

# **Analysis of Transgender YouTube Videos**

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## **Abstract**

This big'ol project analyses transgender YouTube videos and engages with the YouTube transgender community through video creation and sharing. 33 of the first videos a transgender person might see are analyzed according to a normative rubric. This essay discusses the features that differentiate good, bad, and unique videos. This project includes the production of a YouTube channel and videos discussing transgender issues.

## **Introduction**

I started male-to-female Hormone Replacement Therapy on November 19th 2015. I had considered it for three years, researched it for one, and worked to obtain a prescription for another. That research was relegated to the solitude of early morning. My first questions - 'What does a gender transition look like? Am I trans? How do I tuck?' - were answered by transgender YouTube users who had walked a similar path before me. YouTube offered me an alternative to being alone with my questions before coming out to even my closest friends.

Growing up in the cis-normative world leaves young queer folks without ready access to media that answers their questions and represents their narratives. YouTube offers transgender individuals an opportunity to share their experiences with each other, and with the world. YouTube is a safe space to ask all sorts of questions and have them answered by people with experience. When people come to YouTube asking, 'Am I Transgender,' the answer from people with is experience is, 'You probably would not ask if you were not transgender, and it is going to be okay.'

By comparing the level of research, editing, engagement with transgender people, and performance within the genre for 33 videos this Bachelor's Essay catalogues what features

distinguish good, bad, and unique cases. This normative rubric assigns more points to more thoroughly researched, well edited, thought-provoking and accurate videos. I have made two YouTube videos of my own as part of this project. One introduces me and traces the first four months of my physical transition and the next introduces topic videos I am creating to communicate concepts from queer theory.

This paper is organized as follows. The Literature Review is on page 2. The methodology motivating the video analysis portion of this paper is presented on page 10, followed by the results of that analysis on page 15. A discussion of video scoring begins on 18. Comments about the process of video creation are included on page 21. The paper concludes on page 23. Appendix one, on page 25, contains raw video outlines and scripts used during production. Appendices two, and three, on page 30, depict the video search and selection process, and the only unsupportive comment I have received, respectively. The Works Cited information is included on page 31.

## **Literature Review**

The field of transgender studies has recently come to view YouTube as a space for meaningful creation and communication of trans identities. YouTube offers a platform for transforming interests into communities. Individuals engage with peers on virtually any subject, either passively, as a viewer, or actively, as a commenter or content creator. Transgender users have created communities using that platform which affords new transfolk unprecedented access to content by, about, and for trans people. Even as trans issues get more attention in mainstream media the depth and breadth of content available through those outlets pales in comparison to the

diversity of YouTube content. The following literature review traces an outline through scholarly work on YouTube, queer theory, and transgender communication.

Any paper on transgender issues tends to begin by taking a stance on some definition of the term transgender. Definitions of transgender often rely on Judith Butler's definition of gender. Butler develops that definition through a discussion of performativity in which she argues that gender is more a pattern of styled behaviors than a seamless immutable identity or sexual characteristic (Butler, 1988). To Butler, gender is constituted by a person's desires and behaviors more than physical characteristics. In her book *Transgender History* Susan Stryker defines transgender as, "... *the movement* [of a person] *across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place* - rather than any particular destination or mode of transition [emphasis in original]" (Stryker, 2008). In *Transgender Communication Studies* Leland Spencer and Jamie Capuzza build upon Stryker's definition, adding that, "Rather than a static identity classification or political label, *transgender*... describes a subject-in-movement. Not quite a verb and certainly not a noun, *transgender* remains an adjective..." (Spencer, 2015). Teich offers a plain definition in *Transgender 101*, referencing the meaning of the root 'trans,' as 'across,' and describing transgender as an umbrella term over categories like gender queer and transexual (Teich, 2012). These definitions cast transgender as a broad category encompassing any movement along a gendered axis, whether that movement is from one pole to another, or in a new or different direction altogether. Definitions of transgender offered above are cohesive and can be taken together - transgender refers to a performance of roles which move the performer from an unchosen initial point. The diversity of performative identities that constitute departure

from a starting point give rise to an understanding of transgender as a category that encompasses cross dressers, drag queens & kings, genderqueer & nonbinary people, and transexuals.

Transgender demographic studies focus on examining the prevalence of transgender people within the general population. Benjamin Harris used US census data on name and gender changes to estimate the transgender population (Harris, 2015). Harris' model predicts that there are about 90,000 transgender people alive and counted in the 2010 census, or 0.029% of the total population at that time. This estimate only captures transgender individuals who change their legal name from one name that is considered to be gendered to an opposite-gendered name, and likely excludes many transgender people. In a meta-study examining survey results from multiple large-sample surveys of LGBT populations, Gary Gates estimated that the transgender prevalence in the United States is 0.3% (Gates, 2011). This rate of prevalence is more likely true than the rate estimated by Harris, as it does not rely upon a transgender person to have undergone the costly legal process of formal name change, but upon data from surveys in which transgender people could self-identify. Grant, Mottet, and Tanis document the discrimination transgender individuals face, finding that 71% attempt to hide their transition (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011). This prevalence of privacy regarding transition is a key difficulty of researching transgender populations, and a barrier to political organization.

