In your workbook, write down each item from this list that applies to your experience in childhood.

☐ You learned that your society is divided up between boys and girls, and that you were supposed to fit into one of those categories.
☐ You were exposed to TV, movies, media, and other means of communication that your society used to let you know how you were “supposed to” behave.
☐ You interacted with other kids (at school, on the playground, siblings and cousins, etc.) and noticed how everyone tended to fall into certain roles, both in real-life and during pretend-play.
☐ You were “classified and socialized” as a certain gender (“This is what girls do, this is what boys do—since you are a ______, you need to follow these rules”).
☐ You were rewarded for behaving like your assigned-sex-at-birth.
☐ You were scolded/punished for not behaving like your assigned-sex-at-birth.
☐ The more you tried to express your true self, the more uncomfortable social situations became for you.
☐ No one else talked about feeling the same way as you—therefore you assumed you were the only person in the world who felt the way you did.
☐ You felt like you were “acting” the way you were supposed to as your assigned-sex-at-birth, and hoped you were doing it right.
☐ You felt a sense of shame, embarrassment, and guilt for expressing and experiencing yourself in certain ways. You felt like you had to either stop doing them or had to do them in secret.
☐ You saw other people being put down or bullied for showing signs of being “outside the norm.”
☐ You knowingly or unknowingly experimented with different gender roles when playing (including clothing, items, and behaviors).

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very much” and 10 being “a whole lot,” how
much did each of the above items impact, influence, or confuse your sense of gender and your ability to express it?

Record your answers in your workbook, also indicating which one(s) you ranked the highest.
“YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: CHILDHOOD (AGES 3-11)”: YOUR UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF GENDER IDENTITY IN CHILDHOOD

There is a fallacy that says you must have the “right” answers to “prove” you experienced discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth during childhood. The truth is we all come from different backgrounds and have unique ways in which we experience ourselves. There is no cookie-cutter approach to examining the roots of your gender identity questions.

Remember, the fact that you are still working through this guide means you are meant to continue on this gender identity journey.

There are many reasons why one’s experience of gender identity in childhood can differ so much from someone else’s—and all of these reasons are valid!

In the following exercise presents examples of these variables so you can understand which ones may have affected your experience of your gender identity in childhood.

INFLUENCES ON YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER IDENTITY IN CHILDHOOD

Read through the items listed below. Which of these scenarios did you experience between the ages of 3-11?

- Some kids were raised in a strict “binary” environment (“boys do this and girls do that”) where consequences were imposed when any resistance to their place on the binary was shown. These consequences might have included: being teased, scolded, receiving “corporal punishment,” and/or being sent to a counselor whose job it was to talk you out of how you were feeling. Therefore a child might have pushed away their true feelings in order to protect themselves from emotional, mental, and/or physical harm.

- Some kids were raised in a more “gender neutral” environment at home. The parents may or may not have been aware they had created this type of environment. This kind of upbringing could result in a child who was not aware there were other beliefs in the “bigger world” about gender stereotypes, gender roles, and expectations to conform to their assigned-sex-at-birth. A child may be older before they notice these beliefs exist outside of their home, which would affect how they process this.

- Some kids were raised in a community that was intolerant, fearful, and/or ignorant when it comes to understanding differences between one another. This could be due to: living in a specific geographical region, growing up during a certain time period, the lack of resources and information, less exposure (and therefore more resistance) to progressive changes and ideas, and/or certain cultural traditions (religious upbringings, military and other similar cultures, ethnic traditions). Therefore a child may have been raised to believe that what they were experiencing within themselves was wrong or, at the very least, not knowing this was something that anyone else in the world experienced. This could result in the repression of one’s authentic feelings because of pressure from the community and the desire to avoid its negative judgments.

- Some kids were raised in a community that was liberal, open-minded, and accepting when it comes to understanding differences between one another. This could be
due to living in a certain regions that has embraced more progressive ideas, or being surrounded by persons who are “different” and seeing them treated with kindness and respect. There may have been ample information available regarding how to embrace differences between one another. There may have been certain religious, cultural, or ethnic teachings that encouraged self-discovery. A child raised in this type of environment may have experienced freedom to express their gender however they pleased, and were encouraged to be creative and expressive. They may have never known there was a problem with who they were until they encountered someone or something outside of this environment that said something to the contrary.

- Some people are able to **recall childhood memories very easily**, and **others have a harder time with it**. This can be due to personality differences, the experience of trauma in childhood resulting in the need to repress memories, being introverted vs. extroverted, keeping a journal or not, having family members who can help fill in the blanks, and so on.

- Some kids **didn’t have a lot of exposure to anyone outside of their close family unit**. This could be due to: being home-schooled, parental careers that kept the family mobile, certain ethnic, cultural, or religious customs, isolation due to extreme stress in the home (alcoholism, severe mental illness, abuse), and so on. The impact of this on a child depends on the type of upbringing they received from the primary adults in their lives. It could result in the ability to form a strong sense of self that is untouched by the “ways of the world.” It could also result in a sense of self that is based only upon what the adults teach them as being “the truth.” Either way, until this child is exposed to the “real world” they may not know there are any other ways of being that exist outside of the one they were exposed to.

- Some kids had the experience of being raised in an environment where they were exposed to “gaslighting.” This is a type of **psychological abuse** in which a family member twists information about themselves (with the goal being they are “good” or “right”) to such an extent that it causes the child to question their sense of reality. This highly manipulative tactic can affect a child’s ability to self-reflect, as well as trust their own thoughts and feelings. This can create a lengthy list of issues for the child, including their ability to process any gender identity questions which arise.

✍ In your workbook, write down each item from this list that applies to your experience in childhood.
“YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: CHILDHOOD (AGES 3-11)”: REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS

Now it’s time to reflect upon your experience of your gender identity during your childhood years.

This section is broken up into three different age categories: 3-5, 6-9, and 10-11. If you don’t have memories during a particular time frame, it’s okay! Just move on to the next one. You can always fill it in later if something surfaces.

Call upon your feelings, your thoughts, your experiences, your physical sensations, as well as your visual memories.

SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED

- Draw pictures that express how you are feeling and what you are thinking
- Look back at childhood photos of yourself
- Listen to music you enjoyed during that time
- Create a collage
- Talk to others who knew you during this time (be selective of who you pick!)
- Turn to the examples given earlier in this exercise of how others described their experience for ideas about how to express yours.
- Don’t analyze your answers right now. Write whatever comes to mind without second-guessing or judging yourself.

Note: Later in this chapter we’ll be taking a closer look at the roles of guilt and shame during your growing up years. Be sure to list any examples of these feelings, even if it’s something you didn’t know at the time but are aware of now in retrospect.

REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 3-5

#1—What thoughts can you remember having about your gender from ages 3-5?
Write these thoughts down in your workbook.

#2—What feelings can you remember having about your gender from ages 3-5?
Write these feelings down in your workbook.

#3—How do you remember behaving in relation to your experienced gender, as well as its expression, from ages 3-5?
Write these examples down in your workbook.

#4—What was the reaction from those around when you behaved this way from ages 3-5?
Write these reactions down in your workbook.
REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 6-9

#1—What **thoughts** can you remember having about your gender from ages 6-9?

Write these thoughts down in your workbook.

#2—What **feelings** can you remember having about your gender from ages 6-9?

Write these feelings down in your workbook.

#3—How do you remember **behaving** in relation to your experienced gender, as well as its expression, from ages 6-9?

Write these examples down in your workbook.

#4—What was the reaction from those around when you behaved this way from ages 6-9?

Write these reactions down in your workbook.

REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 10-11

#1—What **thoughts** can you remember having about your gender from ages 10-11?

Write these thoughts down in your workbook.

#2—What **feelings** can you remember having about your gender from ages 10-11?

Write these feelings down in your workbook.

#3—How do you remember **behaving** in relation to your experienced gender, as well as its expression, from ages 10-11?

Write these examples down in your workbook.

#4—What was the reaction from those around when you behaved this way from ages 10-11?

Write these reactions down in your workbook.

☑ SELF-CARE REMINDER!

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It’s time to set this guide aside and spend some time with your chosen activity.
CHAPTER TWO:
YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY:
ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (AGES 12-17)

The timeframe of one’s adolescent and teenage years is usually filled with an expected amount of mental and emotional chaos. Look at what we’re expected to juggle when, only months beforehand, we were still considered to be children!

- The mental, emotional, and physical changes that occur with the onset of puberty.
- Developing a deeper sense of self and a broader awareness of our identity—starting to answer the question of “Who am I?”
- Searching for how you fit into society, this world, and what your contribution might be.
- Increasing desire for autonomy and independence, while at the same time not feeling ready for it.

Now imagine that, in addition to these challenges, you were also having feelings of confusion about your gender identity. Having uncertainty about something that is such a core part of “who you are” could have affected your ability to work through the developmental challenges that occur during this age. If unaddressed, this confusion may have also impacted the way you moved into the next stage of your life.

In the first part of this chapter we’ll be looking at how the formation of your “overall” identity during ages 12-17 can be affected by having issues about your gender arise. The second part will focus on the impact puberty had in this process.

Note: If you are currently an adolescent or teenager, change the past-tense wording to present tense.

TIP: As you look back at the memories from this time of your life keep in mind that some of them could be fuzzy, confusing, and even painful to examine. There may have been stressors present that would have rendered gender identity exploration/realization nearly impossible. They could include: poverty, mental illness (undiagnosed or diagnosed), learning/developmental disabilities, and abuse. Be sure to use your Self-Care Checklist as you move through this chapter, and go at a pace that feels right to you.
PREPARE FOR SELF CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter, and an activity for afterwards.

Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

#1—At this time do your “Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity.”

#2—When you are finished, turn the page to begin the first exercise.
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

“YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (AGES 12-17)”: IDENTITY FORMATION

A person’s “gender identity” is only one layer of their entire identity. Identity formation begins at a very young age, and then kicks into high gear between the ages of 12-17.

The adolescent and teenage stages are when you typically begin to develop a stronger sense of your “overall” identity by exploring who you are. You can do this on your own, but oftentimes you do this with others and then reflect on the feedback you get from them. This exploration occurs both consciously as well as unconsciously.

There are numerous challenges and obstacles to this self-exploration process that can be disruptive, resulting in someone being thwarted in their progress.

I surveyed my Facebook community (“Conversations with a Gender Therapist”) and posed this question to the trans/transgender and gender nonconforming members of my audience:

“What were your adolescent/teenage years like?”

Read through their responses below. Can you relate to any of their answers?

In your workbook, write down any of the answers from this list that you feel applies to your experience of your adolescent/teenage years.

I went gung-ho into anything that proved just how male and macho I was.

I learned a form of disassociation. I learned to be someone else when I walked out of the door.

I think I actually missed some of the life lessons and skills I was supposed to get at this time because my energy and attention was so consumed by repressing who I was.

Not too bad at all. It wasn’t until I was in my early 20’s that I realized I had been hiding something from myself without really knowing it.

I would say it drove me to either isolate myself or to gravitate to social groups where gender roles were less important to social acceptance or the hierarchy.

I didn't date, join clubs or attend student functions.

I always felt isolated and numb. I saw boys doing things I had no interest in and girls looking happy and confident and I SO wanted to be one of them.

I became very sexual very fast—at school I wore short skirts, tight V necks and push up bras.

Overall, this condition negatively affected my education, future romantic relationships (if any), employment and the role I play in “society”.

I could never be close with someone. If I let someone in close, they would be able to see the
During puberty I was extremely withdrawn, had extreme flashes of anger at home, and was prescribed one depression medication after another to no effect.

I could not sit through a sex education class because any discussion of male and female anatomy made me violently ill.

I felt like I didn’t fit in with either side of the binary, like a complete alien in the land of “young women” that I supposedly belonged in, but also an outsider looking in on the land of “young men.”

SELF-EXPLORATION CHALLENGES DURING YOUR ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS

Below you will find a list of ways one’s self-exploration process can be disrupted during their adolescent/teenage years, with an emphasis on gender identity. Do any of these apply to you and your experience?

In your workbook, write down any of the answers from this list that you feel apply to your experience of your adolescent/teenage years. Also, take a guess as to what age(s) you were and write that next to each answer.

- You acted like someone you weren’t in order to “fit in.”
- The way you carried yourself was met with resistance, discomfort, and/or bullying from others.
- You struggled so much with the changes you were going through that you kept yourself separate from others as much as possible.
- You found it difficult to trust your own thoughts and feelings about who you were.
- You had confusion about your sexual orientation in addition to your gender confusion.
- You searched desperately for a group that you could belong to and fit in with.
- You were teased/bullied as being “gay,” “lesbian,” or gender-shamed.
- You felt pressured to take on a certain “role” that was untrue to who you really were.
- You were taken to see a therapist, counselor, or pastor who tried to convince you that what you were feeling was not true.
- You were prescribed medication that you did not need and it made things worse.
- You did not see or hear about positive examples of yourself in society, in the media, or in your community.
- You struggled with depression and/or anxiety due to not knowing the reason why you were feeling so out-of sorts socially, as well as physically.
- You considered the option of ending your life and/or attempting to end your life.
- You didn’t explore other aspects of who you were as a person.
- You developed social awkwardness due to feeling very self-conscious around others.
- You experienced a high level of body shame, discomfort, and disdain (including your face).
- You dissociated from your body, consciously or unconsciously (i.e. disconnected your mind from body, so as to not have to “feel” its presence).
- You found dating and intimate relationships to be very confusing and/or scary.
- Your first experiences with sex were filled with discomfort, uncertainty, and dissociation.
- You turned to alcohol, drugs, and/or self-harm as a means of escape.
- You took steps to become “too much” like the gender you were assigned at birth (aka hyper-masculinizing or hyper-feminizing).
- You disliked, despised, or hated yourself.
- You felt so uncertain as to who you were that you became a stranger even to yourself.
“YOU & YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (AGES 12-17)”:
HERE COMES PUBERTY

As awkward as this life stage can be, the physical changes brought on by puberty can result in a teen feeling an empowering sense of “moving away from childhood” as they develop characteristics of adults.

However, if you don’t feel aligned with your assigned-sex-at-birth, things can take a difficult turn during what is, for others, an expected “rite of passage.”

That’s because puberty causes your body to develop secondary sex characteristics based on the sex hormones present in your body, not based on how you experience your gender (unfortunately hormones really don’t care about that).

I surveyed my Facebook community (“Conversations with a Gender Therapist”) and posed this question to the trans/transgender and gender nonconforming members of my audience:

“What was your experience with puberty?”

Read through their responses below. Can you relate to any of their answers?

In your workbook, write down any of the answers from this list that you feel applies to your experience of your puberty.

It was very confusing. Throughout that stage, it felt like I had the wrong hormones. My brain was always telling me to go one direction, but puberty kept pulling me the other direction.

I knew I wanted to be a boy since the age of 3-4, but I was bullied a lot because of it, so when puberty hit I just tried to fit in and started copying the girls.

Hell. As I grew hair and hit 6’ tall, I looked at the other girls around me and wondered why I wasn’t growing breasts like they were.

I didn’t have so much of an issue with getting my period as I did with growing large breasts and developing really feminine curves. It felt like an out-of-body experience that I just had to somehow deal with.

I woke up often from dreams in which my body was developing properly, little breasts forming, my penis no longer there, and I would check under the sheets and only then would I realize that it was just a dream.

Mine was fairly normal, except freaking out about growing hair on my body.

Female puberty was something I knew existed, but didn’t believe that it would ever happen to me.

It was as if two personalities were fighting within myself: he and she.

I was so disassociated with sexuality and gender, I just thought this was how life was.
Puberty for myself seemed backwards and strange.

Physical changes during puberty didn’t feel all that uncomfortable, but the social expectations about what it meant to be a boy were downright awful.

I felt that my body was betraying me. Felt everything was a lie.

You can see that these responses range from mildly uncomfortable, to confusion, to extremely painful (this is yet another reminder of how there are many different levels on which gender identity discomfort can be experienced!).

A LOOK AT THE PHYSICAL CHANGES BROUGHT ON BY PUBERTY

Below you’ll find a list of the secondary sex characteristics that usually occur when someone goes through puberty.* Think back to when you went through puberty.

✍️ On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not much at all” and 10 being “very much,” how much discomfort did you experience with each of the secondary sex characteristics listed below? Write your answers in your workbook.

The increase in testosterone can cause:

- Deepening of the voice/development of Adam’s Apple
- Increased growth of the penis and testicles
- Increase in amount of hair growth on the face and body
- Greater than average height
- Broad/muscular build
- Increase in size of hands, feet, and shoulders
- Widening of/squaring off of jaw and face

The increase in estrogen (as well as progesterone) can cause:

- Growing breasts
- Menstruation
- Distribution of fat towards the hips
- Subcutaneous fat padding/softness of the body

✍️ Going through puberty, did you wish you were developing any of the secondary sex characteristics listed above? If so, indicate this in your workbook.

Note: In “Stage Three: Exploration” you will explore how you feel present-day about your physical body—the answers in this exercise are specific to the adolescent/teenage timeframe.

*There are chromosomal and hormonal conditions (for example Klinefelter syndrome, Turner syndrome, XXYY syndrome, hirsutism, and intersex conditions) that can result in wide variations of development of secondary sex characteristics. If this is your experience go ahead and answer these questions however is accurate for you, ignoring the separation between the two groups.
Now it’s time to reflect on your gender identity during your adolescent and teenage years. This section is broken up into two different age categories: 12-14 and 15-17.

Take another look at your answers in the previous exercises in this chapter. Use these to help you see the full picture of this time in your life. Try to evoke your feelings, thoughts, experiences, physical sensations, and your visual memories.

**SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED**

- Draw pictures to express how you are feeling and what you are thinking
- Look back at childhood photos of yourself
- Listen to music you enjoyed during that time
- Create a collage
- Talk to others who knew you during this time (be selective of who you pick!)
- Turn to the examples earlier in this chapter of how others described their experience for ideas as to how to express yours.
- Don’t analyze your answers right now. Write whatever comes to mind without second-guessing or judging yourself.

*Note: Later in this chapter we’ll be taking a closer look at the roles of guilt and shame during your growing up years. Be sure to list any examples of these feelings, even if it’s something you didn’t know at the time but now know in retrospect.*

**REFLECTING ON YOUR ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS: AGES 12-14**

**#1—What thoughts can you remember having about your gender from ages 12-14?**

عقوبات Write these thoughts down in your workbook.

**#2—What feelings can you remember having about your gender from ages 12-14?**

unoccupancy Write these feelings down in your workbook.

**#3—How do you remember behaving in relation to your experienced gender, as well as its expression, from ages 12-14?**

unoccupancy Write these examples down in your workbook.

**#4—What was the reaction from those around when you behaved this way from ages 12-14?**

unoccupancy Write these reactions down in your workbook.
REFLECTING ON YOUR ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS: AGES 15-17

#1—What thoughts can you remember having about your gender from ages 15-17?

Write these thoughts down in your workbook.

#2—What feelings can you remember having about your gender from ages 15-17?

Write these feelings down in your workbook.

#3—How do you remember behaving in relation to your experienced gender, as well as its expression, from ages 15-17?

Write these examples down in your workbook.

#4—What was the reaction from those around when you behaved this way from ages 15-17?

Write these reactions down in your workbook.

☑ SELF-CARE REMINDER!

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It’s time to set this guide aside and spend some time with your chosen activity.
CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF SHAME & GUILT

Looking at the impact shame and/or guilt might be having on your gender identity journey is like checking for any leaks in your tires before going on a roadtrip. If these powerful emotions are not brought to light, they will eventually keep you from moving forward.

“Shame” and “Guilt” are words that are oftentimes lumped together. Sometimes it makes sense for that to happen—both feelings can come up as a result of something you did, that you think you did, or that you are even thinking of doing.

However, to truly understand how much these feelings might be impacting you, we need to look at them separately.

In its simplest definition we find that:

**Shame**: Relates to Self  
**Guilt**: Relates to Others

📚 **Shame** is when **you believe something is “wrong” with you**. Other words describing this deeply troubling feeling are:

- Bad
- Flawed
- Insignificant
- Unlovable
- Meaningless
- Unimportant
- Lacking value
- Worthless
- Unwanted
- Damaged
- Sinful
- Undeserving

Shame can be the result of doing something that results in you to feeling this way, or someone telling you these things about yourself. Sometimes nothing seems to explain where this feeling originated. It’s as if you came out of the womb feeling this way.

📚 **Guilt** can result from a belief that **you have done something wrong to someone else**. This can be something that:

- You have actually done to someone, either on purpose or accidentally, or
- You are thinking of doing of something, but imagining the hurt you might cause to someone results in you experiencing guilt.

Additionally, it can be caused by a belief that “the way you are” makes others feel disappointed,
uncomfortable, or angry—*even if you are actually doing nothing “wrong.”*

This feeling of doing something “wrong” to someone else can also be applied to entities or collectives such as a deity, your culture, your “tribe” or group, or your society.

**Shame + Guilt**: When you feel both shame and guilt at the same time it’s usually because you feel guilty for something you have done or are thinking of doing, and then feel shameful about yourself because of that. This painful combination can then lead to *self-loathing.*

*During this phase of your journey it is essential that you take time to examine whether or not you are wrestling with the presence of shame and/or guilt.*

If these feelings aren’t brought to the surface, examined, and worked through you could end up making life choices from this place of shame and/or guilt, leading to deeper repression of your authentic self.

In this chapter you will first look at shame and guilt separately to better understand the roles each one might be playing in your life as you explore your gender identity. Then you will look at the role they both might be playing in your life and, therefore, how much self-loathing you could be struggling with.
PREPARE FOR SELF CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter, and an activity for afterwards.

✍️  Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?
✍️  Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

#1—At this time do your “Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity.”

#2—When you are finished, turn the page to begin the first exercise.
“THE ROLE OF SHAME AND GUILT:”
HOW MUCH IS SHAME CONTROLLING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION?

There are two ways the feeling of Shame can originate:

**SHAME AROUND SOMETHING YOU HAVE “DONE” OR “ CAUSED”**

You can feel shame over something very specific you have “done” or “caused.” You did not previously feel there was something wrong or bad about who you were, but then something happened which resulted in your feelings of shame.

Examples of how this type of shame can arise are:

- Injuring or killing someone in an accident
- Having an affair when previously never having thought of doing so
- Discovering something surprising about yourself that you had unknowingly repressed for years
- Expressing something about yourself that, unexpectedly, results in upsetting people in your life

It’s as if you didn’t know you were capable of being the “type of person” who would do something given in these examples. You then assign meaning to what you’ve done as being something that a “bad” person would do.

📝 Can you relate to any of these examples? If so, write them in your workbook.

**SHAME AROUND YOUR VERY EXISTENCE**

Some people feel shameful over their very existence, unable to remember a time during which they didn’t feel this way. It’s challenging to pinpoint where this originates, for the answers are unique to each individual.

Here are a few theories regarding the possible origins of Shame:

- The parent/child bond was somehow disrupted early on. This could be either through the physical absence of a parent(s) due to death, abandonment, or distance, as well as emotional disconnectedness.
- Religious teachings leading a child to believe that who they are as a person goes against their higher power and/or belief system. For example, a belief that one is “born a sinner,” or that there are certain ways of being that would be considered “sinful.”
- Having one’s innate sense-of-self being in direct odds with cultural, societal, or community expectations of how they “should” be like in order to be accepted.
- Unaddressed mental or emotional challenges (i.e. mental illness, hormone imbalances, learning disabilities).
- Having physical/medical or behavioral challenges that resulted in a great deal of time, energy, and finances being spent on them.
- Having a personality type that is seen as being “not the norm,” “weird,” or “weak.” For example being introverted, highly intelligent (i.e. a “nerd”), intuitive, sensitive, creative, etc.
- Having identity confusion arising from the lack of positive examples from the surrounding
world to help support their inner world.

- Having experienced emotional, verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse at a young age, resulting in a belief that for some reason one deserves such punishment.
- For those who believe in past lives or reincarnation: that you are picking up from where you left off in the last life and are still living with something you have done in a previous life.

Can you relate to any of these examples? If so, write examples of them in your workbook.

THE PRESENCE OF SHAME IN YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS (AGES 3-11)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in “You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood Years” (p.74). Read through your responses and search for the presence of Shame.

Remember, Shame feels like something is wrong, bad, weird, or flawed about who you are as a person. Even if you didn’t know it back then, you will recognize it now.

(1-A)—THOUGHTS

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “1-A.”

(1-B)—FEELINGS

Did any of the feelings you had between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “1-B.”

(1-C)—BEHAVIORS

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “1-C.”

(1-D)—TOTALS (SHAME FROM AGES 3-11)

Add up your scores from letters (1-A), (1-B), and (1-C) and list the total in your workbook as:

Total score for SHAME you experienced during your childhood years = ______

Label this number as “1-D.” We’ll use it again at the end of this exercise.
THE PRESENCE OF SHAME IN YOUR ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (AGES 12-17)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in “You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescent/Teenage Years” (p.83). In the same manner in which you approached the previous exercise, read through your responses and search for the presence of Shame during your adolescent/teenage years.

(2-A)—THOUGHTS

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “2-A.”

(2-B)—FEELINGS

Did any of the feelings you had between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “2-B.”

(2-C)—BEHAVIORS

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Shame? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Shame that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “2-C.”

(2-D)—TOTALS (SHAME: AGES 12-17)

Add up your scores from letters (2-A), (2-B), and (2-C) and list the total in your workbook as:

Total score for SHAME you experienced during your adolescent/teenage years =

Label this number as “2-D.” We’ll use it again at the end of this exercise.

THE DEGREE OF INTENSITY SHAME IS AFFECTING YOU

In your workbook write out the following, including your scores:
Total score labeled as 1-D (SHAME you experienced during your childhood years) = 

Total score labeled as 2-D (SHAME you experienced during your adolescent/teenage years) = 

(2-E)—TOTALS (SHAME: AGES 3-17)

What is the total of (1-D) and (2-D) added together? 

This equals your total score for the degree of intensity of which Shame is controlling your gender identity exploration.

Label this number as “2-E.” We’ll use it at the end of this chapter.
“THE ROLE OF SHAME AND GUILT:”
HOW MUCH IS GUILT CONTROLLING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION?

The feeling of Guilt comes from believing we have done something “wrong” to someone else.

THE EMERGENCE OF GUILT: COMPLEX AND MULTI-LAYERED

Here are a few reasons why your experience of Guilt can vary so much from another person’s:

- The definition of what constitutes something being “wrong” differs from person to person (for instance, you might do something that upsets one parent but not the other).
- The definition of what constitutes something being “wrong” differs from situation to situation (for instance, it was fine if you behaved a certain way in the privacy of your home but not if you behaved that way in public).
- The definition of what constitutes something being “wrong” differs from time to time (for instance, behaving a certain way when you were younger was “okay,” but behaving that way when you were older is “not okay”).
- Your own definition of what is “wrong” is determined by feedback you’ve received from others in your lifetime—therefore it makes it difficult to know what you really believe to be “wrong.”
- For some even thinking about something you’d like to do that could potentially “hurt” others can result in feeling Guilt.
- If there’s something about yourself that you don’t see positively reflected in your society you may experience Guilt as a result of feeling “wrong” for making others uncomfortable, angry, or disappointed.

Can you relate to any of these examples? If so, write them in your workbook.

THE PRESENCE OF GUILT IN YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS (AGES 3-11)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in “You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood Years” (p.74). Read through your responses and search for the presence of Guilt.

Remember, Guilt is when you feel like you have done or would end up doing something that would hurt, anger, or disturb someone else. Even if you didn’t know it back then, you will recognize it now.

(3-A)—THOUGHTS

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “3-A.”
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

(3-B)—FEELINGS

Did any of the feelings you had between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “3-B.”

(3-C)—BEHAVIORS

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages 3-11 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “3-C.”

(3-D)—TOTALS (GUILT: AGES 3-11)

Add up your scores from letters (3-A), (3-B), and (3-C) and list the total in your workbook as:

Total score for GUILT you experienced during your childhood years = ______

Label this number as “3-D.” We’ll use it again at the end of this exercise.

THE PRESENCE OF GUILT IN YOUR ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (AGES 12-17)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in “You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescent/Teenage Years” (p.83). In the same manner in which you approached the previous exercise, read through your responses and search for the presence of Guilt during your adolescent/teenage years.

(4-A)—THOUGHTS

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “4-A.”

(4-B)—FEELINGS

Did any of the feelings you had between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “4-B.”

(4-C)—BEHAVIORS

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages 12-17 result in you experiencing Guilt? If so describe them in your workbook.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the “not very much” and 5 being “very much,” how would you rank the intensity of the Guilt that resulted from this? Write this number in your workbook and label it as “4-C.”

(4-D)—TOTALS (GUILT: AGES 12-17)

Add up your scores from letters (4-A), (4-B), and (4-C) and list the total in your workbook as:

Total score for GUILT you experienced during your adolescent/teenage years = ________

Label this number as “4-D.” We’ll use it again at the end of this exercise.

THE DEGREE OF INTENSITY GUILT IS AFFECTING YOU

In your workbook write out the following, including your scores:

Total score listed in (3-D) (GUILT you experienced during your childhood years) = ________

Total score listed in (4-D) (GUILT you experienced during your adolescent/teenage years) = ________

(4-E)— TOTALS (GUILT: AGES 3-17)

What is the total of (3-D) and (4-D) added together? ________

This equals your total score for the degree of intensity of which Guilt is controlling your gender identity exploration.

Label this number as “4-E.” We’ll use it again at the end of this exercise.
“THE ROLE OF SHAME AND GUILT:”
HOW MUCH IS SHAME + GUILT CONTROLLING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION?

