



MANUAL

TRANSILIENCE

Social resilience

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INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by social resilience?

Resilience means the ability to cope with stress, uncertainty, and setbacks, and even view these as opportunities for personal growth.

Social resilience refers to the ability to stand up for oneself, rely on, and feel connected to a supportive network. It also includes seeking professional help when needed (for example, when experiencing violence).

For transgender individuals, the connection with others is often under pressure due to experiences of discrimination, violence, prejudice, and stigma. Some may isolate themselves as a result and avoid certain places or social situations. Social resilience can help reduce certain barriers—such as initiating contact with others or seeking help.

What is its importance for our target group?

Transgender youth often have few or no transgender individuals in their personal network to relate to or exchange experiences with. Their gender identity and expression are also frequently questioned or disapproved of by important people in their immediate environment. As a result, transgender youth may sometimes "adapt" to their surroundings: they suppress their gender identity, which can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, guilt, shame, etc.

For this reason, in this module, we focused on organizing opportunities for transgender youth to share experiences, allowing them to get to know each other, but also themselves, better. Additionally, we worked with them to find ways to overcome various social barriers (such as daring to be oneself in public, coming out at school or work, standing up for oneself, etc.).

Approach of the module

To strengthen the social resilience of transgender youth, we developed several workshops. We based these on the input from youth gathered during a co-creation session and relevant literature. We also engaged in conversations with various experts: speech therapists, a stylist, staff from the Care Center for Sexual Violence (UZ Gent), and from the Hate Crime Desk. They later took on a coaching role within the project.

Input from the co-creation session

After a broad brainstorming session on the different forms of resilience, the youth collectively thought about what they wanted to learn or explore within each module. For the module on social resilience, this led to the following results:

I want to create/adjust social scripts so that I know what to say and how to behave in different situations.

I want to have enough self-confidence to be able to be myself...

I want to break stereotypes within myself and others

I want to meet others like me...

I want to participate in activities that are outside my comfort zone and thus push my boundaries.

Conclusion

Based on their input, we developed a group program. In the first phase, the focus was primarily on voice as part of gender expression. For this, we collaborated with the speech therapy team at UZ Gent. Additionally, in partnership with the Hate Crime Desk and the Care Center for Sexual Violence, we organized an informative session on seeking help when becoming a victim of violence. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the youth were allowed to bring a trusted person to this session.

After receiving feedback from the youth that the social resilience module was too narrowly focused on voice, we added a workshop on makeup and one on fashion as part of gender expression in the second phase. In both phases, we also invited a transgender woman to share her personal experience of her social and medical transition. The participants found her testimony valuable, although they expressed a preference for hearing multiple testimonies.

Finally, we organized a karaoke session to encourage the youth to use their voices in front of others and to strengthen the sense of community.

SCRIPT



SESSION OVERVIEW

Session 1: Voice as part of your gender expression (1)

Session 2: Voice as part of your gender expression (2)

Session 3: Testimony of social transition

Session 4: Karaoke

Session 5: Styling and makeup as part of your gender expression

General objectives within this module

- Give transgender youth the opportunity to meet each other in a safe environment to exchange experiences.
- Encourage transgender youth to talk about the barriers they face in different social contexts (work, school, leisure, etc.).
- Assist transgender youth with their self-acceptance (for example, by setting realistic goals regarding their voice).
- Provide transgender youth the opportunity to explore their gender expression through voice, makeup, clothing, etc.
- Empower transgender youth by informing them about their rights.
- Reduce the threshold to professional support by organizing joint information sessions (for example, on gender-based violence in collaboration with the Hate Crime Desk and the Care Center for Sexual Violence).

Before you start...

What follows is a description of the sessions we have delivered.

This is intended purely as inspiration. Therefore, feel free to adapt things while keeping in mind the context in which you are working, as well as the questions and needs of your participants.

Be sure to also read our guidelines for helpers and those regarding autism-friendly work, which we have developed based on our experiences within TRANSILIENCE. You can download them via the following link: www.uzgent.be/transilience.

SESSION 1: VOICE AS PART OF YOUR GENDER EXPRESSION – PART 1

People speak to communicate thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others.

Your voice is part of your identity. The tone, intonation, and volume of a voice can reveal a lot about a person, such as their age, gender, self-confidence, etc. But is this always accurate? People tend to associate the sound of a voice with personal traits. They do this based on previous experiences and prejudices that are strongly linked to the prevailing norms in society. However, sometimes a person's voice doesn't match how they feel. In such cases, a voice can feel like a necessary evil that you face every day.