Gender, sex, gender identity, and gender role are indistinguishable and in-line with social expectation for cisgender people, or non-transgender people (Swanstrom, 2006). Transexuals, like myself, are transgender people who undergo some social and/or physical process in order to change their gendered role, performance, or perception. Many transexual people pursue transition to alleviate feelings of dysphoria, or anxiety due to incongruity between psychological

gender and physical sex characteristics (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). The Transgender YouTube genre tends to foreground the form of transition involving Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). HRT causes the development of either masculine or feminine secondary sexual characteristics like breast tissue, hair, skin, and fat distribution, and has varying effects dependent upon age, dosage, and genetics (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). Whereas Stryker defines transgender as movement across the space of gender in no particular form of transition the subcategory of transexuals are differentiated from transgender people in that they engage with the process of transition either in actuality or desire (Stryker, 2008). People can transition to non-binary genders by combining elements of other gender roles, living without gendered norms altogether, or inventing new ones. YouTube videos centered on the process of gender transition are the most popular and numerous of the transgender genre (Horak, 2014). As a result, the majority of videos in this analysis (mine included) feature transexual transgender content creators.

Queer theory is a field of political thought that examines norms regarding gender, sexuality, and the violation or rejection of those norms. In *Queer Theory: an Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose write that Queer theory “focuses on mismatches between gender, sex, and desire” (Jagose, 1996). That focus is intended to disrupt the assumptions of hetero-, homo-, and cis-normativity, thereby creating a space for the expression of counter-normative identities (Jourian, 2015). In *What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now*, Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz discuss the state of queer theory in 2005, noting that the field must grow away from white gay male narratives and foreground queer youth (Eng, Halberstam & Muñoz, 2005). The subsequent emergence of YouTube as a popular host of young radical transgender narratives presents an

opportunity to expand the scope of queer theory. One branch of queer theory examines the effects of queer identity on perceptions of time over the course of a life.

The concept of Queer Time features prominently in transgender media analysis. Coined by Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam writes that,

“Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience - namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (Halberstam, 2005).

Queer culture creates its own distinct sets of understandings about time over the course of a human life, wherein the motives of reproduction and longevity do not always carry the significance they do in the straight cisgendered mainstream. In queer time constructs that are often regarded as fixed become sites for change, namely: gender, sexuality, and the human body.

Writing on the impact of a photoset depicting Riverdale’s physical transition on testosterone, Joshua Barnett notes that, “Whereas before-and-after photographs foreground the dramatic, Riverdale’s photographic sequence emphasizes slow change over time” (Spencer, 2015).

Depictions of transition as a lived process instead of a fixed event creates a space between gendered forms, offering a challenge to the construct of binary gender on a physical, personal level. This formulation of queer time is evident in the category of transition videos, where transgender YouTube users trace their physical changes over the course of the process, and transition update videos, which instead offer a snapshot of progress at one point in time. Laura Horak in “Trans on YouTube,” differentiates the temporality of transgender YouTube videos from that of queer theory generally, noting that in the YouTube context, time begins with the

Hormone Replacement Therapy start-date, to the exclusion of all other markers of time, such as age (Horak, 2014). Transition timeline videos which present slideshows of pictures, Horak argues, only allow time to progress as the subject makes progress in their transition, creating the impression of a smooth transition, thereby co-opting the straight time of progress (Horak, 2014). The result of this temporality is a joyful shared narrative that affirms the viability of trans self-determination.

Transgender YouTube videos primarily consist of a form of life narrative. Social science traditionally use narratives either to study lives in their social contexts or as texts that reflect identity formation (Lieblich, & Josselson, 1997). Transgender transition narratives fundamentally concern identity formation, as the actions of transition are often presented as ‘creating’ the transgender person’s present self. The communication of those actions and identities is facilitated by features of the digital space, such as the ability to edit photos, use avatars, and rapidly distribute content on a global scale (Cover, 2016). The anonymity of digital space provides some measure of safety for exploring gender identity without fear of discrimination. Recent work in narrative studies has identified YouTube’s power to generate celebrity within each category of video, uplifting otherwise unheard voices and establishing communities (Kavoori, 2011). In *The Impact of YouTube on U.S. Politics* Lachrystal Ricke writes of YouTube that, “Its structure, including ease of use, person-to-person connectivity, and asynchronous interactivity, have ushered in a wave of ... engagement that connects people to politics, and politically to one another, in ways that far outreach previous communication technologies” (Ricke, 2014). Participants in the Transgender YouTube community benefit from the asynchronous nature of communication facilitated by the platform. Through this mechanism



of asynchronous communication, a transgender person can engage with content created by trans people at their exact stage in transition, with information about how that person's transition has progressed up to, and after that point, despite the ever-changing nature of the self throughout the process. By selecting videos based on results for key-words this study incorporates some relatively popular, and some virtually unknown videos, with a range of 181 to 97,000 views at time of analysis. Transgender YouTube studies examines the narrative structure, political consequences, temporal understandings, and of the genre, as well as the community created by video producers and viewers.

The field of transgender YouTube studies is young and small, with few articles published in academic journals. Many theorists in this field base their insights on common roots in communication studies and queer theory, discussed above. Queer communities allow for social reinforcement of experiences gained on queer time, and in queer space. Pullen's *Queer Youth and Media Cultures* opens with the phenomenon of trans youtube videos, covering the coming out process, self-representation, and presenting five identifiable trans youth narratives. Bryan Wuest contrasts the excitement of young trans youtube video makers with the darkness of mainstream media narrative surrounding young trans suicides (Pullen, 2014). Wuest notes that, "... queer youth [are] using YouTube to overcome these obstacles and facilitate their own identity development through two important methods: visibility and acculturation" (Pullen, 2014). This acculturation serves as a substitute or supplement for mainstream processes of acculturation in which straight cisgendered practices and norms are communicated to the next generation. Laura Horak's work, "Trans on YouTube," identifies race and attractiveness important differentiating factors between popular and unheard of content creators, noting that

existing social hierarchies persist (Horak, 2014). More attractive content producers receive more views and subscribers, and few of the top content producers are people of color.

