

TMM Ep1 – The Exhale

A Companion Guide to The Exhale

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Dr. Pixie Popplewell

Femme

A gender expression that reclaims what it means to be feminine.

Butch Femme

Rooted in lesbian history, butch and femme culture created new ways to express gender and experience relationships outside of traditional rules.

Transitioning (Medical)

Beginning hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and then pursuing gender-affirming surgeries.

Masking

Meant both literally during the height of COVID, and when exerting effort to be perceived as “normal,” which can be neurotypical, straight, cisgender, able-bodied, etc.

Chosen Family

Bonds created with people who are not related but whose significance matches or exceeds the expectations of family.

“T”

Testosterone.

Intersex

Individual with variations in reproductive or sex anatomy which may appear in chromosomes, genitals, or internal organs.

Fae

Gender-expansive pronoun used to express an identity outside of the binary and often connected to whimsical nature.

Polyamorous

A romantic expression that allows people to form multiple meaningful bonds, instead of limiting deep love to just one partner. Every relationship is unique without needing to fit into traditional hierarchies or be inherently sexual.

Queer Compound

A gaggle of queers — a space where queer community comes together to redefine home and reimagine what daily life gets to look like.

Community

An intentional group of people with a shared identity and/or experience.

Gender Fuckery

Intentional efforts to denounce, bastardize, and redefine the performance of gender.

Intersectionality

The unique experience of the overlapping of multiple identities.

Shame

Feeling associated with assuming responsibility or fault for not meeting an expectation that causes a negative self-view.

Guilt

The thoughts attached to blame that impact personal actions.

Neurodivergent

An altered neurobiology. Personally, that looks like depression, anxiety, CPTSD, and ADHD.

Housing Instability

Lacking a safe, stable, and permanent residence. For me that looked like staying on people's couches or in their garages, sleeping in my car, taking jobs that had live-in components, and living in an abandoned building.

Binary

An idea that presents experiences or identities as only existing in parallel to its opposite.

Aly Alexander

Service Access

Someone’s ability to understand and utilize community services available that could potentially help them with a problem.

Local Politics

The relationships or schemes people balance and maintain in order to obtain or maintain power or complete a mission.

Micro-Aggression

A subtle behavior or comment that is actually insulting to a certain population, with or without intent.

Trust

Belief that someone or something is reliable (and specifically in relationships) and not going to cause harm.

Hide Your Identity / Mask

Denying the world the true you. For example, using the names, pronouns, and gender norms that match sex assigned at birth in public rather than using the chosen name and true gender identity.

Privilege

The circumstances in which someone falls into that gives them a life advantage.

Normalizing

Creating a sense that an experience is normal or commonplace.

Signaling

Non-verbal communication through clothing, signage, language, etc. that indicates I hold a certain set of values.

Safe Space

A place where a person can be authentically themself without judgment, shame, or harm.

Female Presenting

Styles, hair, makeup, body shape, and clothing with traditional, female gender norms.

Autonomy

The ability and independence to make your own decisions in life.

Patience

The ability to tolerate waiting even when it’s hard.

KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Kayla Bentzen

Bullying

Name calling, excluding, isolating, and/or causing emotional/physical harm to a person or group of people.

Safe Space

A person or place that makes all people feel safe, cared for, and loved.

Isolation

Causing a person to be or feel alone/separate from others, physically or emotionally.

Intentionality

Doing or trying to do things with purpose.

PRIDE

A safe community for people who are LGBTQ+.

Outlier

A person that believes/feels differently than the majority of people in an area.

BEYOND THE INTERVIEWS

What the Literature Confirms

The words above come from lived experience. The findings below come from the published research literature, grouped by the themes that surfaced across the three interviews.

01 Body, Identity, and Emotional Experience

- Body dysphoria is a deep discomfort with one's own body. It is the most common experience described by transgender adults when talking about gender-related distress (Cooper et al., 2020).
- Many transgender people describe staying on constant alert, watching for danger even when nothing is wrong. Researchers call this hypervigilance. It can cause ongoing anxiety and fear in daily life (Cooper et al., 2020).