In our voice sessions, we wanted to help transgender youth embrace their voice (color) and encourage them to use it and stand up for themselves. We helped them set realistic voice goals for themselves. We introduced them to different voice tones, intonations, and pitches so they could more easily accept their own voice and learn to use it in various social settings. We also made time to share experiences (such as being misgendered) with each other. These sessions were inspired by the book 'Stem in transitie' by Stefanie Van Moen.

Materials

- Name tags, joker cards (see attachment, and guidelines on autism friendly working), post-its, writing materials
- Anatomy models
- Handouts for relaxation exercises
- Voice hygiene cards

Program overview

- 1) How does our voice apparatus work?
- 2) Characteristics of the voice
- 3) Everyone listens differently
- 4) Voice care
- 5) Relaxation and breathing exercises
- 6) Needs and wishes regarding the voice
- 7) How reliable are online exercises?

Welcome

Always meet at the same location, even if the session venue changes. This ensures predictability. Greet participants or pick them up to go to the room together.

Always start your session in the same way, for example, by having participants write their name on a name tag, offering them a drink, and reviewing the program together.

Also, refer to our "Guidelines for Autism-Friendly Work" for more information on setting up a workshop.

1) How does our voice apparatus work?

This part of the session focuses on informing participants about the function of the voice apparatus. This is an important component as it can help them in managing their voice during transition. They will learn how the voice apparatus produces sounds and which factors can influence this process. This way, they gain more insight into how the voice apparatus works and how a potential surgery can bring about changes. Below is an example of the information that can be presented in this session.

2) Characteristics of the voice

The basic sound of our voice is colored and amplified as it passes through various body cavities (oral, throat, and chest cavities). This is called **resonance**. Resonance includes both the vibration and the transmission and amplification of the voice sound. In each person, the vibration of the air is amplified differently because everyone's body structure is unique (think of the difference in soundbox and volume between a violin and a cello).

Everyone has a unique **voice timbre**, which is partly due to the fact that our resonance cavities vary in shape and size (also between men and women). Depending on where the sounds vibrate the most, we speak of a 'nasal' or 'throaty' timbre.

The voice is not only formed by the length and thickness of the vocal cords but also by the muscles of the lips, tongue, and mouth. Our bone structure also creates 'soundboxes' that amplify the voice sound. Our entire body can actually be compared to an instrument that generates a different type of sound for each of us. The good news is that you can adjust your personal musical instrument to produce a sound that truly fits you.



ATTENTION

It is important to always work with certified speech therapists during this session who have experience with the target group or have previously worked on feminizing and/or masculinizing the voice.

REFLECTION OF THE COACHES

- *From our sessions, it became clear that the participants especially appreciated seeing the voice apparatus visualized. For this, we primarily used video material and anatomical resources.*
- *The participants felt it was important that the focus was on practical tips rather than too much theory or technical information.*
- *They also appreciated the opportunity to ask questions themselves and exchange tips with others.*

3) Everyone listens differently

It is common for transgender people, influenced by stereotypical thinking in our society about how a man or a woman should sound, to become fixated on their voice and set unrealistic goals for themselves. The purpose of this section is to break these stereotypes and help participants adjust their expectations.

Exercise 1: Measuring the Voice Range

It is explained how to measure your vocal range (the distance between the lowest and highest note one can sing) and how, in recent years, there has been a shift away from the idea that a woman's voice or a man's voice should fall within a specific range (measured in hertz).

Exercise 2: Atypical Voice Sounds

Play various video clips of singers, media personalities, etc., with atypical voice sounds. First, play them without visuals and ask participants to note what comes to mind with each clip. Then, play the different clips consecutively.

Ask them the following questions:

- *What do you think now that you see the clip?*
- *Does this match what you wrote down? Why or why not?*
- *Does this influence how you view your own voice?*

Explain that in the past, it was believed that a woman's voice should sound high and delicate, while a man's voice should be deep and low. However, this is gradually changing.

Also, tell them that a voice is often judged based on pitch, but there are other aspects as well, such as volume, pauses, melody, etc.

Homework assignment: Listen to different voices on the radio or TV.

Which qualities of these voices do you find pleasant, and which less so?

Try to describe these qualities. Then, you can try to integrate these qualities into your own voice.