Understanding the subgenres of Transgender YouTube videos is important to analyzing those videos in context. Matthew G. O’Neill presents a typology of trans YouTube videos, categorizing them as, “Transitional videos, D.I.Y. gender, Trans video blogging, Trans anti-bullying videos, and Celebrity Trans video blogging” (Pullen, 2014). My analysis uses similar categories of Communicating Transition, Passing Tips, and Stories/Vlogs. The Communicating Transition category describes 13 of the videos in this analysis, and contains transition videos that show physical changes over time, and hormone update videos, where content creators discuss their progress in transition. 9 of the videos in this analysis belong to the Passing Tips category, which is similar to O’Neill’s ‘D.I.Y. Gender’ category, and includes makeup tutorials and other information provided to help alter gender presentation. Stories/Vlogs encompasses the last three categories in O’Neill’s typology and 12 videos in this analysis, featuring narrative content describing notable life events and providing affirmation for viewers who may be struggling with their own gender identity.

Many trans content creators on YouTube engage in making more than one of these forms of video. Carrie Higa uses interview data in *Motivations of Transgender YouTube Users* to discuss why transgender YouTube content creators make their videos, finding that, “... respondent's actions on YouTube were not only influenced by personal needs or desires, but also by a strong consciousness of how their actions support or connect with specific audiences,” including other trans people and the general public (Higa, 2013). YouTube offers a way out of the geographic and temporal isolation that are quotidian elements of minority life, providing a

platform for users to build a repository of trans life stories and advice without the dour filter of mainstream media.

By interrogating the transgender body of work on YouTube, this project aims to help others understand the genre, and to contribute to its depth. By introducing concepts from academic queer theory into the transgender YouTube genre through the publication of new videos, this project seeks to make publicly available the terms and concepts which constitute the field of study.

## **Methodology**

The genre of transgender YouTube videos is a quickly growing repository for trans resources and narratives. There are currently over 953,000 videos on YouTube tagged as transgender, and numerous dedicated content creators. There are 353,000 more videos included in this search than in August 2014, constituting a 58% increase over two years (Horak, 2014). Transgender people can anonymously access those resources regardless of where they are in transition, providing a gateway to exploring gender identity for those who may still be in the closet, or otherwise isolated from trans resources.

These videos, their creators, and viewers constitute an online transgender community with the power to educate trans and cis-gender people alike. These videos often include transgender people telling their own stories for the purpose of helping other transgender people with various steps in the transition process. While mainstream media has begun including more transgender narratives, YouTube is a space where those narratives belong exclusively to the trans storyteller. YouTube analysis sheds insight into the experiences of many transgender people, but

especially the younger generation, which is able to document and share their transgender experience through the use of technology.

I relied on YouTube for information when I went through the process of discovering that I was transgender. The video-creation portion of this project is motivated in part by a desire to give back to the community for the assistance it gave me in thinking through my gender identity. The video-analysis portion of this project is motivated by a normative desire for well researched, well edited transgender videos, produced by trans people. By analytically examining a survey of videos in that genre, this project documents the strengths and weaknesses of the information available to new transgender people, and identifies exceptional content creators.

The rubric I used to score videos assigns point values between 0 and 3 for four categories per video. All videos were scored on three basic categories; the level of research, editing, and the gender identity of the content creator. Each video is also ranked on one of three genre-specific categories that determines the extent to which the video is an exemplary work from that genre. The three genre categories are videos which communicate the transition process, those that discuss or demonstrate passing as male or female, and those that tell a story or Vlog about transgender experience. Those categories are referred to below as ‘Communicating trans, Passing, and Stories/Vlog. The full rubric is presented below in Table 1. This normative scale assigns higher point values to videos which are well researched, well edited, produced by transgender people, and perform well within their genre category.

Table 1: Video Rubric

Score	Level of Research	Video Editing	Content Creator	Communicating Transition	Passing	Stories/ Vlogs
0	No experience	No editing	No engagement with transgender people	No context on transition presented	No advice	Jumbled Narrative
1	Personal experience	Editing for time only	Trans people presented as content	Transition presented as 'before & after'	Tips, but no demonstration	Basic storytelling, no conclusions
2	Experience + secondary sources	Minor special effects	Trans people involved in video production	Transition as a process out of context	Tips with examples	Storytelling + background information or advice
3	Experience + primary & secondary sources	Full editing: intro/outro, annotated links	Trans people overseeing video production	Transition as a process in context	Full Tutorial	Storytelling + background information and advice

In order to analyze the videos a new transgender person might first see I have taken the top 3 hits for basic searches into the genre assuming these are the videos a new trans person is likely to see first. Those 11 search terms are included below.

MtF Transition	FtM Transition	Mtf HRT Update	FtM HRT Update
Trans passing tips	Ftm makeup	Mtf makeup	Am I trans?
Mtf Vlog	FtM Vlog	It Gets Better Trans	

Videos within the first 3 results by the same content creator are skipped. Duplicate videos are skipped if they appear in subsequent searches. A Google Chrome incognito tab was used to negate the effects of my personal media bubble, which may have caused different videos to appear in these searches. A sample search is included in Appendix II. Table 2 presents Video selections and basic information below.

