

## Female-To-Me: A Case Study Exploring the Shifting Sense of Personal, Social & Cultural Self in an FTM Transman from India

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### ABSTRACT

This research presents a qualitative case study aimed at understanding the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in an individual transitioning from female to male (FTM). Through a semi-structured interview, the lived experiences and perspectives of a transman were explored, so as to gain insights into his journey of self-discovery and self-identification. The study focused on three key aspects: the personal self, the social self, and the cultural self. The participant was approached through purposive sampling, and the interview was conducted using open-ended questions that allowed the participant to freely express his thoughts, emotions, and experiences related to his evolving sense of self. An integrated approach involving narrative and thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data, resulting in the identification of several prominent themes. The findings revealed that the process of transitioning from female to male had a profound impact on the participant's personal sense of self. It brought about a newfound authenticity and empowerment, enabling him to align his gender identity with his true self. The participant described a sense of self-acceptance and confidence that fostered personal growth and well-being. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in trans men. The research highlights the importance of providing support and fostering inclusive environments that affirm and validate diverse gender identities. The study also emphasises the need for further research and advocacy to address the social and cultural challenges faced by FTM people during their transition journey.

**Keywords:** *Female-to-Male (FTM), Indian Transman, Gender Affirmation, Shifting Sense of Self, Thematic Analysis, Narratives*

*“It's not about being a new person, but becoming the person you were already meant to be.”*

In the evolving landscape of gender identity, transgender people often face unique challenges as they navigate their personal journeys towards self-discovery and self-actualization. Among the diverse stories that emerge from this vibrant tapestry of human experiences, the transition from female to male (FTM) is an important narrative that deserves attention and understanding.

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The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) acknowledges that just as each individual is distinct, so too is their gender identification. Transgender people may experience greater comfort, confidence, and enhanced everyday functioning when both their external manifestation and interior sense of self operate in harmony.

It has been recorded that the market size for Sex Affirmative Surgeries has been significantly impacted by the rising incidence of Gender Dysphoria and Sex Affirmative Procedures, far surpassing a staggering global total of USD 623 million in 2022 and anticipating an increase of 11.5% CAGR between 2023 and 2032 (Global Markets Insights Report, January 2023).

While these are global figures, there continues to be a denied visibility in official records regarding transgender Indians, despite the fact that the Hijra community of India has existed on the subcontinent roughly for as long as the civilization itself.

However, it's important to note that India recognised transgender persons as third gender after a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 2014, wherein the Supreme Court of India advised to "follow the psyche" of the person for gender recognition. This was intended to ensure equal opportunities for transgender people. The transgender population in India, which includes FTM transitioning individuals, faces unique challenges and experiences related to social acceptance, healthcare, legal recognition, and discrimination.

This case study aims to explore the intricacies and complexities of an FTM transman's life in the cultural context of India. By delving into his personal journey, we seek to shed light on the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of his transition, as well as the broader implications for gender identity and acceptance within Indian society.

In light of the fact that affirmative surgeries aim to harmonise a person's internal sense of self with their outward physical and sexual traits, it is crucial to examine how these patients' sense of self evolves over time.

This gets the author to the main objective of her research, which is to study how a trans person's lived experience of altering, becoming, and operating multiple intersecting identities eventually leads him to a stronger understanding of his core identity. This study explores his experiences around transition and an evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self.

### ***Problem Statement***

In order to battle stigma and anti-transprejudice-driven bullying, harassment, and exclusion, among other hardships faced by transgender persons, we must first recognise what it means to be trans and the realities of those who are living it.

Despite increasing awareness and acceptance of transgender people, there remains a limited understanding of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self-experienced by individuals transitioning from female to male (FTM). This lack of understanding hinders the provision of effective support and resources for transgender men during their transition journey.

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By addressing this gap in knowledge, the research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the transgender experience and inform the development of more inclusive and supportive environments for trans men.

Given the fact that surgery is only one of many available choices for gender affirming care, all trans and gender diverse people are uniquely distinctive and can opt to affirm their gender in a manner that feels right to them. However, one of the most important aspects of gender affirmation, with or without surgery, is the ever-evolving self-perception of these individuals, which has been studied the least in comparison to other aspects of gender affirmation.

Since the everyday struggles transgender persons face have a direct impact on their sense of self, the transgender experience in its entirety cannot be researched without examining the self.

Therefore, this research, through a single case study, aims to explore and gain insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of trans men, specifically focusing on their evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self.

### ***Purpose of Study***

*The purpose of this study is to acquire insight into the daily lives of transgender persons by looking at how their personal, social, and cultural selves alter following transition.*

In spite of being over 4,000 years old and having been highlighted in ancient Indian writings, the Hijra community is a testament to the sexual and gender-based diversification that is indispensable yet often overlooked in Indian culture.

According to Bilodeau & Renn (2005), “the majority of the transgender studies are interpreted using psychiatric lenses.” Thus, this research will investigate the experiences of an Indian Trans Man from the perspective of psychology.

Sadly, the current literature does not offer a complete picture of transgender people, as more focus is given to trans women’s stories than trans men’s. Given the considerable qualitative difference between the lived experiences and sense of self between the two, this research will be an attempt to not conflate the two.

This research will thereby render it easier to learn how transgender people—in this case, an FTM Transman—varies individually in terms of his overall well-being. By examining this, the study seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on transgender experiences and provide insights that can inform the development of more inclusive and supportive environments for trans men.

As a matter of fact, transgender persons have often encountered psychosocial struggles associated with affirming their gender identity and any resulting social and physical changes. Therefore, there is an imperative need to engage in constructive discourse about LGBTQIA++ communities so that transphobia in India also declines. May this research educate people, as intended.

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That said, courage and an understanding of the self, continue to serve as prerequisites for a smoother transition into their authentic gender, which this research primarily intends to achieve.

The ultimate goal is to promote acceptance, well-being, and empowerment for FTM individuals as they navigate their evolving identities and negotiate their place in personal, social, and cultural contexts.

### ***Definitions of Terms***

- Self/ Sense of Self- a person's sense of his or her own identity, distinctness, and capacity for self-direction.
- Shifting/ Altering/ Changing Self- an unstable sense of identity that is characterised by incoherence or identity inconsistency.
- Personal Self- a person's distinctive individuality or identity.
- Social Self- the social self is how we see ourselves in relation to other people.
- Cultural Self- the understanding of how one's culture has shaped them.
- Intersecting Identities- the idea that a person's identity is made up of several interconnected elements, such as their gender, their expression of their gender, their race, their ethnicity, their class (both current and past), their views about God, and their sexual orientation.
- Becoming/ Evolving- to begin to be one's authentic self.
- Gender- the socially constructed qualities of men, women, girls, and boys are referred to as gender. This covers interpersonal connections as well as the standards, mannerisms, and roles that come with being a woman, man, girl, or boy.
- Gender Identity- perception of one's own gender. A person's gender identity may or may not match their assigned sex.
- LGBTQIA++- an evolving acronym that represents lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual, and any other terminology (such as non-binary and pansexual) used to define gender, sexuality and physiological sex characteristics.
- Transgender/ Transsexual- someone who does not identify with their birth sex.
- Transman- a person whose sex was assigned female at birth but who lives and identifies as a man.
- Transmasculine- a person whose gender identity is partially or fully masculine and differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.
- Transgenderist- A person living in or who would prefer to live in a gender role opposite their anatomical sex and who may or may not intend on undergoing sex reassignment surgery.
- AFAB/PFAB- Assigned female at birth/Presumed female at birth.
- FTM- The term "Female-to-Male" (abbreviated "FTM") is most frequently used to refer to a transgender person who is transitioning from being a woman to being a man.
- Gender Dysphoria (diagnosis)- a DSM-5 diagnosis characterised by a marked incongruence between one's experienced gender and physical characteristics, and a strong desire for medical affirmation.
- Gender Dysphoria (experience)- a feeling of discomfort that a person could experience as a result of a discrepancy between their legal sex and their gender identity.

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- Gender Euphoria- the experience of comfort, connection and celebration related to our internal sense of self and our gender. The pride of feeling and being affirmed as who we are.
- Coming Out- telling another person about one's romantic orientation, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- Transitioning- the process of changing an individual's gender presentation or sexual features to correspond with their internal sense of gender identity is known as gender transition.
- Misgendering- using non-affirming language, such as referring to an individual by their deadname/former name or incorrect pronoun, or making assumptions about their appearance, & using gendered language, that can be considered disrespectful and inappropriate.
- Gender Affirmative Surgery- surgical procedures that help people transition to their self-identified gender.
- Pre/Post Operation- referring to before and after the gender affirming surgery.
- Tanner Stage- a scale of sexual maturation used by doctors to describe stages in the development of secondary sex characteristics.

### ***GENDER DYSPHORIA***

Gender dysphoria refers to the discomfort or distress that arises from a discrepancy between a person's sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This sense of unease or dissatisfaction may be so intense that it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on the daily life of the individual experiencing it.

It entails experiencing persistent thoughts that one's gender at birth does not correspond with their internal sense of self as being male, female, mixed, neutral, or something else (gender identity), which can cause severe discomfort or difficulty functioning.

Some individuals have the feeling of living in a body that is not in line with their internal sense of self as male, female, or another way (gender identity). Such feelings might arise while one is young. In one example, individuals who are assigned male at birth have feelings of being entrapped in a female body, and vice versa. It is not a disorder until this mismatching feeling—also known as gender incongruity or gender nonconformity—causes the person considerable discomfort or impairs their capacity to operate.

As per The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), the prevalence of gender dysphoria is 0.005–0.014% for adult individuals presumed male at birth and 0.002-0.003% for adult individuals assigned female at birth. In Europe, 1 per 30,000 adult males and 1 per 100,000 adult females seek gender-affirming surgery.

Some persons with gender dysphoria experience a total, grave, distressing, and long-lasting incompatibility between anatomical sex and gender identity, and they are likely to go for pharmacological, hormonal, cosmetic, and other gender-affirming surgical procedures to manage the concern.

### ***GENDER DYSPHORIA DSM-5-TR DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA***

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR) provides a comprehensive diagnostic criterion for gender dysphoria with distinguishable specific criteria for children, adolescents, and adults.

Gender dysphoria in adults and adolescents is defined by the DSM-5-TR as a significant incongruence between the gender one experiences or expresses and their ascribed gender, persistent for no less than six months in duration and demonstrated by two or more of the following:

- A considerable discrepancy between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sexual traits (or, in the case of developing adolescents, the expected secondary sex characteristics).
- An intense desire to purge oneself of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics due to an apparent disparity in one's experienced/expressed gender (or, in youngsters, an urge to avert the growth of predicted secondary sex characteristics).
- A strong urge to have the primary and/or secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite gender.
- A keen desire to have the characteristics of the other gender (or a gender that is distinct from one's designated gender)
- An overwhelming desire to be regarded as the opposite gender (or a gender that is not one's ascribed gender).
- A firm belief that one possesses the typical emotions and responses of the other gender (or a gender other than one's designated gender).
- The condition additionally has to be correlated with a clinically significant state of distress or challenges in interpersonal, professional, or other significant spheres of functioning for it to fulfil the diagnostic criteria.