When you feel as though you are (Shame) causes only hurt and pain to the people you care about (Guilt), it can be too painful a burden to bear. You may feel like the only solution is to cast these feelings into the trunk in your unconscious* (i.e. “repress” it).

When you obey the power of your Guilt and/or Shame you are denying a crucial part of who you are through this line of reasoning: “I am unable to become my Self because I am afraid of hurting you.”

This painful state of feeling trapped, caged, and powerless oftentimes results in turning to unhealthy coping methods as a means of escape. This could manifest in the form of alcohol and/or drug use, emotional outbursts, volatile mood swings, isolation, lying, and so on.

Ironically, these damaging behaviors end up hurting the very people you hoped to shield in the first place, leading you to feel even more Guilt and/or Shame than you started with.

THE DEGREE OF INTENSITY SHAME AND GUILT ARE CONTROLLING YOU

Take a look at this formula:

\[
\text{SHAME ABOUT WHO YOU ARE} + \text{GUILT OVER HURTING OTHERS} = \text{THE DEGREE SHAME AND/OR GUILT ARE CONTROLLING YOUR LIFE}
\]

In your workbook write out the formula:

\[
(2-E) + (4-E) = \text{Your Grand Total}
\]

What was your total score from (2-E) in the exercise “How Much is Shame Controlling Your Gender Identity Exploration?” (p.91). Write this number in the spot in the formula labeled (2-E).

What was your total score from (4-E) in the exercise “How Much is Guilt Controlling Your Gender Identity Exploration?” (p.94). Write this number in the spot in the formula labeled (4-E).

What is the total of (2-E) and (4-E) added together?

This number tells you the grand total that Shame and Guilt are affecting your gender identity exploration.

HOW SHAME AND GUILT ARE CONTROLLING YOU AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Your total Shame/Guilt score will fall within one of the ranges below.

- If your Shame total is higher than your Guilt total this means you have more work to do
around how you feel about yourself and less work around how you feel you will impact others.

- If your Guilt total is higher than your Shame total this means you have more work to do around how you feel about the way you affect others and less around how you feel about yourself.
- If your Shame and Guilt totals are the same or very close then you have equal amounts of work to do around how you feel about yourself as well as how you affect others.

In your workbook, take note of which range it is that you fall into.

- **12-28:** Shame and/or Guilt are controlling your life somewhat and may be mildly impacting your gender identity exploration.

  Once you get to *Stage Three: Exploration* you should be able to work through it without having to do a lot of work around your Shame and/or Guilt. However, if you are caught by surprise by the emergence of more Shame and/or Guilt than you were expecting, seek out the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey and/or you can use the tools listed in the Further Reading section at the end of the book.

- **29-44:** Shame and/or Guilt are moderately controlling your life and may be noticeably impacting your gender identity exploration.

  Once you get to *Stage Three: Exploration* you might have difficulty making it through the section without Shame and/or Guilt interfering. More than likely you could use the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey and/or you can use the tools listed in the Further Reading section at the end of the book.

- **45-60:** Shame and/or Guilt are highly controlling your life and are significantly impacting your gender identity exploration.

  You may find yourself unable to work through *Stage Three: Exploration* without seeking the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey as you work through your Shame and/or Guilt. You can also utilize the Further Reading section at the end of this book, where you will find articles to help you deal with how much Shame and/or Guilt have control over your gender exploration.

- **SELF-CARE REMINDER!**

  What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It’s time to set this guide aside and spend some time with your chosen activity.
SUMMARY OF YOUR RESPONSES
STAGE TWO: REFLECTION

Well done! You’ve reached the end of Stage Two: Reflection.
Before we move on let’s pause to look at the “big picture” of what you’ve learned about yourself in this section. Specifically, in what ways have your experiences during your childhood, adolescent, and teenage years affected your gender identity journey?
By understanding how and why you ended up where you are you can:

✓ Recognize how experiences from your past are interfering with your ability to engage in self-exploration
✓ Face challenges in your gender identity exploration with a greater understanding as to why this might be difficult for you
✓ Be watchful of the presence of shame and guilt as you get closer to discovering your authentic self

Take a few minutes to go back to your answers from each part of this section and consolidate them onto 1-2 pages of your workbook.

CHAPTER ONE: YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: CHILDHOOD (P.67)

➢ What clued you in to the “bigger world” that you were “supposed to” fit into, and therefore affected the way you began to experience your gender identity from ages 3-11?

➢ What was the main factor that influenced your own personal, unique way of experiencing yourself and your gender identity?

➢ Summarize your thoughts, feelings, and actions (as well as the responses to your actions) about to your gender identity during the ages of 3-11. Looking back, how does it make you feel?

CHAPTER TWO: YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY:
ADOLESCENT/TEENAGE YEARS (P.76)

➢ What were the main ways you experienced disruption of your self-exploration process during these years, specifically concerning your gender identity?

➢ How much discomfort did you experience while you went through the changes of puberty? (Physically, mentally, emotionally)

➢ Summarize your thoughts, feelings, and actions (as well as the responses to your actions) about your gender identity during the ages of 12-17. Looking back, how does it make you feel?

CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF SHAME AND GUILT (P.85)

➢ To what degree is Shame controlling your life concerning the experience of your gender
identity?

➢ To what degree is Guilt controlling your life concerning the experience of your gender identity?

➢ How can you address the control that Shame and Guilt exercise over you when it comes to your experience of your gender identity?
STAGE THREE:
EXPLORATION
INTRODUCTION TO STAGE THREE: EXPLORATION

“There’s something that doesn’t make sense. Let’s go and poke it with a stick.”

—The Eleventh Doctor (“Doctor Who”)

At last! We have arrived at Stage Three: Exploration.

It should come as no surprise to discover that you have taken on the role of the “explorer” throughout this guide. An explorer is someone who finds themself in an unfamiliar place and has the desire to get to know it better, unearth its secrets and riches, and sometimes even establish a new home in this land.

That’s just what you’ll be doing in this stage, with the “unfamiliar place” being you and your life.

You’ve done a lot of work in Stage One: Preparation and Stage Two: Reflection to get ready for this part of the journey. Let’s take a moment and look at the logline you created in the “This is Your Life” exercise (p.33) in response to the question, “What is your reason for continuing on the path of self-exploration?”

Write your logline into this section of your workbook.

Remember, your logline is like a compass, providing you with direction when you feel lost, overwhelmed, defeated, or just want to go exploring. It reminds you of the why’s of what you are doing.

Here is a look at what you will be “exploring” in Stage Three: Exploration:

✓ Wisdom Tips to keep in mind during your exploration
✓ The “big picture” of who you are right now, and how close or far away you are from discovering your authentic self
✓ A deconstruction of gender to help clear up many of your questions
✓ The importance of finding others with whom you can relate, and how to go about doing this
✓ Why listening to your “gut” is a critical part of this process and how to do this
✓ The stream of constant questions that may create confusion around your gender identity
✓ How much discomfort you have with your assigned-sex-at-birth
✓ Possible explanations why you might feel the way you feel
✓ How to explore your gender in ways that will bring you more clarity
✓ Your “gender identity options” and finding the one(s) that come closest to describing your experience of your gender identity
✓ Ideas as to what you can do with what you have discovered about yourself

By the time you complete this portion of the book you will unearth, gather, and digest enough information about yourself to have a deeper understanding of how to define your gender identity (if you choose to define it at all!).
To help you come to this place of increased self-awareness you will be prompted at the end of each chapter to pause and “check in.” “Check-In Time” is a short journaling prompt at the end of each exercise that acts as a reminder to process how you are feeling after each discovery.

This will allow you to:

- **Slow down** long enough to notice and retain important information about yourself
- **Gauge** your stress-levels and adjust your pace accordingly
- **Remind** yourself to employ self-care as needed
- **Create** a written account of this part of your journey

As you begin *Stage Three: Exploration* remember:

**What you are in search of is already inside of you.**

Here is a quote that beautifully illustrates this point:

"*Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything.*
*Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that really isn't you*
*so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.*"

— Anonymous
Wisdom Tips: Introduction

The metaphor of the “The Hero’s Journey” is suitable for the Exploration Phase of your gender identity journey. Also known as the “Road of Trials,” this stage can be filled with “Tests, Allies, and Enemies,” the “Approach to the Inmost Cave,” and “Ordeals.”* Imagine you decide to seek out the advice of a wizard, medicine woman, or Yoda before you begin this portion of your journey. You are sitting before them and are ready to hear what advice they have to offer. They pause dramatically and then speak:

“I know you must be eager to begin your Exploration. Nevertheless, you must take the time to gather nutrients from these Wisdom Tips. They are your food, your fuel, and your water for the next part of your quest. They will be there for you when you encounter ‘The Road of Trials.’”

Being one of the trusted “mentors” on your journey (p. 51) I am here to send you off with words of wisdom in preparation for what’s ahead. These tips are the result of years of observation, research, and experience.

Breathe, focus, and listen to what they have to say.

Be sure to take notes—they will be there for you to return to at any point in time. You will need them.

WISDOM TIP #1:
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM “EXPLORATION”

Take a moment to imagine one of your favorite explorers. It can be someone real or a fictional character. If you were to create a montage of the various moments of this explorer’s life, what would it look like?

I imagine one of my childhood heroes, Indiana Jones. When it’s time for him to set off on an adventure I see his life filled with moments of excitement, confusion, discovery, fear (“Snakes!”), humor, pain, mistakes, and victories.

This is what you can expect during your exploration montage as well.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare for what lies ahead:

#1—Have someplace you can keep track of your exploration ideas.

We’ll take a closer look at how you can do this in Chapter One.

#2—Exploration will be different for each reader of this book.

Your exploration will be influenced by factors such as where you live, your financial situation, your personality, your life experiences, your support system, your relationship status, your age, your resourcefulness, your health, etc. There is no exploration process that is “right” or “better” than another. It’s about tapping into your own unique strengths and abilities.

#3—Remind yourself of the steps you have already taken to prepare for this journey.

Read through your answers from Stage One: Preparation. Remember, you now understand your fears and have a plan for approaching them. You minimized negativity in your life and learned how to take better care of yourself. You established a mentor and a support team and created an internal Bodyguard and Nurturer. (If you have not yet taken these steps, please pause and do so before continuing on. These preparations are crucial for you to be able to take on the full impact of this journey!).

#4—Be prepared for changes to happen.

What will those changes be? There’s no way to know for sure. Will some them be incredible and gratifying and others painful and difficult? Probably and probably. This is why Exploration is frequently the most courageous step you can take in this journey: you never know where it is going to lead.

#5—As often as you can, take time to reflect on your exploration process.

What’s worked? What hasn’t worked? What have you learned about yourself so far? Do you need to pause and take time for self-care? Do you need to pick up the pace? Do you need to slow down? Frequent reflection is crucial to your success. That’s why every chapter in Part Three: Exploration
concludes with a “Check-In Time” for you to reflect on your progress.

#6—Your plan will be thrown off.

Your journey will change course, unexpected shortcuts, detours, roadblocks and U-turns. It’s best to expect this from the start. Some of these twists will be pleasant surprises. Others will knock the wind out of you, so much so that you might be tempted to turn around and “go back home.” In the end you can utilize creative solutions, patience, resourcefulness, and faith in yourself to make it through the more challenging parts of the journey.

#7—Exploration is a life-long process.

You will learn a great deal about yourself during this portion of the book. Most importantly, you will learn that your Exploration process never truly ends. Your gender identity is only one facet of who you are, and you will almost certainly unearth more information about yourself than you anticipate. This will continue to happen throughout the course of your life! Even though periods of exploration will fluctuate between intense and calm, new discoveries are always there, waiting to be made. You can use the techniques you have learned in this book for any future journeys you find yourself on!
WISDOM TIP #2: REMEMBER TO USE YOUR SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Hopefully by now turning to your Self-Care Checklist has become a part of your daily routine. In *Stage Three: Exploration* there won’t be cues before and after exercises for you to do this. I encourage you to pause and take the time to:

REVISIT YOUR LIST

Are there any items you need to add to your list? Which ones have you found to be of greatest use to you? Are there any items you need to remove? (items you have outgrown, have become too distracting, overly escapist, etc.).

SET A REMINDER FOR YOURSELF

If you think you might forget to use your self-care activities throughout *Stage Three*, create a reminder for yourself. You can take time right now to write “self-care activity” throughout this part of the guide. Or, if you are reading this in digital form, use the appropriate tools on hand to create reminder notes.

MAKE IT REALLY HARD TO FORGET

Hang your Self-Care Checklist in places you spend a lot of time. You can also share it with loved ones, so they can offer reminders to you to follow through with items on your list.

MAKE IT REWARDING

When you take the time to use your Self-Care Checklist the reward comes from how much better you feel when you use it compared to when you don’t. Since it can be easy to forget what this feels like, take a few moments to write down how you feel *every time you use your checklist*. Also write down how it feels *when you don’t use the checklist*. By comparing how you feel when you use the checklist to when you don’t, you will eventually make connections between how much better you feel when help you schedule in time for your Self-Care activities.
WISDOM TIP #3:  
LEARN FROM THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN THERE

I conducted a survey through my “Conversations with a Gender Therapist” Facebook page to ask my audience what advice they would have for those who are in search of answers to their questions about their gender identity.

Here are the top responses from those individuals who have already “been there, done that.”

- Get into therapy/counseling
- Get support from loved ones
- Learn (and believe) that trans/transgender/Gender Dysphoria is something that exists
- Work on not judging self harshly or negatively
- Seek out and experience validation of who you are and how you feel
- Realize that medically and/or socially transitioning to your true gender is possible and something can be done about it
- Find people around whom you can be yourself
- Say the words aloud that you are thinking and feeling
- Realize that concerns about possibly transitioning are oftentimes concerns about other people
- Learn the language that describes your existence
- Examine what you were “taught” about gender vs. who you are discovering you actually are.
- Realize that Gender Dysphoria can be physical, mental, emotional, social - any or all of the above
- Recognize you don’t have to experience Gender Dysphoria to be trans or to want to transition
- Realize there’s no such thing as “not being trans enough”
- Understand there is a “gender continuum” as opposed to having to choose between “one or the other”
- Try things until you it feels “right” to you
- Figure out what resources other people use
- Talk with people who are like you/going through a similar experience

If any of these ideas sounded of interest to you, you are in luck. We will go into detail as to how you can follow through on many of the items on this list throughout Stage Three: Exploration.
WISDOM TIP #4:
THE STAGES OF “GENDER IDENTITY FORMATION”

It might bring comfort to some of you to know there are stages that a significant number of
individuals go through as they try to make sense of their gender identity.

These stages were first conceived by Aaron H. Devor, PhD (a sociologist, and sexologist, and trans
man) in 2004 and are summarized below*. I’ve made a few adjustments to his descriptions of
gender identity to create consistency with current terminology.

This list is by no means an “absolute” determinant for how to go through “gender identity
realizations.” It merely demonstrates that it is normal and expected to experience confusion,
uncertainty, and curiosity throughout this process.

Here are things to keep in mind as you read through Devor’s stages:

✓ These stages are going to be different for everyone
✓ All of the stages do not have to be experienced
✓ The stages do not have to be experienced in the order listed
✓ The length of each stage will vary from person to person
✓ Some of the stages may end up being repeated/returned to
✓ One might settle at a certain stage and choose to not move past past it

See if you can relate to any of the stages and return to this list throughout the journey.

💡 TIP: Although the word “transgender” is used throughout the stages I’ve put it in
parenthesis to remind you that you can eventually fill in any other word that makes more sense
for your experience (i.e. non-binary, gender dysphoric, trans, agender, genderfluid, etc.).

STAGE #1: Underlying/Unexplainable Anxiety

Not being sure why you feel the way you feel.

STAGE #2: Confusion Around Your Assigned-Sex-at-Birth

Wondering if your assigned-sex-at-birth actually matches who you are.

STAGE #3: Making Comparisons

Seeking out and exploring other gender identities as possibilities while not knowing consciously
why you are doing this.

*“Witnessing and Mirroring: A Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation.” Devon, Aaron H.
Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psycho-therapy (The Haworth Medical Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.)
Vol. 8, No. 1/2, 2004, pp. 41-67
STAGE #4: Discovering the Word (Transgender)

Learning this is something that exists.

STAGE #5: Confusion Around Your Identity Related to Being (Transgender)

Questioning the authenticity of whether or not your experience matches that of being (transgender).

STAGE #6: Making Comparisons Between Yourself and Those Who are (Transgender)

Testing and experimenting to see if other gender options are ones you can identify with. Identifying less with assigned-sex-at-birth.

STAGE #7: Possible Acceptance of Being (Transgender)

Beginning to conclude that you probably are (transgender).

STAGE #8: Delay of Acceptance of Being (Transgender)

Possible fears and challenges arise. Seeking more confirmation of being (transgender).

STAGE #9: Acceptance of Being (Transgender)

Concluding that you are indeed (transgender).

STAGE #10: Delay Before Transition (optional)

Gathering information on how to transition. Considering changes that might occur socially, professionally, etc.

STAGE #11: Transition (optional)

Undergoing social and/or medical transition.

STAGE #12: Acceptance of Self, Post-Transition

Establishing self as “true” gender identity, both internally and externally.

STAGE #13: Integration

Incorporating your gender identity with all aspects of who you are.

STAGE #14: Pride

Being “open” and “out” as (transgender). Possibly getting involved with advocacy for (transgender) rights.
WISDOM TIP #5:
SIMPLIFYING THE COMPLICATED

Your gender identity touches and affects nearly every aspect of the way you experience yourself in the world, and the way the world experiences you. When all of these layers of “you” are competing for attention it can make the task of exploring your gender feel overwhelming and complicated!

It is important you learn how to simplify things by examining each layer separately.

Once you’ve done this you can bring all of the pieces back together to see your “big picture” with more clarity and find more accurate answers about your gender identity.

Here are some of the layers that might be affecting your exploration of your gender identity:

- Sexual orientation questions
- Childhood trauma and/or influences
- Mental illness (diagnosed and undiagnosed)
- The influence of learned gender stereotypes
- Physical discomfort with one’s gender
- Mental and emotional discomfort with one’s gender
- Social discomfort with one’s gender
- A “dislike” of certain genders
- A “preference” of certain genders
- Internalized transphobia and/or homophobia
- Personality traits
- Religious/spiritual influences

The list can go on and on!

Fear not—as soon as you turn to the next chapter you’ll begin the process of peeling back the layers, one by one. Each of the following chapters is broken up into separate “components” of yourself to work through one step at a time.

Once you’ve completed the chapters in Stage Three: Exploration you’ll then learn how to integrate these various aspects of yourself to form a more complete picture of who you are.

Remember: you are a complex, multi-faceted being, which can be both amazing and overwhelming to experience. Examining each of these various layers individually is the key to getting through this process without being swallowed up by the enormity of it.
WISDOM TIP #6:  
**LABEL-FREE GENDER EXPLORATION**

Do you believe that having the words to explain your gender identity is of high importance? Do you prefer not to be labeled? Do you think you’ll find words to describe how you feel now but could see yourself not using them later?

Regardless of which camp you fall into, many of the exercises in *Stage Three: Exploration* are geared toward exploring gender as thoroughly as possible without having to assign a name to what you discover.

*Being able to answer questions about yourself without the pressure of a final destination can be very freeing!*

For example, you could go into this part of the guide wondering, “Am I or am I not trans/transgender?” Or, you could try to approach yourself with curiosity as a whole person and with an open mind.

As you work through the exercises in *Stage Three: Exploration* keep in mind there is no longer a need for “black and white” answers to your questions about your gender.

*Gender is complex, multi-layered, and very individualized.*

There are many options and combinations for you to choose from to find what fits you. This is a somewhat new line-of-thinking that many (though certainty not all) parts of the world are beginning to embrace, and I encourage to you keep that in mind as you progress through this part of the book.

Upon completion of *Stage Three: Exploration* you’ll have the opportunity to explore terms and phrases that you may want to use when describing yourself and your gender identity. The goal is to find what works for *you* (which may not be what works for someone else!).

🔥 TIP: You may feel pressure to “prove” that you don’t identify as the sex you were assigned at birth and therefore must use certain terms to label yourself and your gender identity. This pressure can come from mental health and medical professionals, your family, your friends, and even from yourself.

It is realistic to keep in mind that we live in a world in which you might need to describe your gender identity to others in such a way that could make you feel uncomfortable. We will take a closer look at that in “Chapter Seven: Putting It All Together.”

In the meantime, try to set aside these pressures as you work through the exercises in this section—this part of the journey is for *you!*
WISDOM TIP #7:  
“WHAT IF THIS TURNS OUT TO BE TRUE?”

“It was in that moment—imagining who I might be, and the terrifying and glorious possibilities that it held—I realized that the instrument we’re given is not always the one we’re meant to play.”

—Sam Dylan Finch

For some of you the question “What if this turns out to be true?” may already be ringing around in your brain.

“This” = needing to do something about the gap you feel between your actual gender identity and your assigned-sex-at-birth.

Ask yourself:

“How much is my fear of ‘this’ keeping me from facing certain truths?”

It’s completely understandable if this is the case! There are certain challenges that can arise if one realizes the answer is “YES” to the question “Are you uncomfortable with your assigned-sex-at-birth?”

The following illustrates just a small fraction of the concern that can result from having this discovery about one’s self:

✓ “Should I transition medically? If so, how?”
✓ “Should I transition socially? If so, how?”
✓ “How do I find a gender therapist?”
✓ “How should I come out to my family members and friends?”
✓ “How should I come out at work, school, to my faith community, and in other areas of my life?”
✓ “What steps do I need to take to legally to change my name and/or gender marker?”
✓ “In what ways am I protected or not protected by laws in my state and/or country?”
✓ “How should I handle possible discrimination, harassment, and other forms of negativity?”
✓ “Does my health insurance cover the costs of transitioning?”
✓ “How can I plan to cover the costs of transitioning?”

Keep these tips in mind as you begin the Exploration Exercises in Stage Three: Exploration and use them to help you work through any anxiety that may come up as a result of what you discover:

➢ It is normal to feel overwhelmed by the possibility that “this” could end up being true.

➢ Gently check in with yourself as you work through this part of the guide, asking, “Do I really know, deep down, what the answer is? Is my fear of the answer being ‘yes’ keeping me from admitting it?”

➢ All of your “ah-ha moments” during Stage Three: Exploration will help you to move
further away from your assigned-sex-at-birth and more towards...well, that’s what you’re trying to figure out! Try to refrain from any predetermined “end goal” and allow yourself the freedom to see what lies ahead.

- **Eventually you’ll find your “sweet spot,”** when it comes to the unique way you describe and express your gender identity. This guide will get you to your next step, whatever that may be (there are resources listed at the end of the book to help you get started on to those next steps).
GETTING ORGANIZED:
KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR EXPLORATION IDEAS

The further you go into *Stage Three: Exploration* the more “exploration ideas” you will encounter. It’s important to get organized early on and have a way to keep track of all of them.

Having someplace to do this will:

- Give you a place to “dump” them so they don’t rattle around in your head
- Keep them from being forgotten before they’ve had the chance to be explored
- Help organize your thoughts during your journey
- Create something you can share with those who accompany you along this journey
- Help you assess your progress along the way
- Enable the creation of a daily ritual to keep track of your exploration ideas

There are many methods to choose from to keep track of your exploration ideas. Find one that suits your personality, your pace of life, your preference for “old school” or something more techy...there's something out there for everyone! For example, you can use:

- Pinterest
- Apps such as Evernote, Wunderlist, Pocket, etc.
- Bookmarks and folders in your web browser
- A notebook
- A sketch book
- A file on your computer (ex: Word document)
- Your mobile device (ex: Notes)

Which of these ideas could you see yourself following through with? Record them now in your workbook.

Here are ways you can use an “exploration ideas list” for general ideas:

- “Find YouTubers to follow”
- “Search for a local support group”
- “Get magazines and cut out pictures of hairstyles I might want to try”
- “Find a therapist I can talk to”

Here are ways you can use an “exploration ideas list” for specific ideas:

- “Subscribe to the ‘Neutrois Nonsense’ blog to learn more about non-binary identities”
“Go shopping with (name of person) at a thrift store by (set date) to explore new clothing options”

“Journal for (20) minutes every morning about how I am feeling about my gender exploration

“Purchase Trans Bodies, Trans Selves”

Think of your exploration ideas “Master List” as a syllabus of sorts that you are creating for your very own program of study—the study of yourself!
Chapter One: Keeping In Mind the “Big Picture”

Wrestling with questions about your gender identity can be so all encompassing that it becomes easy to forget it is only one aspect of who you are as a person.

In this chapter you will be introduced to ways you can keep “the big picture” of who you are in mind. By doing this you will make your self-discovery process a little less complicated, confusing, and overwhelming.

In this chapter you will be taking a closer look at:

Internalized Transphobia

Something that might be getting in the way of you being able to see “the big picture” is internalized transphobia. You will explore what this is, how it can interfere with the crucial step of self-acceptance, and how much of this you might be experiencing.

You and Your Identities

This chapter serves as a reminder that you have other identities in addition to your gender identity. You will take a “big picture” look at what it means to have identities, why you need them to better connect with your sense of self, how you share your identities with others, and why it is wise to not get overly-attached to your identities.

“The Questionnaire”

Through this questionnaire you’ll get a better idea of your unique “big picture.” You’ll do this by exploring, in detail and layer-by-layer, the different ways you are being affected by gender identity confusion.
“KEEPING IN MIND THE ‘BIG PICTURE’:
BECOMING AWARE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

“(W)e have been exploring…how internalized homophobia and transphobia develops from us
internalizing the voices of our bullies and then turning those voices onto ourselves and each
other.”
— Laverne Cox

**Gut Check!**

Without hesitation, answer this question:
“How much am I resisting the very thought of being trans/transgender?”

(Not At All)  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  (Very Much)

🔗 Record your answer in your workbook.

Maybe you are trans/transgender*, and maybe you’re not. To be able to answer this question
truthfully and accurately you need to be aware of how much resistance you have to the very thought
of being trans/transgender.

It is a sad (but true) reality that many of you reading this book feel resistance towards
accepting that you might be trans/transgender. The root of this resistance oftentimes comes in the
form of what is called internalized transphobia.

Internalized transphobia can disrupt your ability to see the “big picture,” usually without you
ever knowing it. If you are unaware of its presence you might unconsciously sabotage yourself
throughout the course of not only your gender identity journey, but your entire life!

This exercise will help you with any internalized transphobia that might inhibit your self-
exploration journey.

Bringing it to light will enable you to work through these difficult feelings, giving you control
over how much they affect you. Otherwise, if you continue repress them, they will have control over
you.

**WHAT IS TRANSPHOBIA?**

The root of transphobia, whether it’s being felt about one’s self or about someone else, is fear.

There is something about straying from the “expectations of gender” that causes anxiety,
discomfort, uncertainty, and even anger in certain individuals.

The fear at the root of transphobia stems from inaccurate conceptions of gender and gender
identity that remain deeply ingrained into many cultures (it’s as if “The Ways of Old” has a
Bodyguard who is freaking out at the very notion that there could be such a thing as someone not
feeling aligned with their assigned-sex-at-birth!).

*The use trans/transgender in this section is a reflection of the most current “definitions” that are being used to
describe the feeling of discomfort and misalignment between one’s assigned-sex-at-birth and one’s actual gender.
Trans tends to speak more of the experience of non-binary persons and transgender to those who have a more
binary experience (we’ll look more closely at these definitions in Chapter Two).
WHAT IS INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA?

Here are examples of how many of my clients have described their internal dialogue when it’s laced with internalized transphobia:

- “Why can’t you just be normal?”
- “You’ll look terrible as a (fill in gender here).”
- “Nobody will see you as a ‘real’ (fill in gender here).”
- “I’m pretty sure you’re just delusional.”
- “This is really about how you were (fill in traumatizing childhood event).”
- “This is only a symptom of your (fill in other diagnosis you might have).”
- “You’re really only trying to live out a fetish / fantasy.”
- “No one will ever want to be in a relationship with you because you’re not a ‘real’ (fill in gender).”
- “You’re too young to know this about yourself.”
- “You’re too old to bother with trying to change anything about this.”
- “You will never find a partner who will want to be with you because of this.”

Does this internal dialogue sound familiar to you? If so record examples of this in your workbook.

This internal dialogue can be followed up by feelings of:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Anger
- Depression
- Hatred
- Disappointment
- An Urge to Self-Harm
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Despair
- Panic
- Feeling “lost”
- Self-Loathing
- Disgust
- Hurt
- Fear

Have you experienced any of these feelings as a result of this internal dialogue? If so record examples of this in your workbook.

These feelings are so painful that the cycle can result in:

- Denial
- Repression
- Talking yourself out of further exploration
- Staying stuck in a place of wishing to be cisgender (i.e. to feel aligned with your assigned at
birth sex and gender)

- Increased internalized transphobia towards self
- Increased internalized transphobia towards others
- “Checking out” mentally, emotionally, socially
- Trying to, instead, find yourself in other identities
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs or other potentially destructive behaviors
- Taking this pain out on others, including those who are trans/transgender

Have you ever found yourself in this stage of this cycle? If so record examples of this in your workbook.

DISCOVERING THE PRESENCE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

Now that you have a better idea as to how internalized transphobia reveals itself, let’s look more closely at whether or not it is present within you.

STEP #1—ASKING THE QUESTION

Find a mirror and, looking at your reflection, read the following statement. Pay attention to your internal response.

“There is a chance that I am trans/transgender.”

STEP #2—TAKING NOTE OF YOUR THOUGHTS

What are the voices in your head saying? Are these the voices of people who are understanding and supportive, or are they the voices of doubters, critics, and haters?

Take time to journal about this in your workbook.

STEP #3—TAKING NOTE OF YOUR FEELINGS

What feelings come up for you during this exercise? What feelings will linger with you for the rest of the day, maybe even longer?