3) Voice care

If you want to work on your voice, it's important to do so in the right way and also take care of your voice. Below is an example.

Exercise 1:

For this exercise, participants work in small groups.

Each group receives 3 cards with pictures of things that are good or bad for your voice.

The participants look at the images and discuss what they think is good or bad for the voice. Afterwards, they turn the cards over (the answers are on the back).

Below you'll find the correct answers.

Good for the voice:

- Water
- Sleep + vocal rest
- Inhaler / humidifying air
- Healthy Food vs. greasy Food
- Exercise
- Healthy eating
- Throat lozenges / honey
- Tea

Straining for the voice:

- Chili pepper (spicy food)
- Yelling
- Dust, air conditioning
- Coffee
- Fruit juice and soda
- Whispering
- Greasy food
- Alcohol

5) Relaxation and breathing exercises

In addition to voice care, relaxation exercises and proper breathing are also very important. For the following exercise, participants will also work in small groups. Each group will receive several cards with relaxation exercises described on them, along with a photo. First, give the participants some time to figure out how to perform the exercises. Afterward, the voice coach will go around to offer guidance or provide tips where needed.

Exercise on relaxed breathing:

Ask the participants to place their hand on their stomach. Now, breathe in and out deeply together. Encourage them to breathe in and out only through their stomach.

6) Needs and wishes regarding the voice

At the end of the session, time was set aside for participants to write down any questions they might have regarding the session, voice surgery, voice exercises, or other topics related to the voice.

These questions were placed in a jar and then read aloud one by one.

Below is a selection of the questions:

Practical questions about speech therapy and voice surgery (How? Where? Cost?)

Singing after testosterone (how to manage your new vocal range, both when speaking and singing)

Can you practice on your own, or is it better to do this with guidance?

How long does it typically take to notice changes in your voice (after hormones, after voice therapy)?

Does the anatomy of the vocal apparatus change with hormone use?

How do you deal with speech anxiety and gender dysphoria related to your voice?

How reliable are online exercises?

SESSION 2: VOICE AS PART OF YOUR GENDER EXPRESSION - PART 2

In this session, we will dive deeper into the questions that participants noted during session 1 and perform various voice exercises.

The participants will be divided into 2 groups, with one group focusing on feminization of the voice and the other on masculinization of the voice. Under the guidance of a speech therapist, participants will learn how to make their voice sound higher or lower while maintaining controlled speech.

Materials

- Exercise bundles
- Straws
- Corks
- Lax Vox tubes and bottles
- VR set
- Dilemma cards
- Dixit play cards

Program overview

- 1) Warm-up with flow ball
- 2) Carousel of exercises
- 3) Discussion of online practice material
- 4) Discussing obstacles

1) Warm-up with flow ball

With a flow-ball (photo on the right), you can perform various breathing exercises, including practicing a steady exhalation, as well as improving your lung capacity.



Exercise 1

Participants blow evenly through the straw and try to make their ball hover about 5 cm above the basket. To ensure the ball maintains a constant height and doesn't fall off the basket, they must control the descent of the ball when exhaling. This exercise helps to control your breathing.