Table 2: Selected Videos

Video	Views	Author	Date	Video Genre
MTF Transition Timeline	263744	ZoeZoco	6/9/2015	Communicating Trans
Transgender MTF Transition (Birth to 2yrs HRT) (Andrea Chrysanthe)	245801	<a href="#">Andrea Chrysanthe</a>	11/18/2015	Communicating Trans
MTF transition timeline   6 months on HRT	15655	<a href="#">Sky Rae Vitrano</a>	1/2/2016	Communicating Trans
FTM transition- before and after photos through the process till now	15646	<a href="#">Kieran moloney</a>	5/29/2014	Communicating Trans
FTM Transition - 10 MONTHS ON T (ALL THE CHANGES W/ PICTURES)	265505	<a href="#">Benton</a>	3/8/2014	Communicating Trans
FTM TRANSITION TIMELINE (body morphology) - 3 YEARS ON T	49870	<a href="#">Maël FTM</a>	11/8/2015	Communicating Trans
1 Month HRT Update MTF (LOVE AT FIRST SWALLOW!?)	12172	<a href="#">Ellory Lien</a>	11/11/2015	Communicating Trans
TWO YEARS on MtF HRT UPDATE   Hormones   Brittney Kade	30100	<a href="#">Brittney Kade</a>	2/5/2016	Communicating Trans
MTF 5 Months on HRT Update!!	4334	<a href="#">Jalivah London</a>	1/1/2015	Communicating Trans
FTM Survival Guide   Hormones	18227	<a href="#">Tyince</a>	1/23/2015	Passing
FTM Testosterone Update: Self-Injection and 3 Months on T	2235	<a href="#">pinkmantaray</a>	8/26/2015	Communicating Trans
3.21.15 - 1 Year on Testosterone - FTM Transition Update - List of Changes Throughout the Past Year	18809	<a href="#">gorillashrimp</a>	3/22/2015	Communicating Trans
How to Pass   MTF Transgender Tips	11364	<a href="#">Nikki Wiggins</a>	7/29/2015	Passing
FTM Transgender - HOW TO PASS	284606	<a href="#">Benton</a>	1/4/2014	Passing
Gender Analysis 05. Trans Passing Tips for Cis People	13808	<a href="#">Zinnia Jones</a>	2/28/2015	Communicating Trans
FtM Make Up Tutorial!!	14195	<a href="#">Queerology</a>	8/27/2015	Passing

Video	Views	Author	Date	Video Genre
Masculine Face Contouring / FTM Makeup	35174	<a href="#">Shiloh M</a>	6/5/2014	Passing
Female to Male Makeup	914776	<a href="#">Alise Carter</a>	9/16/2013	Passing
Boy to Girl Makeup Secrets - MTF Transsexual?   Joseph Harwood	978802	<a href="#">Joseph Harwood</a>	12/10/2013	Passing
Boy To Girl 16 Years Old MTF Make Up Transformation	42973	<a href="#">clawdeena9</a>	12/30/2015	Passing
Feminine Makeup Tutorial for MtF Transsexuals.	23494	<a href="#">Nikki Piława</a>	9/11/2014	Passing/Communicating Trans
FTM - Am I Trans?	7656	<a href="#">Jett Taylor</a>	7/8/2015	Stories/Vlog
How Do I Know If I'm Transgender?	79123	<a href="#">Dara Hoffman-Fox</a>	4/24/2014	Stories/Vlog
Am I Trans enough to transition...?	25477	<a href="#">a Girl for all seasons</a>	3/12/2015	Stories/Vlog
HOW I REALIZED I WAS TRANSGENDER! MtF   Raiden Quinn	29507	<a href="#">Raiden Quinn</a>	9/10/2015	Stories/Vlog
Transgender Vlog #6: First Laser Hair Removal!	19101	<a href="#">Maya</a>	2/14/2015	Stories/Vlog
Tiffany's Vlog #53 Let's Dilate!	120396	<a href="#">Jessica Tiffany</a>	10/1/2015	Stories/Vlog
Seth's amazing FTM Vlog adventures- Part 1	26376	<a href="#">mrsethcorbin</a>	3/18/2008	Stories/Vlog
FtM Vlog	181	<a href="#">Queer Wolf</a>	6/29/2015	Stories/Vlog
FTM VLOG: SURGERIES GALORE!	2745	<a href="#">Out of the Closet. Into the Woods.</a>	1/22/2015	Stories/Vlog
It Got Better Featuring Laverne Cox   L/Studio created by Lexus	338890	<a href="#">lstudiopresents</a>	6/11/2014	Stories/Vlog
It Gets Better: Janet Mock, Transgender Activist & Writer	148413	<a href="#">Janet Mock</a>	5/12/2011	Stories/Vlog
It Gets Better - Parents of Transgender Children	86622	<a href="#">In The Life Media</a>	3/5/2012	Stories/Vlog

## **Results**

In order to score these videos I watched them in their entirety while taking notes on content. I then used those notes, observations, and comparisons with other videos to assign point values in each rubric category. A presentation of how each video scored is presented below in table 3. High scoring videos are colored green, low scoring videos are colored red, and videos that are unique in some way are colored blue. Videos from the Communicating transition genre are presented first, followed by the Passing genre, and then the Story/Vlog genre.