The DSM-5-TR describes gender dysphoria among children as an acute discrepancy between one's experienced/expressed gender and ascribed gender that persists for a minimum of six months and is demonstrated through a minimum of six of the following (one of which meets the first criterion):

- A keen desire to be the opposite gender or an assertion that the individual belongs to the opposite gender (or a different gender than one's ascribed gender).
- In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or imitating female attire; or in girls (assigned gender), a strong inclination to dress solely in typically masculine clothing and an extreme opposition to wearing typically feminine attire.
- A strong affinity for gender-bending roles that occur in make-believe and fantasy games.
- A strong predilection for hobbies, diversions, or activities typically associated with the opposite gender.
- A significant predilection for the opposite gender as playmates
- In girls (designated gender), a strong refusal for traditionally feminine toys, games, and hobbies and a distinct resistance to harsh play; or in boys (assigned gender), a strong rejection-related to manly play items, games, and interests and a marked avoidance of rough play.
- Hostility towards one's own sexual anatomy

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- An intense desire to acquire physical sex traits that align with one's experienced gender.

Similar to the criteria for diagnosis for adolescents and adults, the condition must also be characterised by severe clinical distress or difficulties in essential social, occupational, or other aspects of functioning.

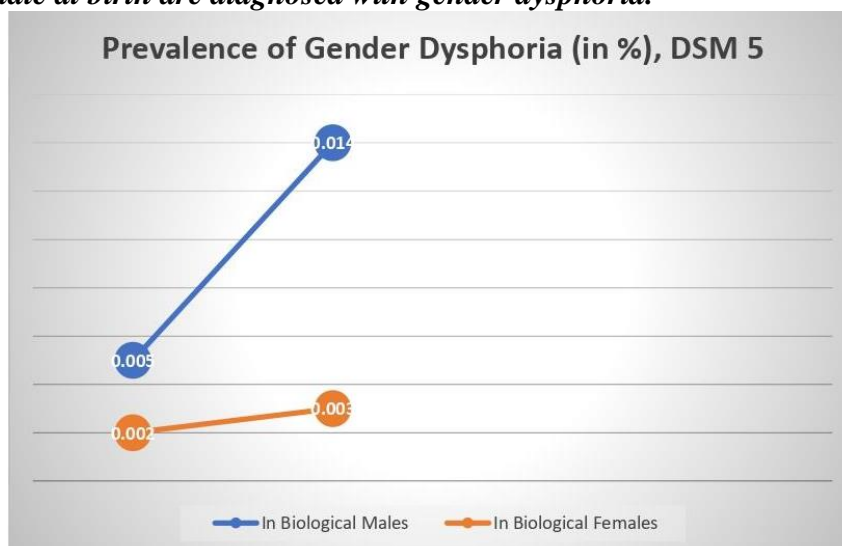
As explained in the diagnostic criteria given in DSM-5-TR Section 2, Gender Dysphoria. Codes F64.2 and F64.0, pages 512–513.

### **Prevalence**

Numerous worldwide investigations have been conducted to ascertain the prevalence of gender dysphoria.

According to a Dutch study, 4.6% of the 8064 study participants who were designated male at birth and 3.2% of the 8064 study participants who were designated female at birth self-identified as ambivalent to their specific birth assigned sex and were equally (able to identify as) male or female based on their internal perception of self. (Kuyper, 2013)

**Figure 1 According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, 0.005–0.014% of people assigned male at birth and 0.002–0.003% of people assigned female at birth are diagnosed with gender dysphoria.**



Individuals presumed female at birth have a higher prevalence of gender dysphoria in both Japan and Poland. (Gender Dysphoria Statistics, Prevalence, Influencing Factors, and Treatment, n.d.)

The age at which gender dysphoria sets in can differ for different people. Between the ages of 2 and 4, children who later develop gender dysphoria may exhibit gender-crossing behaviours. Others might not develop it until they hit puberty. People for whom gender dysphoria persists into maturity are typically aware of the discrepancy between their birth assigned sex and gender identity at a young age.

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In most cases, gender identity and awareness begin between the ages of 2 and 4. Given this norm, it's reasonable that an understanding of one's intrinsic gender differences could come about in early childhood. Young children may briefly experience gender dysphoria as an ordinary part of their growth.

In India, however, since the statistical records pertaining to the Indian transgender population are extremely meagre, the profile and prevalence of gender-variant behaviour and dysphoria continue to be essentially obscure. It has been estimated that 5–6 million eunuchs reside in ghettos in contemporary India (S. Kalra, 2012). In reality, these eunuchs are transsexual people.

Consideration must be given to the sociological threats associated with disclosure in relation to the prevalence of transgender people. Fear of repercussions keeps many persons with gender dysphoria diagnoses from coming out, resulting in an underestimation of the prevalence of gender dysphoria, especially in the Democratic Republic of India.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY TRANSGENDER PERSONS IN INDIA**

The Indian transgender community continues to be among the most marginalised groups due to transmisia and discrimination. Sexual orientation or gender identity frequently make transgender people in India social outcasts. Transgender people are frequently ostracised by Indian society, and sometimes the members of their own families think of them as liabilities and exclude them as well.

In many cases, the paucity of legal support for transgender people in India results in unemployment.

Harassment, discrimination, and even violence prevent the Indian transgender people from accessing equal academic opportunities. The majority of transgender children in India are forced to opt out of school due to a lack of resources within the education system. When accessing health care, transgender people in India are frequently subjected to discrimination, ranging from lack of regard and abuse to violence and blatant denial of service.

The community continues to be extremely susceptible to sexually transmitted illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. According to a recent report by The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the prevalence of HIV among transgender people in India is 3.1% (2017).

Problems with mental health in these individuals range from depression to tension related to violence, as well as attempts at suicide.

They are economically marginalised in Indian society and dragged into livelihoods such as prostitution and beggary or the exploitative entertainment industry in order to survive.

Transgender people are directly discriminated against and denied access to residences and apartments in India. In addition, they encounter difficulties due to a dearth of gender-neutral or transgender-specific restrooms and discrimination in having access to public restrooms. It has always been difficult for the Indian transgender community to obtain precise and uniform identity documents.



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Transgender persons in India are frequently at risk of sexual assault, rape, and exploitation as a result of gender-based violence.

### **GENDER AFFIRMATION IN INDIA**

The last several years have seen the emergence of very functional gender identity clinics (GICs) in the Indian states of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Bangalore, Jodhpur, Kochi, Vijayawada, Ghaziabad, Coimbatore and the national capital, New Delhi.

These interdisciplinary GICs are adept at offering both initial and ongoing treatment related to gynaecology, urology, fertility, voice transition, gender affirming hormone therapy (GAHT), and other surgical options. They also offer services related to mental health care, including but not limited to, psychological assessment, psychometric test administration, and therapeutic counselling like psychotherapy if necessary.

These clinics strictly abide by the guidelines outlined in the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's (WPATH) Standards of Care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people, as well as the Indian Standards of Care for persons with gender incongruence (GI) and people with diversified sexual development or orientation.

In addition to having a team of specialists that includes gastrointestinal surgeons, gynaecologists, urologists, and otolaryngologists who provide complete affirmative treatment, Indian GICs also include psychiatrists, endocrinologists, cosmetic surgeons, and clinical and counselling psychologists.

Ethical and responsible healthcare providers practising in these GICs demand the patient produce a referral from a board-certified mental health professional (MHP) prior to the commencement of hormone therapy (HT) or breast removal/augmentation surgery, and two such referrals prior to genital surgery.

The legal age for attaining majority in India is 18, and according to the legislation, no irreversible surgical procedures are permitted before this age. As a caution, the surgeons prefer to engage the court via a "waiver of liability affidavit", a notarized declaration on paper in which the patient makes a vow to not file lawsuits against the GIC for performing these life-altering cosmetic procedures. The affidavit outlines the patient's requirement for a gender transition and absolves the medical crew from liability for removing the patient's (natal) sexual organs, even if the genital reconfiguration surgery (GRS) goes unsuccessful or results in a permanent impairment in the patient's existing sexual function and fertility. A spousal release affidavit may additionally require notarization if the patient has a conjugal relationship, although this is not mandated by Indian law.

It is ensured that prior to having a permanent genital alteration, the patient receives a first-hand taste of what it is like to live in the preferred gender role throughout the year. This reduces any possible likelihood of regret by addressing any difficulties about gender expression and sexuality.

This is achieved with the help of puberty-suppressing/blocking hormones that are typically prescribed at or around Tanner stage II of puberty. They work by delaying the development of secondary sexual characteristics, thereby giving the young patient an additional 4 years to

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discover their gender identity and expression while being able to ‘pass’ and/or get along more confidently with the peer group, escaping dysphoria related social distress and depression.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be started at around the age of 16-18, which facilitates the patient's transition into the experienced gender role by assisting with voice deepening, growth of facial hair and beard, switches in body fat distribution towards male-oriented; and improved definition and formation of the muscles in a trans man who was physiologically a woman but whose lived gender identity misaligned with his sex.

Similarly, a transwoman who was assigned male at birth may experience changes in body composition that promote the development of breasts, feminine curves, softer skin, the cessation of male-patterned baldness, improved scalp hair growth, and progressively slower growth of body hair, including facial hair.

As per the case, cryopreservation of sperm, testicles, oocytes, embryos, and ovarian tissue may be done if the patient so desires owing to HRT's infertility-related adverse effects.

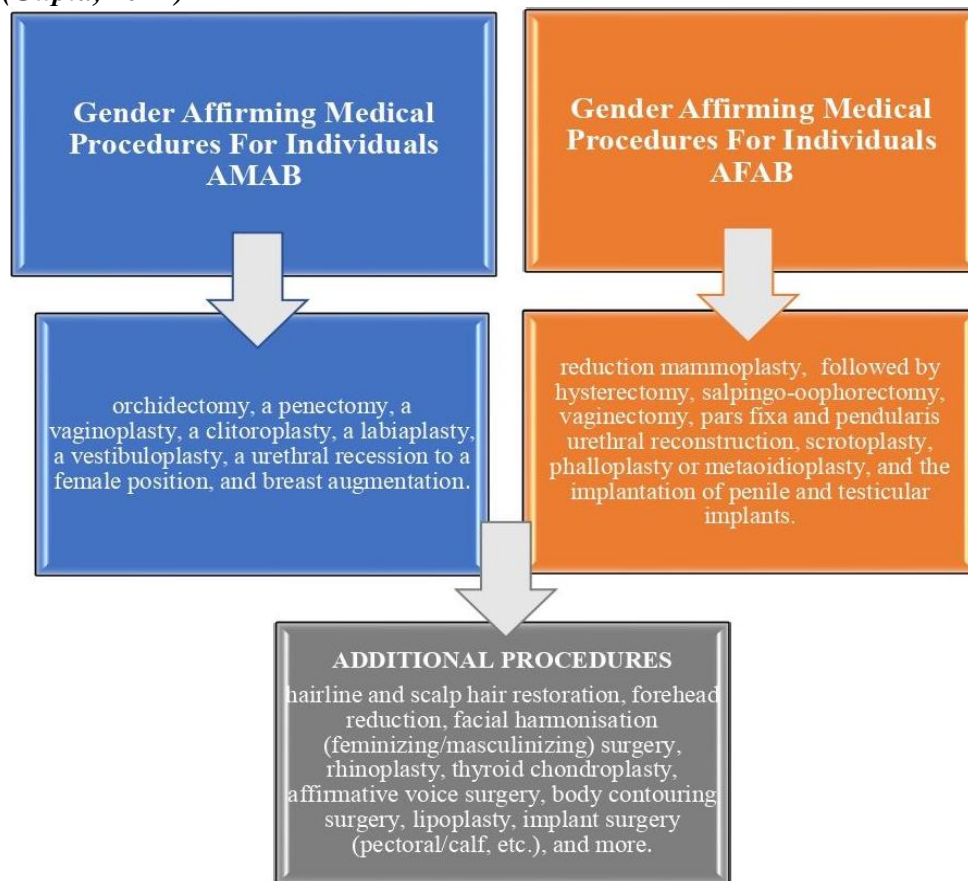
The endocrinologist or other healthcare professional advises the patient to have routine consultations and laboratory tests.

