

ILLUSTRATION BY MYENN RAHNOMA

Gender euphoria and why transitioning is worth it



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When I came out as transgender at near the end of 2020, I was terrified. I did not know what I was even supposed to do. I was directionless.

My name is Alexia. I've been out for about two and a half years, and I've gone through a lot of changes in my life in that time.

I've had more ups and downs than I can count, but I'm still on the same journey I started when I first found out my identity.

What has kept me continuing on my journey has been the euphoria of being able to be myself.

Gender euphoria is the feeling of being happy and at peace with the alignment and presentation of one's own gender identity, according to Healthline.

When COVID hit, and I had to stay home, the amount of people that I knew that were openly transgender was close to zero.

During this time, I almost never saw my friends in person and my family was less than accepting.

The time I had to spend alone in my room every day in Zoom class became a time for me to start reflecting on myself - and I realized I didn't like myself at all.

I didn't think I was a bad person, but I had started to feel a realization that there was something missing in my life.

I constantly felt depressed and engaged in various self-destructive behaviors because I felt mad at myself. I felt like there was something I was doing that was wrong, something about me that was causing me so much emptiness.

I felt like I had nobody to even talk or relate to, I felt completely alone.

I felt completely disconnected from myself and my own body. There was an indescribable feeling of emptiness that had followed me since childhood.

I didn't have any words to describe myself, because I barely even felt like a person. I never really had an identity of my own. I didn't really feel depressed, I just never felt any strong emotions and it was hard to put into words. I was just whatever everyone else wanted me to be. I was never "myself."

There was a time in my freshman year that I got hit by a car while riding my bike to school, and I didn't even have an emotional reaction, I didn't feel fear.

As I was launched off my bike directly into the pavement, I showed up an hour late to school, my hands covered in blood from the accident and my friends were mortified and asked if I was okay. I didn't even care.

It wasn't that I hated myself, it was that I never even thought about myself, I hated the person I saw in the mirror, it was that I didn't even see a person there at all. I was alive, yes, but I was not living.

In my sophomore year of high school I came out to my friends as bisexual.

This was something I had known within myself for a very long time, but it felt so liberating to finally be able to have a word to express what I was feeling.

It was also the first time I felt really happy, excited to recognize something about myself and identify with that part of me in a genuine way.

A little while after, I had come out to my friends about my sexuality and I started exploring my gender.

It wasn't a conscious decision, but being in queer spaces for the first time made me start to appreciate other ways of expression and fashion I never really thought about before.

I had started to care about my looks a lot more. I started cuffing my jeans, tucking in my shirts and occasionally wearing face masks to obscure my face behind a blushing cat-face smile.

I started to gravitate towards fashion and clothing that was more feminine, I slowly started to realize I felt more and more happy with my appearance as I began trying on clothes that were more feminine.

There was a certain part of me that still felt alone within myself. I would stay up all night constantly thinking about that feeling I kept having, that euphoria of presenting like a girl.

Why was I so happy when I was feminine? Why did I never feel that happiness whenever I did anything else?

That feeling of not feeling like a person was still there. The more feminine I dressed, the more I gravitated towards friends of mine that presented that way.

This led to the realization of how alive I felt when I felt feminine. I had never felt that type of happiness before.

I started joking to my friends about it, because I didn't know how else to express my feelings. I would joke constantly about wanting to be more feminine, and wanting to wear skirts and dresses and put on makeup.

It was usually in the format of "Wouldn't it be funny if you guys started treating me like a girl?" To me, that just felt like my own way of expressing my frustrations.

I remember being alone in my bedroom, staring at the ceiling with my arm resting on my forehead and all of these feelings had been slowly accumulating in my head for months where it finally hit me.

"Oh my god. I'm trans."

After I had come to this revelation, I told nobody for weeks. I tried my hardest to think about it as little as possible. What was I supposed to say? How would people react?

I was so uncertain about everything. It felt like my world was crumbling.

I had finally realized what I always knew deep down but never fully understood, that the reason I had felt so empty for so long was because I was really pretending to be a person that I wasn't.

My friend Keely asked me out of the blue if I had been questioning my gender. It turns out my jokes were more obvious than I had realized.

I slowly started to tell more of my close-knit friends. It was terrifying, but it felt comforting that I had people who would help me figure things out.

I remember asking my friends to start referring to me as a girl, this was the first time I fully felt euphoria.

The idea of being a girl is one thing, but having people call you and treat you like one was the most wonderful feeling I had ever felt.

There are no words to describe it. I felt happy. I had been alive for 16 years, but that was the first day I started truly living.

I needed a new name. I was talking to my friends and they decided to help me try to pick one.

I heard a lot of random suggestions, and I don't remember any of them. None of them felt like me.

I thought about it for a while. I decided I wanted to go by Alexia, the name of the lead singer of Sacramento rock band Destroy Boys, a band I had long been inspired by.