> *"Dysphoria and hypervigilance are two of the most common threads researchers find in transgender adults' own accounts of distress.*

02 Chosen Name, Pronouns, and Affirmation

- Transgender and gender-diverse youth who can use their chosen name and pronouns across more parts of their life, including at home, school, work, and with friends, show lower depression, suicidal behavior, and suicidal ideation (Russell et al., 2018, as cited in MacMullin, 2023).
- For transgender and gender-expansive youth, affirming adults can protect against harm by using a child's affirmed name and pronouns, supporting gender exploration, and advocating across systems such as schools, healthcare, and community settings (Gambardella, n.d.).
- Transgender and gender-expansive youth who disclosed a gender-affirming name to parents who then used that name had fewer depressive symptoms, less suicidal ideation, and greater self-esteem (Pollitt et al., 2021, as cited in Marx et al., 2023).

> *"Being called by the right name and pronoun is not a courtesy. The research treats it as protective.*

- One nonbinary young adult described living in a place where correcting people's pronouns became exhausting, compared to a place where people asked for pronouns upfront and owned their mistakes (Gamarel et al., 2021).

03 Family and Parents

- Parents of transgender and nonbinary youth often report mixed emotions, including fear, worry, love, pride, and acceptance. Research also documents parental concerns that a child may be too young, influenced by peers, or going through a phase (Matsuno et al., 2022).
- Family behaviors toward transgender children are often multifaceted, with accepting, rejecting, and mixed behaviors occurring at the same time. Both rejecting and mixed parental behaviors have been linked to negative psychosocial consequences (Johnson et al., 2020, as cited in Gamio Cuervo et al., 2022).
- Research on transgender and nonbinary Latinx adults conceptualizes family rejection as cumulative trauma, with rejection increasing precarity and forcing some people to renegotiate family relationships to preserve safety (Gamio Cuervo et al., 2022).

> *"Parents rarely land in one place. Fear, pride, love, and doubt often show up together, in the same household, at the same time.*

04 Chosen Family and Community

- In a study of transgender young people who had experienced homelessness or unstable housing, more than three out of four built a chosen family to make up for support they were not getting from their family of origin (Morrow & McGuire, 2023).

3 in 4

built a chosen family after homelessness or unstable housing (Morrow & McGuire, 2023)

05 Housing Instability and Homelessness

- LGBTQ+ youth make up an estimated 20% to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness, even though they are only 5% to 10% of the overall youth population (Shelton & Bond, 2017; see also Sellers, 2018).
- In a national survey of transgender and gender-nonconforming adults, 44.2% of people who had stayed in a shelter said they left because of poor treatment or unsafe conditions (Begun & Kattari, 2016).
- Across studies reviewed by Samuels et al., shelter use among homeless youth ranged from 7% to 40%, showing that many young people do not rely on shelters even when they need support (Samuels et al., 2018).
- Hidden homelessness includes temporary, insecure, or informal living arrangements, such as staying with friends or relatives, that can keep youth outside formal homeless services and official counts (MacEntee et al., 2024).
- Research on LGBTIQ+ homelessness links stigma and discrimination with isolation, feeling trapped, and low self-esteem, which can make it harder to seek safety or exit homelessness (Fraser et al., 2019).

20%–40%

of homeless youth are LGBTQ+, though they are only 5%–10% of all youth (Shelton & Bond, 2017; Sellers, 2018)

06 Discrimination and Access to Care

- Everyday discriminatory interactions across public and institutional settings are a recurring part of many transgender people's lives (Ingram et al., 2017).
- Between 22.3% and 50.0% of transgender and gender-nonconforming people report having experienced employment discrimination because of their gender identity (Bradford et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2011; Lombardi et al., 2002, as cited in Begun & Kattari, 2016).
- Research on transgender and gender-questioning youth in small towns found that community climate shapes whether support resources are available, used, or still unmet. In

22.3%–50.0%

of transgender and gender-nonconforming people report employment discrimination (as cited in Begun & Kattari, 2016)

places without formal services, school-based groups, supportive community organizations, phone or video support groups, counseling, and vetted online spaces may help close part of that gap (Paceley et al., 2017).

- A Canadian study found that 2SLGBTQ+ youth in rural and suburban areas sometimes travel up to 2 hours, or move entirely, to reach support services concentrated in cities (MacEntee et al., 2024).

07 Language, Visibility, and Numbers

- The word “transgender” first appeared in print in American English in 1965 and entered widespread use in the 1990s (Stryker, 2020).
- Nearly 3 million people ages 13 and older in the United States identify as transgender, including about 1 in 30 youth ages 13 to 17 (Herman & Flores, 2025).

~3 million

people ages 13+ in the U.S. identify as transgender, including about 1 in 30 youth ages 13–17 (Herman & Flores, 2025)

References provided upon request.

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