Table 3: Rubric Results

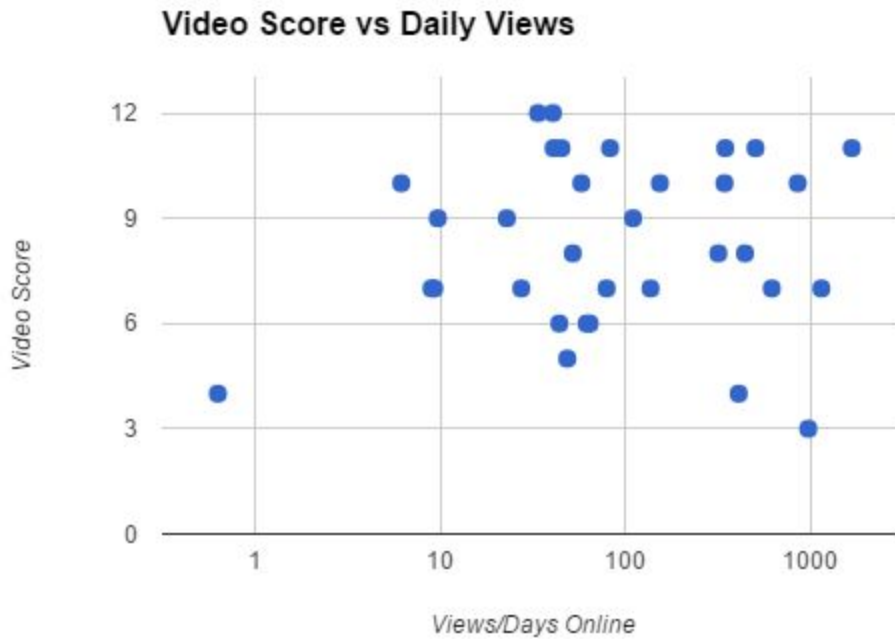
Video	Total Score	Research	Editing	Creator	Communicating		
					Transition	Passing	Story/Vlog
MTF Transition Timeline	10	2	2	3	3		
Transgender MTF Transition (Birth to 2yrs HRT) (Andrea Chrysanthe)	11	2	3	3	3		
MTF transition timeline   6 months on HRT	10	2	2	3	3		
FTM transition- before and after photos through the process till now	9	2	2	3	2		
FTM Transition - 10 MONTHS ON T (ALL THE CHANGES W/ PICTURES)	11	2	3	3	3		
FTM TRANSITION TIMELINE (body morphology) - 3 YEARS ON T	8	2	2	3	1		
1 Month HRT Update MTF (LOVE AT FIRST SWALLOW!?)	7	2	2	3	0		
TWO YEARS on MtF HRT UPDATE   Hormones   Brittney Kade	8	1	2	3	2		
MTF 5 Months on HRT Update!!	7	2	1	3	1		
FTM Survival Guide   Hormones	11	2	3	3		3	
FTM Testosterone Update: Self-Injection and 3 Months on T	9	2	2	3	2		
3.21.15 - 1 Year on Testosterone - FTM Transition Update - List of Changes Throughout the Past Year	5	1	0	3	1		
How to Pass   MTF Transgender Tips	6	1	1	3		1	
FTM Transgender - HOW TO PASS	10	1	3	3		3	
Gender Analysis 05. Trans Passing Tips for Cis People	12	3	3	3	3		

FtM Make Up Tutorial!!	6	1	0	3		2	
Masculine Face Contouring / FTM Makeup	8	1	1	3		3	
Female to Male Makeup	3	1	1	0		1	
Boy to Girl Makeup Secrets - MTF Transsexual?   Joseph Harwood	7	2	2	0		3	
Boy To Girl 16 Years Old MTF Make Up Transformation	4	1	1	0		2	
Feminine Makeup Tutorial for MtF Transsexuals.	12	1	2	3	3	3	
FTM - Am I Trans?	7	1	1	3			2
How Do I Know If I'm Transgender?	9	3	2	1			3
Am I Trans enough to transition...?	6	1	0	3			2
HOW I REALIZED I WAS TRANSGENDER! MTF   Raiden Quinn	7	1	1	3			2
Transgender Vlog #6: First Laser Hair Removal!	11	2	3	3			3
Tiffany's Vlog #53 Let's Dilate!	7	1	1	3			2
Seth's amazing FTM Vlog adventures- Part 1	7	1	2	3			1
FtM Vlog	4	1	0	3			0
FTM VLOG: SURGERIES GALORE!	10	2	2	3			3
It Got Better Featuring Laverne Cox   L/Studio created by Lexus	11	2	3	3			3
It Gets Better: Janet Mock, Transgender Activist & Writer	11	2	3	3			3
It Gets Better - Parents of Transgender Children	10	2	3	2			3

Ideally the highest quality videos would be those with the most views. I graphed videos' average daily views against score on my rubric to determine whether there was a relationship

between video quality as I have described it, and video popularity. Graph 1, presented below, shows that a relationship between video score and viewership does not appear within my data set.

Graph 1: Video Score vs Daily Views



## Discussion

In order to explain how the rubric is applied I will discuss the scoring of one good, one bad, one unique, and one exceptional video. The good video is Benton's *FTM Transition - 10 months on T*, the bad video is Maël FTM's *FTM TRANSITION TIMELINE (body morphology) - 3 YEARS ON T*, the unique video is Nikki Pilawa's *Feminine Makeup Tutorial for MtF Transsexuals*, and the exceptional video is Zinnia Jones' *Gender Analysis 05. Trans Passing Tips for Cis People*.