Take time to journal about this in your workbook.

STEP #4—TAKING NOTE OF HOW YOU COPE

What do you usually do to try to cope with these thoughts and feelings? These can be responses you do consciously (i.e. “I know I am drinking/withdrawing/angry because of this”) or unconsciously (i.e. not knowing you were taking your feelings about this out on other people).

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

By working through this exercise you are already taking one of the most important steps towards challenging internalized transphobia: to even know if it exists within you. It’s possible you didn’t realize this is what you’ve been experiencing. This is understandable: so many of us go
through life unaware of the internal dialogue we constantly have going on in our minds!

Let’s look at ways you can learn to recognize when you are engaging with internalized transphobia, and what you can do about it.

STEP #1—WHICH “VOICE” ARE YOU HEARING?

With enough practice you’ll be able to tell if your self-talk is coming from an Internal Bully or from your Bodyguard. The key is to ask yourself:

- What words are being used in my self-talk?
- What is the tone and intention of my self-talk?

For example, when you read through the internal dialogue examples at the beginning of the exercise you may have heard them as having a biting, condescending, shaming tone of a “bully.”

The Internal Bully is trying to change your mind by scaring you into submission, wanting to send you back into the prison within yourself.

The Bodyguard, while still highly concerned about what might happen to you on your self-discovery journey, wants you to be okay and is open to working together with you to make that happen.

STEP #2—REFRAMING THE SELF-TALK

Here are examples as to how to reframe statements using your Bodyguard as the voice instead of the Internal Bully. Try this out by looking in the mirror as you reframe the original statements:

Internal Bully: “You are such a freak, why can’t you just be ‘normal’?”

Bodyguard: “It scares me to think of everything you might have to go through if it turns out you are trans/transgender. I know you don’t like feeling ‘different’ but you are not alone. How can we find others who are going through this?”

Internal Bully: “This is nonsense, you’re too young to know this about yourself.”

Bodyguard: “I’ve heard people say you can’t figure this sort of thing out about yourself until you’re an adult. I’m not sure if they are right or not. Who do we trust to talk to about this to find out?”

It is important for you to be able to acknowledge your anxiety around the possibility of being trans/transgender. This step teaches you to both recognize and do this from a place of encouragement and understanding instead of a place of anger, fear, and self-loathing.

STEP #3—STAY ALERT TO THE PRESENCE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

When you utilize the “Check-In Time” prompt throughout Stage Three: Exploration, read through what you have written and pay attention to anything that indicates the presence of internalized transphobia. Whenever this comes up, use this exercise to reframe your self-talk in such a way that reflects comfort and understanding.
THE RESULTS OF BEING FREE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

One of the greatest benefits of being free of internalized transphobia is reaching a point of self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance doesn’t mean you aren’t going to experience fear, anger, sadness, and confusion on this journey. What self-acceptance does is replace the negative beliefs you have about yourself in regard to being trans/transgender with beliefs that are encouraging, accepting, and compassionate.

I gathered comments from my Facebook community (at “Conversations with a Gender Therapist”) describing what it was like for them to finally experience self-acceptance in relation to gender identity. Here’s what some of them had to say:

✓ “Finally loving myself.”
✓ “Decisions and answers became clearer.”
✓ “I’m more committed to living.”
✓ “I have pride in myself.”
✓ “I can finally be real.”
✓ “I have a better life.”
✓ “I’m happy with myself.”
✓ “I can accept it even if I don’t understand it.”
✓ “I have a better understanding of myself.”
✓ “It’s like a weight has been lifted.”
✓ “I nurture myself now.”
✓ “I see the positives of myself.”
✓ “I feel at peace.”

Which of these would you most want to experience? Are there any not listed that you would like to add? Write all of these down in your workbook.

There isn’t a timeline or formula that predicts when self-acceptance will happen for you, so remember to be patient with yourself through this process.

Everyone is different when it comes to what “bullying” messages they have heard over the course of their life, and how deeply they have internalized them. Being aware of internalized transphobia is a huge step, so continue to monitor where you are with this when you are prompted at the end of each exercise to pause and reflect.

☑ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“KEEPING IN MIND THE ‘BIG PICTURE’”:
YOU AND YOUR IDENTITIES

As essential as it is to understand your gender identity, it is important to remember you are made up of many other identities as well.

In this exercise we’re going to take a look at the “big picture” of what it means to have identities, why we need them to better connect with our sense of self, how we share our identities with others, and why it is wise to not get overly-attached to our identities.

HOW IDENTITIES HELP TO FORM YOUR SENSE OF “SELF”

You were first introduced to the concept of having “identities” in Stage One: Preparation when you created a logline in which described yourself as a character on a journey. You also kept it in mind throughout Stage Two: Reflection when you learned that your adolescent and teenage years are pivotal times during which identity formation takes place.

One of the definitions of the word identity is “the condition of being one’s self, and not another” (dictionary.com). It is human nature to seek out explanations for who we are, how we fit into this world, and how we relate (and don’t relate) with others.

Discovering who and what it is that you “identify with” can be useful in several ways:

✓ Allows you to clarify who you are in relation to yourself, as well as to others
✓ Can bring you closer to answering the question of “Who am I?”
✓ Helps you form a sense of who you are as a “whole” person
✓ Enhances your sense of uniqueness as an individual person
✓ Enhances your sense of belonging to a like-minded community/collective

WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT IDENTITIES?

Here are examples of the different ways a person can identify over the course of their lifetime:

- Gender identity
- Political affiliation
- Religious affiliation
- Nerd/geek
- Kink
- Astrology sign
- Introvert/ extravert
- Personality type
- Fandom
- Subculture
- Mental illness diagnosis
- Spiritual beliefs
- Physical descriptions
- Cultural background
- Ethnic background
“Addict” of something (or someone)
Profession/job
Educational background
Things you like (food, beverages, movies, music, TV and book series)
Things you do (hobbies, interests)
Socio-economic status
Relationship status
Age group
Sexual/romantic orientation
“Lifestyle”

Using the list above write down the identities you feel are important to use to describe who you are today. Add any others that aren’t listed. Be sure to also list any identities that seem to conflict with one another.

Using the list you just made, which ones do you feel relatively certain about, and which ones do you feel are currently up for debate?

EXAMINING YOUR PAST IDENTITIES

Over the course of your lifetime you have taken on any number of identities, whether or not you consciously knew it at the time. This is a normal part of the growing and learning process, as it has allowed you to test out these identities to see if they are a real “match” for you.

It can be fascinating to look back on identities that you really thought were “you” at the time and to recognize how you outgrew them. There are also identities that stick with you your entire life, and others you move away from but then return to.

STEP #1—LIST YOUR PAST IDENTITIES

Once again, read through the list of identities in the exercise above (“What Are Your Current Identities?”). Which ones have you used to describe yourself in the past? You can divide them up into age categories, such as “adolescence/teenager years,” “young adulthood,” “ages 18-24,” etc.

Record your answers in your workbook.

STEP #2—WHICH ONES HAVE REMAINED?

Are there any identities that have remained consistent for you throughout the years?

Record your answers in your workbook.

STEP #3—WHICH ONES NO LONGER FIT?

Which identities no longer fit, and why? How did you discern that? What was it like when you transitioned away from them, and towards something else?

Record your answers in your workbook. Hold on to this answer, we will return to it at the end of this section.
SHARING (AND NOT SHARING) OUR IDENTITIES WITH OTHERS

The realization and formation of our identities can be either a public or private matter, or oftentimes a combination of both.

For instance, take a look at anyone’s social media account (including your own). More than likely you will see examples of a person’s identities splashed throughout the page: the profile picture that is chosen, the handle that is used, the information that is shared, the discussions that are brought up. This is even more apparent on dating/relationship sites, where the ability to succinctly describe “who you are” is key to attracting people that you would like to be in contact with.

Fun Fact: The handle that I used in 2007 on lesbianpersonals.com that got the attention of my now-wife was “tattooed-lez-mom.”

More than likely you won’t put every single identity “out there” for everyone to see, keeping some of them to yourself or for only those who know you intimately. This is especially true if you are feeling ambivalent about certain identities you’ve held for a while, and are in the process of re-evaluating them.

When you do choose to share your identities with others this can result in finding others who are like you. You can discover individuals, as well as communities, that can embrace and support you. Although this certainly isn’t a guarantee in every situation, it is something worth considering if one is in search of likeminded folks to connect with.

As affirming as it can be to reveal one’s identities (and therefore one’s self) to others, this can also result in complications. It’s possible others might disagree with how you self-identify and/or decide on their own how they want to identify you. You also might move beyond certain identities while others are still attached to you having them, resulting in them resisting the changes you are experiencing.

Although this might be disheartening it is also understandable. Are there times you have felt this way about a change someone else was going through, in regards their identities?

We could all use a little more compassion and patience when it comes to working through these identity transitions!

BECOMING OVERLY-ATTACHED TO AN IDENTITY

When you become overly attached to an identity you miss recognizing certain truths about yourself:

- Using your identities to hide from an identity you aren’t ready to face
- Over-emphasizing certain identities and neglecting your other identities
- Thinking of yourself only as an identity, and not as a person having identities
- Being too invested in identities which no longer serve you, thus becoming blind to discovering other possible identities

As you continue to learn more about identity formation you can become aware of the existence of your identities without letting them solely define who you are. Once you have this awareness you’ll be able to better recognize when it is time to move on from identities that are no longer serving a purpose in your life.
Bringing “Gender Identity” Back into the Discussion

Look back at your answers in the exercise “Examining Your Past Identities” (p.121). Read over your response to the following questions: “Which identities no longer fit you? How did you know this?”

You can use the answer to this question as a way to re-visit your discovery and evolution process, this time focusing specifically on your gender identity.

How have you realized in the past that a certain identity no longer suited you? How can you apply this to your current questions about your gender identity? Record your answers in your workbook.

TIP: Keep in mind that gender affects nearly every aspect of who you are. This means the clearer you are about your gender identity the clearer you’ll be about who you are as a whole.

Check-In Time!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“KEEPING IN MIND THE ‘BIG PICTURE’”:
“THE QUESTIONNAIRE”

The last step to keeping the “big picture” in mind during your gender identity exploration is exploring the different ways (in detail and layer-by-layer) you are being affected by gender identity confusion.

This concept was first mentioned in “Wisdom Tip: Simplifying the Complicated” (p.109). Now we’re going to put it into practice!

The following questions will help you examine as many layers of yourself as possible, focusing on gender only if it makes sense for you to do so. This way you can discover which attributes of yourself and your life are most affected by gender and which are not.

Once you’ve finished Stage Three: Exploration you’ll have the chance to put all of these pieces together so you can see if any patterns have formed. For now, give each question as much individual attention as possible.

🔍 Get out your workbook—you’ll need it for this entire section!

TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU FILL OUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE

#1—Each question is open-ended. This is to encourage you to use your own words to describe your experience and give you the chance to explore complex questions in more depth.

#2—“How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?” This question is asked because it is possible not all of the questions will tie back into your gender identity. Results will differ from person to person—there are no wrong and/or right answers here, only your answers.

#3—Fill out what you can. You may not be able to answer all of the questions right now, and/or your answers might change over time. You will have the opportunity to fill this questionnaire out again towards the end of the book once you have worked through Stage Three: Exploration.

EXAMPLES

Q: How do you feel about the name you current use and are addressed as? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

Although it was unintentional on my parents’ part when they named me I feel my first name is fairly gender neutral. This does relate to my gender because, if I felt it was “too feminine,” I would want to change it.

Q: How do you feel about having the amount of body hair that you have/don’t have? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

I do not like having body hair. I can’t even put into words how wrong it feels to have it, and to have to see it on me. I am pretty sure this has to do with my gender, although maybe I just don’t like body hair in general?
LET’S BEGIN!

1. How do you feel about the name you currently use and are addressed as? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

2. How do you feel about the way you are addressed by a gendered term that coincides with your assigned-sex-at-birth? (ex: ma’am, sir, ladies, fellas, lad, lass). How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

3. How do you feel about the way you are addressed by a gendered term that does not coincide with your assigned-sex-at-birth? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

4. How do you feel about being addressed as your assigned-sex-at-birth pronoun? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

5. How do you feel being addressed by gendered adjectives such as “pretty” or “handsome”? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

6. How do you feel about using the public restrooms/changing rooms that you are “supposed to” based on your current gender presentation? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

7. How do you feel about having/not having a menstrual cycle? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

8. How do you feel about being able to/not being able to conceive a child? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

9. How do you feel about having the amount of body hair that you have/don’t have? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

10. How do you feel about having the amount of facial hair that you have/don’t have? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

11. How do you feel about your voice? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

12. How do you feel about tone and pitch in which you speak? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

13. How do you feel about your eyebrows? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

14. How do you feel about your hairstyle? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

15. How do you feel about your current wardrobe? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

16. How do you feel about wearing/not wearing makeup? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

17. How do you feel about wearing/not wearing earrings, having/not having piercings and/or
tattoos, and carrying/not carrying certain accessories? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

18. How do you feel about your height? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

19. How do you feel about your chest? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

20. How do you feel about your body shape? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

21. How do you feel about the structure of your face? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

22. How do you feel about the size of your hands and feet? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

23. How do you feel about having (or not having) an “Adam’s Apple”? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

24. How do you feel about your genitals? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

25. How would you describe your sexual orientation? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

26. How do you feel about having partners, in regard to physical intimacy? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

27. How do you feel about having partners, in regard to emotional intimacy? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

28. How do you feel about assumptions others make about you based on their perception of your gender? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

29. How do you feel about the way your family addresses you when not using your name? (i.e. son/daughter, niece/nephew, mother/father, etc.) How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

30. To what extent do you feel your hobbies and interest truly reflect who you are? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

31. How do you feel when you are separated into groups according to your perceived gender? How much (if at all) does this relate to your gender?

**SUMMARY OF YOUR RESPONSES**

Read through your answers. Which of your responses are most problematic to you? (i.e. revealed a high level of disconnect, dissatisfaction, discomfort, etc.). These can be questions that do or do not relate to gender.

📝 List all of the questions, along with your answers, in your workbook.
How many of these questions and answers that you just listed are related to gender?

[List all of the questions, along with your answers, in your workbook.]

[CHECK-IN TIME!]

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
CHAPTER TWO: 
DECONSTRUCTING GENDER

While filling out “The Questionnaire” you examined different aspects of who you are and determined how much gender affects each one of them. This was to help you get a more accurate picture of the specific areas of your life you struggle with the most when it comes to the gap you feel between your assigned-sex-at-birth and your gender identity.

The next step is to put aside whatever you think you know about gender and approach it with an open mind as we spend this chapter deconstructing gender.

You probably have at least some idea of what gender is—otherwise you wouldn’t be reading a book entitled You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery. You know there is something bothering you when it comes to the gender you were socialized as, are seen as, and are expected to behave as.

This chapter is your chance to clear up confusion and fill in some gaps in your understanding of what gender is and what it means to question your assigned-at-birth sex

As we set forth on this leg of the journey keep this in mind...

There isn’t a “perfect” definition of what it means to be trans/transgender.

There are multiple ways to define and discuss gender, therefore I cannot lay claim to possessing the “right” way to do so. This is just my way. Be sure to continue seek out and explore other perspectives until you find the one(s) you most deeply resonate with.

What matters most is that your answers are right for you.
“DECONSTRUCTING GENDER”: 
WHAT GENDER IDENTITY IS...AND ISN’T

“To know someone’s identity you have to ask.” — Micah (neutrois.me)

Think back to the question you were asked at the very beginning of this book:

Are you uncomfortable with your assigned sex at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES      MAYBE       NO

This question was posed because you were assigned a sex at birth based on the physical manifestation of your “biological sex.”

“Biological (sex) includes physical attributes such as external genitalia, sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, and internal reproductive structures. At birth, it is used to assign sex, that is, to identify individuals as male or female.” — genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender

As you can probably see, this presents several problems.

**BIOLOGICAL SEX DOES NOT DETERMINE GENDER IDENTITY**

Since the assumption is made that one’s biological sex and gender identity are identical, this means an infant is also assigned a gender identity as soon as their “biological sex” is determined. This assignment of sex and gender can even happen while the baby is in the womb! (thanks to ultrasound technology).

This assumption of gender is based solely on whether the baby has a penis (assigned male), a vagina (assigned female), or a combination of both (assigned intersex).

However, there are many documented instances where a person’s gender identity and assigned biological sex do not align. This indicates that:

**Biological sex does not determine one’s gender identity.**

This conclusion reveals that the archaic practice of assigning gender at birth based on biological sex needs re-evaluation and adjustment.

To be fair, this is an approach to gender identity that has only recently begun to receive attention. We can’t necessarily find fault with anyone for going along with this for so long.

- Embarrassing Fact: In 2000 I was incredibly frustrated at my child’s father for not wanting to find out if we were having a “boy or a girl,” and continued to hold this against him for several years.
The ritual of assigning gender to a baby either before or at birth is deeply embedded into our society, which can make it challenging to imagine how this could be changed. Nonetheless, it is time we start exploring new options.

YOUR ASSIGNED-SEX AND ASSIGNED-GENDER AT BIRTH

Based on the physical “proof” gathered by doctors, your parents, etc., what sex (and therefore what gender) were you assigned at birth?

_________ Male   _________ Female   _________ Intersex

Write your answer to this question in your workbook.

On the scale below, what is your hunch as to where do you think you might fall, when it comes to your actual gender? You can always change this later!

Male ——————| —————— Even Split ——————| ——————Female

Nowhere on this scale
Various places on the scale at various times
I’m not sure yet

Write your answer to this question in your workbook.

WHAT DETERMINES GENDER IDENTITY?

So what does determine one’s gender identity? It’s a complex question that can have many answers, depending on who you ask.

“Gender identity goes beyond gender roles. It runs deeper than clothes, hair, makeup, colors; although these are means to express it, they do not make your gender. To me gender identity is a feeling: something internal, intangible, and very difficult to explain with words.”

— Micah (neutrois.me)

For the sake of this exercise, and certainly at the risk of over-simplifying it, let’s use this formula as a place to start:

Your internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither +
Your gender expression (or desired gender expression) +
Your unique combination of masculinity and femininity =

Your Gender Identity*

*Some might also include aspects of their biological sex as a part of what defines their gender identity.
Whether or not you incorporate this entire formula into your definition of “gender identity,” the point is that you determine your gender identity.

(To further complicate matters, coming to conclusions about one’s gender identity and how to express it cannot help but be influenced by the social environment in which one exists. You can learn more about this through the study of social identity theory, which was first theorized by Tajfel and Turner in 1986**).

TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER QUESTIONED THEIR GENDER...

This definition of gender identity can come across as confusing to someone whose assigned-sex-at-birth is in alignment with their internal sense of gender (aka “cisgender”). Someone who is cisgender doesn’t need to spend time or energy “determining” their gender identity—by coincidence, it’s just fine as it is!

This doesn’t mean that they won’t have issues with certain gender roles and stereotypes that are placed upon them. However, this is separate from having issues with their actual gender identity not matching the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Individuals whose internal sense of gender does not align with their assigned-sex-and-gender-at-birth will more than likely spend considerable time and energy over the course of their life trying to determine what’s really going on inside of them (see “Wisdom Tip #4: The Stages of ‘Gender Identity Formation’” on p.126).

The bottom line is gender is a core aspect of who we are.

Again, those who have never questioned their gender may not understand why this is true and what it even means. I encourage these individuals to pay attention to how many times within one day they are:

- Verbally gendered (being addressed or referred to as a specific gender)
- Told to use a gendered space (public bathrooms, changing rooms, clothing departments)
- Expected to abide by rules and expectations based on the gender they are perceived to be.

Gender is everywhere.

STARTING TO THINK ABOUT YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

Revisit the following formula:

Your internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither +

Your gender expression (or desired gender expression) +

Your unique combination of masculinity and femininity =

Your Gender Identity

Based on what we’ve discussed, think about what your might put into this formula. Knowing full well you can change your answers later, what would the “rough draft” look like of this formula for yourself?

Write your answer to this question in your workbook.

What would you say your level of comfort is with the gender others perceive and assume you to be? This is on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “Very Uncomfortable” and 10 being “Very Comfortable.”

Write your answer to this question in your workbook.

A LOOK AT “GENDER IDENTITY OPTIONS”

For those who are searching for answers about their gender identity it can be helpful to know definitions of the various terms that could be use to describe one’s experience.

In this section we’re going to look at the terms transgender, gender-nonconforming, and Gender Dysphoria.

THE VARIOUS USES OF THE TERM “TRANSGENDER”

When it comes to using the term transgender as a way to describe one’s experience of their gender identity, recent years have seen an expansion of this ever-changing “definition.” In other words, the days of, “There is only one definition of transgender and if you don’t fit it then you aren’t really transgender” are quickly fading.

Keeping this caveat in mind, what follows are a few ways the term transgender is currently being used. As you read through them, be mindful that:

- You are not limited to connecting with only one of these descriptors of transgender.
- You have the freedom to connect with one descriptor now and then realize you connect with another one or a different one at a future date.
- You don’t have to connect any of these descriptors and can still feel a disconnect between your assigned-sex-at-birth and your gender identity.

#1—TRANSGENDER AS AN UMBRELLA TERM (AKA “TRANS”)

This perspective goes with the idea that the word “trans” means “across” or “beyond.” So being “trans-gender” means you are going across/beyond the gender you were assigned at birth, and the destination can vary greatly.

That is why there are so many options beneath the Transgender Umbrella. This includes non-binary identities (such as androgynous, genderfluid, genderqueer) as well as binary identities (i.e. transman, transwoman).

This approach can simplify things for those searching for answers to their questions about their gender identity. The “umbrella” gives multiple options from which to choose. “Why yes, I definitely find myself under there somewhere, therefore I must be trans!” Knowing there are so many others who feel they fit somewhere under that umbrella can help bring someone a feeling of community, belonging, and relief.

However, this approach can create confusion by lumping all gender identities and gender expressions into one category. The general population may not understand there are differences in
the ways everyone under the umbrella identifies. It can also frustrate people who are of a particular gender identity who don’t want to be “lumped in” with other gender identities beneath the umbrella.

#2—**TRANSGENDER IN REFERENCE TO MEDICAL TRANSITION (AKA “TRANSSEXUAL”)**

This perspective pertains to those who feel *transgender* describes someone who is (or will be) taking medical steps to align themselves with their gender identity. These medical steps can include hormone therapy, hair removal, and a wide variety of surgeries.

This definition of *transgender* is what our current mainstream media is profiling most frequently; therefore it comes with unique benefits and challenges. The average layperson is being taught that to be “transgender” means to transition medically and socially from their assigned-sex-at-birth to the “other side” of the gender binary.

For some this assumption can be useful. If this mainstream description of “transgender” fits who you are then it may be easier for others to comprehend what you are going through. However, if you identify as “transgender” and do not fit the narrative that is being popularized by the media, this could make it more challenging for you to convey your personal experience to others.

#3—**TRANSGENDER AS A DESCRIPTOR OF A “MEDICAL CONDITION”**

Some prefer to use the term *transgender* only when describing what they call their “medical condition” to describe the mismatch they feel between their assigned-sex-at-birth and their gender identity.

For instance, if you were assigned-male-at-birth and your gender identity is female, you would use this descriptor of “transgender” only in the context of working with mental health and medical professionals. You refer to yourself as being “female” or “a woman” and not as “transgender.”

Everyone has the right to identify (or not identify) however they choose—this approach enables those who connect with this as their experience to do so.

However, it is important to look at whether this desire to separate yourself from the term *transgender* is empowering, or if it stems from a place of internalized transphobia (“Becoming Aware of Internalized Transphobia,” p.116).

Do any of these descriptors of “transgender” pique your interest? Do you feel disconnected from any of them? If so, why? Write your answer to these questions in your workbook.

** DEFINING “GENDER-NONCONFORMING”**

There are individuals who experience discomfort with their assigned-sex-at-birth but feel the word “transgender” doesn’t accurately describe this feeling. “Gender-nonconforming” is one of the options available to those who are seeking a way to describe their experience without having to put themselves into a category they feel doesn’t truly fits them.**

*Transsexual* has developed a negative connotation in many respects and therefore should only be used if it is how a person asks to be identified.

**“Gender expansive,” “gender variant” and “gender creative” are also used to describe this experience.
“Gender-Nonconformity refers to people who do not follow other people’s ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.”

—Sylvia Rivera Law Project (srlp.org)

A good example of this can be seen (in certain cultures) in the gender expression of some of today’s youth. There are more children, adolescents, and teenagers breaking gender norms nowadays (some even don’t know they are doing so!), especially as more parents are encouraging and supportive of this.

As a result, more and more youth have the freedom to “gender-bend” without being policed, as well not being pre-maturely labeled as “transgender” when they actually aren’t (although parents are still strongly encouraged to listen for any indications from their child that they may indeed be questioning their gender identity).

Additionally, someone can identify as both transgender and gender-nonconforming (i.e. someone who doesn’t feel aligned with their assigned-sex-at-birth and also bends the rules of gender expectations).

Learning there is an option such as “gender-nonconforming” can bring individuals who connect with this a sense of relief. They may have previously believed they had to abide by certain criteria in order to claim the right to feel uncomfortable with the “norms” placed upon them by the gender they are perceived as.

Do you feel any connection to the term “gender-nonconforming,” when it comes to your own experience of gender? Write your answer to these questions in your workbook.

**DEFINING “NON-BINARY”**

The term non-binary carries similar power to expand gender options as gender-nonconforming does. It can be the answer someone is looking for but didn’t realize existed. We’ll be exploring this in the next section, “Non-Binary Gender Identities.”

**DEFINING “GENDER DYSPHORIA”**

According to dictionary.com the definition of dysphoria “as related to medicine” is:

An emotional state marked by anxiety, depression, and restlessness

This is why the description of having these types of feelings around one’s gender can be referred to as gender dysphoria.

The use of this term has increased over the past several years due to:

- It’s inclusion in the 2011 World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7 as “discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person’s gender identity and that person’s sex assigned at birth and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics.”
- It’s inclusion in 2013 in the 5th Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which replaced the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder.
The term *gender dysphoria* has been around for some time. It was coined in 1974 when Dr. Norman Fisk, in an effort to broaden the definition of what it meant to be “transsexual,” opened a clinic where persons could be diagnosed with “gender dysphoria syndrome” and therefore have a higher chance of being approved for “sex reassignment.”*

Although the term *gender dysphoria* is used for diagnostic purposes by therapists and medical professionals (which has helped in the fight to have insurance companies cover the costs of transgender health care), it is being used in other contexts as well.

Many of my clients use this term as a way to describe how they are feeling about the discomfort they are experiencing with their assigned-sex-at-birth (“I’m feeling very dysphoric today,” “That incident brought up so much of my dysphoria”).

This feeling of *dysphoria* in regard to one’s gender oftentimes surfaces as the result of something that happened to them in a social situation, and/or when they experience a strong feeling of discomfort associated with their physical body, specifically in relation to their gender.

It’s important to note that someone who identifies as transgender can experience *gender dysphoria* at different levels and in different ways, or maybe not even at all. However, they may still be required to use the term with certain mental health and medical professionals for the aforementioned diagnostic purposes.**

**From what you just learned about Gender Dysphoria, does this sound like something you might use as a way to describe your experience?**

_write your answer to this question in your workbook._

**CHECK-IN TIME!**

*Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?*

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**For more on this topic check out: Ritchie, Ronnie. "You Can Still Be Transgender If You Don't Feel Physical Dysphoria – Here's Why." Everyday Feminism. Web.*
“DECONSTRUCTING GENDER”: NON-BINARY IDENTITIES

“Society seems to think there are only two valid options when it comes to gender – man or woman – when there are actually lots of other ways to embody gender, and even ways of having no gender at all.”

—Sam Dylan Finch

Let’s start with a few interesting facts about my experience with non-binary identities:

- Almost 1/3 of the emails I have received from around the world are written by individuals who ask me, either specifically or using other terms, “Could it be that I’m non-binary?”

- Of all of my “Ask a Gender Therapist” YouTube videos the one that has been viewed the 2nd most number of times (after “How Do I Know If I’m Transgender”) is “Can I Transition if I am Non-Binary or Genderfluid?”

- In 2013 I attended a workshop about non-binary identities during the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. It was there that I had my first realization that I felt incredibly uncomfortable introducing myself as a “female” who uses “she/her” pronouns. Nor did I want to introduce myself as a “male” using “he/him” pronouns.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NON-BINARY?

To be able to explain “non-binary” let’s first define “binary.”

📖 “Binary,” in regard to gender identity, refers to being female or male, woman or man, girl or boy. “Bi” = two, meaning there are only two options for gender that exist.

Or so we thought.

As a gender identity “non-binary” does indeed exist!

📖 “Non-binary” means to feel uncomfortable identifying as male or female. Not feeling aligned with the sex and gender one was assigned at birth while also not feeling aligned with the “opposite” gender.*

It can be difficult for someone to put into words why they feel this way about their gender. They may only know what does and doesn’t feel “right” when they are reminded of this (and remember: since gender is everywhere, it is bound to happen quite often).

*“Non-Binary Transition for Medical and Service Providers” by Micah (http://neutrois.me/2015/09/21/non-binary-workshop-p1/)
THE CATEGORIES OF NON-BINARY IDENTITIES

*Non-binary* is an umbrella term that has a multitude of options within it. That’s because if someone feels like they are “not binary” the possibilities are endless as to how gender can be experienced and described.

Let’s look at a few of the general categories that non-binary identities can be broken into*:

**Agender:** To feel as though you are without gender. Feeling as though gender is lacking within you, is undefinable, or unknowable. Agender can also be used as a way of stating you have no gender identity, and therefore non-binary may not accurately describe your experience either.

