



# Research Brief: Affirming Actions and Gender Euphoria Among Transgender and Nonbinary Young People

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## Background

Gender euphoria is defined as satisfaction or joy caused when one's gendered experience aligns with their gender identity, rather than with the gender they were assigned at birth (Ashley & Ells, 2018). Gender euphoria is an integral experience for many transgender and nonbinary people. Gender euphoria is often conceptualized as the opposite of gender dysphoria, which is the feelings of discomfort produced by the disconnect between one's gender identity and their gendered body parts or their experiences associated with one's assigned gender at birth. While empirical research exists on gender dysphoria, especially concerning the positive impact of gender-affirming healthcare and policies (Foster Skewis et al., 2021), gender euphoria has historically received much less attention. The term "gender euphoria" has been used in transgender and nonbinary communities as early as 1976 but has remained unexamined by empirical analyses until very recently (Kai & Devor, 2022). A handful of qualitative studies have sought to document experiences of gender euphoria among transgender and nonbinary individuals, examining its role on their mental health. One such study found that gender euphoria often arises after a gender-affirming event, which prompts gender-affirming thoughts and positive emotions (Austin et al., 2022). Gender euphoria can be both internal (prompted by personal thoughts about one's gender) and external (prompted by social experiences; Beischel et al., 2022). Notably, external forms of gender euphoria are frequently connected to gender affirmation from other people (Kai & Devor, 2022). Furthermore, gender euphoria is connected to transgender and nonbinary individuals' mental health and associated with feelings of confidence, increased coping, and enhanced quality of life (Austin et al., 2022; Beischel et al., 2022; Kai & Devor, 2022). In recognition of Transgender Awareness Week and Transgender Day of Remembrance, and in an effort to better understand gender euphoria among transgender and nonbinary young people, this brief uses The Trevor Project's [2023 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#) to examine actions other people can take to help transgender and nonbinary young people feel euphoric about their gender identity.

## Results

Respondents were asked the open-ended question, "What are things that others do that make you feel

happy (or euphoric) about your gender?” They reported several actions that evoked feelings of gender euphoria, which were categorized into four themes: Affirming Communication, Inclusivity and Belonging, Appearance Affirmation, and Support and Respect.

## Affirming Communication

Transgender and nonbinary young people reported several different forms of affirming communication that made them feel happy or euphoric about their gender identity. Many respondents described feeling euphoric when others used their pronouns correctly - both by using the pronouns they identify with and avoiding pronouns they do not use. Some transgender and nonbinary young people found it especially euphoric when strangers correctly used their pronouns without being told. One respondent explained, *“Honestly just calling me by the proper name and pronouns makes me so happy.”* Using a young person’s chosen name rather than their given name was also frequently cited as affirming communication.

*“Honestly just calling me by the proper name and pronouns makes me so happy”*

Many transgender and nonbinary young people described feeling affirmed and euphoric when other people used gendered terms or language that aligned with their gender identity. Common examples included gendered compliments (e.g., pretty, handsome), gendered titles (e.g., sir, ma’am), or gendered nicknames. One young person expressed feeling euphoric when others used *“feminine expressions when referring to me.”* For respondents identifying outside of the traditional gender binary, gender-neutral language was also reported as affirming, leading to feelings of gender euphoria. One young person expressed a preference for *“compliments that [weren’t] gendered (saying “attractive” instead of “gorgeous” or “handsome”).”* Another stated, *“I like it when people don’t call me by a gender.”*

## Inclusivity and Belonging

Inclusivity and belonging among their peers was also a common theme in young people’s responses about gender euphoria. Many transgender and nonbinary young people reported feeling euphoric when they were treated in ways that aligned with their gender identity. One respondent reported feeling euphoric when others *“genuinely treat[ed] me like they would a friend or person of that gender.... I don’t need to be treated like a third category of trans I need to be treated like a 22 year old girl who never learned a few things.”* Some young people reported feeling particularly affirmed