As stated by Gupta (2022) the most commonly performed surgeries for trans men are reduction mammoplasty, followed by hysterectomy, salpingo-oophorectomy, vaginectomy, pars fixa and pendularis urethral reconstruction, scrotoplasty, phalloplasty, or metaoidioplasty, and the implantation of penile and testicular implants.

While those for transwomen include an orchidectomy, a penectomy, a vaginoplasty, a clitoroplasty, a labiaplasty, a vestibuloplasty, a urethral recession to a female position, and breast augmentation. (Gupta, 2022)

Additional gender confirmation medical procedures for both trans men and trans women may include hairline and scalp hair restoration, forehead reduction, facial harmonisation (feminizing/masculinizing) surgery, rhinoplasty, thyroid chondroplasty, affirmative voice surgery, body contouring surgery, lipoplasty, implant surgery (pectoral/calf, etc.), and more.

Figure 2 Gender Affirmative Medical Procedures Available for MTF and FTM People (Gupta, 2022)



### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT FOR CLINICAL WORK**

For people who do not conform to gender norms, an environment that is unpleasant and unwelcoming has been created as a consequence of unprogressive laws, initiatives, and loosely implemented policies, which has eventually led to mental turmoil and psychological distress in these individuals.

It is well recognised that this community suffers from inequalities in health care, particularly in the realm of mental health, especially in India.

Because they are members of a gender minority population, transgender persons are exposed to a higher level of social stress, which could possibly be a contributory factor for the increased risk of exhibiting mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among those in this demographic.

In this context, psychologists and therapists have the opportunity to serve a substantial function. This includes offering support to transgender people on an individual, interpersonal, or social/community level to ensure that they are able to discover and affirm their gender identity.

This assistance may occur on various levels. The psychologist may also assist transgender persons in rehabilitating from the adverse impact that societal discrimination has had on their physical and psychological well-being.

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Additionally, they may aid in creating pleasant ways of coming out with loved ones, peers, and community members. Providers of mental health care who understand and care for their patients have frequently been an essential component of this.

This research intends to provide sufficient data to analyse and provide a brief picture of the FTM community's experience.

Therefore, this study, aimed at understanding the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self of FTM (female-to-male) persons, holds several significances, explained as follows:

- **Empirical Research:** Conducting such a study will contribute to empirical research on transgender experiences, specifically focusing on FTM individuals. It helps gather data and evidence to better understand their unique perspectives and challenges.
- **Identity Development:** Exploring the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self of FTM people can shed light on their identity development process. This understanding can benefit not only the transgender community but also mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers who work with or advocate for transgender people.
- **Psychological Well-Being:** Understanding the impact of transitioning, defeminizing, and self-perception changes on the psychological well-being of FTM people can aid in developing effective support systems and interventions. It can help identify factors that contribute to positive and/or negative mental health outcomes and inform strategies for addressing potential challenges.
- **Social Acceptance and Inclusion:** By investigating the social and cultural aspects of FTM people's self-perception, the study can provide insights into the barriers they face in society. Findings may highlight the importance of promoting acceptance, inclusivity, and creating a more supportive environment for transgender people.
- **Policy and Advocacy:** Research on the shifting sense of self among FTM people can inform policy, healthcare development, and advocacy efforts for promoting equality and acceptance for people who are transgender. It provides evidence-based data to support policy changes that promote equality, access to gender-affirming care, and protection against discrimination based on gender identity.
- **Education and Awareness:** The study's findings can contribute to educational programmes and awareness campaigns aimed at increasing understanding and reducing stigma around transgender and gender variant people's experiences. This knowledge can foster empathy, sensitivity, and inclusivity among the general public.

Overall, a study focusing on the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self of FTM people is significant for advancing knowledge, improving support systems, promoting social change, and enhancing the overall well-being and equality of transgender people.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Devor, H. (2004), in his paper, proposed a framework for understanding the 14-stage model of transsexual identity formation, emphasising the evolving and shifting nature of the sense of self throughout the process.

Xavier, J., et al. (2005) explored the experiences and specific needs of transgender people of colour, highlighting the intersections of race, gender identity, and the emerging sense of self.

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Bockting, W. O. (2008) evaluated the relationship between transgender identity, suicidality, and other factors, highlighting how these experiences contribute to shifts in the sense of self of these people.

Lin Fraser (2009), by fusing modern psychodynamic, Jungian, and gender identity theory, offered an introductory and transpositive strategy for conducting depth psychotherapy with transgender people. He found that the concerns that surfaced in psychotherapy with transgender people, as with all persons, were related to the self and how one interacts with one's surroundings as one negotiates one's identity with reality. The struggle between desire, authenticity, and stigma avoidance is experienced by transgender people as they navigate their transgender selves in a society that views gender as binary.

Vocks, S., et al. (2009) explored body image and its association with the sense of self in transgender people, highlighting the positive role of gender-affirming interventions on body satisfaction and self-esteem.

Grant, J. M., et al. (2011) shed light on the experiences of transgender people in accessing healthcare and the impact of discrimination, providing insights into the challenges they faced in developing a stable sense of self.

Coleman, E., et al. (2012) outlined standards of care for transgender people, addressing their shifting sense of self and the importance of affirming their gender identity. The SOC's overarching objective was to offer clinical direction to health professionals so they can help transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people find safe, effective routes to long-lasting personal comfort with their gendered selves in order to improve their general health, psychological well-being, and sense of fulfilment.

Hidalgo, M. A., et al. (2013) outlined the gender affirmative model of care for transgender people, emphasising the significance of supporting their evolving sense of self throughout development.

Audra K. Nuru (2014) identified identity gaps and discursive techniques while traversing and analysing narrative texts using CTI to detect transgender identity negotiation processes. Her results showed that trans-identities are negotiated across many levels of identity.

Gupta, S., et al. (2015) examined the Indian literature on transgender identity development and self-discovery. The research generated qualitative studies, exploring themes such as gender transition, self-acceptance, and societal challenges faced by transgender people. The study found the importance of social support networks, mental health services, and policy reforms to facilitate a positive sense of self and holistic well-being among transgender populations in India.

White Hughto, J. M., et al. (2015) critically reviewed the stigma determinants, mechanisms, and interventions related to transnegativity and its impact on health, including the shifting sense of self.

Witcomb, G. L., et al. (2015) focused on body image dissatisfaction among transgender people and its impact on their sense of self, highlighting the need for comprehensive support and interventions.

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Pas, C., et al. (2017), using a prospective longitudinal study, examined if self-perception of voice changes during CSHT, and if a change of serum testosterone levels as a result of CSHT can predict a change in self-perception of voice. They concluded that during CSHT, self-perception of voice improves in both trans men and trans women.

Rood, B. A., et al. (2017) explored the identity development process in transgender and gender nonconforming adults and identified the beneficial effects of disclosure, social support, and self-acceptance in shaping their sense of self.

White Hughto, J. M., et al. (2017) studied individual interpersonal and structural factors related to access to transition-specific care in a sample of transgender adults in Massachusetts.

Sharma, A. (2018) investigated the problems faced by the transgender community in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Using personal interviews, he collected facts from his case participant and found that the transgenders in M.P. put in tremendous efforts to improve their image in order to gain respect and acceptance in society.

Verma, A., et al. (2018) conducted an exploration of the process of transgender identity development and the associated shifts in self-perception among Indian transgender people. Drawing from qualitative studies, the study elucidated the impact of media on societal stigmatisation, discrimination, and cultural norms and therefore, on transgender people's sense of self. The findings underscored the significance of promoting acceptance, empowerment, and social integration to foster a positive self-image among transgender populations in India.

van der Miesen, A. I., et al. (2018) updated the evidence regarding the overrepresentation of (symptoms of) autism spectrum disorder (ASD) among persons diagnosed with gender dysphoria.

Costa, A. B., & Pase, P. F. (2018) systematically assessed the impact of sex reassignment surgery on the sense of self among transgender people, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges associated with this aspect of transition.

Golden, R. L., & Oransky, M. (2019) looked at the experiences of transgender people within their family contexts, emphasising the importance of family acceptance and support for their sense of self.

Farrow, L.P., et al. (2019) studied the impact of transgender microaffirmations received from romantic partners and their positive impact on the romantic relationships of transgender couples.

Suleman, D., & Binti Ab Rahman, F. (2020) analysed the character of Anjum, a transgender, in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and highlighted the reasons behind the issues faced by the transgender community in Indian society.

Sharma, A.J., & Subramanyam, M.A. (2020) examined the association of several social determinants with the mental health of middle-aged and older queer men in India by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies and found that older and midlife gay

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and bisexual men with higher income found ways to manage their masculinities with no discernible adverse psychological outcomes.

Fraser, G. (2020), used mixed methods and a reflexive community-based approach to review the existing research on rainbow mental health support experiences in New Zealand and discovered widespread knowledge gaps that compromised the ability of New Zealand's MHPs to provide culturally competent support to rainbow clients.

Matsuno, E., et al. (2021) conducted a survey on 93 parents to understand what prevents them from supporting their child's trans or nonbinary identity or what helps facilitate parental support and found out the primary reasons to be emotional barriers such as fear of their child being bullied or hurt; lack of knowledge/skills, including difficulty adjusting to a new name or pronouns; beliefs and attitudes; and systemic barriers such as a lack of inclusive policies at their child's school.

Shiphherd, J. C., et al. (2022) compared the sense of self and resilience levels between transgender and cis-gender people and found that transgender people often demonstrated high levels of resilience despite facing unique challenges.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This section will shed light on the procedures used to examine a transgender person who is transitioning from a female to a man, with the intent of exploring his developing sense of self during his journey. The design of the research, participant selection, the tools used for gathering the data, and how the individual was safeguarded during the study will all be covered in this chapter.

#### ***Participant Selection***

Finding a participant for the research didn't come as a challenge, as the researcher's acquaintance with a few members of the transgender community made it much simpler to get access to the potential research participant.

A non-random purposive sampling method was used to get to the participant on the basis of their readiness to disclose information for the purpose of academic study.

While it was desirable that the participant in this research had undergone or would have completed SRS, it was not necessary given that not all transgender people choose to undergo full SRS owing to the dangers associated with the operations (WPATH, n.d.).

However, to be considered for inclusion in this study, the participant was required to acquire a sufficient understanding of transgender culture, and to ensure the same, it was a mandate for the participant to fulfil all of the following participation criteria adopted from a study conducted by Magallanes (2014), wherein she conducted a case study of a 22-year-old female-to-male transgender person for the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of experiences of formal and informal support in relation to gender identity:

- A. identification as a female-to-male transgender person;
- B. having attained the age of legal majority as per Indian law and being at least 21 years old at the time of the initial interview (so as to maintain continuity of development status);

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- C. having used formal and informal supports and/or resources for at least 2 years as an adult;
- D. having participated in counselling or psychotherapeutic services for at least 2 years;
- E. having begun the transition from female to male at least within the past 10 years but not earlier than 3 years;
- F. having knowledge and experience of transgender culture (i.e., being an active part of a social network that supports transgender people);
- G. and having been in at least one romantic relationship- optional.