**Androgyne:** When your gender feels both masculine and feminine. This does not have to be an “even split” between masculine and feminine, nor does it have to remain the same combination at all times.

**Demigender:** Feeling a partial connection to a gender identity. There are sub-categories to choose from such as demiboy, demigirl, and demiandrogyne.

**Genderfluid/Genderflux:** Variances in your gender over time. Which genders? That is up to the individual. Over how much time? How often? Again, that is up to each individual.

**Genderqueer:** Can be used as an umbrella term, like non-binary. A place for those who feel like existing terms fail to truly express their gender (or lack thereof). It is oftentimes used to describe the intersection of one’s gender identity, sexual orientation, and romantic orientation.

**Bigender:** Feeling as if you are experiencing two gender identities simultaneously, or varying between the two. These gender identities can be binary or non-binary.

**Neutrois:** To feel that your gender is neutral or “null.” A combination of the French words *neutre* (“neutral”) and *trois* (“three”).

**Pangender:** Feeling that your gender is described by having all genders co-existing within yourself, including genders which have yet to be named, and perhaps will never be named. All of the genders do not have to be experienced at the same time and can be experienced more or less of the time than others.

**Third Gender:** When individuals are categorized, either by themselves or a society, as being neither male nor female. Specific terms are used within this “third gender” category by societies that recognize there are three or more genders. Because this term is very culturally and societally specific it is *strongly advised* that one looks into the cultural origins of these terms before deciding to identify as such.

Within each of these categories there are even more specific terms that can help you narrow down your particular experience with gender. Additionally, you can use as many terms as you want, in whatever combination you want!

*With lots of help from gender.wikia.com/wiki/Gender_Wiki*
I heard a non-binary YouTuber (thecharliecharmander) describe it like this:

“Think of it as using adjectives to describe your gender identity, instead of nouns.”

Although this can sound liberating and full of possibilities, this could also sound a little confusing for some of you. “Chapter Seven: Putting it All Together” will walk through the steps of choosing from these terms and piecing together your very own description of your gender identity.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU MIGHT BE NON-BINARY?

Read through the following questions. Which of these would you answer “yes” to?

Write down any of the questions you can answer “yes” to in your workbook.

TIP: Keep in mind that answering “yes” to any of these questions doesn’t mean you are undeniably non-binary! It means there’s something here worth exploring further.

- Do you feel uncomfortable being given only the choice of male or female as options? (Ex: checking either “male” or “female” on forms, restrooms, at concerts when the singer says to the crowd, “Ladies you sing—now guys you sing!”)
- Do you shop in whichever clothes section has the clothes you want to wear, regardless of how the section is labeled? (as well as having difficulty finding clothes that fit you properly?)
- Do you dislike being addressed as either “sir” or “ma’am,” as well as gendered terms such as “ladies” or “fellas”?
- Do you wish you could be seen as whatever gender you feel like on any particular day?
- Do you wish there was no such thing as gender and would rather have nothing to do with it?
- Do you feel fine with whatever gender you are perceived as, maybe even getting a kick out of confusing others with how you are presenting?
- Do you have discomfort with being referred to as either “she” or “he”?
- Do you have no real attachment to being referred to as either “she” or “he”?
- Would you like to have the freedom to use non-gender-related terms to describe yourself, even when your gender is specifically asked for?
- Do you have a first name that is very gendered (i.e. very feminine or masculine) and it feels like it doesn’t suit you?
- Do you find it unpleasant to be presented with only two options, especially if you are expected to choose one of those based on the gender others assume you are?
- In regard to your sexual orientation, do you find it difficult to specify if you are “gay” or
“straight” because that means you are saying you are interested only in the “opposite” or “same” gender?

- Do you feel like there are some aspects of who you are physically, socially, and hormonally that you are fine with and others that you are very uncomfortable with that are related to the gender you are perceived as?

- Do you find yourself not wanting to be limited by gender when it comes to what you can be interested in, how you can act, how you dress, etc.?

If this exercise has begun to spark your curiosity, keep on reading! All of the exercises in this book were created keeping in mind the possibility that your gender identity may very well be one that is non-binary. There are also resources in the Further Reading section of this book for you to explore more about non-binary identities.

**POSSIBLE CHALLENGES WITH IDENTIFYING AS NON-BINARY**

On the one hand, it can be a big relief for someone to realize that they might identify as non-binary if they had previously only been exposed to binary options of gender identity.

On the other hand, the reality is that societies will frequently show initial resistance to a new perspective about something that has been a long-standing “tradition” (in this case, the notion that are only two genders: “male” and “female”).

This resistance can be conveyed as confusion, uncertainty, and discomfort towards the people who are having this experience. It can also result in a refusal to acknowledge their very existence, as well as expressions of disrespect and disdain.

Keep in mind it is common (as well as necessary) for a society to be introduced to “new perspectives” and then to struggle with them for a while. Hopefully, over time, the society will come to an understanding that this is a valid perspective and therefore learn to embrace it as a genuine expression of the human experience of many of the members of the society.

This is where we are at with non-binary identities in much of the world. The existence of non-binary gender identities is something that has only recently been put into words in many societies (although certainly not all of them). This means it’s still in its infancy stage of being recognized and incorporated by these populations.

Here are some of the challenges that people who identify as non-binary might come across when they are in the process of exploring and sharing this:

- Exploring different gender identities over a period of time and having others say you are being confusing/that they don’t believe you

- Not having many role models to choose from, whether in private or public life

- Not seeing yourself represented in the “mainstream”

- Wanting to use third-gender pronouns (such as they/them) but having issues with getting others to get to used it

- Having difficulty finding resources, support, and stories of those who identity as non-binary

- Having your gender identity (or lack of gender identity) being seen as invalid by those who
are binary (i.e. “Pick a side”)

- Feeling like you don’t “qualify” as being trans/transgender
- Not wanting to identify as trans/transgender but having others say that you are
- Encountering resistance if you decide to take medical steps to transition
- Encountering resistance if you decide not to take medical steps to transition
- Being faced with increasing awareness that societies were oftentimes formed with “binary” as the only option

Remember, if you identify as non-binary you are in the early stages of what is seen in many societies as a “new perspective.” It’s going to take time for everyone else to get caught up, so be sure to find support and community for yourself!

☑️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“DECONSTRUCTING GENDER”: BREAKING DOWN GENDER STEREOTYPES

Regardless if someone likes, dislikes, or is indifferent to the existence of gender stereotypes, the bottom line is that they do exist and more than likely will continue to exist for some time.

This exercise focuses on how you can be more aware of gender stereotypes and, in particular, how gender stereotypes might be confusing your gender identity exploration.

WHY MIGHT GENDER STEREOTYPES CONFUSE YOUR GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION?

“Gender stereotyping is defined as overgeneralization of characteristics, differences and attributes of a certain group based on their gender. Gender stereotypes create a widely accepted judgment or bias about certain characteristics or traits that apply to each gender.”*

Many of the messages I receive from individuals who are questioning their gender identity include details as to why they are confused. Here’s an example of what it looks like when someone accidentally gender stereotypes themselves in one of these messages:

#1: The writer gives examples of their interests, behaviors, and/or appearance. They might compare the things they used to do to what they do now, or what they wish they could do.

#2: They will then assign these characteristics genders, usually “female” or “male” (as well as using terms such as “girly,” “guy-like,” “feminine,” “masculine,” etc.).

#3: They will then ask me if their gender identity is “female” or “male” based on the assigned gender of these characteristics. If they are aware of non-binary identities they might also ask if they are “neither” gender, “both” genders, or “many” genders based on the evidence they have given me.

#4: Additionally, some writers ask me if having the “opposite” characteristics of their assigned-sex-at-birth means they are gay (i.e. someone assigned male-at-birth having “feminine” qualities and someone assigned female-at-birth having “masculine” qualities”).

*http://nobullying.com/gender-stereotype
It is entirely understandable why someone would take a look at these self-descriptors and use them when trying to determine their gender identity. However, when it comes down to it:

*Your interests, behaviors, physical features, and appearance do not exclusively determine your gender identity.*

This can be a tricky concept to grasp, and a frustrating one as well. It means you cannot make a list of your interests, behaviors, aspects of physical features, and appearance as a way to define your gender identity. These may give some indications as to what it *might* be, but they are not the only pieces of the puzzle.

**WHERE DOES GENDER STEREOTYPING COME FROM?**

Discussion has been brewing for several years now about how gender roles and stereotypes are “socially constructed.” This means that every society is different when it comes to how they define gender, what “male” and “female” should look and act like, and if there is any room for discussion for non-binary gender identities.

Every society has its own story as to how its gender stereotypes evolved and to what extent they are adhered to. Religion, politics, agriculture, poverty, wealth, industrialism, war, culture, civil rights movements, the entertainment industry, economics, and the media can be just a few of the motivating factors behind how a society’s gender stereotypes evolve.

Difficulties arise when a rigid association (i.e. a stereotype) forms between what is expected of a person behavior-wise and the gender they are perceived as being. This rigid expectation also completely excludes the spectrum of non-binary gender identities.

Over the years some societies have relaxed their gender stereotypes, while others remain firmly entrenched in them. You more than likely are aware of what your society’s views are on these gender expectations. Depending on your age and/or how many places you have lived, you may have had multiple experiences with this over the course of your life.

✏️ *What was your experience of gender roles and stereotypes growing up? Have you made changes in your life that reflect a perspective on gender roles and stereotypes that is different from what you experienced in the past? Write your answers in your workbook.*

**REMOVING GENDER FROM THE PICTURE (FOR NOW)**

It is time to take a closer look at ways you might be caught in the trap of trying to fit yourself into a “male” or “female” box based upon gender stereotypes. For now you’re going examine your interests, behaviors, and appearance as being separate from your gender identity. The focus will be on these characteristics as a part of your *overall* identity.

This doesn’t mean there isn’t a time and place to bring these elements of who you are into the bigger picture as clues to helping you learn more about your gender identity. In fact we’ll be doing that plenty later on in this guide!

*The intention of this exercise is to make things less complicated in your gender identity exploration.*

Removing “the gender factor” from the equation will help free you from constraints you may
have taken upon yourself, and allow other things to inform you about who you are.

Let’s look at each of these areas individually:

**INTERESTS**

These could be hobbies, tastes in music, entertainment, what you read, what you watch, what you like to study and learn about, what you spend your time thinking about, things you like to do, who you like to spend time with, things you like to talk about, how you like to spend your time, what you like to eat and drink, where you like to spend your time, hobbies, quirks, lifestyles, etc.

![In your workbook, make a list of three columns labeled A, B, and C with the heading “My Interests.”]

a) Look again at the examples of “interests” on the previous page. What are your interests? List these in column “A.”

b) For each interest listed, write either “male” or “female” in column B if you’ve been taught to believe that your interest is “traditionally” associated with either of those genders. You can write “neither” or “both” as options as well. Include anything that comes to mind, even things that you keep hidden from others.

c) If you were able to remove the gender that is associated with each interest would you still want to keep it? Write “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” in column C.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY INTERESTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
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<td><strong>B</strong></td>
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<td><strong>C</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Online gaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar playing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BEHAVIORS**

This includes the various aspects of the way you present your “self” to the world. “Behavior” includes the way you use your body: the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you gesture. It can be the way you “act” in certain situations: assertive, passive, anxious, laid-back, organized, spontaneous, cocky, humble, extraverted, introverted. It can be a certain role you’ve taken on in general: as a caregiver, an intellect, a leader, a free spirit, an adventurer, a mediator, an innovator.

![In your workbook, make a list of three columns labeled A, B, and C with the heading “My Behaviors.”]

Make a list of three columns labeled A, B, and C with the heading “My Behaviors.”

a) Look again at the examples of “behaviors” on the previous page. How would you describe your behaviors? List these in Column A.
b) For each behavior listed, write either “male” or “female” in Column B if you’ve been taught to believe that your behavior is “traditionally” associated with either of those genders. You can write “neither” or “both” as options as well. Include anything that comes to mind, even things that you may have kept hidden from others.

c) If you were able to remove the gender that is associated with each behavior would you still want to keep it? Write “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” in Column C.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a good listener</td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td>maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking softly</td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sarcastic</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPEARANCE**

This is what you can *control and change* about your appearance. Think of it as “you,” head-to-toe: your hair (it’s length, how it’s cut, color or highlights, is it thinning?), the structure of your face, makeup, your eyebrow shape (are they tweezed or not?), ear piercings, any other visible piercings, sunglasses, reading glasses, use of accessories (such as headwear, scarves, rings, bracelets, suspenders, ties, purse/bag), finger and toenails (painted or not?), smells (perfume, cologne, scent of shampoo or deodorant), weight, tattoos, types and style of outfits worn (including footwear), undergarments.

All of these aspects, the ones you display publicly and the ones you might keep private, come together as a “visual” picture of you: how others see you as well as how you see you.

*In your workbook, make a list of three columns labeled A, B, and C with the heading “My Appearance.”*

a) How would you describe your appearance? List these in Column A.

b) For each aspect of your appearance, write either “male” or “female” in Column B if you’ve been taught to believe that this aspect is “traditionally” associated with either of those genders. You can write “neither” or “both” as options as well. Include anything that comes to mind, even things that you may have kept hidden from others.

c) If you were able to remove the gender that is associated with each aspect of your appearance, would you want to still keep that as part of your appearance? Write “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” in Column C.
### MY APPEARANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Medium length</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purse</td>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo</td>
<td>Shoulder tattoo</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on your answers in these exercises, how close would you say you are to having interests, behaviors, and an appearance that is consistent with you as a person as opposed to you as a gender. Use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very close” and 10 being “very close.”

📝 Write your answer to this question in your workbook.

✔️ **CHECK-IN TIME!**

*Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?*
CHAPTER THREE:
FINDING OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH

Take a moment to look again at “Wisdom Tip #3: Learn From Those Who Have Already Been There” (p.106). Notice how many of the suggestions can be addressed (both directly and indirectly) by connecting with others with whom you can identify. For instance:

- Learn (and believe) that trans/transgender/gender dysphoria is something that exists
- Seek out and experience validation of who you are and how you feel
- Realize that medically and/or socially transitioning to your true gender is possible and something can be done about it
- Find people who experience and see you as yourself
- Discover what resources other people use
- Talk with people who are like you/going through a similar experience

In this chapter you’ll be taking a closer look at:

LEARNING FROM THE STORIES OF OTHERS

You’ll see how learning from the stories of others with whom you identify and connect can help reveal a lot of information about yourself, and how you can go about finding these types of kindred folks and their stories.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS ONLINE

You’ll explore the benefits of finding other people online, learning how to connect with them and how to do so while remaining safe and smart.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN PERSON

We’ll look at how easy or difficult it might be for you to connect with others in person, how you can find people to connect with, and what to do if you want to do this but are unable to at this time.
"FINDING OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH": LEARNING FROM THE STORIES OF OTHERS

There’s something indescribable about how it feels to see, hear, or read the account of someone’s “story” and recognize yourself in it. People will oftentimes describe this as an “aha moment,” an epiphany, or a revelation.

This type of connection with a person and their story occurs when it connects with you, not only mentally, but also emotionally.

Here are some ways this realization can be experienced:

- Feeling emotional/like you are going to cry
- Actually crying
- Getting goosebumps/the chills
- Feeling lightheaded
- Feeling elated
- Feeling a sense of calm/peace
- Feeling a rush of adrenaline
- Getting short of breath
- Being in a state of shock
- Feeling like the world is spinning
- Feeling like the world has stopped
- Having a desire to exclaim something loudly
- Having a strong urge to share what you have just discovered with someone else

These feelings usually don’t last for long, but they can be deeply impactful. Something in your actual brain chemistry changes in that moment, and the world is rarely ever the same afterwards.

In this exercise we will take a look at where you can find these “kindred folk” and their stories, as well as ideas for how you can use what you learn from them to move further along in your gender identity discovery.

Note: This will specifically be focused on people who you will more than likely not be interacting with (unless they happen to be good about responding to messages and comments).

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU LIKE TO TAKE IN INFORMATION?

Think about your preferences and abilities when it comes to finding kindred folk and their stories.

☐ Do you prefer to watch videos?
☐ Do you prefer to read books?
☐ Do you prefer to listen to audiobooks?
☐ Do you prefer to read blog posts or articles?
☐ Do you prefer to read news articles?
☐ Do you prefer to listen to podcasts?
☐ Do you prefer to watch reality TV shows?
☐ Do you prefer to watch documentaries?

✍ Write your preferences in your workbook.
By focusing on the specific media that you are most likely to seek out, you will be able to narrow your search options down more quickly.

**FINDING SPECIFIC STORIES YOU CAN CONNECT WITH**

Finding specific kindred folk and stories that are “up your alley” can take a bit of perseverance. On the bright side, the age of the internet has made it far easier to find what you are looking for. However, it also means it could take a little while to find what you are specifically looking for.

Most people will begin by typing what they are looking for into their preferred search engine (such as Google, Yahoo, YouTube, Amazon, Wordpress, etc). The key is to try as many different combinations of words and phrases as you can until you hit upon what you are searching for.

Typing in “transgender videos” or “gender confusion” will pull up so many results that you will probably get overwhelmed. Make your search more specific by using terms you have come across that you connect with (if you are uncertain as to what these might be you can look ahead to the list of gender identity options in “Chapter Seven: Putting it All Together”).

Some examples of this are:

- “Non-binary testimonials”
- “Trans women stories”
- “Advice from trans men”
- “Teens who think they are transgender”
- “People who feel like they don’t have a gender”

⚠️ TIP: Be sure to also include as a part of your search the type of medium through which you prefer to take in information (“videos,” “books,” “podcasts,” “reality TV shows”).

Searching for these terms means you have to make an educated guess as to what it is you might be experiencing. Don’t worry—you aren’t being graded on this. You can take as many guesses as you need to, especially as you continue to learn more about yourself.

If at first you don’t come across stories you can relate to, don’t give up. It might take a little while to sift through everything that is out there! Be sure to check out the “Further Reading” section of this book for resources that can help your search.

**KEEPING TRACK OF WHO YOU CONNECTED WITH AND WHY**

When you discover kindred folk whose stories you connect with they will grab your attention and leave a huge impression on you. You can use this section to keep a record of the videos, blog posts, books, etc. so you will always remember how it is they reached you, and how it is they did that. You will have this to look back on when you encounter doubt and uncertainty, as well as to turn to for inspiration and comfort.

✍️ In your workbook, create a section where you can keep track of the following:
Who did you connect with?:

Title of what you watched or read:
Where did you find them? (include specific link, if need be):

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?:

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story? (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations):

Do I want to follow/subscribe to this person so I can continue to learn from them? (If it’s an option):

Repeat this as often as you need to so you can document all of the stories you connected with. Also, don’t forget to add these resources to your “Master List” for easy access! (see “Getting Organized,” p.113).

A NOTE ABOUT FICTIONAL STORIES

Although this exercise was focused on autobiographical resources you might also be interested in searching for fictional stories that contain characters you can connect with. For instance you may strongly connect to characters in novels/literature, television series, motion picture films, fan fiction, comics, etc.

If you turn to fiction to find connection be sure the creators of the work can be trusted to tell the characters' stories with respect, accuracy, and compassion. Doing a search online for opinions others have shared about these fictional pieces of work can give you an idea as to whether or not it is high enough quality for you to explore.

✔ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“FINDING OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH”:
CONNECTING WITH OTHERS ONLINE

Interacting with others online isn’t for everyone. It’s understandable that someone might feel hesitant to reach out to strangers, especially those they may never meet in person.

However, if you are open to trying, this exercise will discuss the benefits of connecting with others online, how to find them, and being safe and smart about it.

WHY SHOULD YOU CONNECT WITH OTHERS ONLINE?

There are many advantages to connecting with others online. It can provide the opportunity to:

- Get ideas and support from those having similar experiences
- Explore more of who you are from the privacy of your home
- Find validation for the way you are feeling
- Practice talking with others about yourself before coming out to loved ones
- Connect with others who can relate to what you are going through
- Help you see potential and possibilities
- Find friendship and reduce loneliness/isolation
- Remind you that there are others out there like you
- Find out what resources other people use

What are some of the reasons you would want to connect with others online? Write about this in your workbook.

Connecting online also offers multiple options for communicating with others. Contact often begins in written form, and it can stay that way if that is what you are most comfortable with. You can also limit the conversations to a more public forum or initiate more private, one-on-one conversations.

If you decide you are comfortable enough to take the relationship a step further you can use platforms such as Skype or FaceTime to have video chats. You can also agree to exchange phone numbers so you can call or text each other.

HOW TO FIND OTHERS ONLINE

Just as it was both easy and difficult to find kindred folk to connect with in person, it can be the same way when trying to find others to connect with online. Chances are there is someone out there who would be the right person (or persons) for you to talk to—it’s finding them amongst all of the noise of the internet that is the challenge.

The best way you can go about doing this are the 3 P’s: patience, personable, and practice.
PATIENCE

You may have to try several different methods of connecting with others before you find the one that works best for you. You may also attempt connection with several different people before you find those with whom you “click.” It’s just like when you are trying to make friends in person: it takes time!

PERSONABLE

Before you jump online seeking others to connect with, remember that these are going to be social exchanges. Therefore act the same as you would if you were getting to know someone in person.

For instance: introduce yourself, be friendly, ask others about themselves, and don’t over-share. Also keep in mind that you may be interacting with people from all over the world so be mindful of any cultural or societal differences. As you continue to get to know people you can relax a bit more into the relationships.

PRACTICE

You’ll definitely need to practice if you aren’t used to talking with others about your gender identity. Go easy on yourself—it might take a little while for you to figure out how to best talk about what’s on your mind. You might also need practice when it comes to how to use the internet to find others online, especially if you wouldn’t consider yourself to be “tech-savvy.” Don’t give up—you’ll get the hang of it!

WHERE TO FIND OTHERS ONLINE

The options for connecting with others online are nearly endless. What follows are ideas as to how you can start doing this. However take the initiative to explore the internet for even more ways!

These are just general resources—you’ll still need to search for those specific terms and phrases we discussed in the previous exercise to help you hone in on the types of people you would like to connect with.

In your workbook, keep track of the ideas you would like to follow up with.

YouTube channels: Although you may get lucky enough to find someone who personally answers fans’ comments more than likely it would be in the comments section that you can find folks with whom you might connect.

Forums, chat rooms, support websites: You can better your chances of connecting with the right websites if you search for those that are specific to what it is you feel you are experiencing.

Facebook groups: This is an option that has really boomed over the past couple of years. Again, if you type in the specific type of group you are looking for, chances are you will be able to find it. Some groups are “open” while others are “closed,” so it’s up to you if that will be an important criteria piece for you.*
Mutual social media friends: Once you begin to connect with others online your network can continue to expand and grow however quickly you would like it to. Pay attention to who is suggested to you as potential new connections (“Who to Follow,” “You May Also Know...”). Be sure to follow the etiquette guidelines of whichever site you are using.

Reddit: Reddit is an “online bulletin board system” where you can find a wide variety of communities to connect with. People post content that others can share and/or comment on. Take some time to get to know a certain community by seeing what it is they post and talk about, and then jump in when you feel ready.

Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat: Each of these sites/apps uses hashtags (#) to help users find topics and people they want to follow and connect with. Each of these platforms has its own unique way of sharing information, so take a look at each one to see which ones feel like someplace you’d like to spend some time.

Dating/friendship websites or apps: Using a dating/friendship website or app is similar to using social media as a way to connect with others, with the added potential game-changer that it can increase your chances of connecting one-on-one with someone. Explore this option while being safe and smart!

Start your own blog: Instead of going out in search of others, you can bring others to you! If you decide to create your own blog you will need to be sure it is listed in such so others can find it. You might also want to combine some of the other ideas in this list with this one (i.e. finding communities and platforms online where you can share your blog/website). A great place to start a free blog is through wordpress.com.

TIP: Many of you may want to be able to connect with others online while, at the same time, not having certain family members, friends, professional connections, etc. know about it quite yet. Therefore you may want to consider setting up a separate account that is specifically used for reaching out to these new connections, so you can continue your exploration in privacy (check with each site to see what their rules are around this). Keep in mind that you may later have to explain to those in your life why you set up this separate account.

BEING SAFE AND SMART WHEN CONNECTING WITH OTHERS ONLINE

Although the precautions one should take when interacting with others online may seem like common sense it doesn’t hurt for us to review them in the context of this exercise. Besides, you may think that you would never disregard any of these suggestions. But meeting someone online that you have made a real connection with can be exciting, even intoxicating. You may be tempted to go against your better judgment and bend a few of the rules, “just this one time.”

Revisit these tips as often as you need to while you begin to form connections with others online:

- Do not share any personal financial information with anyone, such as account numbers, passwords, social security number, etc.
- Be cautious of what photos you decide to share of yourself, as well as of your loved ones.
Do not meet with someone in person until you have gotten to know them for an extended amount of time.

If you do decide to meet in person with someone, do so in a public place for at least the first encounter and let someone else know you what you are doing, where you are going, and when you expect to return.

Remember that whatever you put on the internet, both publicly and privately, can be saved and shared later on.

Be careful about giving out your phone number—make sure you know the person well enough to know that they will not use it more than you are comfortable with.

As for how you can be smart when connecting with others online, try to follow the same guidelines that apply to any in-person relationships you have experienced:

- **Remember they are human**, just like you. Everyone is not always at their best all the time, feelings will get hurt, words will be misinterpreted.
- **Treat it just like any other relationship**. You may go through ups and downs, just like in any other relationship. If this is someone you really end up connecting with you’ll want to ride through the rough patches with patience and understanding.
- **Speak up** if you see or hear something that hints of bullying, shaming, or hate. If it makes you uncomfortable to do publicly, you can privately contact the person and/or contact the person who was on the receiving end of the comment.
- **Respect each other’s time**. If you find people you enjoy talking with remember that everyone has lives offline as well.

**FINAL THOUGHTS...**

One more general piece of advice when it comes to connecting with others online:

*Open your mind and be creative!*

Although you may want to seek out certain people and communities regarding your gender identity exploration, you can broaden your search as well.

Are there communities you already belong to that you would feel comfortable being open with? (Re-visit your list of identities in the previous exercise for ideas).

뇌.Serializable ideas for this in your workbook.

Are there communities you haven’t connected with yet that are known for being open-minded, supportive, and understanding towards issues around gender identity?

뇌.Serializable ideas for this in your workbook.

Opening up your mind to other communities will increase your chances of being able to find folks with whom you can make a connection.
CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?


“FINDING OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH”:
CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN PERSON

“Connect with others in person.” Sure, this sounds great! If only it were that simple. In reality, connecting with others in person is going to be a challenge for some of you. It could be that you aren’t ready to meet others in person, that you are limited in your ability to find others to connect with in person, or that you are generally uncomfortable meeting new people.

GAUGING YOUR ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN PERSON

This exercise is broken up into three parts that are based on the level of difficulty you might have in being able to connect with others in person. Each level is broken down into the categories of “geographically,” “logistically,” and “socially/mentally/emotionally/physically.”

In your workbook, write down each category (along with its difficulty level) that you feel comes closest to describing your situation.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN PERSON: Difficulty Level = “Easy”

- **Geographically:** You live in a city that has an LGBTQ Center, a Gender Identity Center, or both! You are on a college or university campus that has trans/transgender resources. There is a trans/transgender conference held in the area in which you live. You already have friends, family members, or colleagues who identify as trans/transgender. You have a support group already built-in at places you frequent, such as your church, place of employment, etc. You are able to meet people online who live near you, and are able to meet them in person without having to travel far.

- **Logistically:** You have enough freedom in your life to be able to attend support groups and/or meet one-on-one with people you want to spend more time with. You have finances, as well as transportation, that afford you the ability to do this as well. You are able to travel outside of where you live to meet with others, including going to conferences that are trans/transgender focused.

- **Socially/Mentally/Emotionally/Physically:** You don’t mind showing up to support groups alone and are comfortable meeting new people. You are stable mentally and emotionally. You do not have any physical limitations that may inhibit your ability to socialize in person with others.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN PERSON: Difficulty Level = “Challenging, but Possible”

- **Geographically:** Where you live has limited or no resources, but you are within driving distance of someplace that does have them. You may know a couple of people in your area who are trans/transgender who are open to connecting with you. You are able to meet people online who may not live in your city/town, but who you could drive to meet if so desired.

- **Logistically:** You have some limitations as to how much freedom you have in your life to
be able to attend support groups and/or meet one-on-one with people you want to spend more time with. You are on a tight budget but with some extra planning you could save up enough money to drive to support groups and/or meet up with individuals. With a lot of extra planning you might even be able to save up to go to a conference outside of where you live. You either have transportation or are able to acquire transportation.

- **Socially/Mentally/Emotionally/Physically:** You have a definite degree of nervousness in showing up to a support group alone and aren’t always comfortable meeting new people. You have some limitations and/or fluctuations when it comes to your mental and emotional stability. You have a physical limitation that can sometimes make it difficult for you to be able to socialize with others in person.

**CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN PERSON: Difficulty Level = “Close to Impossible”**

- **Geographically:** You live someplace where the risk to your safety is too high to even try to search for trans/transgender resources or people. You do not know anyone who is trans/transgender where you live. You live too far away from anyone who you meet online to be able to meet with them in person. You are too far away from any trans/transgender related conferences to be able to attend them.

- **Logistically:** You are extremely limited as to how much freedom you have in your life to be able to attend support groups and/or meet one-on-one with people you want to spend more time with. Your finances are such as you are unable to afford anything extra, such as gas money to drive a certain distance to attend a support group or meet up with individuals. You do not have reliable transportation. You are unable to afford the expense of attending a conference, whether it is close to you or farther away.

- **Socially/Mentally/Emotionally/Physically:** You have a high amount of anxiety in social settings. You cannot see yourself showing up to a support group or being able to engage with new people. You have severe limitations and/or fluctuations when it comes to your mental and emotional stability. You have a physical limitation that makes it close to impossible for you to be able to socialize with others in person.

