

Why I keep records of my transition

By Guest

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Abstract

by Zinnia Jones I keep a personal Tumblr for notes on my daily experiences while transitioning, as well as timeline photos documenting my physical development. Recently, an anonymous reader asked why I would keep such a history. This is my reply. Anonymous asked: Wouldn't most trans people not want to keep records of their transition? I mean, [...]

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Anonymous asked: Wouldn't most trans people not want to keep records of their transition? I mean, isn't that like proving "you're not really a woman, see, here's an old picture of you" by reliving your transition? If I was trans I would think I wouldn't want to be reminded that I was once a male.

Personally, speaking solely about my own experiences and feelings, I don't agree with this at all.

Yes, some or many trans people prefer that their gender history remain firmly in the past. There are a lot of us who just want to get it done and move on without it being brought up, and without being reminded of it. Most of the time, I too would prefer it not be an issue.

It's not something that needs to come up when I'm buying groceries, meeting other parents when out with the kids, and so on. It can be obnoxious when others try to bring it up in irrelevant contexts. And, yeah, I know a lot of trans people who are pretty averse to seeing their own pretransition photos, or anyone's - it's not something they want to be reminded of.

But the presence or absence of photos and records won't change the reality of my history. The fact is that, for 23 years of my life, I did have a body with male-typical features, and I still have a few of them even after transitioning. Being reminded that I "was once a male"? I call that "looking down". Photos and records pale in significance next to the experience of living in this body.

I've been in it my whole life, through all of its different stages. Trying to erase photos seems futile - more than just photos, I have memories, experiences, feelings. Whether there's an old photo of me out there or not... I still remember who I was. So having to see old pictures of myself is quite a minor concern - either way, I'll still have the memories of being that person, which are much more vivid, thorough, and full of emotion than a simple photo.

And I don't want to forget who I was. That phase of my life is an enormous part of my history. It constitutes the majority of my existence up until now. Yes, there were difficult times, and things I've done my best to forget and move on from.

But I don't feel my life up until now is disposable. This wasn't some bad dream that I only recently woke up from. It was real, and I can't deny that. As hard as it might have been, it was not devoid of any value. I was still a human being. I was making the most of my life, just as I am now. And even in those times, there was much worth remembering.

I also have to recognize that, during that time, I did genuinely believe I was male. It may have been an incorrect belief, it may have stemmed from my confusion of the absence of a strongly female identity with the presence of a male identity... but I did believe it.

That's also a fact of my history, and something that can hardly be erased by deleting a photo. There were many years when I thought of myself as male, presented as male, and didn't pursue a better option or even realize there was a realistic alternative. That was just who I was at the time. I don't see any need to shy away from that, or deny it.

More importantly, my personal gender history, whether seen or unseen, doesn't invalidate my womanhood. It's completely understandable why many of us keep this to ourselves and don't tell most people. We still live in a society where "trans woman" is taken to mean "not really a woman" or "actually a man". We don't want that knowledge of our history to get in the way of us being seen as who we are now. We don't want our genders to come with an asterisk attached. We don't want it to be the first thing people see us as, when they think about us.

But that's their problem - not mine. Being trans and having a history as "a guy", and being a woman, should not be incompatible. Being trans doesn't mean you're not a woman. I have friends, co-workers, family, my partner, my children, so many people in my life who know that I'm trans, and are still capable of recognizing my womanhood. For them, my transness doesn't get in the way of my womanhood. It doesn't preclude my existence as a woman, or diminish it in any way. So what excuse does anyone else have to deny what I am?

Further, I find transitioning to be fascinating from an experiential, philosophical, and scientific perspective. This isn't something that most people will go through in their lives. It's also something I'm only going to experience once, and I feel it's important to make note of every little moment. It's rare, and fleeting, and extraordinary.

Keep in mind that medical transition, as we now know it, is barely a century old, if that. We're still at the very beginnings of transition treatment. And there's often no other way to learn about the current process in detail except by experiencing it firsthand. Most available research has to do with hormone levels and surgery results and complications of treatment. But there's much less information about the day-to-day mental changes that trans people can experience, or the specifics of how our breasts develop, or simply what it will feel like.

For that reason, I believe documenting my transition can serve as a useful resource for other trans women. When I was first considering whether to start treatment, and then decided I would, I still had very little idea what I was getting into. Yes, there are the broad strokes: you'll grow breasts, your sex

drive will change, you'll probably feel better...

But that didn't really answer the question of what it would be like. And now that I've been through this myself, I realize that such vague information is like being shown only a single frame of an entire movie. How will my breasts develop? How fast? What will they look like and feel like? How will my sex drive change? How will I adjust to that? Will I like it? How are my moods going to change? Is it really such a big change? Will I be the same person? When it comes to these specific questions, there's still so little information available. And I believe trans people deserve better. To that end, I've tried to explain and describe and capture these things in as much detail and depth as possible, just so the world can have some better sense of what this whole experience is like. Sharing our experiences, and finding points of similarity in our own lives, is incredibly important for trans people. Knowing what to expect, and that someone else out there has been through it, and feels much of the same things you do, is a thing of comfort in what can otherwise be a very uncertain and difficult time.

Most of all, I love that this is happening to me. For me, transitioning has been an experience that's so extraordinary and affirming and life-changing, I'm thankful every day that this is possible and that it could happen in my life. It's damn near a miracle that something like this can be done, and all I can do is stare in awe.

I love seeing my body change more and more every day, growing into something that feels like home, even if I've never been here before. I love being able to feel things more intensely and deeply than I ever could before, and finally looking out on the world with true happiness, unburdened by any chemical imbalance dragging me down. I love seeing my face turn into something new and unknown and beautiful. I can finally love myself.

When I look back at what I was, I don't feel it dragging me back. Instead, I see just how far I've come. All of this is possible because of the body I once had, the seed for something amazing to grow. All of this is possible because of the person I once was, the one with the courage to survive and figure this out and make it real. I can't forget that, and I wouldn't want to.

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