These participation criteria were adopted in order to ensure that there would be a substantial amount of accessible data, reflecting experiences of a changing sense of self.

### ***QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN***

The purpose of this intrinsic study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the sense of self of an FTM transgender person continuously grows on personal, social, and cultural levels throughout the course of his transition.

Since the study has no hypothesis and has been designed to be more exploratory and descriptive in nature, a case study seemed to be an appropriate design that could aid in gaining concrete, contextual, in-depth knowledge about this specific real-world subject.

A qualitative approach was employed to obtain a detailed analysis of the participant's transition, as the researcher's inclination lay in exploring the meaning of experiences for the participant himself rather than generalising the findings to other people.

An amalgamation of narrative inquiry methodology along with thematic content analysis was utilised to gather the participant's individual tales for the research. The researcher then took on the role of a storyteller.

In spite of the fact that case studies are not employed to test hypotheses, the researcher left room for this one to serve to produce one (Younger, 1985).

### ***Area of Study***

This study offers an insight into the daily life of a female to male transitioning person based out of Delhi by looking into how his personal, social, and cultural self-evolved throughout the course of his transition.

### ***Tools Used***

The different tools used to collect information for this research were as follows:

- a) A structured telephonic interview for the purpose of initial screening.
- b) Psychological instruments like Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and The Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire- Revised (SBQ-R) to rule out underlying depression, stress, and suicidal ideation prior to the interview.
- c) A semi structured face-to-face interview that explored the participant's family background, professional life, personal life, interpersonal relationships, culture, etc. and how it all impacted his changing sense of self through the entirety of his transitional phases.



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### ***Schedule of the Study***

The initial contact with the participant for the purpose of the study was made on February 10, 2023, following which, a telephonic interview was conducted on February 20, 2023. The final interview was conducted in two phases and was held in person, on February 25, 2023, for which the participant was expected to commute to the nearby clubhouse that was made available for a span of 3 hours, specifically for the conduction of the one-on-one interview.

Both interviews were scheduled as per predetermined and mutually comfortable dates, times and place and an approximate duration of the interviews was informed in advance.

### ***PROCEDURE***

The participant of this study was purposefully sampled and approached via email with a request for voluntary participation and a valuable contribution towards understanding identity, after gaining approval from Amity University, Noida, in February 2023 to conduct this study. The project's objectives were explained in the email, along with information on how data will be gathered, made use of, and maintained confidentially throughout the study. This was to establish an in-depth understanding of the sensitive nature of the study. When the participant gave his nod of approval, he was offered a choice of dates and times to choose from so that he could be contacted telephonically for the initial screening interview, which was expected to last up to 30 minutes.

The participant's initial screening interview provided him with the opportunity to clarify any questions he had about the study or his involvement while the interviewer evaluated the inclusion criteria. The topics of maintaining participant anonymity and upholding ethical principles were also discussed. The participant was eligible and consented to take part in the study after learning more about it. The participant was then given the option to choose a venue from a list of potential dates, times, and locations for the conduct of a face-to-face interview. He was also given the flexibility to suggest any other place of his choice, if need be. The participant was informed about the administration of questionnaires for the purpose of psychometric assessment, required to eliminate persistent depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies, prior to the main interview. Any queries raised by the participant were addressed.

The participant showed up at the location agreed upon by both parties, which was a private corporate meeting room at a local clubhouse in the heart of Delhi, reserved by the researcher. It was ensured that the space gave off a welcoming, warm, and safe vibe so that the mood, cognition, and behaviour of the participant were not adversely impacted. The seating was non-confrontational and conducive to a relaxed dialogue. For the sake of avoiding any disruption and noise, the windows were kept shut, but the opened blinds allowed optimum sunlight to enter the space, making it look bright. To make the participant feel secure, he was reassured that no conversations were audible outside the room. Entrance and exit were also restricted until the interview was terminated.

The interview commenced without haste, and the participant was given ample time to settle in. As part of establishing rapport with the participant, preliminary information was collected, and general questions like his name, age, and qualifications were asked. Once the participant appeared at ease, he was directed to fill out an informed consent form and sign the letter of confidentiality. He was given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

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The participant was then asked if he was ready for the first phase of the interview to begin, and on receiving an affirmative answer, he was handed over the Beck's Depression Inventory Scale, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the revised version of the Suicide Behaviours Questionnaire. The participant was briefed about how to fill out the questionnaires and that he would not be judged on the basis of the results. He was informed that there was no time limit. Once the scoring had been wrapped up and the participant qualified for the verbal interview, we proceeded further.

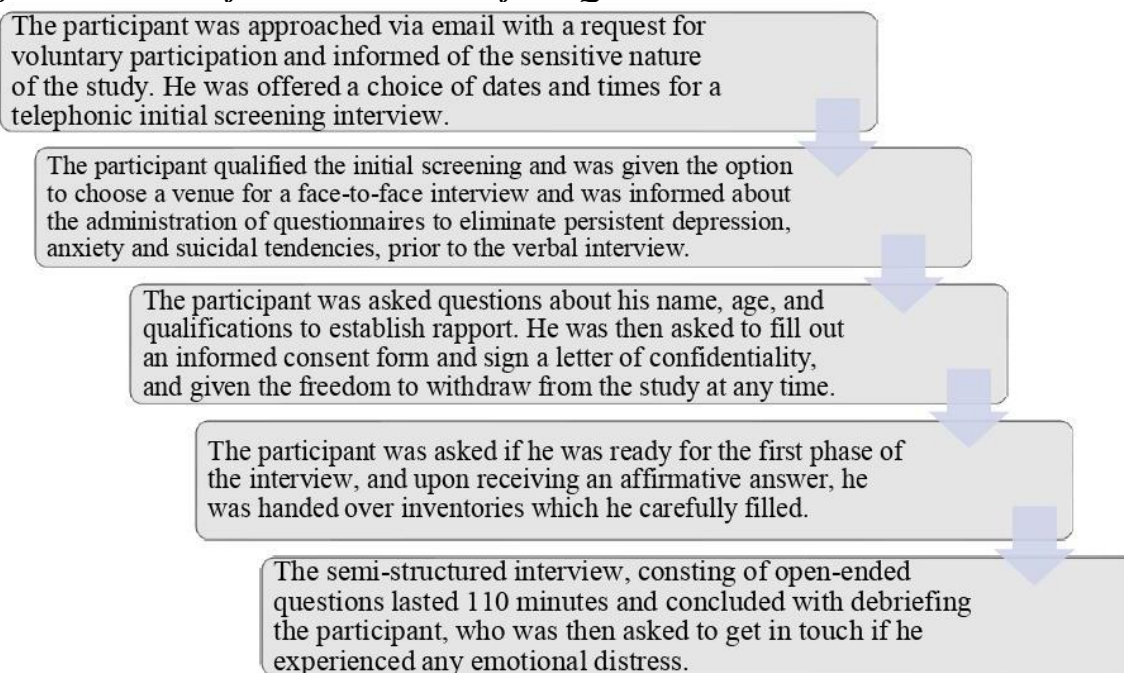
Throughout the second phase of the in-person interview, the letter X was used as a pseudonym to de-identify the participant. The semi-structured interview allowed open-ended responses and lasted for about 110 minutes, during which light refreshments and water were made readily available. A box of tissues was also placed in plain sight, in the middle of the table between us, so that the participant had easy access to them in case he had an emotional release and needed to grab some. The interview concluded with debriefing the participant, post which he was asked to get in touch if he faced any emotional distress later.

After the completion of this study, the draft was shared with the participant so that he could suggest any required corrections, including additions or deletions, before the publication of the final version. This ensured respondent validation and increased the trustworthiness of the study. It also led to the development of new insights.

As a token of gratitude and incentive, the participant was sent a thank-you note along with two e-tickets to a recently released Bollywood film.

The study was conducted to the best of the researcher's professional and ethical capabilities, as she was cognizant of her role as a leading investigator, ally, and advocate of LGBTQIA++ visibility.

### ***Figure 3 Procedure for the Conduction of this Qualitative Research***



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### ***Protection of the Participant***

In order to ensure that the participant was apprised of how the research would be put to use, an informed consent form (Appendix B) was provided to him before the study started.

Participation in this study posed no greater risk than that encountered in everyday life or during routine psychological assessments.

However, volunteering for a case study necessitates introspection and recalling different emotions, ideas, and life experiences (Berg, 2004; Stake, 1995). Therefore, it was communicated to the participant that in addition to recalling instances involving pleasant or favourable events, it is anticipated that he may also recall unpleasant or challenging experiences, feelings, or emotions that might make them uncomfortable within.

Due to the potential risks associated with greater emotional distress for the participant, the participant needed to be free of major or disabling anxiety, depression, and self-harm ideas for a period of one month before their first interaction with the researcher. Necessary psychological interventions were carried out prior to the interview. (Appendix E)

In order to retain his anonymity throughout this investigation, the participant has been identified by the letter X to assure that there is 'sufficient uncertainty' to prevent re-identification. No inquiries that may have required him to disclose his identity were made.

Additionally, any data gathered that would have the potential to reveal the participant's name has been withheld, such as the place of residence or where he worked. The goal was to release as little information as ethically required without having to compromise the overall narrative or the authenticity of the study.

In an attempt to minimise the likelihood of being recognised or singled out, the participant was also offered the option of meeting the researcher at a neutral location of his choosing, which later became the venue for this study.

The information was acquired in a quiet, secluded conference room of the clubhouse where no one could see or overhear the conversation.

To allow for further anonymity, it was made certain that nobody from the research team obtained any directly or indirectly identifiable information that could be used to link participant responses to his identity.

By signing the letter of confidentiality, the researcher and the participant entered into an agreement that guaranteed the participant's identity, personal information, responses, etc. would not be released to anyone outside of the research team unless otherwise agreed upon. This agreement served to uphold confidentiality with regards to the safeguarding of the participant's personally identifiable data. (Appendix C)

All through the course of the interview, the participant's degree of distress was monitored verbally by discussing the participant's psychological and cognitive states, as well as level of distress. If it had become apparent to the researcher that the participant experienced any discomfort during the study caused by his engagement, as evidenced by emotional and

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behavioural instability, their role in the study may have been terminated at the researcher's request for the participant's welfare.

Since the participant did not consent to digitally record any part of the interview, including audio, video, voice or image, his requests were adhered to, not challenging the spirit of informed consent.

A debriefing statement (Appendix D) was presented to the participant upon the successful completion of the interview.

### ***Data Collection***

In order to obtain personal narratives from the participant in this qualitative research, an open narrative interview approach was adopted. The environment created by these interviews invites and inspires the respondent to share a narrative (or tales) about important events in their life. The semi-structured interview and subsequent analysis of the participant's recollections from the past served as the basis for the study.

Therefore, a semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix F) that explored the participant's shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self during the transitioning process. The guide included open-ended questions that proved to be a valuable data collection method. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the participant's experiences, perspectives, and emotions related to his personal, social, and cultural identity throughout their transitioning process. The prepared interview guide aimed to allow personal theories of gender to emerge from direct questions such as, "Can you briefly describe your personal journey of realizing your gender identity and deciding to transition? How has transitioning impacted your sense of personal identity? In what ways has it changed or solidified your understanding of who you are?"

The open-ended questions encouraged the participant to freely express his thoughts, emotions, and experiences, without being constrained by predetermined response options. These questions enabled the participant to reflect on his personal journey and explore the complexities of his personal identity. This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the participant's shifting sense of self.