**TALLY YOUR RESULTS**

- **If you have the most checkmarks in the “Easy” level:** You should have little to no problem in finding others to connect with in person.

- **If you have the most checkmarks in the “Challenging, but Possible” level:** You should be able to find others to connect with, though it might take extra planning and effort to be able to do so.

- **If you have the most checkmarks in the “Close to Impossible” level:** You will more than likely need to postpone your attempts at connecting with others in person—at least for right now. This is more than likely true if you have any checkmarks in this level.

Which level did you end up coming under? Record this in your workbook.
HOW CAN YOU FIND OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH IN PERSON?

If you are ready and able to pursue connecting with others in person here are some ideas as to how you can do so:

- Ask LGBTQ Centers/Gender Identity Centers in your area about support groups and events
- Ask your/a gender therapist in your area for leads
- Do a thorough internet search for resources in your area, being sure to extend it out as far as you are able and willing to travel
- Look into national conferences that are trans/transgender-oriented
- Look into local and statewide organizations and groups that are trans/transgender-affiliated
- After establishing a solid relationship, consider meeting up with people you have met online

Which of these ideas will you follow through with? Record this in your workbook.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF IT FEELS “CLOSE TO IMPOSSIBLE”?

There are many reasons why some of you have checkmarks in the “Close to Impossible” level, which makes it difficult to address each one of them here.

Instead, what I’d like for you to do is answer the following questions with an open mind and a compassionate heart towards yourself and where you are in life:

1) Can you improve your circumstance or situation? If so, how?

2) What can you do now?

3) What can you plan for later?

4) Is it possible you are more capable than you think you are? Have you have been led to believe certain things about yourself that might not be true?

If applicable, answer these questions in your workbook.

If at all possible, find a counselor, therapist, or coach with whom you can work with to set goals to help get your plan in motion. This person can also work with you on any self-doubts and other issues that may be holding you back.

Knowing that some of you truly are unable to change your circumstances, or at least cannot do so in the foreseeable future, be sure to turn to your online community for support, as well as anyone you can trust as an ally.

☑️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
CHAPTER FOUR:  
LISTENING TO YOUR GUT

Now that you’ve begun to actively explore your inner and outer worlds in regard to your gender identity chances are your Thinking Self has begun to kick into high gear: debating, analyzing, and questioning everything that is being brought to your attention.

This phenomenon occurs because, by opening yourself up to the truth, you are giving your Bodyguard a lot to handle.

Imagine your Bodyguard has, for the past several years, had their feet kicked up, watching Netflix, sipping on a warm beverage, feeling all in all quite relaxed knowing you are playing it safe in what can be a cruel and dangerous world.

All of a sudden a panic alarm goes off. Your Bodyguard is jarred, as if they are awakened from a deep slumber. Tossing aside their creature comforts they throw on the appropriate Bodyguard attire and grab their weapon of choice, ready to defend you from the enemy.

This happens all because you opened up the first exercise of Stage Three: Exploration and began to read it.

Your Bodyguard then hooks up with your Thinking Self. Phrases like, “What are you doing??! This is a terrible idea!!! Why would you want to stir the pot, rock the boat, ruffle any feathers!?!?” shoot from your Bodyguard’s lips as they are fueled by your Thinking Self’s anxiety.

If your Bodyguard is scared enough they will use the worries, doubts, and fears that have been brought up by your Thinking Self to say these things with enough intensity and frequency to make them a part of your daily thought process.

More than likely you have already heard these lines of thinking in the past. Maybe it even stopped you from any exploring you were trying to do before.

This time around I want you to remind your Bodyguard of something:

“Not knowing the truth about myself, and not expressing that truth about myself, is much scarier than keeping it a secret.”

Because your worries, anxieties, doubts and confusions might increase during this time it is important to remember you have other ways of getting closer to your answers besides just your Thinking Self.

This chapter will teach you how you can use your “gut” when your Thinking Self has been working overtime and needs to take a well-earned break.

.toolbox Your “gut” = your hunch, your sense, your instinct, your “Spidey sense,” your intuition
“LISTENING TO YOUR GUT”: USING YOUR GUT TO DISCOVER YOUR “TRUTH”

I once heard about a website called amitransgender.com (that’s “Am I Transgender”) so I decided to check it out.

*Spoiler alert!* If you go to the website here’s what you see on the screen:

**YES**

This reminded me of a comment once left on my “Conversations with a Gender Therapist” Facebook page where someone said:

“Cisgender people don’t spend this much time and energy wondering if they are trans.”

Points taken. As I mentioned earlier, if a book called You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery sounded like something that might help you then it means you have at least some level of discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth.

However, as you have also learned through this book, there doesn’t have to be a black and white answer to your gender identity questions. Even if you have a suspicion as to what is going on with you, you are more than likely looking for more clarification on it.

You already have information inside of you that will help you get closer to your answers.

It’s been there all along. It’s the baggage from Stage Two: Reflection that, in part, has made it difficult for you to access that information.

It’s not gone—remember, it’s in your “trunk of secrets” in your unconscious, and your gut has a direct link to it! This exercise is going to help you use your gut to get some of this information back.

**TOUCHING BASE WITH YOUR CHILD-SELF**

In Stage Two: Reflection you took some time to see if as a child there were ways you may have expressed a gender identity more in line with who you really are. This exercise expands upon this by asking some very specific questions about things you did as a child that may bring up even more clues for you.

Remember, your “child self” holds crucial information for us to access. This was “you” before puberty, before gender expectations, before you were told in some form or another that how you were feeling, thinking, and acting wasn’t “right.”
Let’s take a look at ways your gender identity may have been trying to express itself while you were young*. Take a moment to quiet your mind and let the memories come up without forcing them. It’s okay if it takes multiple tries to do so.

In your workbook, write down the examples from this list that you can recall having done in your youth.

- Praying that you would wake up as not your assigned-sex-at-birth
- Telling Santa Claus that for Christmas you want to become a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Blowing out your candles on your birthday and wishing you could become a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Seeing a shooting star and wishing you could become a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Asking a “Magic 8 Ball” questions about your gender.
- Imagining if you had a genie in a bottle, that you would ask the genie to make you into a gender another than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Dressing up in Halloween costumes that were unlike ones your assigned-sex-at-birth was expected to wear
- Pretending to do activities that your assigned-sex-at-birth usually doesn’t do
- Seeing one of your parents or siblings do something you wish you could do, maybe asking if you could (i.e. shaving your face, painting your nails)
- Playing “dress-up” and wearing clothes that your assigned-sex-at-birth usually doesn’t wear
- Having make-believe friends that treated you like you were a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Having fantasies about being a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Having actual dreams in which you are a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Asking people to call you a name other than the one you were given at birth
- Trying to make your voice sound unlike the one you have
- Connecting more often with characters in stories who were a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Having a desire to be more like certain people (celebrities, family members, coaches, etc.) who were a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Wondering if you could cut off certain parts of your body with nail clippers, floss, scissors, etc.
- Wearing clothing items that hide certain parts of your body that you didn’t want others to see and that you didn’t want to see
- Choosing to be a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth whenever you played games
- Wishing you could tell someone that you wanted to be or felt like you were a gender other than the one you were assigned-at-birth
- Wishing you could accept the gender you were assigned-at-birth, like “everyone else”

*Some of these examples could indicate sexual orientation confusion instead of gender identity confusion, or in addition to gender identity confusion. For instance if, while growing up, someone didn’t realize they were “allowed” to be attractive to the same gender they might have a desire to be the “opposite” gender for this reason. This is a layer that we’ll be exploring further in Chapter Five, in case this is something you are wondering about yourself as well.
Are there any other examples you can think of that aren’t listed? Write those in your workbook as well.

To help jog your memory, here are a few I have gathered from my Facebook community:

I used to wish there was a disease I could get and ‘sex change surgery’ was the only cure for it.

I used to pretend like I was a boy by putting a toilet paper roll between my legs and would pee standing up.

I used to get under my covers and pretend I was in my mother’s womb, and then pretend I was being born again but this time as a girl.

Sometimes I would think about that if I died and got reincarnated, that I’d come back as a boy.

I learned from my grandpa that if you put salt on a snail that it would shrink and die. I remember pouring a pile of salt on the ground and sitting on it without my pants on, hoping it would make my you-know-what fall off.

When I learned that they sold hormones at the pharmacy I thought about ways I could break into it and get them.

Something else you can do to get in touch with your child self is watch videos or read stories online about modern children who are telling their parents that they do not feel aligned with their assigned-sex-at-birth.

Many of these kids are being listened to, and believed. They are being told, “What you are saying sounds important, and we want to help with this.”

You can do a search online for stories about children who are transitioning, as well as finding several links in the Further Reading section of this guide.

Do you see any hints of yourself in the stories about these kids? Write about this in your workbook.

GETTING TO THE TRUTHS OF YOUR PRESENT-DAY SELF

You can glean a lot of information from your younger self. But your present-day self has plenty to offer up as well. It may take a little prodding to get there but it is worth the effort.

One of the most effective ways to connect more deeply with your present-day self is through creativity. Being creative helps you shift away from your Thinking Self into your more Imaginative Self. Your Imaginative Self can go places your Thinking Self can’t get to, doesn’t want to get to, or isn’t sure how to get to.

What follows are “creative prompts” that are meant to put your Imaginative Self into the driver’s seat for a while. You can answer as few or as many of them as you want:

If I knew I was going to die tomorrow....” What do you like about how you’ve lived your life? What would you wish you could have changed?
Do you project jealousy or anger towards people because of their gender? If so, why do you do this?

Do you research gender and gender identity to a point where it has begun to feel like an obsession? If so, why?

If you are “mistaken” for a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth, how does that feel?

What characters do you connect with the most in stories? What are they like? Why do you connect with them?

How is your gender perceived by others? How okay are you with this? Do you wish it could be different?

If you could ask a genie in a bottle to change something in regard to your gender, what would that be?

Do you feel like you over-masculinize or over-feminize? If so, why?

If you could leave behind your current life and move somewhere else and start a new life, would you? If so, what would that new life look like?

When you look in the mirror, are there things you see that you feel you can’t relate to? If so, what are they?

Do you ever feel like you are wearing a “mask” or a “costume” or “acting” a certain part? Explain.

If you knew that certain people or attachments you have in your life would be unaffected by any major changes you were to make in your life in regard to your gender, would you make those changes? Explain.

Do you feel the same or different, when it comes to the gender you are seen as by those closest to you?

How do you feel in gender-segregated spaces?

What areas of your life do you feel are affected by your gender identity confusion?

In your workbook, write down any of these creative prompts that you are open to trying out. Set aside time to pursue them and keep track of what you discover.

There are many ways you can creatively explore these questions. Here are some ideas how you can do this:

- Through writing: exploring them through journaling; through letter writing (to yourself or others); through fiction writing; poetry
- Through video: filming yourself talking about these questions; creating a video montage of images of yourself over the course of your life
- Through audio: recording yourself talking about these questions; talking out the questions without recording yourself
- Through photos: creating photo collages or montages, using pictures of yourself and/or pictures from magazines, websites, etc.
- Through art: using mediums such as painting, pottery, sculpting
- Through music: playing instruments, singing, writing songs, making music mixes
- Through nature: being in a natural environment in which you can clear your head and let the answers come to you, spending time with animals
- Through spiritual means: prayer, meditation, visualization, yoga, retreats
Which of these ideas can you see yourself following through with? Make note of this in your workbook.

CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“LISTENING TO YOUR GUT”:
GIVING YOUR “THINKING SELF” A BREAK

At the beginning of this chapter we touched upon how your Bodyguard works in tandem with your Thinking Self. Sometimes this can work out well, like when your Bodyguard has information they want you to carefully analyze, inspect, and interpret.

Other times, such as when your Bodyguard really starts to freak out, they partner with your Thinking Self in ways that can cause a good deal of suffering and agony.

In this exercise we will look at how you can recognize when this has happened, as well as ideas for what you can do about it.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT’S TIME FOR A BREAK?

You can tell when your Thinking Self has reached the point of needing to be put into a “time out” when this part of you begins to perform its tasks to an extreme.

What you should do is pay attention to when your Thinking Self begins to experience:

- High anxiety
- Obsessive ruminating/deep thinking
- Debilitating fear
- Over-analysis
- The inability to stop your thoughts with other thoughts
- “Self-bullying” types of thoughts
- A downward spiral into depression, self-loathing, hopelessness
- Exhausting confusion that leads to paralysis, stopping, turning back

Which of the above symptoms do you tend to experience when your Thinking Self has been overactive? Write these down in your workbook.

It is at this point that its time to let your Thinking Self take a break and turn to your gut.

HOW DO YOU SETTLE YOUR THINKING SELF DOWN?

When your Thinking Self kicks into high gear it stirs up powerful emotions as well. Once your emotions get involved it is far more difficult to detach from those thoughts and you can get stuck in them, as if they were quicksand.

So before you turn to your gut you need to give your Thinking Self the chance to gradually wind down, let go, and give up control for a little while.

Here is how you can give your Thinking Self this opportunity to rest:

STEP #1—Become aware that your Thinking Self has gone to the extreme.

If you are able to recognize the symptoms above as they are happening, you can give your Thinking Self permission to take a well-deserved time out.

STEP #2—Turn to your Self-Care Checklist.

Pick an activity from your Self-Care Checklist that can take your mind off of things. Remember not
to do it to excess, just long enough to take the edge off and to return you to a more centered state.

What are three activities from your Self-Care Checklist that you can use to help your Thinking Self take a break?

oredProcedure

**STEP #3—Recognize when you are in a calmer state of mind.**

Once you are in this less agitated state of mind you can gently revisit one of the topics you tend to over-analyze, ruminate on, bully yourself over, etc. and, this time, use your gut instead.

When I say *gently* I mean asking yourself questions from a curious point of view and letting yourself be open to the answers. If you key in on using your gut during this process this will give your Thinking Self (and your exhausted Bodyguard) a much needed rest.

**HOW TO BRING IN YOUR GUT**

Let’s look at how you can invite your gut into the picture to help you answer the questions you have about yourself.

**#1—ASK AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION**

Asking open-ended questions creates an environment in which your gut can feel safe in sharing the truth. Examples of these types of questions are:

- “Does __________ feel right?”
- “Does __________ help me feel more comfortable?”
- “Does __________ help me feel better?”
- “Do I enjoy __________?”
- “Am I happier when I __________?”
- “Do I feel at ease when I __________?”
- “When I’m not doing __________, do I feel uncomfortable?”
- “When I’m not feeling __________, do I feel worse?”

Procedure

In your workbook, fill in the blanks with what has come up for you over the course of reading this book. You can also include any other experiences you have previously had or that you can imagine happening at some point in the future.

**#2—PAY ATTENTION TO FEELINGS AND SENSATIONS**

The initial answer will oftentimes come as a feeling, a sensation, a physical reaction, or all three at once. Examples of this are: peace, calm, serenity, sadness, grief, joy, pleasure, tingling, tightness, shortness of breath, comfort, surprise, fear, clarity, certainty, nervousness, lightheadedness, racing heart, pain, love.

At a later point this may be followed by a clarifying thought, which will put words to what you are feeling and sensing. However don’t lose sight of the original information your gut was sharing with
you—your gut is where your truth is coming from.

#3—BE PATIENT

It may take several attempts to get your gut to respond. A friend told me once that you could imagine your “truth” as a frightened kitten (or any baby animal of your choice) that doesn’t know if it can trust you. Approach this part of yourself as you would this kitten. Don’t push it too fast or too hard. Simply let it approach at its own pace.

If you make a practice of turning to your gut for answers, your questions of “Why is this?? What causes this?? Is this really what’s going on??” will begin to subside as your truth continues to reveal itself to you.

Be sure to turn to the resources in the “Further Reading” section of this book for more tips on how you can communicate with your gut.

🔗 TIP: If you attempt to use these methods to minimize your symptoms and they do not subside and/or get worse consider getting a mental health evaluation to screen for other possible physical, emotional, and/or mental causes of this.

☑️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“There is no need to panic and no need to rush into anything. Live with this uncertainty for a little while and see what comes of it.”

— Matt Kailey

There are few aspects of the “gender identity journey” that aren’t touched by uncertainty. I’ve seen the issues touched upon in this chapter come up with great frequency in my work with those who are questioning and exploring their gender identity.

Wrestling with these questions and doubts is an essential part of the self-discovery process. It is the phase in the Hero’s Journey where one is faced with tests and enemies, and determines who their true allies are.

This chapter will teach you ways you can increase your chances of being able to successfully navigate this portion of the journey, namely by returning to the concept of “breaking things down into layers” as a way of taking a nice big breath in the midst of all of the confusion.

Simplifying the process in this way will help you:

- **Focus your attention on one thing at a time**
- **Gain clarity as you analyze each question on its own**
- **Broaden your understanding of yourself as a multi-layered individual**
“WRESTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY”: THE LAYERS OF YOUR DISCOMFORT

At this point in the journey it’s clear that something feels “off” about the way you experience your assigned-sex-at-birth, both personally and publically. Now that you’ve worked through a significant portion of this book you might even have ideas as to what some of these areas of concern could be.

For some this sense of something being “off” may not be all that disturbing. It could feel more like “noticing” it in such a way that doesn’t result in a problematic emotional response.

For others, feeling “off” can sometimes reveal itself in such a way that is extremely unsettling, becoming so strong that it is difficult to function.

In this exercise we are going to take a closer look at the “discomfort” you might be experiencing with your assigned-sex-at-birth. Being able to pinpoint when, how often, and how intensely this discomfort is felt can help you discover more specific information about yourself in relation to your gender identity.

The way we’ll go about doing this is to break down these possible areas of discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth into sub-categories and explore them one-by-one:

“PHYSICAL” DISCOMFORT
“SOCIAL” DISCOMFORT
“MENTAL” DISCOMFORT

WHY USE THE TERM “DISCOMFORT”?

In the exercise “What Gender Identity Is...And Isn’t” you learned that one of the definitions of Gender Dysphoria is “discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person’s gender identity and that person’s sex assigned at birth and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics.”

Although the word “dysphoria” could have been used throughout this exercise instead of “discomfort,” it’s important you are able to explore how you are feeling without having the pressure of fitting a possible mental health diagnosis.

You may end up being able to use what you learn from this exercise to describe your experience to mental health and/or medical professionals. Put that aside for now. You’ll be able to bring it back into the picture in “Chapter Seven: Putting it All Together.”

In this exercise we’ll be using “discomfort” as a blanket term to summarize the feeling someone gets when something feels “off.” Another way of looking at it is that you were feeling “comfortable” (even if you didn’t know it) and then something happens that results in your feeling “discomfort.”

The Questionnaire you filled out on p.125 got you thinking about when those situations come up for you, as well as just how much they end up bothering you.
That being said, if you feel like the term “discomfort” is one you don’t connect with, go ahead and use the words you want to use to describe your experiences.

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CHARTING YOUR DISCOMFORT

The following chart is a visual representation of what we will be discussing in regard to your discomfort levels physically, socially, and mentally. We will be returning to it at the end of each section for you to rank your level of pain/discomfort.

⚠️ TIP: You may want to make copies of the chart if you decide to mark on it—you will be using it repeatedly in the coming days.

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Mental discomfort</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>discomfort someone feels by how they are seen socially</td>
<td>discomfort someone feels when their thoughts and emotions are at odds with their sense of identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We’re also going to use your answers from The Questionnaire as a tool to help you recognize when you are experiencing “discomfort” in relation to your gender identity, so have it handy as well.

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BEFORE WE BEGIN...

One of the main goals of this guide is for you to able to define your gender identity in a manner in which you are comfortable with. Therefore: you do not have to experience certain levels of discomfort in any of these sub-categories to “qualify” as trans/transgender. You can read more
about this in “Not All Transgender People Have Dysphoria—And Here are 6 Reasons Why That Matters” by Sam Dylan Finch (everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/not-all-trans-boys-dysphoria/).

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A CLOSER LOOK AT “PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT”

When you filled out The Questionnaire you answered questions addressing your “physical self.” These items explored how you felt (and currently feel) about your:

- Height
- Bone structure
- Body shape
- Hand and foot size
- Facial structure
- Voice
- Body hair
- Head hair
- “Adam’s Apple”
- Genitals
- Chest
- Level of comfort with physical intimacy
- Presence/no presence of a menstrual cycle
- Ability (inability) to conceive a child

Although discomfort related to your physical self could be caused by someone or something externally, it often can be something that happens to you in private. Examples of this are:

- When you are in the shower
- When you are changing clothes
- When you look in the bathroom mirror and/or full length mirror
- When you are using the toilet
- When you are masturbating
- When you are having sex
- When you are exercising
- When you get an erection (for those assigned-male-at-birth)
- When you menstruate (for those assigned-female-at-birth)

Do you experience physical discomfort during any of these scenarios? If so make note of it in your workbook.

A CLOSER LOOK AT “SOCIAL DISCOMFORT”

The Questionnaire also included scenarios that addressed your “social self.” Those questions explored how you felt about:

- The way you were addressed when your name wasn’t used (ex: ma’am, sir, ladies, fellas, lad, lass
How you felt about your first name
- How you felt being addressed by your assigned-sex-at-birth pronoun
- How you felt being addressed by gendered adjectives such as “pretty” or “handsome”
- How you felt about using the public restrooms/changing rooms that you were “supposed to” based on your current gender presentation
- How you felt about your hair style
- How you felt about your current wardrobe
- How you felt about wearing (or not wearing) makeup
- How you felt about wearing (or not wearing) earrings, having (or not having) piercings and/or tattoos, and carrying (or not carrying) certain accessories
- How you felt about assumptions others make about you based on their perception of your gender
- How you felt about the way your family addresses you when not using your name (i.e. son/daughter, niece/nephew, mother/father, etc.)
- How you felt when you were separated into groups according to your perceived gender

Your “social self” includes your interactions and relationships with your family, your friends, your acquaintances, your co-workers and colleagues, and the general public. This includes those you know in person as well as through social media and other online means. It also includes those you talk with on a regular basis and those you rarely spend time with.

Because you are seen, addressed, and interacted with continuously, studying your social interactions can be a useful way to reveal discomfort that might be present in relation to your gender.

✍ Take a moment to reflect on which “social interactions” bring to the surface the most discomfort and is connected with your gender. Make a note of this in your workbook.

A CLOSER LOOK AT “MENTAL DISCOMFORT”

“Mental discomfort” is something that can be present at all times, which is why there aren’t any specific questions on The Questionnaire asking about its presence in your life.

📖 “Mental discomfort” has to do with the way your brain is “wired,” gender-wise. Conflict can arise when you experience a difference between your physical body and your “wiring,” as well the experience of being perceived by others as your assigned-sex-at-birth when your “wiring” is telling you otherwise.

“Mental discomfort” can be difficult for someone to pinpoint and describe. That’s because:

- It’s possible it has been there for so long that, to a certain extent, you have gotten used to it.
- You figure it must be the way you are supposed to be feeling and just need to live with it.
- You don’t know what else to attribute that feeling to.

In her article, “That Was Dysphoria? 8 Signs and Symptoms of Indirect Gender Dysphoria,” Zinnia Jones states:

“Some of us suffer the distress that stems from dysphoria, but without many clues that this is about gender. (Its) relation to our genders may be obvious only in retrospect.”
In other words, the actual frequency and intensity of your “mental discomfort” will more than likely be revealed after you begin to make changes that help to align your mind and body with your actual gender identity.

Here are ways some of my clients have described the experience of no longer experiencing “mental discomfort” after taking steps to be in harmony with their gender identity physically and socially:

- “I had no idea how much irritability/dissatisfaction/stress I was feeling on a regular basis until I…”
- “I didn’t know how depressed/anxious I actually was until I…”
- “I never knew how much I wasn’t ‘me’ until I…”
- “I never knew what ‘peace’ could feel like until I…”
- “I had no clue how cluttered my mind has been all of my life until I…”
- “Having to wear ‘guy clothes’ to work didn’t bother before (or at least I didn’t think it did) until I…”
- “Being addressed by my birth name used to be fine, but it definitely isn’t anymore now that I…”
- “I didn’t realize how disconnected I was from my body, myself, my life until I…”

Do any of these statements sound intriguing to you? If so, take a few moments to write about this in your workbook.

A “PRACTICE RUN-THROUGH” OF RANKING YOUR DISCOMFORT

Now that you are familiar with how you can experience physical, social, and mental discomfort in relation to your gender you can use the answers from The Questionnaire to take a closer look at your levels of intensity in each of these areas.

The following is a “practice run-through” to get you accustomed to the presence of mind necessary to assess your discomfort level.

STEP #1—SELECT A SITUATION FROM YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE

- Open your workbook to your answers from The Questionnaire (p.125).
- Find your list of responses that revealed a high level of disconnect, dissatisfaction, and discomfort that also felt connected with your gender.
- Choose one of your answers to work with.
- With this answer in mind, recall a situation in which something happened to you which caused “that feeling” to come up. This could be something brought on by someone (or something), or something that happened to you privately.

What set the “stage” for the situation? (i.e. who, what, when, where)

Example: You chose “How do you feel about being addressed as your assigned-sex-at-birth pronoun?” as one of the items from The Questionnaire that you struggle with the most. You recall how, just yesterday, your boss repeatedly referred to you by your assigned-sex-at-birth pronoun in an email that went out to the entire company.
STEP #2—BRING YOURSELF BACK INTO THE SCENE

Close your eyes and try to recall as many details of the situation as possible. The purpose is to re-experience how it felt so you can access your honest response in the situation.

✍️ What happened? What did you hear, notice, or experience that brought up this feeling? Describe that moment in which you felt something shift inside of you. You can use “discomfort” but don’t be restricted by it.

Example: You imagine yourself reading the email, very casually at first. You then come across the first example of the pronoun being used, and your stomach gets a sinking feeling in it. As you keep reading you are unable to focus on the message of the email and, instead, continue to feel more and more tension with every mention of that pronoun.

STEP #3—RANK YOUR DISCOMFORT

Use the chart to rank the discomfort you picked up on in any or all of the three categories of physical, social, and mental. Use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not intense at all” and 10 being “extremely intense.”

✍️ Write down your scores in your workbook.
Example: For this situation you rank your physical discomfort as a “3” because it didn’t feel directly related to your physical self. You rank your social discomfort as an “8” because this was a situation in which many people that you see on a regular basis were reading this email, and this made you incredibly uncomfortable. You rank your mental discomfort as a “5” because, even if you were not sure why, something about seeing your pronoun in this email brought up a lot of confusion and left you in a state of distress for the rest of the day.

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“WAS THAT REALLY ABOUT MY GENDER?”

One of the biggest challenges that can occur during this exercise is trying to decide if that “discomfort” was indeed caused by something in relation to your gender, as opposed to it being about something else.

As a rule of thumb, you can ask yourself:

“In that moment when something didn’t feel “right” to me, was it because I felt uncomfortable being seen, treated, or labeled as my assigned-sex-at-birth?”

You don’t have to know right now what (if any) gender you would have rather been seen, treated or labeled. For right now just focus on learning how to gather more information about yourself and the level of discomfort you feel with your assigned-sex-at-birth.

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WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL “PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT”? 

Now that you’ve been able to practice how this works, let’s take a closer look at your answers from The Questionnaire in relation to the possible existence of physical discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth.

STEP #1—REVISIT YOUR RESPONSES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Look at your answers from The Questionnaire specifically related to your “physical self.” Did you indicate a high level of discomfort with any of these questions? Additionally, did any of those responses relate to your gender?

☞ List any responses that related to your “physical self” and also have to with your gender.

STEP #2—RANK YOUR PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

Work through the steps from the practice exercise for each answer you listed. Those steps, again, are:

1) What “set the stage” for the situation?
2) What happened? What did you hear, notice, or experience that brought up this feeling?
3) What is it that you thought the other person (or people) were thinking or perceiving about you?

4) Use the chart to rank your physical discomfort using the scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not intense at all” and 10 being “extremely intense.”

Record your responses and your ranking in your workbook.

### On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?

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#### STEP #3—RANK YOUR PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT FOR EACH OCCURRENCE

Look at your answers and to determine when and where this happens. Is there a pattern to this?

- Are there certain times, places, and situations where discomfort with your physical self (in relation to your gender) is higher than others?
- How often does this happen, on average? (ex: several times a day, once a day, several times a week, every couple of weeks)
- On average, what is the intensity of your discomfort in these situations?

Take the time to write out the answers to these questions in your workbook.

#### STEP #4—RANK YOUR OVERALL PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

Using these responses, what is your average overall discomfort with your physical self in relation to your gender?

Rank this on the chart between 1-10 and record it in your workbook.
WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL “SOCIAL DISCOMFORT”

Now let’s take a closer look at your answers from The Questionnaire in relation to the possible existence of social discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth.

STEP #1—REVISIT YOUR RESPONSES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Look specifically at your answers from The Questionnaire related to your “social self.” Did you indicate a high level of discomfort with any of these questions? Additionally, did any of those responses relate to your gender?

 Guzzle List any responses that related to your “social self” and also have to with your gender.

STEP #2—RANK YOUR SOCIAL DISCOMFORT

For each answer you listed, work through the steps from the practice exercise. Those steps, again, are:

1) What “set the stage” for the situation?
2) What happened? What did you hear, notice, or experience that brought up this feeling?
3) What is it that you thought the other person (or people) were thinking or perceiving about you?
4) Use the chart to rank your social discomfort using the scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not intense at all” and 10 being “extremely intense.”

 Guzzle Record your responses and your rank in your workbook.
STEP #3—RANK YOUR SOCIAL DISCOMFORT FOR EACH OCCURRENCE

Look at your answers as to when and where this happens. Is there a pattern to this?