Benton's video opens with a comical introduction that references some of the changes that have occurred as a result of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) as if they had happened overnight. Benton then goes from head to toe explaining the physical and psychological effects of his HRT using picture and video evidence from earlier in his transition to document progress. This video receives a 2 in the research category for the inclusion of secondary sources in combination with personal experience. The level of editing in this video is professional, and resembles the work of dedicated YouTube content creators. Inclusion of an introduction, outro screen, edited dialogue and overlaid images earns this video a 3 in the editing category. Because Benton is a transgender person this video earns a 3 for the content creator category. In the genre category, communicating transition this video earns a 3 for the inclusion of examples which provide information about psychological and physiological changes on testosterone after 10 months, and for addressing "common misconceptions" about transmen having anger issues. The aggregate score of 11 indicates that this video is exceptional, compared to other videos.

Maël FTM's *FTM TRANSITION TIMELINE (body morphology) - 3 YEARS ON T* is devoid of dialogue, and instead relies on text to communicate information about Maël's transition. The series of side-by-side progress photos and standalone photos afford the video a research score of 2. While the editing is minimal there is overlaid text, music, and a series of images. Due to the inclusion of these basic special effects, this video earns a 2 in the editing category. Since Maël is a transgender man, this video earns a 3 in the content creator category for representing a trans man's transition in his own words. In the genre category, communicating trans, this video earns a 1 due to the lack of contextual information and the presentation of the

transition process as single event with a discrete before and after. The aggregate score of 8 indicates that this is a low quality video, compared to higher scoring videos.

Nikki Pilawa's *Feminine Makeup Tutorial for MtF Transsexuals* begins as a discussion about Nikki's progress in transition, goes into a makeup tutorial, and then cuts to video of her at her endocrinologist appointment, going over her change in dosage. Since the video opens with and ends with a narrative about hormone process it falls into the Communicating Trans genre. The title and middle section of this video, however, place it as a passing video. For this reason, it was scored in both categories. The level of research is minimal, compared to other videos, earning it a one for that category. The video earns a two for editing by including multiple segments have been edited for time. Since Nikki is trans this video earns a three for the creator category.

Zinnia Jones' *Gender Analysis 05. Trans Passing Tips for Cis People* is one of the only two videos in this analysis to earn a 3 for the research category, and the only video which includes academic works cited information. It earns a perfect score in all categories for Jones' application of academic sources to construct an argument against the pressure transgender people may feel to pass as a cisgender person. The video has been edited for time and content, and includes special effects that present research findings. Since Jones is transgender this video earns a three for the creator category. This video's thoughtful consideration on transition issues earns it a three in the genre category.

## **Video Creation**

I have produced two videos as a part of this project. The first details my progress in transition, and the second discusses basic concepts of queer theory. I plan to continue both videos as series as I continue to transition. The shift from critic to creator is a humbling transition. Outlines and scripts for my videos are included in Appendix I.

I opened my first video by tracing out the timeline of my social transition, and steps in my gender identity. I discussed going through an extended period of introspection as I spent a year working to get access to HRT. I then presented a time lapse video of my face in transition, indicating how many weeks I had been on HRT in each picture. I conclude by discussing the physical and emotional changes I have noticed since starting HRT.

I included information about my gradual progress through gender identities to help give viewers basic context for understanding my transition. I am not one of the people who ‘always knew’ I was transgender, and I find that important to represent. The time lapse video of my face offers a real-time perspective on physical changes as they happen, while I am still immersed in the context of my life. My surroundings, clothes, shadows, and makeup flit rapidly across the screen, each frame laden with information about my daily life. My list of physical and emotional changes on HRT was heavily inspired by other hormone update videos of this style. I discussed these changes to mark my progress thus far, and to express my excitement for what is to come.

Preparation for this video began on November 5th, 2015, when I began photographing my face each day. Other than personal experience and that time-lapse this video did not include additional research. The editing of my first video took place in Windows Movie Maker to save

time and money. I had used the software before and was able to shoot, compile, edit, and upload it all in one day.

The video has garnered 5,500 views in the first six weeks, and has generally been well received. Comments are almost entirely supportive, and the video has earned only 1 dislike, and 59 likes. This video received one anti-transgender comment, which is included in Appendix III. I had the option to review that comment for approval, and eventually chose to allow it. I do not think the strength of their argument that I do not exist stands against my argument that I do, nor do I think reading the gender-essentialist rant will seriously harm anybody.

My second video, *Queer Theory with Max Ep 1: Performativity, Normativity, & Trans Identity* is designed to be a primer for discussing more complicated concepts from Queer Theory. I begin my video by discussing conflict between individual desires and societal pressure, and connect that to Judith Butler's performativity argument. I then discuss societal norms using examples like violence and crossdressing. After defining normativity I discuss heteronormativity and homonormativity in the context of their societal consequences. The video then shifts to defining transgender identity as movement across the space of gender with a quote from Susan Stryker. I conclude by noting that there is variation within the community that considers themselves transgender, mentioning that I belong to a subcategory called transexual.

This video was designed as a 101-level primer, and therefore did not require additional sources beyond those already used in this paper. Relevant sources were presented in a works cited note on the video description. Microsoft Movie Maker was not advanced enough to handle editing slides that appear in my video, so I downloaded and taught myself an editing software

called Lightworks. I spent a half week preparing the script. The video was shot and edited overnight.

In the four weeks since my second video has been uploaded it has received 1,400 views and 23 likes. The five commenters were generally supportive. I feel as though this video has received significantly fewer views than my first in part because it does not fall within the frequently searched genre of hormone progress updates. Hopefully as I continue to publish videos both series will see appreciable gains in viewership.