Questions focusing on personal self-authenticity and congruence prompted the participant to delve into his internal feelings, thoughts, and experiences related to his gender identity. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how the participant's sense of self evolved as he progressed through his transitioning process.

Exploratory questions related to social self and support systems shed light on the participant's experiences within his social networks. By asking about his interactions with friends, family, and chosen communities, the participant was encouraged to discuss the impact of these relationships on his sense of belonging, acceptance, and social support. The open-ended nature of these questions allowed for a comprehensive exploration of both positive and challenging aspects of their social experiences, including instances of misgendering or discrimination.

The interview also addressed the intersectionality of gender and cultural identity. Questions regarding the participant's cultural background and its influence on his transitioning journey

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provided insight into the negotiation of his gender identity within cultural expectations. By exploring how his cultural context shaped his experiences, the participant was able to reflect on the interplay between his gender identity and cultural identity, thereby highlighting the complex dynamics at play.

Overall, the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was instrumental in collecting rich and nuanced data for the case study. It allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the participant's shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self. By providing a platform for the participant to share his personal experiences, emotions, and perceptions, the interview method facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the participant's journey, providing valuable insights into his transitioning process and the evolving facets of his identity.

Sexual orientation of the participant, though not the foci of the project, was uncovered in the interview process. In fact, sex became a large part of the dialogue, during the final phase of the interview. However, the researcher refocused the conversation back to the issues under investigation without losing the participant.

The semi-structured nature of the interview thus provided a balance between structure and flexibility. The interview guide offered a framework to ensure that essential topics and areas of interest were covered, while also allowing for organic and in-depth conversations.

Detailed field notes during the interview were taken down to capture verbatim dialogue, non-verbal cues, context, and additional observations.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data was analysed using a combination of two conventional content analysis techniques- narrative analysis and thematic analysis- that this qualitative methodology is closely linked to.

Narrative inquiry is a process of knowledge construction. Through inquiry into narratives, the participant has the opportunity to reflect on what he has experienced in his life. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988)

With that in mind, this research falls outside Clandinin's criteria for a narrative inquiry study. Rather, "narrative as content analysis" was the strategy for analysing the data (Clandinin, 2013).

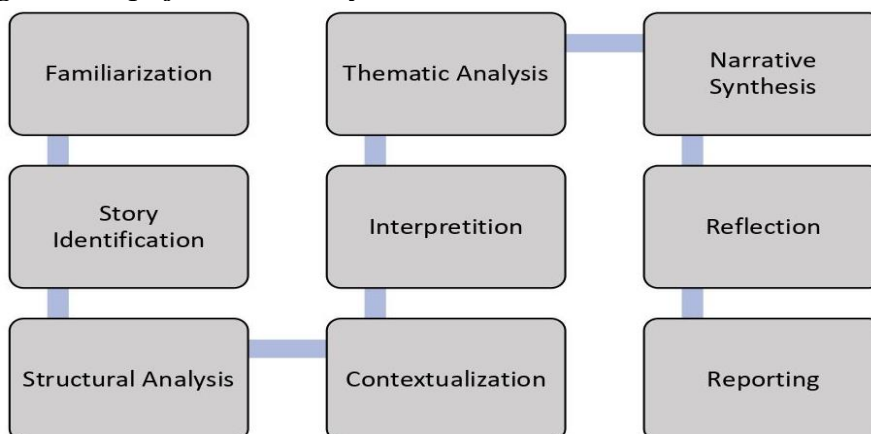
Narrative analysis involves analysing the content, structure, and meaning of narratives or stories shared by the participant. A general framework for conducting a narrative analysis for this study involved the following steps:

1. Familiarization and Transcription: The researcher familiarized herself with the interview data by reading and re-reading the field notes via which, intelligent verbatim transcriptions were prepared, and gained an understanding of the overall narrative structure and identified key themes or events within the participant's story.
2. Story Identification: Identification of the main stories or narratives shared by the participant was done. Recurring themes, significant events, turning points, and personal experiences that shaped the participant's sense of personal, social, and cultural self were considered.

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3. **Structural Analysis and Code Creation:** The structure of each narrative was analysed, including the beginning, middle, and end. How the story unfolded, the sequence of events, and any patterns or motifs that emerged were all taken into account. The plot, characters, conflicts, and resolutions were also closely studied. This led to the creation of codes.
4. **Thematic Analysis:** The underlying sub-themes, main themes and patterns within the narratives were then identified. The researcher looked for common threads, ideas, or experiences that the participant shared. These themes related to the participant's personal identity, social interactions, cultural influences, and the process of transitioning.
5. **Interpretation and Meaning-Making:** Interpretation of the narratives was then achieved considering the meaning attributed to the experiences shared by the participant. The researcher analysed how the participant made sense of his shifting sense of self, the impact of his experiences, and the significance he attributed to certain events or relationships.
6. **Contextualization:** The narratives were then situated within the broader context of transgender experiences, social norms, cultural influences, and personal growth. It was considered how external factors shaped the participant's narratives and influenced his sense of self in different domains.
7. **Supporting Evidence:** Relevant quotes or excerpts from the interview responses were selected and included to support the identified codes and themes. These quotes were representative and illustrative of the participant's narratives.
8. **Narrative Synthesis:** Next, synthesis of the individual narratives into an overall narrative or meta-story that captured the collective experiences and themes shared by the participant was done. The researcher identified any overarching patterns, common struggles, or transformative moments that emerged from the narratives.
9. **Reflection and Implications:** Finally, the implications of the narrative analysis findings were reflected on. It was considered how the narratives shed light on the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in the participant and the potential implications for support, interventions, and societal understanding.
10. **Reporting:** To conclude, a comprehensive report of the data analysis process was written, taking into account the identified codes, sub-themes, main themes, supporting evidence, interpretations, and implications. The findings were presented in a coherent and organized tabular manner, ensuring clarity and transparency in the presentation of the results.

**Figure 4 Steps for Data Analysis**



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**Table 1 Tabular Representation of Data Analysis using Thematic Analysis**

<b>Evolving sense of self</b>	<b>Verbatim Data Extracts</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Sub Themes</b>	<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Narrative Synthesis</b>
<i>Personal Self</i>	<p>"I experienced intense gender dysphoria, feeling a profound disconnect between my assigned gender at birth and my true identity."</p> <p>"Gender dysphoria was a constant presence in my life, motivating me to embark on my transition journey."</p> <p>"I started my transition journey with a mix of excitement and nervousness. It was a leap into the unknown, but I knew deep down that it was the right path for me."</p> <p>"The transition journey has been a rollercoaster of emotions. It's a process of self-discovery, learning, and growth. Each step forward brings me closer to my true self."</p> <p>"Transitioning allowed me to embark on a journey of self-discovery, exploring and understanding my true self."</p> <p>"Through self-reflection and exploration, I discovered my authentic identity as a transgender person."</p> <p>"Being true to myself and embracing my authentic identity has been the most liberating experience of my life. I no longer have to hide who I</p>	<p>Gender dysphoria</p> <p>Transition journey</p> <p>Self-discovery</p> <p>Authenticity</p>	<p>Emotional Distress and Internal Struggle</p> <p>Emotional Distress and Internal Struggle</p> <p>Exploration and Personal Growth</p> <p>Exploration and Personal Growth</p> <p>Exploration and Personal Growth</p>	<p>Self-Authenticity and Congruence</p> <p>Emotional Well-being and Mental Health</p>	<p>The participant's journey towards self-authenticity and congruence emerged as a central theme in their personal self-discovery and identity exploration. They described the process of embracing their true self, which involved aligning their gender identity with their personal values and beliefs. This journey was marked by self-discovery and self-acceptance, as they navigated through their own unique experiences and challenges.</p> <p>The pursuit of self-authenticity and congruence was deeply intertwined with the participant's emotional well-being and mental health. They spoke about the psychological impact of gender dysphoria, highlighting the emotional struggles and discomfort they faced as they grappled with their gender identity. However, they also exhibited remarkable resilience and employed various coping mechanisms to navigate these challenges.</p> <p>Seeking support and therapy played a significant role in the participant's emotional well-being and mental health journey. They recognized the importance of accessing professional support</p>

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	<p><i>am or pretend to be someone I'm not."</i></p> <p><i>"I've come to realize that authenticity is not about conforming to societal norms or expectations. It's about honouring my own truth and living my life authentically, regardless of what others may think."</i></p> <p><i>"Embracing my true self has allowed me to feel a sense of wholeness and peace within myself. It's a constant process of self-acceptance and self-love."</i></p> <p><i>"Through the journey of transitioning, I have learned to embrace and celebrate every aspect of my true self, even the parts that were once considered 'different' or 'unacceptable'."</i></p>	Embracing true self			<p>and actively sought therapy as a means of understanding and managing their emotions. This support network and therapeutic interventions provided a space for the participant to explore and process their emotions, facilitating their overall well-being.</p> <p>The narrative synthesis highlights the interconnectedness of self-authenticity, congruence, emotional well-being, and mental health in the participant's personal self. It underscores the significance of embracing one's true self and aligning it with personal values, while acknowledging the emotional struggles that may arise in the process. The participant's resilience and proactive approach to seeking support and therapy demonstrate their commitment to maintaining their emotional well-being and mental health throughout their gender transition journey.</p> <p>Overall, the themes of self-authenticity and congruence, along with emotional well-being and mental health, reflect the participant's profound exploration of their personal self and the efforts they have made to achieve a sense of authenticity, emotional balance, and psychological well-being.</p>
<i>Social Self</i>	<i>"Coming out to my friends was a</i>	Coming out process	Coming out experiences	Support Systems and Relationships	The participant's social self was