- Are there certain times, places, and situations where discomfort with your social self (in relation to your gender) is higher than others?
- How often does this happen, on average? (ex: several times a day, once a day, several times a week, every couple of weeks)
- On average, what is the intensity of your discomfort in these situations?

Take the time to write out the answers to these questions in your workbook.

STEP #4—RANK YOUR OVERALL SOCIAL DISCOMFORT

Using these responses, what is your average overall discomfort with your social self in relation to your gender?

Rank this on the chart between 1-10 and record it in your workbook.

WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL “MENTAL DISCOMFORT”

Now let’s take a closer look at your answers from The Questionnaire in relation to the possible existence of mental discomfort with your assigned-sex-at-birth.

STEP #1—REVISIT THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Reflect on the final list of answers you made at the end of The Questionnaire. Do you sense there is an underlying “mental discomfort” you are experiencing throughout those examples? If so, how would you describe that?

Take the time to write out your answers in your workbook.

STEP #2—RANK YOUR OVERALL MENTAL DISCOMFORT

Use your responses to rank your overall “mental discomfort” in relation to your gender.

Rank this on the chart between 1-10 and record it in your workbook.

STEP #3—BE OPEN TO REVISI NG YOUR SCORE

New information about your gender identity will be revealed to you as you continue to work through this book. More than likely these discoveries will give you more awareness of “mental discomfort” that you may not have previously known about. You can return to this chart for reassessment and re-rank your “mental discomfort” score at any point.
“IS THIS REALLY ‘MENTAL DISCOMFORT’ OR SOMETHING ELSE?”

“Does this really have to do with my gender? Or is it really just PMS? Depression? An anxiety disorder? Is this just the way I am supposed to be functioning?”

Figuring out the difference between feeling “mental discomfort” around one’s gender identity and it being something else entirely (or perhaps a combination of both!) can be a complicated process. We will be exploring that in an exercise later in this chapter: “Is It Actually This...Or Is It Just That?” (p.191)

SUMMARIZING YOUR ANSWERS

- What number did you rank your overall “physical discomfort”?
- What number did you rank your overall “social discomfort”?
- What number did you rank your overall “mental discomfort”?

Record these answers in your workbook.

Discerning where you have (and don’t have) discomfort in your life concerning your gender will empower you to address those areas that most urgently need attention.
TIP: You may have learned enough in this exercise to somewhat foreshadow where you are thinking about going with this (which we will be exploring more in the “Conclusion”). For now, take note of these numbers and keep them in mind as you journey onward.

✔️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

“WRESTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY”: THE LAYERS OF FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY

In the exercise “Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes” (p.142) you learned how interests, behaviors, and our appearance are oftentimes assigned a gender—usually that of “female/woman” or “male/man.”

The critical teaching point this drives home (which we will be exploring further in this exercise) is:

**Your traits do not define your gender identity.**

Being unaware of this truth can create a great deal of confusion and uncertainty to those undertaking the gender identity journey.

Although this concept may sound logical we have been “programmed” to consciously and unconsciously label our characteristics with gender. It takes time to “de-program” what we’ve been previously taught, followed by integrating a new approach into our perspective.

We’re going to take the first steps toward doing this by looking closer at your layers of “feminine and masculine energies.”

WHAT IS FEMININE AND MASCULINE “ENERGY”? 

When words like “energy” are used in discussions about one’s sense of self, assumptions can arise that things are veering off into a metaphysical, spiritual, or religious arena.

This book was written with the intention of being able to connect with as many readers as possible. Thus, strong efforts have been made to ensure the content is universally appealing.

So, with that in mind...

📖 The origins of using “feminine and masculine energy” can be traced back to a scientific root in regard to electricity—specifically that there are negatively and positively charged polarities that are comprised of “energy” (picture a battery, for instance, and the two options where you can connect it to your electronic device). These polarities were known as “aggressive” (masculine energy) and “receptive” (feminine energy) based on the ways they acted independently, as well as together.*

This original definition evolved over time into a metaphor for how this polarity of energy is found in nature, animals, the universe, and humans as well as how this energy can be categorized as being “assertive” or “receptive” (note: due to a generally negative connotation associated with the word “aggressive” I’ll be using “assertive” from here on out).

That being said, this notion has also been adopted by a wide variety of cultures around the world as being a part of a spiritual belief system (for example, in Taoism with the use of the Yin Yang symbol). Therefore some of you might find ways to relate “feminine and masculine energy” to your already existing spiritual beliefs.

However, you do not have to take this on as a spiritual practice in order to derive usefulness from the original concept. Use this exercise in whatever way it best serves you!

**GENDER IDENTITY VS. FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY**

Let the following statement become your mantra throughout the rest of this exercise, and beyond:

“My blend of feminine and masculine energy is separate from my gender identity.”

In other words:

Feminine ≠ Female/Woman  
Masculine ≠ Male/Man

This means that the “big question” you have been asking yourself can actually be broken up into two separate questions:

**Question #1:**  
What is my gender identity?

**Question #2:**  
What is my blend of feminine and masculine energy?

By giving these questions individual attention you will be able to gain greater clarity regarding your gender identity.

**TIP:** Keep in mind that the answers to both of these questions contribute crucial information to your understanding of who you are as a whole. You will eventually bring them back together in “Chapter Seven: Putting it All Together.”

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“**FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY**” VS.  
“**FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY**”

*Throughout this exercise we’re going to use the terms “feminine energy” and “masculine energy” because the phrases “feminine/femininity” and “masculine/masculinity” can be riddled with gender stereotypes.*

*Gender stereotypes are, in part, created from improperly assigned “extremes” of femininity and masculinity. We must move further away from these stereotypes when discussing your gender identity—hence the shift in terminology to “feminine and masculine energy.”*

*Moving away from gender stereotypes helps to dispel the myths of:*
“I have a lot of feminine behaviors/interests/traits...
Therefore I must be a woman.”

“I have a lot of masculine behaviors/interests/traits...
Therefore I must be a man.”

Additionally, “feminine and masculine energy” can describe both the external and the internal attributes of a person, which proves useful in helping to determine your unique blend of this energy.

Lastly, this also enables those who do not relate to being either female/woman or male/man to be included in the feminine and masculine energy discussion.

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WHAT DEFINES FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGIES?

When attempting to define feminine and masculine energy we need to distinguish how the two differ from one another. In fact, they are considered to be opposite polarities.

Using the definitions of “feminine and masculine energy” from earlier in this chapter we determined that:

Feminine energy = “receptive”
Masculine energy = “assertive”

Individuals, cultures, and societies can interpret the words “assertive” and “receptive” in many different ways. For the sake of this exercise we’re going to use a very specific list of words that define these terms as they relate to feminine and masculine energy.

Slowly read through each list on the next page. Pay attention to the different physical sensations you have as you read through each list. What you are feeling is the type of energy that is characterized by each list (i.e. Receptive vs. Assertive).

What physical sensations do you experience as you read through each list? Record your answers in your workbook.
Feminine Energy
(Receptive)

Nurturing
Soft
Introspective
Slow
Water
The Moon
Reflective
Restful
Gentle
Receptive
Radiance
Affection
Sharing
Tender

Masculine Energy
(Assertive)

Protective
Hard
Extroverted
Fast
Fire
The Sun
Active
Loud
Expansive
Firm
Directed
Aware
Discipline
The energies of “assertive” and “receptive,” as they are being explored through this exercise, are neither positive nor negative in their connotation. However, that doesn’t mean you weren’t taught to have certain responses to these energies.

What sort of positive or negative response did you have to each list? Record your answers in your workbook.

We’ll be returning to your answers at the end of this exercise.

**FEMININE AND MASCULINE “WAYS OF BEING”**

Now that you have the basic “sense” of each type of energy it’s time to associate these energies with different “ways of being.”

These ways of being are a result of how much feminine and masculine energy someone possesses inside of them. You’ll find below some examples of how this is experienced both inwardly and outwardly.

Take a look at the two lists below. As you read them through, record in your workbook of which of these “ways of being” are descriptions of yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Energy (Receptive) Ways of Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate, nurturing, soft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga, meditation, gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates patience and gentleness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More emotion-based approach to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow-paced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking without a recipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediates problematic situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and stillness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking and camping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical, Folk, New Age music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer one-on-one visits or time alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysterious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking more softly and slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Masculine Energy (Assertive)
Ways of Being
- Tough, hard
- Team/group sports and activities
- Problem-solving, intellectual
- More action-based approach to life
- Fast-paced
- Vocalizing
- Cooking with a recipe
- Protective of loved ones
- Competitive
- Passion and fire
- Rafting and 4-Wheeling
- Heavy metal, Rock, Punk music
- Running errands, sight seeing
- Frequent social engagements
- Competitive
- Questioning
- Speaking more loudly and quickly
- Analytical
- Open
- Leading

STEP #1—YOUR INTERESTS: FEMININE OR MASCULINE IN ENERGY?

1. Take a look at your answers in your workbook from the exercise, “Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes” (p.142).
2. In the section where you listed your “Interests” you wrote “male,” “female,” “both,” or “neither” as to which gender you associated with each interest.
3. Create a column D and, revisiting your answers, write “feminine energy,” “masculine energy,” “both energies,” or “neither energy” beside each interest.

**MY INTERESTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online gaming</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>both energies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching football</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>masculine energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar playing</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>feminine energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How many did you list as having “feminine energy”?
- How many did you list as having “masculine energy”?
- How many did you list as having “both energies”?
- How many did you list as having “neither energy”?
Record these amounts in your workbook.

STEP #2— YOUR BEHAVIORS: FEMININE OR MASCULINE ENERGY?

1. In the section where you listed your “Behaviors” you wrote “male,” “female,” “both,” or “neither” as to which gender you associated with each interest.
2. Create a column D and, revisiting your answers, write “feminine energy,” “masculine energy,” “both energies,” or “neither energy” beside each behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a good listener</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>feminine energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking softly</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>feminine energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sarcastic</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>masculine energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How many did you list as having “feminine energy”?
- How many did you list as having “masculine energy”?
- How many did you list as having “both energies”?
- How many did you list as having “neither energy”?

Record these amounts in your workbook.

STEP #3—YOUR APPEARANCE: FEMININE OR MASCULINE ENERGY?

1. In the section where you listed “Aspects of Your Appearance” you wrote “male,” “female,” “both,” or “neither” as to which gender you associated with each interest.
2. Create a column D and, revisiting your answers, write “feminine energy,” “masculine energy,” “both energies,” or “neither energy” beside each aspect of your appearance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium length hair</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>both energies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purse</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>neither energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo on my shoulder</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>both energies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revisit your answers and this time write “feminine energy,” “masculine energy,” “both energies,” or “neither energy” beside each interest.

- How many did you list as having “feminine energy”?
- How many did you list as having “masculine energy”?
How many did you list as having “both energies”?  
How many did you list as having “neither energy”?  

Record these amounts in your workbook.

STEP #4—SUMMARY OF YOUR MASCULINE AND FEMININE ENERGY

Total up all of your answers from the last four questions:

- What was your total number for “feminine energy”?
- What was your total number for “masculine energy”?
- What was your total number for “both energies”?
- What was your total number for “neither energy”?

Record these amounts in your workbook.

YOUR BLEND OF FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY

By now you have probably noticed that you connected with items on both the feminine energy and masculine energy lists. This is how it works—you have both!

This is also a good time to remind you that:

- If you have more traits in the “feminine energy” list this does not mean you are a female/woman.
- If you have more traits in the “masculine energy” list this does not mean you are a male/man.
- If you have an equal number in both lists this does not mean you are androgynous, genderfluid, or nonbinary.

Looking at the blend of your feminine and masculine energy over the course of your life can be confusing. There are a number of reasons for that:

- More than likely your blend of feminine and masculine energy has changed over the course of your lifetime. This can depend on any number of factors happening in your life during those times.

- You may have taken on more feminine or more masculine energy than what feels natural but have done so as a way to hide or cover up the other type of energy (can be known as “hyper-feminizing” or “hyper-masculinizing”).

- Your blend of feminine and masculine energy can change on a regular basis. This can be as a result of changes in your routine, your physical and mental health, your hormone levels, and/or your stress levels. Having these energies flow on a regular basis also might be a natural part of your being.

- Your blend of feminine and masculine energy stays consistent in certain ways, even in the midst of change and chaos. These are the qualities that make up a big part of your “core being” and are unlikely to fluctuate or go away.
Reflect on your gender identity journey to-date. Are there times (including the present-day) when you took on either more feminine or more masculine energy than what feels natural in order to hide or cover up the other type of energy?

Record your answers in your workbook.

When you read over the two lists are there any qualities listed that you feel have been a part of who you are for as long as you can remember and have remained even during times of change and stress? If so, how do you feel about these qualities being such a core part of your being?

Record your answers in your workbook.

CHALLENGES IN EXPRESSING YOUR FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY

Up until now you’ve been able to look at your gender identity as being separate from your blend of feminine and masculine energy.

Before we wrap up this section we are going to bring these topics together to discuss how repressing your natural feminine and/or masculine energy can complicate your gender identity search, as well as damage your overall sense of self.

Progress has been made over the years, yet repression of one’s natural blend of feminine and masculine energy is still happening on a regular basis.

Far too often the gender expectation created at the moment of “It’s a girl!” or “It’s a boy!” restricts one’s ability to feel and express their blend of feminine and masculine energy. This is especially true of the energy that is the “opposite” of what the sex/gender one is assigned-at-birth is “supposed to” embody.

This challenge is especially apparent for those assigned-male-at-birth. These individuals are oftentimes shamed for expressing any feminine energy, regardless if they are trans/transgender. I heard this expressed at a Transgender Education Workshop, shared by a physician who identified as a cisgender male:

“For years I was ashamed of the fact that, deep inside, I am actually a ‘Jewish mother.’ I was in denial for so long because I didn’t think it was okay for me, as a man, to have so much feminine energy. I finally got sick of it and just let it out, and I’ve felt incredible ever since.”

Are you repressing either feminine or masculine energy because you associate it with being a gender that is “forbidden” to you?

Record your answers in your workbook.

Another reason someone may be struggling with expressing their natural blend of feminine and masculine energy is because they have been taught there is something “wrong” with having those types of qualities or that they are un-desirous. For example, someone being taught in childhood that having feminine qualities is “weak” or that having masculine qualities is “oppressive.”

Recognizing where these beliefs originated and challenging their validity are steps you can take towards embracing your unique blend of feminine and masculine energy.
In the exercise, “What Defines Feminine and Masculine Energies?” (p.183) you were asked if you had any sort of positive or negative response to either list, neither list, or both lists. Take some time to reflect on why you had that type of response. Is this something you still believe, or is it a belief you can begin to let go of?

Record your answers in your workbook.

CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
WRESTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY:
“IS IT ACTUALLY THIS...OR IS IT JUST THAT?”

TIP: This section contains exercises that may be quite challenging. Be sure to check in with yourself throughout and turn to your Self-Care Checklist at any point you feel the need to do so.

When it comes to wrestling with uncertainty one of the most complicated steps on the journey is to work through what I call the, “Is it actually this...or is it just that?” layer.

If you take the time to examine this highly complex layer, you will be able to prevent what could be months (even years!) of your gender identity journey being derailed.

These “Is it actually this...or is it just that?” questions create the issues we discussed in “Give Your Thinking Self a Break” (p.165). They are what cause your Thinking Self to spinning wildly out of control, leading to a temptation to completely call off your gender identity exploration.

Let’s start the “peeling apart” of this layer by breaking up the question: “Is it actually this...or is it just that?”

“IS IT ACTUALLY THIS...”

“This” can filled in with a wide variety of statements, all of which are particular to the person who is asking it. A few examples are:

- “Am I really trans/transgender...?”
- “Do I really have Gender Dysphoria...?”
- “Am I really a guy/man/male...?”
- “Am I really a girl/woman/female...?”
- “Am I really not a male/female...?”
- “Am I really nonbinary...?”
- “Do I really need to transition socially and/or medically from my assigned-sex-at-birth...?”

Are any of these statements ones you can relate to? If not, what would you fill in for this part of the question?

Record your answers in your workbook.

“...OR IS IT JUST THAT?”

The options for the second part of the question can be limitless. That’s because every person who is going through a gender identity journey will be coming at it from their own unique perspective.

Below you will find examples of these types of questions. I have gathered these from clients I have worked with, as well as from the messages I have received from persons around the world who are in search of answers about their gender identity.
“...is it just a reaction to having experienced trauma during my childhood?”
“...am I really just gay/lesbian?”
“...is it just a fetish?”
“...is this really just an escape from reality?”
“...am I really a cross-dresser?”
“...is it because I want male privilege?”
“...can I just be a drag queen/king?”
“...is this really just a ‘phase’?”
“...maybe I’m just androgynous?”
“...am I just delusional or ‘crazy’?”
“...is this just a ‘kink’?”
“...maybe I just have a girl side/guy side that needs to come out?”
“...I’m just tired of the responsibilities and challenges that come from being a (fill in assigned-sex-at-birth)?”
“...is it because I’m jealous of how much easier it seems like it would be to be a (fill in something other than your assigned-sex-at-birth)?”
“...is it really just pent-up sexual energy?”
“...do I just admire (fill in name of a gender) so much that I think I want to be that?”
“...is this just a general life crisis?”
“...maybe I just need to release pent up feminine/masculine energy?”
“...is it really just a symptom of my (fill in a mental health diagnosis)?”
“...was I taught (and now believe) that there is something negative about the gender I was assigned-sex-at-birth?”
“...am I just having a mid-life crisis?”
“...maybe I can just release this feeling in other ways?”
“...can I just let go of some of the stereotypes associated with my assigned-sex-at-birth that I’m uncomfortable with?”
“...am I just looking for a new identity?”
“...is this just the way you’re supposed to feel during puberty?”
“...is this really just autogynephilia?”
“...am I just desperate to find any answer as to why I feel so depressed/hopeless?”
“...am I just lonely and looking for a community?”
“...am I just wanting to be a ‘rebel’?”
“...am I just projecting my wish to be able to have a romantic partner that is the gender I was not assigned-at-birth?”

Are any of these statements one’s you can relate to? If not, what would you fill in for the second part of the question?

Record your answers in your workbook.

WHY SO MANY QUESTIONS??

I have heard, over and over again, “Why can’t there just be a test that gives me the answer to this??” The truth is that there isn’t a blood test, online test, or brain scan that can give a 100% accurate answer to the question, “Is it actually this?”

Certainly there are things you can do to try to get as close as possible to this answer (such as working through this book).
When it comes down to it...you are the one who has to make the call.

This responsibility can carry a lot of pressure! You may have to “self-report” your findings to mental and medical health professionals, family, friends, employers, colleagues, and community members. You have to get to a point where you are able to say, to yourself and others:

“This is what is going on with me. I have no ‘proof’ so you’ll just have to take my word for it.”

It can be especially challenging convincing yourself that what you are experiencing in regard to your gender identity is real and true.

This is why it is understandable for someone to have an endless supply of questions around the theme of, “Is it actually this...or is it just that?” You want to be sure, as sure as you can be, that this is what’s really going on with you.

Therefore you’re going to toss around all of the possibilities, over and over, in the hopes of getting closer to the truth.

While there is no guarantee you will be able to answer these questions with 100% certainty, there are ways we can simplify the process so you can work through these questions.

HOW TO BEST APPROACH YOUR QUESTIONS

Your questions are going to be unique to you and your experience, which means there isn’t a “one size fits all” approach to this.

However, there is something you have in common with one another:

You are constantly debating with yourself about what is going with you and are looking for ways to find the truth amongst all the noise.

The following tips can be used as a way to work through this type of confusion and uncertainty:

WATCH FOR INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

Your “Is it actually this, or is it just that?” questions are unique to you because they reflect your personality, your background, your influences, and your beliefs.

They are also a part of who you are as a whole, so taking time to explore them is a crucial part of this process.

When you ask yourself these questions, pay attention to the internal tone of voice in which you hear them. Is it curious, or is it bullying? If you are picking up on a bullying tone be sure to revisit the chapter “Becoming Aware of Internalized Transphobia” (p.116) and stay vigilant for its presence.

SEEK OUT COUNSELING

If it is within your means to do so, talk with a counselor about your “Is it actually this, or is it just that?” questions. This can give you a chance to explore them with a neutral party and give clarity to how much they do or don’t pertain to your gender identity questions.

You can also use counseling as a way to address a multitude of issues you may be struggling
with: healing from childhood abuse, dealing with loneliness, testing for depression, etc. You may have deeper issues than you are currently aware of. If so, there’s a chance they are impairing your ability to accurately interpret what’s going on inside of you.

**CONDUCT TESTS AND EXPERIMENTS**

You can approach your “Is it actually *this*, or is it just *that*?” questions as if they are theories you want to prove or disprove. This involves trying out different things to see if they help you reach a conclusion. We’ll be going into a lot more detail in an exercise in Chapter Six called “Conducting Your Own Tests & Experiments” (p.212).

**GIVE IT TIME**

As anxious as you might be to get to the bottom of things, be careful not to rush the process. You need time to conduct tests and experiments, and to reflect on your results. You might need time to go to counseling to explore some of these questions in greater depth, and/or work through them on your own.

**WAIT A BIT BEFORE TAKING IRREVERSIBLE ACTIONS**

This *does not* mean you should wait until you feel 100% certain—that day more than likely will never come. Nor does it mean you shouldn’t make changes or take risks that can reveal important information to you about yourself. It simply means to be cautious if you are thinking of doing something that could result in a *significant* impact on your life and the lives of those closest to you.

It’s not to say there won’t be a time and a place for that, but make sure you have explored your uncertainties enough to gain as much clarity as you can.

**REMEMBER TO GIVE YOUR “THINKING SELF” A BREAK**

Use what you’ve learned in “Give Your Thinking Self a Break” (p.165) whenever you need to do this for yourself. The chaotic, swirling, circling thoughts and feelings that the “Is it actually *this*, or is it just *that*?” questions can bring up are just what this exercise was meant to help with. You can always go back to examining your questions when you have returned to a more grounded state.

**STOP AND REFLECT**

While you continue to work through each one of your “Is it actually *this*, or is it just *that*?” questions, pay attention to your feelings regarding your gender identity. If these feelings continue to persist, ask yourself, “How often are they coming up? How intensely are they coming up? Over how much time have these been coming up?”

Set aside a spot in your workbook to start keeping track of the answers to these questions. Revisit it often as you need to and pay attention to any patterns that are revealed.

**UN-BECOME WHAT REALLY ISN’T YOU**

Think back to the quote from the beginning of *Stage Three: Exploration* that advised you to focus on “un-becoming everything that really isn't you so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.”

What you are doing in this exercise is figuring out how many of your “Is it actually *this*, or is it
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just *that?* questions really aren’t “you” and, even if some of them are, if there is still room for your questions about your gender identity to have a spot at the table as well.

**APPROACHING THE QUESTIONS IN “CLUSTERS”**

Breaking some of these questions down into “clusters” will make it easier to give advice as to how to approach them. We’ll define these issues layer by layer to help simplify the process.

**#1—THE ASSUMPTION THAT YOU MUST BE EITHER FEMALE OR MALE**

“...maybe I’m just androgynous?”
“...maybe I just need to release pent up feminine/masculine energy?”
“...can I just act less stereotypically like my assigned-sex-at-birth?”

If you have these questions and don’t know about the existence of non-binary gender identities, you are in for a surprise! Discovering non-binary identities can enable you to conduct useful tests and experiments outside of “binary” gender identities, resulting in the discovery of answers that make more sense.

If you think this might be useful for you to explore be sure to go back and read “Non-Binary Gender Identities” (p.137).

**#2—HAVING AN UNEXPRESSED “INNER PERSONA”**

“... am I really a cross-dresser?”
“... can I just be a drag queen/king?”
“...maybe I just have a girl side/guy side that needs to come out?”
“...maybe I can just release this feeling in other ways?”

The first step to take with this cluster of questions involves asking yourself if you have been repressing any feminine energy (for those assigned-male-at-birth) or masculine energy (for those assigned-female-at-birth).

If so, you may need to take some time to look at why you have done this (see the previous exercises around Feminine and Masculine Energy starting on p.181). You can bring this energy to light through tests and experiments (which we will look at in “Chapter Six: Actively Exploring Your Gender Identity”).

Accepting and incorporating this energy into who you are as *a whole* can help to relieve gender identity stress. An example of this is how many present-day assigned-male-at-birth children are expressing their feminine energy through their clothing, interests, behavior, etc. while still identifying as “boys.”

You may end up successfully releasing this pent-up energy, and yet a feeling will remain that it still “isn’t enough.” Again, you’ll be able to use Chapter Six as a way to conduct tests and experiments to see where you may fall on this continuum.

**#3—THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY**

“...am I really just gay/lesbian?”

One of the first bits of education taught in “Transgender 101” courses is that “sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same.” This is absolutely true! However, it doesn’t mean
there can’t be a blurring of the lines between these two layers of one’s self.

Think back to our discussions in the previous exercise about feminine and masculine energy. If someone assigned-male-at-birth senses they have more feminine energy than a “stereotypical male” they might come to a conclusion that they are gay. The same thing can happen to someone assigned-female-at-birth who embodies more masculine energy than a “stereotypical female.”

There is a big issue with coming to conclusions about your sexual orientation using your feminine/masculine energy as the main determiner. It means you aren’t basing your sexual orientation on whom you are (or aren’t) actually sexual oriented towards.

Therefore:

**Your blend of feminine and masculine energy is not only separate from your gender identity, but also from your sexual orientation.**

It is fairly common to have questions about your sexual orientation while trying to understand your gender identity. They are both significant parts of who you are as a person. As with the other examples, take time to conduct tests and experiments in regard to this question.

Keep in mind this could be a question that will remain unanswered until you are able to fully express your true gender identity. The goal for now is to answer the question “Am I really gay/lesbian?” or if there is something more to it.

#4—THE INFLUENCE OF TRAUMA AND/OR MENTAL ILLNESS

“...is it just a reaction to having experienced trauma during my childhood?”
“...is it really just a symptom of my [fill in a mental health diagnosis]?”
“...am I just desperate to find any answer as to why I feel so depressed/hopeless?”
“...is this really just an escape from reality?”

In an article entitled, “Trauma and Transness: Why I Didn’t ‘Always Know’ I Was Transgender,” Sam Dylan Finch says,

“There was no room to consider gender for a long time. It was deemed ‘non-essential’ by the part of my brain that determined what I could and could not handle.”*

For you to give gender “room to be considered” you need to understand **what else might be affecting your overall mental and emotional health.**

The effects of past traumas, symptoms of any current diagnosed mental illness, as well as undiagnosed mental illness can all be present at the same time as gender confusion.

Additionally, if there have been times during your life when you have had to focus mainly on your survival, your brain is going to ask something like “gender identity confusion” to take a back seat until things have stabilized.

You may have looked for ways to mentally “escape” from your traumas, with one of these outlets being daydreaming. Some of these daydreams might have been fueled by the clues you were picking up on about your gender identity. This can result in you accidentally making connections between having gender confusion as a child and thinking you are using it as “escapism” in adulthood.

It can be incredibly difficult to distinguish between all of these thoughts and feelings (as well as their origins) without help.

*http://letsqueerthingsup.com/2016/01/16/trauma-and-transness-why-i-didnt-always-know-i-was-transgender/*
If you don’t have pertinent information about your overall mental and emotional state you might unintentionally negate, minimize, and dismiss the feelings you are having.

**Your feelings are completely valid and need to be expressed and explored.**

If these are questions you are struggling with I highly recommended you begin to work with a trans-friendly therapist, and possibly a psychiatrist, to look at the “big picture” of your mental and emotional health.

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**#5—DOUBTS AROUND YOUR SANITY**

“...am I just delusional or ‘crazy’?”

For some, this cluster of questions can be the “ultimate decider” that overrules everything else. In other words, you could make plenty of discoveries on your gender identity journey that continue to point you in a direction that feels right to you. You may even notice that the more you move in that direction, the better you feel. Then it happens: the appearance of that dreaded thought of “Maybe there is actually something wrong with my sanity?”

This leads you to a belief that you can’t trust what you are thinking and feeling, bringing you back to what you fear is the actual answer: that you actually are “crazy.”

You may be wondering why this cluster is separate from “the influence of mental illness and trauma.” Far too often the terms “delusional” and “crazy” are used to describe the confusing state-of-mind that occurs when someone is trying to determine their gender identity. Other terms that are misused are “I feel bipolar” and “I think I have multiple-personalities.”

This isn’t to say that struggling with or questioning your gender identity doesn’t bring about significant mental challenges and confusion. It’s normal to have thoughts like “I’m losing my mind!” or “I’m all over the place with my emotions!”

*This is different from actually being diagnosed with these conditions.*

The best way to examine this layer is to conduct tests and experiments (p.212). For example, if you truly suspect you might have one of these mental health conditions, get a thorough mental health evaluation from a trans-knowledgeable psychologist or psychiatrist.

Otherwise, be very careful about using terms such as “delusional” or “crazy” if they don’t actually apply to you, for they create and perpetuate negative connotations for those who actually do suffer from these mental illnesses.

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**#6—QUESTIONS AROUND THIS BEING A “FETISH” OR A “KINK”**

“...is it just a fetish?”

“...is this just a ‘kink’?”

“...is this really just autogynephilia?”

First, let’s be clear that *having fetishes or kinks are not indicative of having a “disorder.”* The rule of thumb is: as long as it is sane, safe, and involves full consent from everyone involved, kinks and fetishes can be healthy part of a person’s life.

Confusion can come into play because the layer of who you are as a *sexual being* is closely intertwined with who you are as an *entire being* (which, in this case, includes your gender identity).
Therefore it is important to take the time to face the questions you have about your gender identity and your sexual self. Explore them separately, and then bring them back together to see what results.