Engaging in the video creation process has already had a significant impact on my life. People I meet online often see my videos before seeing me in person, and I can expect the same will be true for future employers. These videos present a depiction of me that is locked in this peculiar moment between genders in my look and sound. Even while I endeavor to discuss queer time, my experience and presentation are shaped by the timing of my own transition. As my gender identity moves towards stability and comfort as a woman I suspect it may start to matter to me more that my online representation be cis-female passing, at least in appearance.

## **Conclusion**

The Transgender community of YouTube is a rich resource for gender questioning individuals. Basic search terms concerning the transition process yield videos that score 8.3/12 points on average. Due to the structure of YouTube, once a user has found one video from a high quality channel that user can access the rest of that channel's content. It is likely that a questioning person would be able to find at least one high quality channel in the first three results for basic transgender search terms.



Participating in the video creation process has given me insight into some of the difficulties of making my transition public knowledge. I discovered that it takes me at least 12 hours of work, and 1 or 2 hours worth of assistance to produce what I consider to be a high quality video. That time cost is distributed primarily across script writing and video editing. These time costs are largely optional for the purposes of publishing content, and users who choose to forgo either preparation or post-production produce videos at significantly lower cost to themselves. The pressure to produce professional-looking videos is therefore laden with constraints of class, as the least economically disadvantaged video makers have the least access to the means and time for production.

All of these videos are valuable contributions to the body of knowledge about transgender lives. This analysis made no accounting for whether it was a video creator's first or five hundredth video, and does not seek to describe the overall quality of a channel. Now go watch some videos! Based on the content I have reviewed my personal recommendations are Benton and Zinnia Jones.

## Appendix I: Video Outlines and Scripts

### Video 1

Max Does YouTube: 15 Weeks on MtF HRT,

Video Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxE\\_XXlcixw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxE_XXlcixw)

Outline and Script:

- Introductory video
  - Introduce myself to YouTube

~4 Months on E

- Dosage - 2 estrogen patches a week, 2 100mg spironolactone per day

Hormone emotional/behavior effects

- Feel more connected, open, and sensitive to emotion

Voice

- Highly modal, with 2 distinct voice ranges.
- Using an instrument tuner to determine pitch of voice
- 85-180 hz for male, 165-255 for female

Hair

- Body hairs are getting thinner, more sparse. Thinning seems to be working from my butt and thighs down my legs.
- Chest hair growth wigged me out and motivated my transition, but it seems to be stopping

Skin

- Noticeably softer within the first weeks

Max does YouTube! 4 Months on MtF HRT

Hi, I'm Max, and I'm a transgender woman!

I go to the College of Charleston, majoring in Political Science and Economics.

I'm making this video to share information about my transition with those going through the same things, or considering transition. This video is part of a project for my Bachelor's Essay studying Transgender YouTube videos in the context of narrative study and queer theory.

I began my transition in the summer of 2014 when I decided I didn't strongly identify with being male or female, and labeled myself agender. I changed my pronouns from he/him to they/them. I began teaching myself how to apply makeup and acquiring a set of gender ambiguous clothes. I was shooting for androgyny, which I achieved by gradually incorporating feminine styles into my more masculine appearance. This was when I got my current haircut and started growing it out. I spent countless nights researching HRT before deciding I wanted to try a low dose to become more androgynous, and began the year-long process of getting my prescription. After 2 months of HRT I started feeling much more comfortable thinking about myself as a girl, and having others address me as such. I changed pronouns and labels again, switching from a agender/transfeminine they to trans woman using she. Here is a time-lapse video made with an app called PhotoChron of my face in the weeks leading up to starting HRT, and most every day since.

[PhotoChron video, T4Me]

Up to this point in my transition I just keep getting happier with the person I am, physically and socially. Sex drive has become much less frantic and urgent, starting about 3-4 weeks in, body hair started thinning after 2 months, and my breasts are growing noticeably everyday, starting at 3 months. My musculature has diminished some, giving me more feminine shoulders. My face has begun to feminize, despite still having most of my facial hair to wrestle with.

I am excited about the continued changes in my chest, making progress with my voice, growing a booty, getting even thinner body hair, and getting more of my facial hair electrolysis'd away.

Tune into my channel to see me cover my transition and explore queer theory in the context of my queer life~

## Video 2

Queer Theory with Max Ep 1: Performativity, Normativity, and Trans Identity,

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gxFvt3HHVk>

Outline and Script:

- 1st vid on queer theory
  - Performativity, normativity, and transgender identity
- Constantly balance identity and expectations of society
  - Identity private, communicated through performance
  - Performance comes from Judith Butler
    - Choose how we express ourselves
    - Result is social self
    - Decisions guided by self, society
- Normativity refers to societal expectation
  - Norms against violence empowered by law
  - Norms against crossdressing enforced by ridicule
  - Norms come from communities
- Norms for minorities too
  - Heteronormativity dominated narratives
    - Queer coding of Jafar, Scar, Ursula
  - Homonormativity presents limitations
    - Happy, settled, monogamous, white, product
    - Grinder, “No Fats, No Fems, No Blacks”
- Performance traces b/n identity and normativity
  - Normativity shapes performance
    - Good, acceptable, evil, taboo
  - Transgender identity at odds with norms
    - Trans people prove norms wrong
    - Trans defined by Stryker as “... *the movement across a socially imposed boundary [Gender] away from an unchosen starting place* - rather than any particular destination or mode of transition [emphasis in original]” (Stryker, 2008, pg 1)
    - Open definition applies to many
    - Categories within definition

- Common distinction of transexual vs transgender
- Queer Theory
  - Next video on Queer Time
  - Thanks!