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<p><i>significant step, and I was fortunate to receive overwhelming support and acceptance."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a network of supportive friends has been crucial in navigating my transition and providing emotional support."</i></p> <p><i>"Despite coming out and requesting to be addressed using my preferred pronouns, I still faced instances of misgendering."</i></p> <p><i>"Misgendering experiences have been hurtful and remind me of the ongoing challenges of being recognized for who I truly am."</i></p> <p><i>"I am grateful for the acceptance and understanding I have received from my immediate family. They took the time to educate themselves about transgender issues and have been there for me every step of the way."</i></p> <p><i>"Finding acceptance and understanding outside of my immediate circle was a bit more challenging. However, I have come across people who are open-minded and willing to listen, which has given me hope for broader acceptance in society."</i></p> <p><i>"I have been fortunate to have a strong support system of friends who have become my allies in this journey. They not only provide emotional support but also actively educate others</i></p>	<p>Supportive friends</p> <p>Misgendering experiences</p> <p>Acceptance and understanding</p> <p>Allies and support systems</p>	<p>Disclosure challenges Social Support and Acceptance</p> <p>Supportive network Finding community</p> <p>Challenges of Misgendering</p> <p>Emotional Impacts</p> <p>Educational Opportunities</p> <p>Family acceptance</p> <p>Personal growth</p> <p>LGBTQ+ organizations</p> <p>Professional support</p>	<p>Communication and disclosure</p> <p>Social Interaction and Support</p>	<p>profoundly influenced by their experiences with support systems and relationships, which emerged as a central theme. They described the significance of having supportive friends, family, and partners who played a crucial role in their gender transition journey. These relationships provided a sense of validation, understanding, and acceptance, allowing the participant to navigate social spaces with greater confidence and support.</p> <p>Communication and disclosure played a pivotal role in the participant's social self. They spoke about the challenges and fears associated with coming out and openly sharing their gender identity with others. However, they also highlighted the positive outcomes that resulted from honest and open communication. Through these conversations, the participant was able to educate others, foster understanding, and build stronger connections based on trust and authenticity.</p> <p>Social interaction and support were fundamental aspects of the participant's social self. They emphasized the importance of engaging with supportive communities, both online and offline, where they could connect with other transgender people and find a sense of belonging. These</p>
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	<p><i>about transgender experiences."</i>  <i>"Joining a local transgender support group has been incredibly beneficial for me. It's a safe space where I can connect with others who understand and share similar experiences. Having that community support has made a significant difference in my life."</i></p>				<p>interactions provided a space for shared experiences, empathy, and mutual support, allowing the participant to feel validated and understood by others who had similar journeys.</p> <p>The narrative synthesis highlights the transformative role of support systems and relationships in the participant's social self. It underscores the significance of effective communication and disclosure in fostering understanding, acceptance, and stronger connections with others. Furthermore, the participant's engagement with supportive communities demonstrates the power of social interaction and finding a sense of belonging in their social experiences.</p> <p>Overall, the themes of support systems and relationships, communication and disclosure, and social interaction and support illustrate the participant's profound reliance on interpersonal connections and their impact on the participant's social self. These themes showcase the participant's resilience, authenticity, and the transformative power of supportive relationships and communities in their journey of social integration and navigating social spaces as a transgender person.</p>
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<p><i>Cultural Self</i></p>	<p><i>"Balancing my transgender identity with cultural expectations has been a complex journey, requiring me to redefine what it means to be a part of my cultural community."</i></p> <p><i>"Education and awareness within my cultural context have helped bridge the gap between my transgender identity and cultural heritage."</i></p> <p><i>"Growing up, I struggled with reconciling my transgender identity with the cultural norms and expectations imposed on me. It was a constant battle between honoring my authentic self and conforming to societal expectations."</i></p> <p><i>"It (reconciling cultural identity with transgender identity) has been a journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance. It required challenging deeply ingrained beliefs and finding a way to embrace both aspects of my identity."</i></p> <p><i>"Raising awareness about transgender issues within my cultural community has been a priority for me. I believe that education is crucial in challenging misconceptions and promoting acceptance."</i></p> <p><i>"I have been actively involved in organizing workshops and discussions within my cultural context to educate others about transgender</i></p>	<p>Balancing cultural expectations</p> <p>Balancing identity and tradition</p> <p>Reconciling cultural norms with transgender identity</p> <p>Education and awareness within cultural context</p>	<p>Balancing Cultural Expectations</p> <p>Cultural Identity Negotiation</p> <p>Cultural conflicts and dilemmas</p> <p>Challenging societal expectations</p> <p>Promoting understanding and acceptance</p> <p>Creating safe spaces for dialogue</p>	<p>Cultural Identity</p> <p>Identity Intersectionality</p>	<p>The participant's cultural self was deeply influenced by their experiences with cultural identity and identity intersectionality, which emerged as significant themes. They described the intricate interplay between their transgender identity and their cultural background, highlighting the complexities and challenges of reconciling cultural norms with their transgender identity.</p> <p>Cultural identity played a crucial role in shaping the participant's sense of self. They discussed their unique cultural heritage and the ways in which it informed their values, beliefs, and traditions. However, they also acknowledged the need to navigate and reconcile these cultural norms with their transgender identity, as it required renegotiating societal expectations and challenging preconceived notions.</p> <p>Identity intersectionality emerged as a central aspect of the participant's cultural self. They shared their experiences of navigating multiple intersecting identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. These intersecting identities influenced their sense of self and their place within their cultural community. The participant expressed the need for education and</p>
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	<p><i>experiences. It's important to create safe spaces for dialogue and foster understanding."</i></p> <p><i>"Connecting with my cultural heritage has been a source of strength and empowerment for me. It's a reminder that my transgender identity does not diminish my cultural roots but adds a unique perspective to it."</i></p> <p><i>"I have found solace in exploring and celebrating my cultural heritage. It allows me to reclaim my identity and challenge the notion that being transgender goes against cultural traditions."</i></p>	<p>Empowerment through cultural heritage</p>	<p>Connecting with cultural roots</p> <p>Reclaiming and celebrating identity</p>		<p>awareness within their cultural context, highlighting the importance of fostering understanding and acceptance of diverse identities.</p> <p>The narrative synthesis highlights the complex relationship between cultural identity and transgender identity in the participant's cultural self. It underscores the participant's journey of reconciling cultural norms with their authentic self, reflecting the challenges and opportunities for growth that arise from this process. Additionally, the participant's experiences of identity intersectionality emphasize the importance of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of identities within cultural communities.</p> <p>Overall, the themes of cultural identity and identity intersectionality shed light on the participant's profound exploration of their cultural self and the complexities they encountered in navigating their transgender identity within their cultural context. These themes reflect the participant's resilience, determination, and the need for education and awareness to foster acceptance and understanding of diverse identities within cultural communities.</p>
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Given that the narratives told in this research were about sensitive experiences in the individual's life, it was essential to approach transgender issues and transprejudice from a morally driven perspective of seeking to comprehend them.

Therefore, while conducting and analysing the interview, the researcher had to be mindful of her status as a cisgendered heterosexual woman (Price, 1996). This acknowledgement of her own self served as the basis for her ethically grounded study, in which she sought to reflexively recognise and consider her own biases and prejudices (Ely, 1991).

### RESULTS

Since each person's experience of transitioning is unique and can be influenced by various factors such as cultural background, personal circumstances, and individual resilience, the below mentioned findings are solely derived from the personal interview with the participant and is therefore unique to his case. They may or may not apply to every FTM transitioning individual.

#### *Personal Self:*

- The participant reported an increased sense of authenticity and congruence with his true self after starting with his transition.
- Gender dysphoria played a significant role in the realization of the participant's gender identity and his decision to transition.
- Transitioning had both positive and challenging effects on emotional well-being and mental health of the participant. It sure brought him moments of self-discovery and empowerment but also exposed him to vulnerability and emotional challenges.
- Seeking professional help, such as therapy or counseling, played a vital role in supporting the participant's mental health during the transition.
- Though transitioning impacted the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the participant's life, presence of supportive partners who actively participated in the transition journey contributed to positive and affirming romantic relationships.

#### *Social Self:*

- The participant's relationships with his family, friends, and significant others were impacted by his transition. While some individuals extended their acceptance and support, others struggled to understand or accept his transition.
- Navigating social spaces was quite challenging for the participant, and misgendering or lack of understanding from others often occurred in the initial phase of his transition. Building a strong support network and seeking inclusive spaces helped him alleviate some of these challenges.

#### *Cultural Self:*

- Transitioning led to reflections on the intersection of gender and culture, with the participant, while he was exploring how his cultural background influenced his gender identity.
- The level of acceptance and support from cultural or community resources varied, while finding some supportive spaces amidst the rest that posed unique challenges due to cultural norms or conservative attitudes.

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### ***Presentation of Findings***

Based on the interview, the findings highlight the evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self in a transitioning FTM person. The key themes and patterns identified are as follows:

#### ***Personal Identity:***

- Transitioning serves as a means to align one's outward appearance with their inner sense of self.
- It fosters a growing sense of authenticity, congruence, and self-discovery.
- Gender dysphoria plays a significant role in realizing and embracing one's true gender identity.
- Seeking therapy and support groups plays a crucial role in maintaining emotional resilience. Therefore, mental health support is vital throughout the transition process.

#### ***Social Identity:***

- Relationships with family, friends, and significant others may undergo changes, with varying degrees of acceptance and support.
- Navigating social spaces may pose challenges, including misgendering and the need for self-advocacy and education.
- Building a strong support network and finding inclusive spaces help in overcoming social hurdles.
- Some individuals may face difficulties or lack of support from people previously in their lives, highlighting the importance of seeking understanding individuals and setting boundaries.
- Supportive romantic partners who actively participate in the transition journey contribute to positive and affirming romantic relationships.

#### ***Cultural Identity:***

- Transitioning prompts reflection on the intersection of gender and culture.
- Cultural background influences one's gender identity journey, with varying levels of acceptance and support from cultural communities.
- Finding inclusive spaces that validate both gender identity and cultural heritage is important.
- Overall, the findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of the evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self in a transitioning FTM person. It underscores the importance of self-discovery, support systems, inclusive spaces, and open communication in fostering a positive and authentic journey of self-acceptance and understanding.

#### ***Prominent Themes***

Based on the interview, some prominent themes that emerge regarding the evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self in a transitioning FTM person include:

#### ***Self-Authenticity and Congruence:***

- Transitioning allows individuals to align their outward appearance with their inner sense of self.
- There is a strong emphasis on personal authenticity and living in congruence with one's true gender identity.

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### *Support Systems and Relationships:*

- The role of support systems, including friends, chosen family, and support groups, is crucial throughout the transition process.
- Relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners undergo changes, with varying degrees of acceptance and support.
- Navigating social spaces and building inclusive relationships become important factors in a transitioning person's journey.

### *Emotional Well-being and Mental Health:*

- Transitioning brings a range of emotional experiences, including self-discovery, vulnerability, and emotional challenges.
- Accessing mental health support, such as therapy or counselling, plays a significant role in maintaining emotional well-being and resilience.

### *Identity Intersectionality:*

- Exploring the intersection of gender identity and cultural background is an important aspect of a transitioning individual's journey.
- Cultural communities may provide varying levels of acceptance and support, influencing the individual's sense of cultural identity during transition.

### *Communication and Disclosure:*

- Effective communication, including open and honest discussions, is crucial in navigating relationships and disclosing transgender identity to romantic partners.
- The decision to disclose is influenced by factors such as trust, long-term commitment, and individual preferences.
- These themes shed light on the multifaceted nature of a transitioning FTM individual's experience, highlighting the importance of self-acceptance, support networks, mental health care, communication, and the exploration of one's intersectional identities. It also emphasizes the challenges and triumphs encountered throughout the journey of self-discovery and the pursuit of an authentic sense of personal, social, and cultural self.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section presents significant insights related to the shifting sense of personal, social and cultural self of the participant, as revealed in the interview, with an emphasis on the following additional themes:

### *Personal Self*

- **Self-Authenticity and Congruence:** The interview revealed that transitioning enabled the participant to align his outward appearance with his inner sense of self. The participant emphasized the importance of living authentically and congruently with his true gender identity. The process of transitioning allowed him to embrace his personal identity, resulting in an enhanced sense of self and increased self-acceptance. He stated “Transitioning has had a profound impact on my personal identity. and has helped me achieve (gender) euphoria. It has allowed me to align my outward appearance with my inner sense of self. As I progressed through my transition, I have felt a growing sense of authenticity and congruence with who I truly am.” He added "I remember the first time I tried binding my chest. It was a

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transformative moment for me. Seeing a flatter silhouette made me feel more aligned with my true self. It was a small but significant step towards embracing my masculine identity. It gave me the confidence to explore other aspects of my personal self and embark on my journey of self-discovery."