Questions you can focus on exploring are:

- “Is it sexually arousing to be myself?”
- “Is it easier for me to become sexually aroused when I feel more connected to myself...more comfortable...more ‘me’?”
- “How does my gender identity come into play with my ‘kink’ life? In what ways is it separate from it?”

Although this cluster of questions can arise with anyone who is exploring their gender identity, I’ve seen a significant number of individuals struggle with this who were assigned-male-at-birth and are questioning whether or not they are actually female.

One of the reasons for this can be traced back to the 1980’s with the creation of a dangerous and deceptive model called “autogynephilia.”

Created by a sexologist named Ray Blanchard, autogynephilia is defined as “male-to-female (MtF) transsexuals who are not exclusively attracted toward men but are instead sexually oriented toward the thought or image of themselves as a woman.” In other words, “misdirected heterosexual sex drive.”*

Although this theory has been professionally disputed and debunked for being “misleading and stigmatizing*” it has still made its way around as being “truth.” It has caused a tragic degree of confusion, shame, and self-hatred in many individuals who are on their gender identity journey.

If this is something you are struggling with, use the resources listed in the Further Reading section for you to learn more in regard to why this theory is highly damaging and inaccurate.

☑️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

CHAPTER SIX:  
ACTIVELY EXPLORING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

“It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life.  
Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.”

— Joseph Campbell

If it feels like you have been building towards this chapter of Stage Three: Exploration you are right! It’s been saved for the end because it reflects one of the final stages of the Hero’s Journey: the “Dark Night of the Soul”.

Throughout the “Dark Night of the Soul” the hero discards old beliefs and illusions about who they are in order to make room for the truth. This process continues through what’s known as “The Ordeal,” during which the hero faces their greatest challenges and fears in the form of “adversaries” (those who are external as well as those which lie within).

An example of “The Ordeal” can be seen in one of the final scenes of the film *Inception.* (Warner Bros., 2010).

The “hero” faces a humongous fortress in the middle of an insane blizzard with heavily armed guards surrounding every entrance. He has one goal: to get into the fortress to discover the truth of how his now-deceased father really felt about him.

He has come a long way to get here and is stunned by the impossible nature of this final step. You can see the doubt settle in. “Should I keep going? The obstacles are so tremendous! Yet I’ve come so far already…”

This scene actually takes place in the hero’s unconscious—he is in a dream within a dream! This metaphor depicts the conflict we have within our own unconscious when we get to the “final” stage of any self-discovery journey.

*There you are, “this close” to finding out the truth, when you suddenly encounter your very own version of fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards.*

This stage is not for the faint of heart! This is a time when, as the hero of your own journey, you will be pushing yourself further outside your comfort zone than ever. That’s why care has been taken throughout this book to prepare you for this.

There is a reason you are putting yourself through this Hero’s Journey in the first place: *to make it through the “Dark Night of the Soul” and “Return with the Elixir.”*

The “Return with the Elixir” is when you return home from your journey with an awareness of self that was previously missing. You are able to live with more freedom after having discovered these missing pieces of yourself, and can share this more authentic “you” with others.
This “elixir” is the prize that awaits you.

Exploring your gender identity through actual experience will be the catalyst that moves you closer to newfound self-awareness.

In this chapter you will follow through with this exploration by:

- Creating a list of “Exploration Ideas”
- Managing your exploration-related fear and stress
- Conducting your own tests and experiments
“Actively Exploring Your Gender Identity”:
Creating a List of “Exploration Ideas”

“Sometimes the only way to untangle how we really feel about something is to experience it.”

— Micah, “The Gender Playbook” (neutrios.me)

Before jumping right into actively exploring your gender identity you’ll need to create a list of “Exploration Ideas.”

An “Exploration Idea” is something you would consider doing with the hope it will give you insight into your gender identity. It can be something you do privately, semi-publicly (with select persons), and/or publicly. It can also be something you explore through internal methods, external methods, or a combination of both.

Creating Categories of “Exploration Ideas”

Breaking your Exploration Ideas down into categories can make it easier to decide which ones you are most interested in pursuing. Here are ideas as to how they can be broken down (you can also create your own categories as well).

**Altering your appearance can help you...**

- Get a sense of how it feels, emotionally, to change how you look
- Have something visual you can look at (ex: using mirror, taking selfie pictures)
- Experiment with different ideas about your “look”
- See if you experience any physical relief by changing your appearance
- Notice if you are treated differently by others when you change your appearance

**Interacting with others online (chat rooms, gaming, etc.) can help you...**

- See how it feels to express sides of yourself you haven’t been able to share publicly
- Experience what it is like to been “seen” and treated as yourself
- Explore how you feel before making any changes that others will notice
- Be selective about who you want to explore your gender identity with

**Using writing, art, music, and other creative methods can help you...**

- Get to know yourself better in private before making any changes that others will notice
- Open up to aspects of yourself that you hadn’t realized were waiting to be discovered
- Decide how you want to explore outwardly what you have been exploring inwardly
- Privately “Play out” certain ideas and scenarios so you can see how it feels

Do any of these categories sound of interest to you? Are there others you would like to include?

📝 Start a section in your workbook to keep track of your ideas.
SEEKING OUT EXPLORATION IDEAS

Some of your Exploration Ideas will feel like they have just “popped” into your head, having a more internal birth. Other times you will see something outside of yourself and will respond with, “Hm, now that looks like something I’d like to try.”

Here are ways you can seek out Exploration Ideas, both internally and externally.

#1—PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT DOESN’T FEEL “RIGHT” TO YOU

Sometimes you’re going to know what isn’t you before you know what is you. Use this sense as a way to sift through your Exploration Ideas so you can experience less of what isn’t “you.” Eventually this will reveal more of what is “you.”

Create a section in your workbook for keeping track of when something doesn’t feel “right” to you, as well as Exploration Ideas that result from this.

#2—ASK YOURSELF, “WHO AND WHAT AM I DRAWN TO?”

Since you are in the process of discovering your gender identity it makes sense to seek out others with whom you “identify” (this is separate from who you are sexually/romantically attracted to, although the two can certainly overlap).

Take note of when you notice a person (or something about a person) and begin to compare yourself to them, try to mimic them, or imagine yourself looking or acting like them. These can be people who are trans, not trans, celebrities, people you know in real life, etc. You may come across them by accident or you may seek them out purposely.

For instance, resources such as Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube are visual mediums where you can find a lot of people you might be drawn to. Pay attention to when your “gut” says to you: “Yes, I like that / can connect with that / want to give that a try.”

Create a section in your workbook for keeping track of when you realize you are drawn to someone in this way. Record any patterns you pick up on (i.e. certain types of people, certain “looks”) as well as Exploration Ideas that result from this.

#3—LOOK AT PICTURES OF YOURSELF

This could be incredibly difficult for some of you, so be sure think about whether or not you should undertake this task. Although can be helpful and revealing it can also bring up certain difficult feelings. If you decide to try this out and are aware that it could be painful, be sure to turn to your Self-Care Checklist afterwards.

Look at pictures across the span of your lifetime. This will provide you with information such as:

- Recognizing times where you could tell you were expressing your true self (for instance, as a young child) and can then see where that began to change.
- Remembering how you were feeling and what you were thinking during certain times of your life.
- Sorting through current pictures of yourself with the question, “How much does that reflect who I truly am?” and paying attention to your response.
Create a section for keeping track of how it feels to look at pictures of yourself. List any times of your life where you feel you were more “you,” how you feel when you look at current pictures of yourself, as well as Exploration Ideas that emerge.

#4—TAP INTO IDEAS THAT HAVE BEEN INSIDE YOU ALL ALONG

Chances are you have been unconsciously gathering Exploration Ideas for a while. This collection of ideas can be tapped into, with a little bit of prodding. We discussed this in “Chapter Four: Listening to Your Gut,” so revisit the exercises “Tapping Into Your Child Self,” and “Questions for Your Present Day Self” to access these ideas.

Transfer any helpful answers from those exercises into this section of your workbook. Continue to take note of any dreams, “fantasies,” longings, wishes, etc. and record them here as well. See what Exploration Ideas are revealed to you through paying attention to these clues.

#5—GATHER IDEAS FROM OTHERS YOU HAVE CONNECTED WITH

In the chapter “Finding Others to Connect With” (p.147) you took steps to learn from the stories of others, connect with others online, and connect with others in person. More than likely you’ve been exposed to their Exploration Ideas and can now use the ones that sounded interesting to you. If you haven’t heard any yet, or can’t remember if you have, revisit those stories and/or the persons you have connected with and see what you can learn from them.

Create a section for keeping track of Exploration Ideas you get from others. Remember, this can include what you learn from fictional characters in novels/literature, television series, motion picture films, fan fiction, comics, etc.

EXAMPLES OF EXPLORATION IDEAS

To get you started, here is a list of Exploration Ideas that can be used to actively explore your gender identity. They are broken up into categories of “semi-private exploration,” “public exploration,” and “internal exploration” to help you better gauge which types of explorations you are ready to move forward with.

As you read through the following list, take note of any Exploration Ideas that appeal to you. Write them down even if you are not sure if you can follow through with them right away.
SEMI-PRIVATE EXPLORATION (others may or may not notice)

- Undergarments: bra, panties, boxers, “boy shorts”
- Wearing a sports bra/sports binder/chest binder/girdle
- A low dose of hormone replacement therapy
- Binding your chest
- “Packing” in your pants

PUBLIC EXPLORATION (others are more than likely to notice)

Add, subtract, or change...

- Your name
- Your pronoun
- The manner in which you walk/carry yourself
- The manner in which you talk/communicate
- The manner in which you gesture
- The manner in which you sit
- Types of shirts/ tops worn
- Types of pants/ shorts worn
- Types of coats/ jackets worn
- Dresses/ skirts
- Your swimwear
- Your “active wear”
- Your uniform
- Headwear
- Padding your chest, hips, and/or buttocks
- Scarfs
- Pantyhose/ stockings
- Bags/ Purses
- Wallet chains
- Watches
- Sunglasses
- Necklaces/ chokers
- Your nails
- Your eyebrows
- Your pajamas
- The colors you wear
- Ties
- Cosmetics
- Bracelets/ wrist wear
- Eyewear
- Earrings
- Other piercings
- Footwear
- Socks
- Tattoos
- Your hair cut, style, color
- Facial hair
Body hair
- Writing as your true self (under a pseudonym or not) in a blog
- Social media profiles that better reflect who you are

INTERNAL EXPLORATION (usually private, although you can share with others of your choosing)
- Brainstorming/daydreaming/visualization
- Dream interpretation
- Creative writing from the perspective of who you imagine yourself to be
- Expressing yourself through art, music, video, etc.
- Exploring ideas from the semi-private and public lists when you are alone

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A NOTE ABOUT HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT)

Starting Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is an option some will want to include on their list of “Exploration Ideas.” Others will want to actively explore their gender identity for a while before deciding if they should begin HRT, while others may never want to use HRT. Remember, there is no definitive way you have to go about your gender identity exploration, including whether or not you start HRT and/or at what point you would make that decision.

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☐ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“ACTIVELY EXPLORING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY”:
MANAGING EXPLORATION-RELATED FEAR & STRESS

“Actively exploring your gender identity...”

Everyone who reads this phrase will be struck by it differently. On the one hand there’s: “This is what I came all this way to do, so let’s do this!” On the other hand there’s: “Um, yeah...I don’t think so.”

There can be constant vacillation between these points (and everywhere in between) on a day-to-day, even moment-to-moment basis! This back and forth can be exhausting and stressful—enough to make someone want to pack up their bags and return home before they’ve obtained “The Elixir.”

To refresh your memory as to why this is a predictable element of the Hero’s Journey (and therefore your journey) let’s revisit what you learned about your Bodyguard in Stage One: Preparation (p.40).

WHAT'S YOUR BODYGUARD BEEN UP TO?

Recall how your Bodyguard has been keeping an eye on you since birth, acting as a psychological defense to help keep you safe.

They have your best interest at heart—however, it is to an extreme.

They are willing to go to great lengths to keep you away from harm, which includes trying to keep you from discovering truths about yourself that “the outside world” may not like. The most common way they do this is by trying to scare you out of doing it.

When you reach the “Dark Night of the Soul” your Bodyguard realizes you are about to make significant discoveries about yourself that will more than likely change your life forever. Therefore, with all of the tough love they can muster, they are going to throw everything they can at you, making one last ditch effort to convince you to, “Pleeeese...don’t do it!!”

What fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards will your Bodyguard call upon to try to stop you? For that you can return to the “Calling Out Your Fears” exercise from Stage One: Preparation where you listed at least five of your biggest fears going into this (p.37).

What fears did you list in this exercise?

Re-write them in your workbook to use with this section.

Your fears will manifest themselves into people, places, and situations in your every day life. Even if they don’t look like fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards they will feel just as threatening.

Chapter Three in Stage One: Preparation (“Feeling the Fear & Doing It Anyway”) went into detail as to how you can become more aware of these fears and what you can do to better manage them. You learned how to:

- Get to know your Bodyguard
Set appointment times with fear
Take a positive approach
Get into the habit of being kind to yourself
Find a mentor
Build a support team

These tools, along with the awareness you are gaining from having them, are incredibly useful for you to carry with you as you actively explore your gender identity.

💡 TIP: Do you need to revisit any of these exercises? If so, now’s the time to do so before you go any further!

MANAGING THE STRESS OF YOUR BODYGUARD (AND YOURSELF!)

Now that you’ve seen how your Bodyguard may stress out (and therefore try to stress you out!) during the Exploration stage of your journey, let’s look at two ways you can prepare yourself for these potential challenges.

STRESS REDUCER: PUTTING TOGETHER A “FIRST-AID TOOLKIT”

First-Aid kits have a useful array of items to help someone with a physical injury: bandages, gauze, little scissors, ointment, medical tape... It’s so nice to have something prepared and ready-to-go—that way you don’t have to worry about it in the middle of the crisis!

In this exercise you are going to put together your own version of a First-Aid Kit to have on hand in case you encounter emotional and mental injuries as you actively explore your gender identity and need to tend to your wounds.

When creating your First Aid Toolkit:

- Make it something you can actually hold in your hands (i.e. not just a list of ideas you keep somewhere)
- Organize your toolkit before something happens that wounds you—that way it is ready for you if and when you need it
- Add to your toolkit as you continue to learn more about what it is that helps you feel better after you’ve been emotionally and/or mentally injured

STEP #1—WHAT WILL YOU USE AS A TOOLKIT?

See if you have something already in your home. If not, check out thrift stores and garage sales for ideas. Choose a size that makes the most sense, considering what items you will want to store in it.

Examples: an empty shoebox or cigar box, a plastic bin, a large envelope, a small trunk, an arts and crafts container.
STEP #2—DESIGN THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR TOOLKIT

Imagine you are in an emotionally difficult state and you go to reach for your First Aid Toolkit. Design it in such a way that you will automatically feel (at least somewhat) better as soon as you see it. It’s up to you if that means it should make you smile or laugh, help you feel calm, inspired, empowered, etc.

Examples: stickers, pictures (from magazines, online, personal ones), paint, construction paper, markers, string, fuzzy balls, plastic jewels.

STEP #3—START WITH YOUR SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

To get you started, take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and choose your top five favorite items from it. If they are activities you would do, write them down on separate pieces of paper and place them in the kit. If they involve tangible items then place those in the kit as well.

STEP #4—FIND ITEMS THAT REQUIRE THE USE OF YOUR SENSES

Actively engaging your senses is a proven grounding technique, and therefore needs to be included in your kit. This can include seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. The stronger you are able to experience the sensation, the better.

TIP: Make sure you choose items that aren’t associated with something that will accidentally re-trigger you (i.e. something with which you have a negative experience).

Examples for sight: pictures of things that bring up strong positive emotions (of loved ones, your “heroes,” nature, baby animals)

Examples for smell: essential oils, scratch and sniff stickers, candles, incense, a recipe for something you should cook

Examples for hearing: mix CDs of songs that will evoke strong positive emotions or a reminder to listen to a certain playlist on a tech device, recordings of loved ones saying encourage words to you, recordings of motivational speakers, audiobooks which inspire you

Examples of touch: stuffed animals that will fit in your toolkit, cuts of fabrics that you enjoy the feel of, a sleep mask, clothing items such as hats, scarfs, pajamas, blankets

Examples of taste: hard candies (especially ones that will “shock” your taste buds, such as hot or sour flavors), gum, breath mints, Tabasco sauce, lemon juice (note: be sure to choose items that won’t attract insects!)

STEP #5—HAVE REMINDERS OF WHO YOU CAN TALK TO

When you are in the midst of going through a painful emotional experience it can be difficult to remember who you can turn to. It’s also important to have several options available to you in
case there are certain people who aren’t able to talk with you when you are in need. You can either write their names down or use pictures of them to place in your toolkit. 

*Examples: members of your support team, your mentor(s), individuals you have met online or in person, your therapist (if they take after-hours calls), local and national crisis line numbers (see the Further Reading section for suggestions)*

**STEP #6— FIND SOMEPLACE TO STORE YOUR FIRST-AID TOOLKIT**

Make sure you store your toolkit in an easily accessible spot that you won’t have to work too hard to get at if and when you find yourself in need of it.

However, if your living situation requires you to keep your toolkit away from other members of the household (such as having very private and personal items in it) do make the extra effort to store it somewhere that others will not stumble upon it.

**STRESS REDUCER: CREATING A PERSONALIZED “RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL”**

Your Bodyguard isn’t *entirely* wrong about the existence of risk while you are actively exploring your gender identity. When it comes to gender identity your Bodyguard might frequently remind you that this world still has a ways to go before it truly understands what it means to be trans/transgender or gender nonconforming.

*The key is to be mindful of the potential challenges you might encounter while actively exploring your gender and to create a realistic plan based on these potential “risks.”*

📝 “Risk” = the potential for something to happen that you would consider detrimental to the current state of your life.

You’re going to need something to help you do this: your very own “Risk Assessment Tool.” This tool will be individualized based on you and your life circumstances.

As you prepare to create your Risk Assessment Tool, remember: *although this is a helpful tool to use for brainstorming, organizing, and preparing, it cannot be used to predict actual outcomes of your gender identity exploration.*

These outcomes will remain a mystery for some time to come, regardless of how much you utilize this tool.

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**EACH RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL CONSISTS OF:**

1) An example of something you would like to do from your list of “Exploration Ideas” (p.201)
2) Your answer to the question, “How noticeable of a change from my usual ‘way of being’ will this create?”
3) Looking at the areas of your life that might be impacted by taking this action (both public and private)
4) Your answer to the question, “How much risk is involved in this?”
5) Your answer to the question, “Can I do this in stages to help minimize the potential impact?”
6) Ideas as to what you can do to prepare for the possibility of each of these areas from #3 being detrimentally affected

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STEP #1—CREATE YOUR COLUMNS

In your workbook create six columns. Label each column using the items listed #1-6 in the box above.

STEP #2—WHAT EXPLORATION IDEA WILL YOU TRY OUT?

In the first column, write down an example of something you would like to try out from your list of “Exploration Ideas.”

Examples: “get my hair cut shorter,” “shave my legs,” “use a different name,” “wear a binder,” “buy more feminine clothes,” “buy boxer shorts,” “get my ears pierced.”

STEP #3—HOW NOTICEABLE OF A CHANGE DOES THIS CREATE

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being “barely” and 10 being “extremely”) how noticeable of a change does this create from your usual “way of being”? Write your answer in the second column.

For example, if you were to cut your hair shorter how noticeable would that be compared to your current hair length? If you were to shave your legs, how noticeable would this be?

STEP #4—WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE MIGHT BE IMPACTED?

What are the areas of your life that might be impacted following through with this Exploration Idea? These can be “public” areas of your life (i.e. your external world involving other people), and/or this can also be “private” areas of your life (i.e. how this would affect your inner world). Write your answer in the third column.

For example, “my relationship with (fill in name of a person),” “my career,” “my physical safety,” “how comfortable I am socially,” “my life at school,” “my self-consciousness.”

STEP #5—HOW MUCH RISK IS INVOLVED?

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being “extremely low” and 10 being “extremely high”) how much risk would you guess is involved in following through with this Exploration Idea? Remember, this means the potential for something to happen that you would consider being detrimental to the current state of your life.
YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

✍️ Write your answer in the fourth column.

For example, if you think by doing ______________ you might lose your job and you depend on it for your main source of income, you would probably rank that as “high risk.” Or, if you think by doing ______________ your mother might disapprove but you don’t feel particularly bothered by that, you would probably rank that as “low risk.”

STEP #6—CAN YOU DO THIS IN STAGES?

Are there stages you can do this in to help minimize the potential impact?

✍️ Write your answer in the fifth column.

For example, if you are thinking about cutting your hair shorter, should you do so a little bit at a time? If you are thinking of experimenting with the clothes you wear, should you do so privately at first? If you are thinking of wearing different clothing in public, should you have someone go with you? If you are thinking about using a different name, should you start by doing this with people who already know you are exploring your gender identity?

STEP #7—HOW CAN YOU PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE DAMAGE?

What you can do to prepare for the possibility that each of these areas might be detrimentally affected?

✍️ Write your answer in the sixth column.

For example, use items from your Self-Care Checklist and ideas from your First Aid Toolkit. If you are concerned about your job or your career, look into what your company’s policies are in regard to gender identity and gender expression. If you are worried that your partner might find out about your exploration before you are ready for them to, look into finding a couples counselor who can help you approach the topic with them sooner than later.

STEP #8—REPEAT AS OFTEN AS NEEDED

Continue to revisit and revise your Risk Assessment Tool as often as you need to throughout the rest of your journey.

☑️ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
“ACTIVE OL EXPLORING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY”: CONDUCTING TESTS & EXPERIMENTS

“Maybe you’ve felt this before— it’s called ‘gender euphoria.’ It’s the sense of affirmation a person feels when their gender identity is validated, whether it was validation from an external source or an internal one.”

—Sam Dylan Finch

We’ve already discussed how, during this stage of the journey, you are an “explorer” of the world that is your inner self. You will also be playing another role: that of scientist.

As a scientist you are “actively exploring your gender identity” through:

1) Creating hypotheses
2) Testing these hypotheses through experiments
3) Gathering data by observing your responses (and the responses of others)
4) Reaching conclusions
5) Validating your feelings through the results of your tests

This process is based on the scientific method and can be directly applied to your gender identity journey.*

By conducting these tests and experiments you are stripping away what isn’t you to reveal what is you.

HOW TO RUN YOUR OWN TESTS & EXPERIMENTS

Let’s take a look the steps in more detail so you can begin to run your own experiments.

TIP: If you have already been “experimenting” (even if you didn’t know you’ve been doing so) you can apply this approach to what you’ve learned about yourself so far!

#1—CREATE YOUR HYPOTHESES

You are curious about something: your gender identity. Having questions that you want to find answers to is all that is required for you to complete the first step of the scientific method!

*"Steps of the Scientific Method.” Science Buddies
Next, you “conducted research” that supported your inquisitiveness. The work you’ve been doing throughout the book has reassured you that: “Yes, I really do have a good question here” (otherwise you wouldn’t have gotten this far, right?).

Now it’s time to create specific hypotheses that you can attempt to prove or disprove through actively exploring your gender identity.

A hypothesis is “a statement of a possible explanation for some natural phenomenon” (dictionary.com).

Here’s how your hypothesis will be broken down:

“If (whatever action you will take), then (the predicted result).”

Your hypotheses need to be written in terms of what you are trying to answer about your gender identity. Use phrases that make sense for you, and don’t worry about how other people describe their experience.

Here are a few examples this:

- “If I start wearing a binder around my chest, then I will feel more comfortable.”
- “If I change (this) about the way I dress, then life will be far more interesting and fun!”
- “If people start using the pronoun ‘they’ when addressing me, then this will feel affirming to me.”
- “If I start on a low dose of Hormone Replacement Therapy, then my Gender Dysphoria will be reduced.”

Other descriptors you might use in your prediction are “relief,” “a reduction of discomfort,” “connected,” or “more congruent.”

Don’t worry if you don’t know if the answers will be true or false—that’s the whole point of testing your hypotheses!

Use ideas from your list of “Exploration Ideas” and write three hypotheses in your workbook that you want to test. You can always create more later—this is to just get you familiar with the process.

#2—TEST YOUR HYPOTHESES

As you look to your Exploration Ideas and devise ways to test your hypotheses, it’s best to come up with experiments that have the following elements:

- CREATE A TEST THAT IS “CLEAR”

This means you change only one factor at a time during the experiment so you will know with clarity what created a certain result. For instance, if you do something different with your hair and your attire at the same time you won’t know if it was your hair or your attire
that made you feel a certain way. Here at the beginning it’s important to test them separately.

**REPEAT YOUR EXPERIMENTS**

Run the same experiment more than once so you can see if that changes how you feel. You can do it in the same manner each time, but by putting yourself in *different* settings you can get additional feedback as to how you are feeling.

For example you can change the setting, who you are with, what time of day it is, if it’s a work/school day or a day off, etc.

Be sure to *keep the test the same* while changing the setting (i.e. If you change the item of clothing you are wearing it means you are running a new test, and therefore you should document it separately).

**USE YOUR RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL**

Remember, your Risk-Assessment Tool (p.209) is there to help you plan your tests and experiments in such a way that balances the amount of risk you *think* you are taking with how much risk you are *willing* to take. It also takes you through the step of breaking down your tests into stages, as well as preparing you for possible negative consequences.

**HAVE A COMBINATION OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EXPERIMENTS**

More than likely you will be conducting your initial experiments alone (or already have done so in the past without knowing that’s what you were doing). This is a good way to gauge your reaction without the pressure of being around others.

When you are ready, you’ll also need to run experiments in a “public” forum (i.e. situations where you can be seen). This is not about how the people around you feel, but about how you feel around those people while carrying out your experiment.

*Note: Be sure to run your public tests through your Risk Assessment Tool before doing them!*

**HAVE YOUR FIRST-AID TOOLKIT READY**

Although you can hope for the best when you conduct your experiments, having your First-Aid Toolkit at your disposal will help mitigate any damage that might occur.

This would include contacting people ahead of time who you have listed in your kit to let them know you will be running these tests, and having any of your Self-Care Checklist items ready for use upon your return home.

*Next to each of your hypotheses write down the type of experiment you want to conduct so you can test it out. Be as specific as possible: include a time, place, and setting for each one. Also include when you will repeat the test, keeping in mind that this can be altered depending on how it went the first time.*
EXAMPLE

Hypothesis: “If I start wearing a binder around my chest, then I will feel more comfortable.”

1st Experiment: I will wear a binder around the house for the entire weekend, with my roommate present.

2nd Experiment: If this goes well I will wear a binder to school for one day.

#3—GATHER YOUR DATA

All good scientists have a log in which they can record the observations and results of any tests they conduct. You’ll need to create this for yourself as well. In this log you can keep track of:

✓ The date and time of your experiment
✓ If the experiment was private or public
✓ If it was public: the setting, people involved, length of time
✓ What you specifically tested (the “if” part of your hypothesis)
✓ Observations of your experience
✓ Observations of others (if this was public)

Try to gather your data from an objective perspective, reporting it as “factually” as possible. You can record your data for both your private and public experiments, as well as when you repeat experiments at different times.

EXAMPLES:

2/3/16: I found a new chat room and introduced myself as male—I was both nervous and excited beforehand—everyone addressed me by my male name and used male pronouns—it felt awesome every time it happened, felt like they were seeing “me.”

7/6/16: Local swimming pool with a friend who doesn’t know I am exploring my gender—I went with my legs, chest, and arms shaved—I felt self-conscious and nervous at first, which lessened the longer I was there because no one seemed to notice or care!

10/2/16: At home in my room, looking in the mirror—Since my hair is getting a little longer in the front I pushed it forward so it framed my face—I liked how it looked and it felt comforting; I then pushed my hair off of my face and I felt dysphoria come up; then it would go away when I let my hair back down—this was both cool and weird for me.

In your workbook create a log using the example given above, or use your own way of organizing it. Have it easily accessible so you can record your data as soon as possible after each experiment.

Keep in mind that additional data may come in when you are not actively experimenting. That’s because you will start noticing more often when something doesn’t feel “right” to you. Go ahead
and create an additional column for these types of observations (ex: “I went out in my ‘usual’ manner today and could tell that I missed how I felt during the experiment yesterday”).

#4—REACHING YOUR CONCLUSIONS

Reaching your conclusions means you are taking the step to “prove” or “disprove” your hypothesis using the if/then formula.

Your method of doing this will be a little different from the approach that scientists take to reach their conclusions. While they may have numbers to crunch, you will have your observations of yourself to analyze. This can include emotions, thoughts, sensations, and intuitions—all of which can come up during an experiment.

Since it can be overwhelming to process all of these observations at the same time it’s best to handle them as we have with the other steps in your exploration process: separate them out into layers and look at them individually.

After each experiment, break the “observations of your experience” into separate categories. You can use categories such as emotions, thoughts, sensations, and intuitions, or you can use other terms that fit your individual experience.

**EXAMPLE:**

The hypothesis I specifically tested:

“If I wear a feminine scarf when I go to the coffee shop, then I will feel more like ‘me’.”

Observations of my experience:

- How I felt beforehand: Scared to death!
- How I felt during it: Still scared but did my best to cover it up—I then felt really good after the barista complimented my scarf
- How I felt afterwards about doing this: Proud of myself for taking this step!
- How I felt in regard to what I tested: It felt really nice to wear something that felt more “me.”

It’s at this point you bring back in your if/then hypothesis and fill in the blanks. Using the example above:

“If I wear a feminine scarf when I go to the coffee shop, then I will feel more like ‘me’.”