We are all engaged in a balancing act between our identities and the expectations of society.

Identity is the fundamentally private collection of our motivations, goals, fears, and behaviors, and is communicated to others through our performance in the world. (Cite Butler). The theatrical language of performance doesn't imply that our presentation is insincere, but that we are making decisions about which elements of our identity to express at any given time. The net result of those decisions is our social self. Decisions about how we perform in the world are guided by our sense of self, but also by our understanding of expectations placed on us by society.

Normativity refers to the set of societal expectations we each live under. Those expectations, or norms, influence every action we perform, consciously or unconsciously. Many norms, like norms against violence, are empowered by law, but many others, like norms against crossdressing, are enforced by social ridicule and fear. These sets of norms are created within communities, and inform the shared identities of those communities.

Norms are not just a majority's expectations for minority behavior. Minority groups maintain their own sets of norms. You might be familiar with how mainstream heteronormativity dominated narratives of the last century, dictating the roles queers could play, like Children's movie villain (Reference images of queer-coded cartoon villains). Homonormativity presents its own standards of behavior; meted out in commercials showing happy, settled, monogamous, and

often white gay couples enjoying some product (Image of gay JC Penney ad), but also in the legion of Grinder accounts professing, ‘No fats, no fems, no blacks.’ (Show grinder logo)

Our performance in the world traces the line between identity and normativity.

Normativity shapes the performance of our identities around what we see society regard as good and acceptable, or evil and taboo. Transgender identity is at odds with many norms, and transgender individuals prove the assumptions of those norms wrong through their performance.

Norms transgender people transgress:

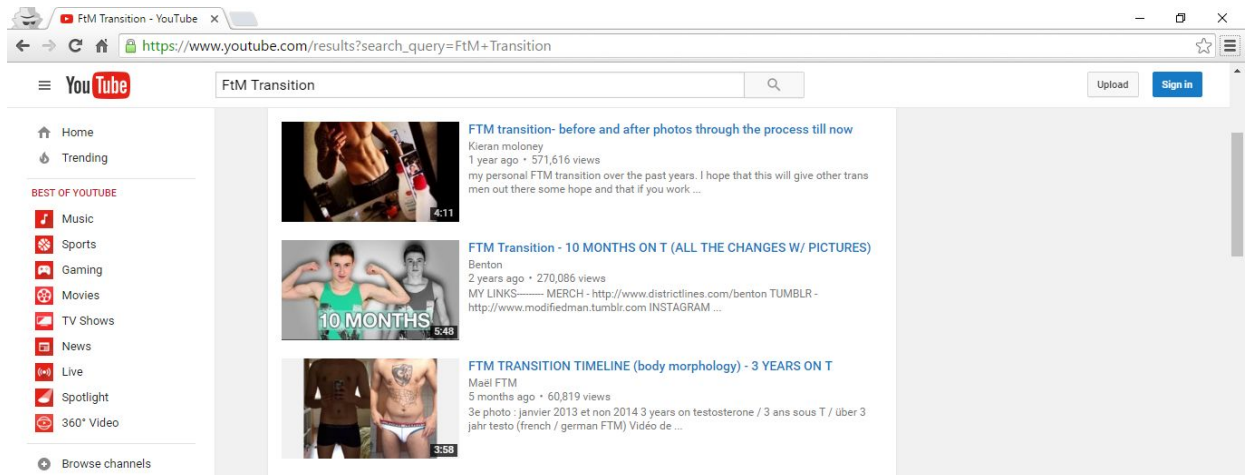
- Sex and gender are the same
- Sex and gender are defined at birth, by body morphology
- Sex and gender can not change
- People can only be one sex, or one gender
- People cannot be without sex or gender
- Biology is destiny

Transgender is defined by Susan Stryker as, “... *the movement across a socially imposed boundary [Gender] away from an unchosen starting place* - rather than any particular destination or mode of transition [emphasis in original]” (Stryker, 2008)

These insights are based in queer theory; an academic discipline focused on the critical analysis and debunking of normativities around gender and sexuality by exploring and valuing the lives of those who live on the margins of society. My next video will dive a bit deeper into the field of Queer Theory, addressing Halberstam’s concept of Queer Time as it applies to life as a transsexual person.

Thank you for watching!

## Appendix II: Video Selection Process



## Appendix III: Anti-Transgender Comment



insaneslamander 1 month ago

The maxim "trans women are women" is a false equivalency that means at least three things.

First, it means that being raised as girl from birth is not an important or relevant aspect of being a "woman" because one can be a woman without these formative experiences.

Second, it means that having a female body is not an important or relevant aspect of being a "woman" because one can be a woman without being female bodied.

And third, it means that to be a "woman" simply reflects an individual's desired relation to the social category "woman," rather than serving as shorthand for the physical and cumulative experiential realities specific to female-born (and certain intersex) people around the globe.

.....

To be a "woman" is to have been assigned the girl/woman social position at birth; subjective identification with that social position is irrelevant and varies wildly.

Reducing the experience of womanhood to a subjectively defined "inner knowledge" that is "inclusive" of anyone who claims to have such inner womanly knowledge erases the lived realities and material constraints placed on women and girls from birth—regardless of whether women enjoy being "women" or not, and regardless of whether they "identify" with other women or not. I will not trivialize these objective realities in order to "validate" the subjective identities of a few. That is not a statement of hate, it is a practical refusal to prioritize identity theory over women's real lives.

Show less

Reply ·  

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