- **Support Systems and Relationships:** The findings highlighted the significant role of support systems, such as friends, chosen family, and support groups, in the transitioning journey. The participant emphasized the importance of having a network of understanding and accepting individuals who provide emotional support, guidance, and validation. The support received from these relationships helped him navigate the challenges associated with transitioning and contributed to his evolving personal self. On romantic relationships, he said "Transitioning has had an impact on my romantic relationships, both past and present. It has prompted a deeper exploration of my own attractions and desires, leading to a better understanding of the types of partners I connect with. Relationship dynamics have shifted as well, with a greater emphasis on open and honest communication." He further acknowledged "I have been fortunate to have a partner who has been incredibly supportive throughout my transition. She has actively participated in my journey, accompanying me to medical appointments, and offering emotional support whenever I need. Her unwavering acceptance has made a tremendous difference in my overall well-being."
- **Emotional Well-being and Mental Health:** Transitioning evoked a range of emotional experiences for the participant, including self-discovery, vulnerability, and emotional challenges. He quoted "Transitioning was not only about physical changes; it was also a journey of personal growth. Along the way, I learned to be more compassionate and patient with myself. I discovered my own strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Transitioning allowed me to break free from societal expectations and discover my authentic voice, paving the way for personal growth and self-acceptance." Accessing mental health support, such as therapy or counselling, emerged as a vital aspect of maintaining emotional well-being and resilience during the transition. The participant acknowledged the importance of addressing his emotional needs and seeking professional help when necessary. He stressed "Therapy has provided a safe space to explore my emotions, navigate the complexities of transitioning, and develop coping mechanisms for any emotional hurdles that arise along the way."
- **Identity Intersectionality:** The interview revealed that transitioning prompted the participant to reflect on the intersection of his gender identity with his cultural background. He acknowledged the influence of cultural norms and values on his transitioning journey. He expressed the need to navigate the complexities of both gender identity and cultural identity, seeking spaces that validate and respect his unique intersectional experiences.
- **Communication and Disclosure:** Effective communication and disclosure of his transgender identity emerged as important aspects of the shifting sense of personal self. The participant discussed the significance of open and honest discussions with his romantic partner regarding his transition. The decision to disclose his identity was influenced by factors such as trust, long-term commitment, and individual preference, emphasizing the importance of clear and respectful communication within intimate relationships. He further mentioned "Communication has played a vital role in my romantic relationships during my transition. Open and honest discussions about my needs, concerns, and experiences have fostered understanding



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and empathy between my partner and me. It has allowed us to navigate the changes together and build a foundation of mutual support.”

### *Social Self*

- **Relationships and Support Systems:** The interview revealed that transitioning had a significant impact on the participant’s relationships with his family, friends, and romantic partner. While the participant experienced acceptance and support from many people, some brought challenges and misunderstandings. The importance of support systems, including chosen family and support groups, emerged as crucial for navigating these changes. The participant highlighted the role of supportive relationships in fostering a sense of belonging and connection during the transition process. He commented “My key sources of support during my transition have been my close friends, chosen family, and support groups specifically tailored for transmasculine, transgenderist and other transgender people. They have offered unwavering support, understanding, and guidance throughout my journey, making a significant positive impact on my overall well-being.”
- **Social Challenges and Acceptance:** The participant shared his experiences of facing social challenges during his transition. Misgendering, lack of understanding, and discrimination were common difficulties encountered in social interactions. However, he also reported instances of acceptance, understanding, and support from certain individuals and communities. He reported "Coming out to my close friends was an emotional rollercoaster. I was unsure of how they would react and whether our friendships would remain intact. But their response was overwhelmingly positive. They not only accepted me for who I am but also became my strongest allies. Their unwavering support helped me navigate the challenges of social transition and fostered a sense of belonging and acceptance." These positive experiences played a vital role in shaping his shifting social self and reinforcing his sense of identity.
- **Negotiating Social Spaces:** The interview shed light on the complexities of navigating social spaces as a transitioning FTM individual. The participant discussed the need for self-advocacy, education, and raising awareness to promote greater understanding and acceptance in various social contexts. He highlighted the importance of finding inclusive spaces that validate his gender identity and provide a supportive environment. The participant shared “I have encountered situations where people may not understand or misgender me, but I have learned to advocate for myself and educate others about my identity.”
- **Intersectionality of Social and Cultural Identities:** The interview revealed the intersectionality of social and cultural identities in the context of transitioning. The participant discussed how his cultural background influenced his experiences of acceptance and support, with varying levels of understanding within different cultural communities. He emphasized the need to reconcile his gender identity with cultural norms and expectations, highlighting the ongoing negotiation of multiple social identities.
- **Building a Positive Social Self:** The participant shared strategies for building a positive social self during the transition. Open and honest communication, education, and actively seeking supportive networks were highlighted as essential. He also emphasized the importance of self-acceptance and self-advocacy, asserting one’s own identity and challenging societal norms and stereotypes. For those on the same

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journey as he is, he conveyed “To other individuals considering or undergoing a gender transition, my advice would be to trust your own journey, surround yourself with a supportive network, and seek out resources that can assist you along the way. Remember that each person's transition is unique, so listen to your own needs and take the time to discover your true self.”

### *Cultural Self*

- **Cultural Influences on Transitioning:** The interview revealed that cultural background played a significant role in shaping the transitioning experiences of the participant. He discussed how cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations influenced his understanding and acceptance of his gender identity. Cultural influences often acted as both facilitators and barriers to his transitioning process, impacting his sense of cultural self.
- **Acceptance and Support within Cultural Communities:** The participant shared diverse experiences of acceptance and support within his cultural communities. He reported finding a strong sense of acceptance, finding understanding and support from his cultural networks most of the time. While at other instances, he encountered challenges due to conservative attitudes or lack of awareness. The varying levels of acceptance influenced his perceptions of his cultural self as he navigated his transition.
- **Negotiating Cultural and Gender Identities:** participant highlighted the complexity of negotiating his cultural and gender identities during the transitioning process. He shared experiences of reconciling his gender identity with cultural norms and expectations. He expressed a desire to challenge traditional gender roles within his cultural context, while also concurrently seeking a balance between his cultural heritage and his evolving gender identity. He recalled "As someone with a strong cultural background, I initially struggled with reconciling my transgender identity with the cultural expectations placed upon me. I had to find a balance between honouring my heritage and being true to my authentic self. It took time and conversations with my family to help them understand that my gender identity doesn't invalidate the cultural heritage of our motherland, but rather adds to the richness of it."
- **Seeking Inclusive Spaces:** The participant discussed the importance of finding inclusive spaces that validate both his gender identity and cultural heritage. He expressed a need for supportive communities that embrace diversity and respect the intersectionality of cultural and gender identities. Access to such inclusive spaces was found to positively impact his shifting sense of cultural self.
- **Empowerment and Redefining Cultural Identity:** The participant shared his experiences of empowerment and redefining his cultural identity during the transition. He described a process of reclaiming cultural traditions and practices in ways that align with his evolving gender identity. This process allowed him to shape a new cultural self that embraces both his gender identity and his cultural heritage. He expressed “While my cultural background remains an integral part of who I am, my transition has sparked reflections on the intersections between gender and culture.”

## **SUMMARY**

Comprehending these themes can equip healthcare practitioners, therapists, and support systems with the knowledge necessary to offer suitable assistance to individuals who are grappling with the intricacies of transitioning.

For example, psychologists have the potential to provide support to people who are transgender or gender non-conforming (TGNC) in navigating familial relationships that may arise during the process of exploring and establishing their gender identity. The provision of mental health services to TGNC people can involve various modalities, such as individual therapy, conjoint sessions with their support network, family therapy, or group therapy. (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2015)

For years, mental health diagnoses have been misused to pathologize identities and other diversities. Pathologizing has historically been, and continues to be, one of the root causes of human violations against persons who are trans or gender diverse. (United Nations Human, 2019) These themes possess the potential to guide the creation of suitable interventions, community structures, and educational programmes that promote inclusivity and provide assistance to those transitioning.

Learning more about these themes can enhance cultural proficiency, education for healthcare professionals and creation of suitable social networks, fostering inclusiveness and assistance for transitioning individuals across varied cultural settings. For instance, psychological counsellors can provide assistance to individuals who are TGNC in determining the appropriate timing and manner in which to disclose their gender identity within various contexts such as the workplace, educational institutions, religious communities, and social circles. (APA, 2015)

### ***Emerging Hypothesis***

The process of transitioning in FTM persons leads to a multi-dimensional transformation of personal, social, and cultural identity, characterized by enhanced self-authenticity, the importance of support systems, the negotiation of social challenges, and the intersectionality of cultural and gender identities.

This hypothesis suggests that transitioning is not solely a physical transformation but also a profound journey of self-discovery, social navigation, and cultural negotiation. It posits that transitioning allows individuals to align their outward appearance with their inner sense of self, leading to an enhanced personal identity characterized by increased self-authenticity and congruence.

Furthermore, it suggests that support systems, including friends, chosen family, and support groups, play a vital role in providing emotional support and guidance during the transitioning process. These support networks contribute to the evolving sense of social self by providing a sense of belonging and acceptance, although social challenges such as misgendering and discrimination may still be encountered.

The hypothesis also recognizes the intersectionality of cultural and gender identities, highlighting the influence of cultural norms, acceptance, and support within cultural communities. It suggests that individuals navigate the complexities of both gender identity and cultural identity, seeking inclusive spaces that validate their unique intersectional experiences.

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Overall, this hypothesis posits that transitioning leads to a multi-faceted transformation, encompassing personal, social, and cultural aspects of self. It suggests that the transitioning journey involves navigating social and cultural contexts, building support networks, and developing a more authentic and congruent sense of self.

Further research is needed to test and validate this hypothesis in larger and more diverse populations, as well as to explore the long-term effects and outcomes of transitioning on personal, social, and cultural self.

### ***Limitations of Study***

While this study provides valuable insights into the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in transitioning FTM people, it is important to acknowledge several limitations:

- **Sample Bias:** The research and its findings is limited to an individual and may not represent the diverse range of experiences within the transitioning FTM population.
- **Self-Reporting Bias:** The data collected through qualitative interview relies on participant's self-reporting, which may be subject to recall bias, social desirability bias, or individual interpretation. The participant may have shared his experiences selectively, leading to potential gaps or biases in the data.
- **Generalizability:** The study's findings are not universal and may not be generalizable to all transitioning FTM people, as experiences of transitioning can differ based on various factors, such as age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. The study's findings should be interpreted within the specific context of the sample population.
- **Limited Exploration of Intersectionality:** While the study acknowledges the intersectionality of gender and cultural identities, the depth of exploration may be limited. Further research is needed to delve into the specific cultural dynamics and intersections that impact the shifting sense of cultural self during transition.
- **Lack of Longitudinal Perspective:** The study provides a snapshot of the participant's experiences at a particular point in time. However, the evolving nature of personal, social, and cultural self in transitioning people requires a longitudinal perspective to capture changes over time and assess the long-term effects of transitioning.
- **Lack of Comparison Groups:** The study primarily focuses on the experiences of the transitioning FTM person without comparison groups, such as non-transitioning individuals or individuals with diverse gender identities. Including comparison groups would provide a broader understanding of the shifting sense of self within the context of transitioning.
- **Potential for Social Desirability Bias:** The participant may have felt compelled to present his experiences in a positive light or align with societal expectations, leading to social desirability bias. This bias may influence the responses, potentially impacting the accuracy and authenticity of the reported experiences.

The author would also like to acknowledge that the sensitivity of the research process is likely affected by a personal trans-positive stance.

Addressing these limitations in future research can strengthen the understanding of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in transitioning FTM people and provide a more comprehensive view of their experiences.