*“I don’t need to be treated like a third category of trans I need to be treated like a 22 year old girl who never learned a few things”*

when strangers or people they did not know well treated them as members of their identified gender, such as holding a door for them or giving them a head nod. Several respondents specifically mentioned feeling euphoric when compared to male or female characters from popular media, with one expressing joy when *“being compared to male actors/characters.”*

Many transgender and nonbinary respondents felt euphoric when included in gendered social groups or dynamics that aligned with their gender identity, such as being part of single-sex spaces or activities. One respondent appreciated *“rough hous[ing] with my other male presenting friends”* and enjoyed it when cisgender friends *“treat me like one of the guys and talk to me like it.”* Another reported feeling euphoric when others were *“putting eyeliner on me, talking about men with me.”* A common desire among transgender and nonbinary young people is a sense of normalcy in gendered treatment and inclusion, with many not wanting special treatment or acknowledgement of their gender identity. For example, they reported feeling euphoric when others would *“treat me like a normal guy”* or *“not [treat] me differently because of my gender identity.”*

### **Appearance Affirmation**

Many transgender and nonbinary young people reported feeling euphoric when others affirmed their appearance. This affirmation could come from various sources, such as friends, family, or even strangers. It encompassed gendered or gender-neutral compliments about LGBTQ young people’s appearance and extended to receiving support in obtaining appearance-affirming tools (e.g., binders, clothes). One young person explained that they felt happy when *“my mom [bought] me boxers instead of panties.”* Another also cited their mother’s positive comments about their appearance as a source of euphoria: *“my mother commenting positively on my feminine appearance.”* Affirmation from young people’s peers frequently took the form of compliments, with one respondent describing feeling euphoric when others *“lik[ed] my outfit and [told] me it makes me look more masculine.”* Additionally, some transgender and nonbinary young people described feeling euphoria in situations where others were confused or unsure about their gender. For some young people, this gender confusion indicated that they were beginning to “pass” as their gender identity, while for others it was affirming to be perceived outside of traditional gender norms or binaries. For example, one respondent reported feeling happy *“when a stranger looks at me and doesn’t know what gender I am.”*

### **Support and Respect**

Finally, many transgender and nonbinary young people reported feeling euphoric when others expressed respect or support for their gender identities. Respect was described in broad terms and was based in open-mindedness or affirming beliefs, rather than particular actions. One young person described euphoria stemming from when others *“respect[ed] me as a person regardless of my identity.”* Another

reported feeling affirmed by *“empathetic people that don’t try to tell you why you’re going to hell.”* Transgender and nonbinary young people also reported specific supportive actions from friends and family that made them feel euphoric about their gender. These included when others provided emotional support and talked about young people’s experiences with gender, supported them in obtaining clothes or tools to express their gender identity, or helped them access information about gender. One respondent explained that they felt happy *“when the only friend I’ve ever told about my gender questioning said she would support me in whatever identity I use.”* Other supportive actions included *“validating my experiences and feeling[s]”* and *“[letting] me get the haircut I want, and [letting] me dress how I want”*.

Two additional supportive actions were cited frequently: correcting gender-related mistakes and showing respectful curiosity about young people’s identities. Respondents reported feeling euphoric when other people quickly and politely corrected mistakes related to their gender identity. This included individuals both correcting their own mistakes and correcting others when they made mistakes, most commonly regarding pronouns, names, and gender-affirming language. Respondents described their euphoria when

others had used their *“pronouns wrong and [said] sorry right away and use[d] them right”* or when others *“[tried] to correct others when they misgender[ed] or deadname[d] me since I don’t have the courage to do it myself.”* Transgender and nonbinary young people also reported feeling euphoric when people in their life demonstrated respectful and open-minded curiosity about their gender identity, such as asking for their pronouns or posing respectful questions about gender transition or other elements of their gender identity. One respondent explained they felt euphoria when *“someone asks about my gender identity actually wanting to try and understand.”*