If you ended up learning something different about yourself than you expected it’s okay to change the second half of your hypothesis. Using the example above, this person may have realized they wanted to use a different phrase to describe the result, such as “I felt more feminine,” “I felt less masculine,” or, “I felt gender completely vanish from me.”
TIP: Remember to run your experiment more than once so you can get a more accurate sense as to what happens if any of the conditions change.

Using the example above, the experimenter may go out later that week to their favorite coffee shop and gather this data instead:

✓ How I felt beforehand: Less scared than the first time but still fairly nervous
✓ How I felt during it: The coffee shop was way busier than the first time and kinda freaked out when I walked in! I got my drink as quickly as I could and left.
✓ How I felt afterwards about doing this: Disappointed that I didn’t stay longer and let my fear get the best of me, but at least I kept the scarf on!
✓ How I felt in regard to what I tested: Although the experience itself sorta sucked, it still felt really nice to wear it. In fact, I left it on the rest of the day when I was hanging out at home.

TIP: Having trouble getting in touch with how you were feeling during the experiment? Be sure to revisit the chapter “Listening to Your Gut” (p.159) for how ideas as to how you can do this.

#5—VALIDATING YOUR FEELINGS THROUGH YOUR TESTS RESULTS

After a while you will develop a list of experiments you have conducted and data you have gathered. At this point you can come to a “bigger” conclusion that summarizes all of the information from your experiments. This conclusion can be as general or specific as you are comfortable with.

General conclusion: “It is true that the more I masculinize my appearance the less uncomfortable I feel, whether alone or around others.”

Specific conclusion: “It is true that according to my definition I am ‘trans’ because the more I moved away from being my assigned-sex-at-birth the better I felt.”

Regardless of what you decide to do with these conclusions, use them as a way to validate your feelings.

Although there isn’t a way to “prove” your gender identity you can use these test results to prove to yourself, “This confirms that I was right—there is something of importance going on here.”

TIP: Return back to the “Conducting Your Own Tests and Experiments” tool as often as you need to throughout your gender identity journey. Chances are you will see changes along the way that you will want to continue to take note of!
✓ CHECK-IN TIME!

Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?
CHAPTER SEVEN: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The privilege of a lifetime is becoming who you truly are. — C.G. Jung

You’ve embraced the “Call to Adventure,” “Crossed the Threshold,” “Met the Mentor,” encountered “Tests, Allies, and Enemies,” wrestled with the “Dark Night of the Soul,” and withstood “Ordeals.”

Regardless of how far you have come in the course of this book you are further along than when you began. Your self-awareness has grown as you have discovered and integrated pieces of who you are into the entirety of your being.

Now it is time for you to “Return with the Elixir.”

You’ve spent much of this book getting in touch with what is really going on inside you without having to fit a certain phrase, narrative, or description of experience.

Now that you have the “wisdom of the elixir” you can begin putting words to the question: “Who I am in terms of my gender identity?” The exercises in this chapter will help you with this task.

Before we begin, let’s review what it is that you have learned about putting descriptors onto your gender identity:

#1—You learned that you do not have to conform to a specific definition of gender identity.

You discovered that your experience of your gender is unique, as well as the way the way you decide to describe this experience. Find the words that make the most sense to you without trying to fit into any preconceived notion that doesn’t feel comfortable.

#2—You learned that you can use different words to describe your gender identity depending on the social context you find yourself in.

Many of you will end up sharing what you have discovered about your gender identity with others, be they loved ones, co-workers, colleagues, peers, teachers, the general public, old friends, new friends, mental health and medical providers...the list can end up being quite lengthy!

Remember, how you decide to self-identify is what matters most.

If/when you choose to share this with others you will want to be careful and wise, as some people will understand where you are coming from more easily than others. Certain situations will feel easier, safer, and more comfortable than others. You may also decide to use certain words now and other words later, depending on where you are at in your discovery journey.

Later in this chapter we will look at how you can approach these people, situations, and time frames in ways that empower you with as much control, comfort, and flexibility as possible.
#3—You learned that you will continue to discover more about yourself throughout the course of your life.

This chapter will help you find words to describe your experience of your gender identity today. You can change your responses tomorrow, in a few weeks, even in a few years. That way you won’t inadvertently pressure yourself into the unrealistic assumption that you must have “all of the answers” right now. Your workbook should be a living, breathing document that you can return back to whenever you discover new insights about yourself.

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“HOLD ON, HOW I FEEL TODAY MIGHT CHANGE???”

The idea that you might end up changing how you describe your gender identity can be unsettling. This is understandable!

It is commonplace for those who are deciding what to do with their gender identity discoveries to struggle with such questions as, “What if I’m wrong? What if I change my mind later?”

Here are some ways you can remain open to growing while also gaining confidence in what direction you would like to go next:

- **Pace yourself.** It is wise to make changes in your life using “baby steps” to see if what you are doing is creating improvement. It’s a positive feedback loop: if what you choose continues to help, you know you are on the right track.

- **Pay attention to what stays consistent.** As you continue to test and experiment you will see what does and doesn’t change, what consistently makes you feel more comfortable, what consistently makes you feel more uncomfortable, and what feelings and thoughts remain with you.

- **Talk it out.** You may one day make decisions that will impact your life in significant ways. When you take the time to talk it out either with a counselor or a trusted friend, they can help you plan for any possible challenges you may encounter. This will also give you the chance to understand the perspectives of others who will end up being affected by these decisions.

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“PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER”:
REVIEWING THE HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUR JOURNEY

Oftentimes an explorer will return from a journey and decide to create an account of their adventure. This can help them see the “big picture” of what they discovered along the way, the changes they went through, and ideas about where they want to go next.

Ideally the explorer took notes over the course of the journey—so much can happen along the way it can be easy to forget some of the most important discoveries!

Luckily, as the explorer in your story, you have been keeping track of these important highlights in your workbook. Now you can use them to arrive at your conclusions from this part of your gender identity journey.

Before we begin to review your highlights, remember:

- Be open to changing your previous answers—hindsight can lead to new insight!
- You can always leave something blank. Simply answer, “I’m not sure,” or change your response later on.
- When in doubt, listen for the answers that come from your gut.

#1: THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

It's the one you answered both at the very beginning and midway through You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery:

Are you uncomfortable with your assigned-sex-at-birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

| YES | MAYBE | NO |

Go ahead—answer it again.

Is your answer the same as or different from when you first began? How about from when you checked in midway through the guide?

✍️ Write about this in your workbook.

#2: THE QUESTIONAIRRE

Go back to The Questionnaire from the beginning of Stage Three: Exploration (p.125). Using an unmarked copy of it, go through all of the questions and answer them again. For now, don’t look at your previous answers.

Make a new list in your workbook of the five questions relating to your gender that are most concerning to you. Look at your original five questions. Compare and contrast the two lists to one another.

Have they changed? How?

✍️ Write about this in your workbook.
#3: THE LAYERS OF YOUR DISCOMFORT

Here, again, is the chart from the exercise “The Layers of Your Discomfort” (p.169)

![Chart](chart.png)

Using this unmarked copy of the chart, rate your general discomfort in each category. For now, refrain from looking at your previous answers.

**Look at your original responses and compare and contrast them to one another. Have they changed? How?**

📝 Write about this in your workbook.

#4: YOUR BLEND OF FEMININE AND MASCULINE ENERGY

Look back at your answers to the following questions from the exercise “The Layers of Feminine and Masculine Energy” (p.181):

- What was your total number for “feminine energy”?
- What was your total number for “masculine energy”?
- What was your total number for “both energies”?
- What was your total number for “neither energy”?

Would you answer the same way now? Why or why not?

📝 Write about this in your workbook.
YOUR CONCLUSIONS

Read over the responses you gave for these four highlights from your journey, as well as your reflections.

What are your overall conclusions?

✍ Journal about this in your workbook. Take your time, write as little or as much as you need to. Remember you can always come back to this later.
“PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER”: YOUR GENDER IDENTITY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

“Definitions have their uses in much the same way that road signs make it easy to travel: they point out the directions. But you don’t get where you’re going when you just stand underneath some sign, waiting for it to tell you what to do.”

— Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us

Finding the words to describe your gender identity can be as simple or as multi-layered of a process as you choose to make it. This exercise will introduce you a variety of approaches to this, and help you find the one that best suits you.

⚠️ TIP: Focus on how you would describe your gender identity if the definitions and opinions of others didn’t exist (in the next exercise we will look at how you can navigate through the rest of the world with your personal description of your gender identity intact).

THE “SIMPLE” APPROACH

Some of you may be hoping for a short, simple way to describe your gender identity. It would exclude extraneous factors such as other aspects of your identity, clarifying phrases, explanation of your narrative, etc.

Here are some examples:

- “I am trans/transgender.”
- “I am a woman/I am a man.”
- “I am not a male/not a female.”
- “I am a transgender male.”
- “I am a transsexual woman.”
- “I am not cisgender.”
- “I identify as nonbinary.”
- “I have no interest in labeling my gender identity.”

As you continue working though this chapter, stay open to this approach to describing gender identity. It just may be the right one for you, or you may end up needing a more multi-layered approach.

THE “MULTI-LAYERED” APPROACH

A “multi-layered” approach to describing your gender identity can be useful to those who would rather not be limited in the way they describe their gender identity. This description can include multiple terms, including your other identities, your body, and inference to whether or not you will be transitioning.

Here are some examples:
As you continue to work through this chapter you will have the chance to explore various ways you can use this multi-layered approach to describing your gender identity.

**Do you think you are more interested in a “simple” or “multi-layered” approach to describing your gender identity?**

Make note of this in your workbook.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE?**

Use the following list as a “starting place” for describing your gender identity:

- Do you want to use the phrase “I identify as....”?
- Do you want to use the phrase “I am....”?
- Do you want to use terms like trans, transgender, transsexual, trans*, etc.?
- Are there non-binary terms you want to use?
- Do you want to use the term “Gender Dysphoria”, as well as the areas in which you experience this? (social, physical, “mind”)
- Do you want to include references to your sexual and/or romantic orientation?
- Do you want to include references to social and/or medical transition steps you might take?
- Do you want to include references to your blend of feminine and/or masculine energy?
- Do you want to include references to how you feel about gender?
- Do you want to include references to your gender expression?
- Do you want to use a narrative form of description rather than a brief one?

Which of these are important to you to include as a part of your description?

Make note in your workbook of any that appeal to you.

**AN INTRODUCTION TO YOUR “GENDER IDENTITY OPTIONS”**

It may surprise you to learn how many options are available to choose from to describe your gender identity. They are evolving out of a growing awareness that gender identity is a far deeper subject than previously thought.

We now know that:
One’s gender identity is not always the same as the sex one is assigned at birth.
Gender identity is not binary (i.e., female or male).
Gender identity is an individual, unique experience.
One’s sense of gender identity can be approached holistically, taking into account who someone is in their entirety (i.e., gender expression, femininity/masculinity, sexual/romantic orientation, one’s body).

We are going to explore terms that are available to use when you describe your gender identity. This list is by no means complete—in fact, a complete list would be impossible to compile! We live during a time in which new terms are being created, tested, and shared at a rapid pace. These descriptions will continue evolving as individuals and communities search for ways to increase recognition and awareness of as many experiences of gender as possible.

Read through the list on the next page. In your workbook, write down the terms that you would consider using to describe your own gender identity. Place a star next to any term you are unfamiliar with but would like to learn what it means. Look up its definition, and then decide whether you want to keep it on your list.*

TIP: Use this list as a way to open your eyes and broaden your perspective about what makes up your gender identity and its relationship to your overall sense of self. You can use all of them, none of them, or a combination of them.

*You should be able to find these definitions by using a good online search engine. If you are interested in learning more about gender identity descriptions check out the Further Reading section for additional resources.
Gender Identities
- Androgynous
- Androgyne
- Tomboy
- Boyflux
- Butch
- Tomboi
- Boi
- Masculine-of-center
- Feminine-of-center
- Stud
- A/G
- Macha
- Masculine Woman
- Feminine Man
- Feminine
- Masculine
- Femme
- Demiboy
- Demigirl
- Demiflux
- MtF (male-to-female)
- FtM (female-to-male)
- Agender
- Neutrois
- Gender neutral
- Gender bending
- Gender questioning
- Gender variant
- Gender nonconforming
- Gender*ck
- Pangender
- Polygender
- Genderfluid
- Queer
- Bigender
- Intergender
- Ambigender
- Genderqueer
- Nonbinary
- Female
- Male
- Woman
- Man
- Boy

Girl
- Trans*
- Transsexual
- Transsexual man/male
- Transsexual woman/female
- Transmasculine
- Transfeminine
- Transgender
- Transgender man/male
- Transgender woman/female
- Trans person
- AFAB (assigned female at birth)
- AMAB (assigned male at birth)
- MtN (Male-to-Nonbinary)
- FtN (Female-to-Nonbinary)
- Cisgender Male
- Cisgender Female

Other identities you can add
- Intersex
- Cross-dresser
- Drag Queen/Drag King
- Queer
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Gray-sexual
- Panromantic
- Aromantic
- Hetereoflexible
- Homoflexible
- Polyamorous
- Kink/BDSM

Culture-Specific Identities
- Third Gender
- Two-Spirit
- Hijra
- Kathoeys
- Fa’afafine
- Māhū
- X-Gend
“MY GENDER IDENTITY IS...”

You now have a broader understanding of the available approaches to describing gender identity. The next step is to create your own personalized description of your gender identity.

STEP #1— In your workbook, make two columns labeled “A” and “B.”

STEP #2— Go back to your answers from the exercise “What Do You Think is Important to Include” (p.225) and write them down in column “A.”

STEP #3— Go back to your answers from the exercise, “An Introduction to Your Gender Identity Options” (p.225) and write them down in column “B.”

As you look at your answers from the two exercises side by side, you can begin to create your own unique description of your gender identity.

 Experiment with a few different descriptions by writing them out in your workbook to see how they look and feel to you.

Example #1:

COLUMN A

“I identify as...”
““I am...”
Include feminine/masculine energy
Include nonbinary terms
How I feel about gender

COLUMN B
Nonbinary
Soft butch
Queer

“I identify as nonbinary, soft butch and queer.”
“I am queer.”
“I do not fit the gender binary.”

Example #2:

COLUMN A

“I am...”
Include Gender Dysphoria
Refer to my gender expression

COLUMN B
Transgender
Female/Woman
MtF

“I am a transgender female with severe social and physical gender dysphoria.”
“I am a feminine woman.”
“I am MtF.”

TIP: If you are uncertain which descriptions you connect with most you can use the “Tests and Experiments” exercises as a way to gauge how you feel about each one.
ANOTHER APPROACH TO DESCRIBING YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

If you find the “fill in the blank” approach easier, here are a few to get your started.

- Fill in as few or as many blanks as you would like
- Write as many terms as you want in each blank
- Keep them all separate from one another or blend them together to form a description of your gender identity

My internal sense of self is __________________________

My gender expression/my desired gender expression is __________________________

My physical body is __________________________

My blend of masculinity and femininity is __________________________

My sexual/romantic orientation is __________________________

Other personal identities important to me are __________________________

My gender identity is __________________________
“PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER”:
HOW TO DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER IDENTITY TO OTHERS

Hopefully one of the key takeaways you’ve gained from this guide is that:

Your gender identity is defined by you.

In an ideal world that would be that! However, the realistic world is one in which you might come across certain complexities when the time comes for you to share your description of your gender identity with others.

WHO IS “THE REST OF THE WORLD”?

Let’s take a look at the various categories “the rest of the world” can be separated into, so we can approach them one at a time.

#1—LOVED ONES AND OTHER PEOPLE CLOSE TO YOU

This is your “inner circle” of people. They are the ones with whom you have the closest relationships with and depend on for certain needs. This group might include blood relatives, “chosen” family, friends, roommates, spouses/partners, parents, children, mentors, pastors, etc. It can include those who are in your life in person and those who are in your life through online means.

#2—ACQUAINTENCES

These would be people who fall somewhere between being strangers and being in your “inner circle.” They could be friends, family members, teachers, coaches, co-workers, bosses, employees of places you frequent often (restaurants, pubs, clubs, etc.) and so on. This category includes individuals who are in person as well as those online.

#3—THE “GENERAL PUBLIC”

These are people you will more than likely only interact with briefly and infrequently. It can cover a large range people who you are around when you leave your home (i.e. “strangers” with whom you likely do not personally connect). For example, this category would include people you need to talk with for customer service assistance.

#4—INFORMATION AND RESOURCE PROVIDERS

This group includes those you encounter as you search for resources, community, insight, and ideas pertaining to your gender identity. For instance, this involves having to think about what words you would type into a search engine, or what terms you would use with someone who works at a local LGBT center.
#5—MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROVIDERS

These are providers with whom you currently have a relationship with as well as those you will have future relationships with. It can include mental health counselors, primary care physicians, psychiatrists, dentists, surgeons, physical therapists, etc. Health insurance companies are included as a part of this category as well.

TIMING AND PACING OF SHARING THIS WITH OTHERS

At this point you probably have some idea as how you want to describe your gender identity. However, you may decide to:

- Sit with it a while to see how it feels
- Tell certain people right away and tell others later
- Describe it in a certain way at first to help others adjust, and then change this the further along they come
- Describe your gender identity in such a way that those around you grow and adjust with it in time
- Change the way you describe yourself depending on the situation

These are all possibilities that may be encountered, so we need to include the idea of “timing and pacing” as a factor to keep in mind when you are describing your gender identity to others.

YOUR LEVELS OF TOLERANCE

As you begin sharing your description of your gender identity you will notice some people are better than others at understanding the language you are using.

Lack of understanding can be due to certain factors:

- Some persons are very willing to learn but need just a bit of time, patience, and practice.
- Others may be resistant at first but, because they value their relationship with you, they will make efforts to try and understand who you are and why this is important to you.
- Others may show intense disinterest and disrespect. This can lead you to feeling emotions ranging from uncomfortable to unsafe.

As you begin to prepare to talk with others about your gender identity it is important you know which descriptions are best, which are bearable, and which you are definitely not okay with. They can also differ from situation to situation, which we will look at more in the next exercise.

YOUR IDEAL DESCRIPTION + “THE REST OF THE WORLD”

You have worked hard in this chapter to create your description of your gender identity. Let’s begin with that description as our starting point in gauging how to approach “the rest of the world.”

STEP #1

Turn your workbook horizontally.
At the top of the page, write down your description of your gender identity (use what feels right for now—remember, you can change this at any point!).

**STEP #2**

Underneath this description create five columns and label each one with the categories listed in “Who is The Rest of the World?”

- Loved ones and other people close to you
- Acquaintances
- The “general public”
- Information and resource providers
- Mental health and medical providers

**STEP #3**

At the top of each column write “Present-day.” Then, slightly below that, write “Eventually.” Then, slightly below that, write “Tolerance.”

“Description of Your Gender Identity”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loved ones</th>
<th>Acquaintances</th>
<th>G. Public</th>
<th>Information Prov.</th>
<th>Medical/Mental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present-day:</td>
<td>Present-day:</td>
<td>Present-day:</td>
<td>Present-day:</td>
<td>Present-day:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eventually:</td>
<td>Eventually:</td>
<td>Eventually:</td>
<td>Eventually:</td>
<td>Eventually:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance:</td>
<td>Tolerance:</td>
<td>Tolerance:</td>
<td>Tolerance:</td>
<td>Tolerance:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STEP #4**

Start with the first column: “Loved Ones.” Keep your ideal description of your gender identity in mind and think about your loved ones and those closest to you:

- Present-day, how do you want to describe your gender identity to them?
- How do you want them to describe your gender identity, if they were to address you or refer to you (with your permission) to others?
- Do you want to describe your gender identity to them a certain way at this time and then, once they have a firm understanding of this, share with them a more multi-layered description of yourself?
- What words and phrases would be “bearable” (and would it be for a short amount of time or for an indefinite amount of time)?
- Are there certain words, terms, and/or descriptions you do not want them to use, ever?
Write out your answers for the above questions in the “Loved Ones” column.

**STEP #5**

Using the prompts above...

Write out your answers for the other four categories.

TIP: You can make this chart as detailed as you choose. You can add situations and settings, people’s names, and specificity to your timeline as your journey unfolds (such as “in the near future,” “in three months,” “after I save up enough money to move out,” “after I get a job with better insurance”).

**CHECK-IN TIME!**

*Take a few minutes to record in your workbook how you feel now that you’ve finished this exercise. What is something new you learned? What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?*
CONCLUSION: WHAT NOW?

I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one that has to walk through it.

—Morpheus, The Matrix

Here you are—so much further than when you first began this guide. Even if nothing has changed in your external world (yet), your internal world has most certainly gone through a significant transformation.

You began this guide with certain questions in mind. Have those questions been answered? Have they changed? Have new questions arisen that you were unaware you had? I'm guessing you experienced at least some, if not all of the above.

Your answers from this leg of the journey make up the components of the “elixir” you now possess: greater self-awareness.

This increase in how well you know yourself can feel exciting, frightening, liberating, and paralyzing.

You may feel like you are ready to take action, make changes in your life and create a world that makes more sense for the person you have discovered you actually are.

You may also feel overwhelmed, uncertain what to do next, and anxious about how any changes might affect your current world.

Trying to figure out “What Now?” can precipitate a whole slew of new questions that need answering.

There is one step you can take right now that will prepare you for the next stage of your life. That step is to...

BREATHE

In fact take as many moments as you need to breathe.

Typically the best thing you can do after an intense journey is to rest for a period of time. Give your mind, body, and soul a chance to rest and let what you learned have a chance to sink in, merge with the rest of your being, and eventually be expressed.

BREAKING DOWN THE QUESTION OF “WHAT NOW?”

When you are ready to approach the question “What Now?” you can break it down the same way you've been doing throughout this book.

#1—PUT SELF-AWARENESS INTO ACTION

Using the paragraph below as an example, merge the self-awareness you gained through this guide with a possible action plan. Change any of the wording as needed to best fit your experience.

Document this in your workbook.
I am uncomfortable with my assigned sex/gender at birth.

I feel (this type of discomfort) in (these types of situation) and the intensity level of this discomfort is ______________________.

My blend of feminine and masculine energy is ________________________.

I want to describe my gender identity as ________________________.

Therefore, here are some of the steps I am thinking of taking to feel more comfortable: ______, ______, ______.

Here is when I would like to accomplish these steps: ________________________.

The steps can be general or specific. Examples are:

- To masculinize
- To feminize
- To socially transition
- To medically transition
- To stop doing what doesn’t feel “right”
- To start Hormone Replacement Therapy
- To find a gender therapist
- To research what my options are in the area in which I live
- To change the way I dress
- To talk to my spouse about this
- To start using a different name
- To find support before I move forward with any sort of transition.
- To look into my workplace’s policy regarding transgender inclusivity

Above all else you need to begin to gain momentum. Try not let yourself become paralyzed by what might feel like an enormous undertaking. You can always go back and reevaluate your steps as well as the timing of them.

Start with something realistic and then do it.

#2—LEARN FROM OTHERS

Although your next steps should be the ones that feel right to you, you can still turn to the examples of others for ideas about what options are available to you.

They can be from individuals who are transitioning, professionals who work with people who wish to transition, as well as advocacy and support organizations.

As you begin your research be sure to:

- Diversify your resources to be sure you draw from a multitude of perspectives
- Learn from the successes and failures of others. Find out what worked well and what could have been done differently.
Be aware you might encounter outdated information—whenever you can, get a second opinion.

Find someone you can trust as an “ultimate source,” especially if you are wanting to learn how to medically and/or socially transition (such as a gender therapist, trans advocate, trans-aware physician, etc.)

#3—TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Through the process of writing this book I have been deeply concerned with what would happen when we reached the end of the “journey.” I wanted to be sure I would not leave you, here at the end, full of self-discovery and yet not really knowing what to do next.

You now have your “map of self-awareness,” but you’ll still need a compass to carry with you in the coming days.

Here are tools I have created to assist you with this:

“**You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery Support Group**”

This private, moderated online Facebook community is there for you to:

- Get to know others who are either working through the guide or have already completed it
- Find support, education, and connection
- Get help with questions, gain guidance, and receive encouragement
- Offer others the benefit of your own experiences

I will also be checking in on the group on a regular basis.

**Membership to this group is free! Just look up the group name on Facebook and make your request to join.**

This is the main “hub” for the current and future resources I offer the trans/transgender/gender nonconforming community. These include blog post articles, YouTube videos, downloadable worksheets, podcast interviews, and announcements about any future projects.

Here are a few articles that can help to get you started:

- “**For Your Transitioning Toolkit: “My Coming Out Master Plan”**”
- “**Gender Transition: The Leap of Brave Beginnings and 8 Ways You Can Help**” (by Charissa White)
“Ask a Gender Therapist” YouTube Channel

Here you will find videos in which I address questions from people around the world regarding trans/transgender/gender nonconforming topics. This includes subjects such as:

- “How to Find a Gender Therapist”
- “Coming Out as Transgender to Family and Friends”
- “Coming Out to Your Parents as Trans”
- “Can I Transition if I’m Nonbinary or Genderfluid?”
- “How Do I Get Hormones?”
- The “I Know I’m Trans...What Do I Do Now??” video series
PARTING THOUGHTS

One day, a book like this won’t have to exist.

Babies will be born without gender constraints immediately being placed upon them.

Children will be free to express their feminine and masculine energy however they choose, and will be encouraged to do so.

As their bodies develop, youth will be able to talk openly with their parents about how their mind, heart, and soul are telling them they ought to be developing.

Teens and young adults will be at liberty to freely experience, express, and enjoy a feeling of wholeness, with gender identity and expression included.

Resources will be available and affordable for those who need medical assistance to help align their physical bodies with their gender identity.

Constraints imposed by the current gender binary will be lifted.

Non-binary identities will continue to grow in number as people realize that gender options do indeed exist.

Today’s gender-specific terminology will evolve into language that celebrates the diversity and uniqueness of individuals on this planet.

In today’s world this book does need to exist, and may be needed for several generations to come.

Be encouraged! Know that what you are doing today—what we are all doing today—is setting the stage for this vision to become reality.

But an evolution is necessary. Any significant cultural shift occurs only with time, persistence, and sacrifice. It will take blood, sweat and tears, both figuratively and literally.

You don’t have to become a trans activist to be a part of this change. The self-awareness you have gained through the pages of this guide is symbolic of realizations our world is experiencing as well.

Every individual experience is contributing to a collective shift that is powerful enough to create significant and lasting change in this world.

There are far too many people who hunger and thirst for the truth. The momentum is there, and there is no stopping it.

Remember this if you are ever in doubt as to why you are on this journey, who is with you on it, and why you are here for this in this time and place in history.

*Take your courage in hand. You are not alone. Your story is meaningful and must be told.*
FURTHER READING

These resources will supplement the information you’ve read and worked on throughout this guide. You'll see it is organized by stage, chapter, and exercise.

INTRODUCTION BY DARA HOFFMAN-FOX, LPC


Dara’s Website & Blog: darahoffmanfox.com

Dara's YouTube channel: youtube.com/user/darahoffmanfox/videos

Conversations with a Gender Therapist (Facebook): facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc

Dara’s Twitter handle: @darahoffmanfox

THE IN’S AND OUT’S OF THIS GUIDE

You and Your Gender Identity: A Workbook to Discovery: discoveryyourgenderidentity.com

Real Talk for Teens: Jump-Start Guide to Gender Transitioning and Beyond by Seth Jamison Rainess (2015)

The Gender Qwest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity

“Coming Out to Your Parents as Trans”: https://youtu.be/3_eQr6jmmBY

Ally Moms: callhimhunter.wordpress.com/ally-moms/


The Trevor Project: http://www.thetrevorproject.org/

SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Trans Lifeline: translifeline.org/

“How to Find a Gender Therapist”: https://youtu.be/SRh5Ab87y9Y

“How to Find a Gender Therapist”: https://youtu.be/SRh5Ab87y9Y

YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

STAGE ONE: PREPARATION

Introduction


Chapter One: “Why Do I Need to Find Out the Truth?”


Chapter Two: “Hold On, This is Scary Stuff!”


Chapter Three: Feeling the Fear & Doing It Anyway


YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY: A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY

Centerlink LGBT Community Center Member Directory:
<http://www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/find-a-center.aspx>

“How to Find a Gender Therapist”: https://youtu.be/SRh5Ab87v9Y


STAGE TWO: REFLECTION

Chapter Two: You & Your Gender Identity: Adolescent/Teenage Years (Ages 12-17)


Chapter Three: The Role of Shame & Guilt


“Reinventing Your Life One Belief at a Time” by Mark Wright <http://theintegritycoach.com/blog/reinventing-your-life-one-belief-time>


STAGE THREE: EXPLORATION

Chapter Two: Deconstructing Gender

Chapter Three: Finding Others to Connect With

genderspectrum.org/lounge
facebook.com
twitter.com
youtube.com
instagram.com
reddit.com
tumblr.com
trevorspace.org (for ages 13 to 24)
pinkessence.com

Chapter Four: Listening to Your Gut


Rylan Whittington: http://www.raisingryland.com/

Avery Jackson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=XUN75MGqdpU


Chapter Five: Wrestling with Uncertainty


Chapter Six: Actively Exploring Your Gender Identity


Chapter Seven: Putting It All Together


DARA HOFFMAN-FOX is a Licensed Professional Counselor and gender therapist in private practice. Frequently serving as a resource on transgender issues for the media, Dara is a prolific gender identity thought leader whose articles and videos have empowered thousands worldwide. Dara provides educational resources through a blog (darahoffmanfox.com), YouTube channel, social media networks, trainings and presentations, and her first publication: *You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery*. Dara lives in Colorado with her wife and teenage daughters and sets aside time whenever she can for frequenting local coffeehouses, movie theaters, and Zumba classes.
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