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### *Implications for Future Research*

The findings and limitations of the study present several avenues for future research. The scope of future research can include the following areas:

- **Larger and Diverse Sample:** Conducting studies with larger and more diverse samples of transitioning FTM people can provide a broader understanding of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self. This would allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of individuals from various cultural backgrounds, age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and geographical locations.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Longitudinal studies can track the transitioning process over an extended period, capturing changes in personal, social, and cultural self over time. This would provide insights into the long-term effects of transitioning, including the stability of the identified themes and the development of new ones as individuals progress through their transition.
- **Comparative Studies:** Comparative studies that include non-transitioning individuals and individuals with varied gender identities can provide a comparative perspective. Examining the similarities and differences in the shifting sense of self across different gender identity groups can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences and challenges faced by transitioning FTM people.
- **Intersectionality:** Further research is needed to explore the intersectionality of gender and cultural identities in the context of transitioning. Investigating how various cultural factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality, influence the transitioning process can deepen our understanding of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple identities.
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Future research can delve deeper into the impact of transitioning on mental health and well-being, including the prevalence of mental health conditions, coping mechanisms, and the effectiveness of support systems and interventions. Examining the interplay between personal, social, and cultural factors in relation to mental health outcomes can contribute to the development of targeted interventions and support services.
- **Intervention Development:** Research focusing on the development and evaluation of interventions aimed at supporting transitioning FTM people in their personal, social, and cultural journey can provide practical insights for healthcare professionals, therapists, and peer groups. This can include interventions that address challenges in self-acceptance, social support, cultural navigation, and mental health support.
- **Impact on Different Life Domains:** Exploring the impact of transitioning on different life domains, such as education, employment, family dynamics, and community engagement, can provide a comprehensive understanding of the wider implications of transitioning. Investigating how personal, social, and cultural changes interact with these domains can inform policy and practice to create more inclusive environments for transitioning people.

By addressing these areas of future research, we can further enhance our understanding of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in transitioning FTM people and promote the development of interventions and support systems that cater to their unique needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study on the evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self during transitioning from female to male reveals significant insights into the experiences of transitioning FTM people. The findings suggest that transitioning is a complex and transformative process that encompasses multiple dimensions of self-identity.

**Personal Self:** Transitioning enables FTM people to align their outward appearance with their internal sense of self, leading to an enhanced personal identity characterized by increased self-authenticity and congruence. The participant reported a greater sense of empowerment, self-acceptance, and alignment with his true gender identity during and after transitioning.

**Social Self:** The social self undergoes significant changes during the transitioning process. The participant discussed the importance of support systems and the role they play in navigating social relationships. While some individuals gave their acceptance and support, others came across as societal threats, having the participant suffer from misgendering and discrimination. Overall, supportive relationships and inclusive social spaces were crucial in fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

**Cultural Self:** Cultural background and norms were found to influence the transitioning experiences of the participant. The participant reported the need to negotiate his cultural and gender identities, striving to reconcile his gender identity with cultural expectations. Acceptance and support within cultural communities varied, with sometimes the participant found understanding and support, but on other instances he faced challenges due to conservative attitudes or lack of awareness.

Overall, the study highlights the dynamic nature of personal, social, and cultural self-identity during the transitioning process. It emphasizes the importance of support systems, the negotiation of social challenges, and the intersectionality of cultural and gender identities. Understanding these dimensions can inform the development of interventions, support networks, and educational initiatives that foster inclusivity and support for transitioning individuals.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, such as sample bias, self-reporting bias, and the need for larger and more diverse samples. Future research should address these limitations to further enhance our understanding of the evolving sense of personal, social, and cultural self during, pre, and post-transition.

### ***Tips for Psychologists***

When working with individuals who are transitioning from female to male (FTM), it is important for counselling and clinical psychologists to approach their practice with sensitivity, respect, and understanding. Here are some tips to consider:

1. **Educate yourself:** Familiarize yourself with transgender issues, updated terminology, and the process of transitioning. Stay up-to-date with current research and resources to enhance your knowledge and understanding.
2. **Create a safe and inclusive environment:** Establish a non-judgmental and supportive space where the individual feels comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Use inclusive language and affirm their gender identity throughout the counselling process.

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3. Validate their experiences: Acknowledge and validate the unique challenges and experiences faced by FTM people. Recognize the impact of societal norms, discrimination, and gender dysphoria on their well-being.
4. Explore their identity and self-discovery journey: Encourage the individual to share their personal narrative and experiences related to their gender identity and transition, allowing space for self-discovery, and discussing the intersections of their gender identity with other aspects of their life. Help them explore their feelings, expectations, and aspirations throughout their identity journey.
5. Address Gender Dysphoria and other mental health concerns: Be attentive to the individual's mental health and well-being. Help the individual explore and navigate gender dysphoria, providing coping strategies and support. Collaboratively work on developing techniques to manage distress related to dysphoria and explore potential options for medical interventions if desired. Address any concerns related to anxiety, depression, or other psychological issues that may arise during their transition. Collaborate with them to develop coping strategies and provide appropriate support.
6. Support social transition and network exploration: Assist the individual in planning and navigating their social transition, including changes in appearance, coming out to family and friends, and managing reactions from others. Provide guidance and resources for legal name and gender marker changes if applicable. Discuss the importance of building a support network of friends, family, and community resources. Help the individual identify supportive individuals and organizations that can provide guidance and understanding.
7. Foster resilience and coping skills: Help the individual build resilience and develop effective coping skills to navigate challenges they may encounter during their transition. Assist in building a support network and accessing resources for additional support.
8. Assist in decision-making: Collaborate with the individual to explore various aspects of their transition, such as medical interventions, legal processes, and social aspects. Provide information and support as they navigate these decisions, ensuring they are well-informed and empowered to make choices that align with their values and goals.
9. Practice cultural sensitivity: Recognize the intersectionality of their identities, including their cultural background, and the potential impact on their transition journey. Be mindful of preferred pronouns, culturally sensitive terminologies (see Table 2), cultural norms, expectations, and the potential need for additional support or resources specific to their cultural context.
10. Referral and collaboration: If necessary, consider referring the individual to specialists or support groups that specifically cater to transgender people. Collaborate with other healthcare professionals, such as endocrinologists or therapists specializing in gender identity, to provide comprehensive care.
11. Self-reflection and ongoing learning: Engage in self-reflection to identify any personal biases or assumptions that may affect your ability to provide effective care. Engage in ongoing professional development and seek supervision or consultation when working with FTM people to ensure best practices.
12. Advocate for the individual: If required, offer to serve as an advocate for the individual within the therapeutic space and beyond. Help them navigate systems, access appropriate healthcare, and advocate for their and needs.

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Remember, every individual's journey is unique, and it is crucial to approach counselling and therapy with a client-centered and culturally sensitive approach. Building a trusting and empathetic therapeutic relationship is key to supporting FTM people in their shifting sense of self and overall well-being.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY**

- GI: Gender Incongruence
- GNC: Gender Non-Conforming
- TGNC: Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming
- WPATH: World Professional Association for Transgender Health
- GIC: Gender Identity Clinic
- SOC: Standards of Care
- HRT: Hormone Replacement Therapy
- GAHT: Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy
- SRS: Sex Reassignment Surgery
- GAS: Gender Affirming Surgery
- GCS: Gender Confirmation Surgery
- MHP: Mental Health Provider

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**APPENDIX B**

**Table 2 Considerations for Culturally Sensitive & Insensitive Transgender Terminology**

<b>TERMS TO AVOID</b>	<b>USE INSTEAD</b>
Ftm/Mtf	Trans man or transgender man/trans woman or transgender woman
Top/bottom surgery	Gender affirming or reconstructive chest/genital surgery
Sex change / reassignment	Gender affirmation/ confirmation/ transition
Pre/post/non op	Transition
Biological/physiological/genetic/natal sex Born a man/woman ( <i>unless used in purely medical context</i> )	Assigned/presumed/designated sex <i>at birth</i>
Biological female/male	AFAB or FAAB/ AMAB or MAAB
Transgendered individual/ transgender	Transgender person/people
Desired/preferred/lived gender	Authentic gender
Gender identity disorder	Gender dysphoria/ incongruence
Identifies as	Is a
Trans rights	Equality and acceptance for people who are transgender
Passing/stealth	Perceived as
Transsexual/ transgenderist/ transvestite/ trans-masculine/ cross-dresser/ drag	Pejorative terms, no longer in use. Avoid unless the person self-identifies with any of these terms.

**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Interview Topic: Exploring the Shifting Sense of Personal, Social, and Cultural Self in a Transitioning FTM Person**

**Introduction:**

Thank you, X, for participating in this interview. The purpose of this conversation is to better understand your experiences as a transitioning FTM (female-to-male) person and how your sense of personal, social, and cultural self has evolved throughout your journey. Your insights will contribute to a broader understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by individuals who are transitioning. Please feel free to share as much or as little as you are comfortable with, and remember that your privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

*Personal Identity:*

- a) Can you briefly describe your personal journey of realizing your gender identity and deciding to transition? How did you become aware of your gender dysphoria or discomfort with your assigned gender at birth?
- b) How has transitioning impacted your sense of personal identity? In what ways has it changed or solidified your understanding of who you are?

*Social Identity:*

- a) How have your relationships with family, friends, and significant others changed during your transition? Are there any specific challenges or positive experiences you'd like to share?

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b) Have you encountered any difficulties in navigating social spaces, such as school, workplace, or public places, as a transitioning individual? How have you coped with or overcome such challenges?

### *Support Systems:*

a) Who have been your key sources of support during your transition? Could be family members, friends, support groups, medical professionals, or others. How have they influenced your experience?

b) Have you encountered any difficulties or lack of support from people who were previously part of your life? How have you coped with such experiences?

### *Romantic Relationships:*

a) How has transitioning impacted your romantic relationships, both past and present? Have you experienced changes in attraction, relationship dynamics, or the way you connect with your partners?

b) Have you faced any unique challenges or obstacles in maintaining or forming romantic relationships as a transitioning FTM person? How have you navigated these challenges?

c) How supportive have your romantic partners been during your transition? Have they actively participated in your journey, such as accompanying you to medical appointments or offering emotional support?

d) Have you encountered any difficulties or had any experiences where your transitioning status became a source of strain or conflict within a romantic relationship? How have you addressed or resolved such situations?

### *Disclosure and Communication:*

a) How do you approach disclosing your transgender identity to potential or current romantic partners? What factors influence your decision to disclose or not disclose?

b) How has communication played a role in your romantic relationships during your transition? Have there been any specific instances where effective communication has helped you and your partner navigate the changes together?

### *Cultural Identity:*

a) In what ways has transitioning affected your cultural identity? Has it changed your relationship with your ethnic, religious, or other cultural communities? Please elaborate on any specific experiences or observations.

b) How have you engaged with or sought support from cultural or community resources during your transition? Have you encountered any unique barriers or sources of strength in this aspect?

### *Emotional and Psychological Changes:*

a) How has your overall emotional well-being and mental health been affected throughout your transition? Have you noticed any shifts in your self-confidence, self-esteem, or emotional resilience?

b) Have you sought professional help, such as therapy or counselling, to support your mental health during your transition? If yes, what role has it played in your journey?

### *Reflections on the Future:*

a) How do you envision your future as a transitioning FTM person? Are there any specific goals or aspirations you have for yourself?

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b) What advice or insights would you share with other individuals who are considering or undergoing a gender transition?

*Closing:*

Thank you once again for sharing your experiences and insights with us. Your input will be valuable in fostering a better understanding of the shifting sense of personal, social, and cultural self in transitioning FTM people. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss before we conclude the interview?