*“Respect me as a person regardless of my identity”*

## Methods

Data were collected through The Trevor Project’s [2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#). A total of 9,074 transgender and nonbinary respondents provided text responses to the open-ended question: “What are things that others do that make you feel happy (or euphoric) about your gender?” We followed a process of identifying and grouping themes that aligned with the methodology of Thematic Analysis (Clark, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). A subsample of 900 responses was selected for analysis. Initially, the first author inductively open coded a random subsample of 100 responses, noting codes that emerged and documenting them in a codebook (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The second author independently coded 50 of these responses, using the first author’s codebook. Both authors discussed and refined the codebook, identifying additional codes (Cascio et al., 2019). The first author then recoded the set of 100 responses with the updated list of codes and coded an additional randomly-selected 100 responses. Two

more codes were identified. After discussion with the second author, these codes were added to the codebook. The first author then recoded all 200 of the previously coded responses to add the new codes and ensure consistency. The remaining 700 responses in the sample were selected in an effort to ensure racial and gender diversity, guided by demographic calculations to reflect the larger sample's demographics. The first author coded the remaining 700 responses, with no new codes found. A random subsample of 50 responses was recoded for consistency checks, revealing minor inconsistencies that did not affect the overall findings. Lastly, both authors independently grouped codes into themes, compared, and integrated their thematic lists to finalize the themes presented in the findings (Williams, & Moser, 2019).

## Looking Ahead

Transgender and nonbinary young people report a number of actions that others can take to affirm and make them feel euphoric about their gender. As identified by other research (Austin et al., 2022), such actions can serve as a precursor to gender affirmation, prompting feelings of confidence and happiness. Upon analysis, these actions were grouped into four broad categories: Affirming Communication, Inclusivity and Belonging, Appearance Affirmation, and Support and Respect.

The theme of Affirming Communication emphasizes the importance of using correct pronouns, chosen names, and gender-affirming language, especially from strangers, in fostering gender euphoria. For some young people, this specifically meant using gender-neutral language to describe and address them. The relationship between affirming language and gender euphoria mirrors findings in other studies of gender euphoria (Beischel et al., 2022; Kai & Devor, 2022), which highlights the need for greater societal awareness and education to promote affirming communication.

In the theme of Inclusivity and Belonging, being treated in alignment with one's gender identity and being included in gendered social interactions were valued. For example, trans girls enjoyed being included in "Girls Night," while trans boys valued being treated as "one of the guys". This theme illustrates the harm caused by legislation seeking to prohibit transgender and nonbinary young people from joining teams or activities that align with their gender identity and the need for more inclusive societal approaches.

Regarding Appearance Affirmation, appearance-based compliments and support in obtaining gender-affirming apparel or hairstyles emerged as sources of gender euphoria, highlighting the importance of supportive environments that affirm the appearance choices of transgender and nonbinary individuals. Our finding that some young people feel affirmed by others' confusion at their appearance aligns with another study which similarly found that expressing gender ambiguity can prompt gender euphoria (Kai & Devor, 2022). Lastly, the theme of Support and Respect showcased the positive effect of respectful and supportive actions towards transgender and nonbinary identities such as correcting oneself or asking

thoughtful questions, underscoring the impactful role of open-minded interactions on the mental well-being of transgender and nonbinary young people.

These findings provide a roadmap for allies and adults to support transgender and nonbinary young people, which can foster feelings of happiness and confidence about their gender. Using affirming language, treating young people in alignment with their gender identity, complimenting their appearance, and expressing support can help transgender and nonbinary young people feel euphoric about their gender and potentially have positive impacts on their mental health (Austin et al., 2022; Beischel et al., 2022; Kai & Devor, 2022).

At The Trevor Project, our Crisis Services team works 24/7 to be a supportive and accepting adult for LGBTQ young people in crisis. We also provide training for adults, including professionals who work with young people and whose affirmation of transgender and nonbinary young people may cause feelings of gender euphoria, as a means to increase awareness of LGBTQ identity and mental health. Our website has a number of resources for adults specifically working with transgender and nonbinary young people, including a [Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Young People](#) and [Understanding Gender Identities](#). Additionally, Trevor's Research team is committed to the ongoing exploration of factors related to mental health among LGBTQ young people and dissemination of evidence that can help everyone to better support and accept LGBTQ young people.

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