One of my friends playfully said "Hi Alexia!" in response to a message I sent and I cried my eyes out. I did not stop crying the whole rest of the night. I felt so cathartic.

There was a weight finally lifted off my back, I knew my name was Alexia.

I often confided in my best friend at the time, Jocelyn. I was always comfortable around her because she is openly queer, with an incredibly supportive family.

When I got to her house on Halloween 2020, she told me to tell her parents about my identity. "I'm just letting you know, I'm transgender. My name is Alexia, and my pronouns are she/her."

That was the first time I had ever muttered those words, and it scared the shit out of me, and her parents supported and accepted me.

As they gave me a big hug, I cried like I had never cried before.

I cried because I knew when I told my parents, they would never be as accepting of me as Jocelyn's parents are.

Jocelyn had a floral dress from Hot Topic sitting in her closet and she asked if I wanted to try it on.

When I looked in the mirror, I saw the slightest glimpse of the real me for the first time.

Two weeks later, I came out to my mom over text.

When I sent the message when she was out picking my sister up from school, she came back furious.

During the 2 hour screaming match we had after the text, she had come up with a million reasons to be mad at me, which all boiled down to "I get to decide your identity, not you, because I don't want you to be any different than the way I perceive you."

This continued for months. We would barely talk to each other, and when we did, it was a long-winded argument about whatever new problem with my identity that she came up with that week.

She thought Jocelyn and my friends were pressuring me into being trans, thinking my identity wasn't valid because I never acted "girly" before, I wonder why?

I barely remember anything during this time, other than I hated myself more than anyone else on the planet. I couldn't understand why things had to be this way with my family.

I barely ever had the chance to feel like myself. I felt like I was being suffocated.

I had to pretend like hearing my deadname doesn't hurt like a kick to the stomach.

I had to put on the mask of a person that I wasn't anymore. It was like watching my life through a TV, and I hated the fucking channel.

Slowly, things got better at home. I don't think they ever really became ideal, but I didn't have much of a say over it.

Senior year was the first time I was out in public, coming out to my teachers and friends that didn't already know.

I started dressing the way I wanted to as much as I could. My peers accepted me. I didn't have to feel unsafe to be myself.

I loved wearing skirts and dresses and whatever I wanted to wear and not having to hide it from anyone. When my real name started getting called by my teachers, I felt a sort of happiness throughout my entire body. School became my safe space to be myself.

For the first time in my life, I was happier being at school than when I wasn't there.

There was a side of me that finally got to come outside. It was pure joy to just exist.

Going to the aquarium with friends, wearing pink corduroy dresses that matched my hair, it was pure joy to just exist.

As I was waiting for my friends to come back, I took a selfie and that became the first photo of myself that I didn't despise, I loved it.

It wasn't a photo of someone I didn't recognize, I finally took a photo of Alexia.

When I finally got to San Jose State in 2022, I had a clean slate.

Nobody knew pre-transition me. Nobody had any pre-existing expectations of me.

I started making friends that didn't know my deadname. I had clothes that I actually liked and felt comfortable with. That hatred of looking at myself in the mirror started waning more and more.

But there was still a looming feeling of unease in the fact that I had never really "been a woman" before.

It's not something that people teach you how to do, because it's kind of assumed you know how to do it.

I didn't, so everything I was doing was the equivalent of throwing random forms of gender expression into the wall until something worked.

I remember a girl I knew asking me "So, when are you going to transition?" That sent me.

As happy and comfortable with myself as I was becoming, that's when I realized that I still have a long way to go.

I spent hours doing my makeup and putting together outfits alone in my room. I never had the opportunity to figure out my femininity or presentation by myself.

Learning makeup sucks, learning how to put together an outfit sucks, learning skin and hair care sucks, it sucks to have to learn the things that most people your age have had their entire lives to learn.

Sometimes I just had to scream in my pillow because eyeliner is just that damn hard, or because the cashiers called me "sir" even though I was in a cute outfit.

Paradoxically, the harder you try to force learning how to do everything, the harder it gets. When I stopped nitpicking every flaw in my makeup, people started telling me how jealous they were of my skills.

What's funny is when I stopped worrying about every detail of color coordination of every outfit and how perfectly even my eyeshadow is on both eyes, that's when everything got easier.

That's when people started telling me that they love my makeup, and they wish they could do it like me. That's when people started telling me that they adore my outfits and think they're adorable.

It's so comforting to be reminded that I'm getting better at "being a woman," for whatever that's worth. It's so nice to know that people are starting to notice as well.

I'm probably the happiest I have ever been in my life right now.

I never see that stranger in the mirror anymore. I see myself.

It's been the most positive experience of my entire life to be unapologetically myself.

This was something I had known within myself for a very long time, but it felt so liberating to finally be able to have a word to express what I was feeling.

Gender Euphoria: the feeling of significant comfort in one's gender identity, biological sex or gender expression