Exercise 2

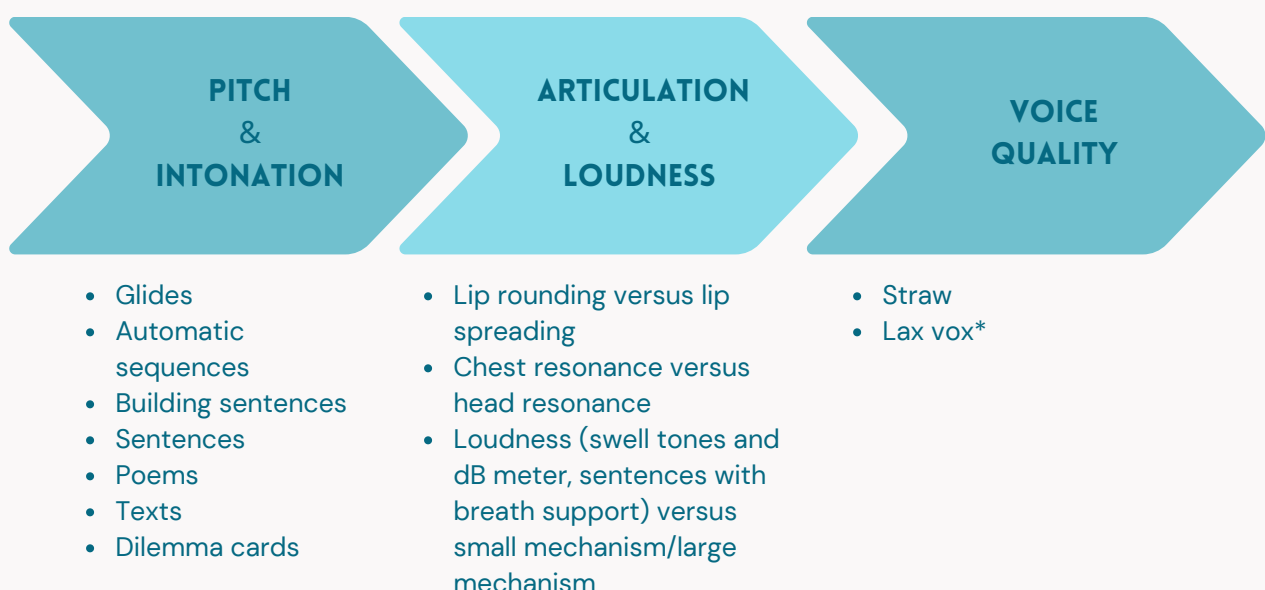
In this exercise, participants need to blow their ball even higher (20 cm). To achieve this, they must gradually blow harder and then softer through the straw.

Exercise 3

During the final exercise, participants need to blow into the straw in such a way that the ball moves up and down without falling into the basket.

2) Carousel of exercises

The participants are divided into two groups. One group practices voice feminization exercises, and the other practices voice masculinization exercises. Exercises focus on pitch, intonation, articulation, volume, and voice quality. Below is an overview of the exercises:



Below we have written out two exercises. Of course, it is best to work with a specialized speech therapist for these.

Exercise 1

Gliding to a lower pitch. You will receive visual feedback via AmPitch, a speech analysis tool (see below). Pay close attention to the green line. This will give you an idea of how your pitch changes over time.

Glijtonen



Automatische reeksen

Zeg telkens eerst mmmm...op je nieuwe toonhoogte vóór elke uiting.

Dus: mmmm 1, 2, 3 ...



Dit klinkt nog niet volledig natuurlijk.
We experimenteren met de stem en
exploreren de mogelijkheden ☺

Let op: zorg dat je toon op het einde
van je uiting niet plots daalt.

Exercise 2

maan ↗ dag

dins ↗ dag

woens ↗ dag

donder ↗ dag

vrij ↗ dag

zater ↗ dag

zon ↗ dag

jan ↗ uari

febr ↗ uari

ma ↗ art

apr ↗ il

m ↗ ei

jun ↗ i

jul ↗ i

aug ↗ ustus

sep ↗ tember

ok ↗ tober

no ↗ vember

de ↗ cember

Splits deze woorden en
eindig het woord met
een hogere stem

Houd je wangen
ontspannen!

3) Discussion of online practice material

The young people were asked to send online tutorials in advance, which were then analyzed and discussed by the speech therapists. The goal was to help them distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources, but also to prevent them from losing hope or developing unrealistic expectations regarding the outcomes of speech therapy or voice-affirming surgery after watching those videos. In the end, only one video was submitted. The speech therapists explained that the person in the video was further along in their transition process, and the exercises shown were too advanced for beginners. Later, the participants mentioned that this really helped them adjust their expectations.

4) Discussing obstacles

The participants are divided into small groups and share the obstacles they face when trying to use their voice.

Here are some examples of questions you could use to start this conversation:

How do you deal with situations where you are misgendered based on your voice?

Do you have tips for others on how to control their voice in stressful situations?

What could help you overcome your shame of speaking in public?

Afterward, you can open up the conversation to the whole group and exchange tips on overcoming speech anxiety.

SESSION 3: TESTIMONY OF SOCIAL TRANSITION

Testimonials are very valuable. However, ensure as much diversity as possible in the stories so that as many participants as possible can relate to them. This helps with their self-acceptance. If you can't find anyone to testify, there are many video testimonies available online, for example on lumi.be or gendervonk.be.

We would also like to mention the videos made within our Digital Storytelling module, which can be found on our [YouTube channel](#). In the first phase, our participants created a short fictional film, and in the second phase, they conducted short interviews to delve deeper into the various themes subtly addressed in the film, such as social anxiety, microaggressions, coming out, and gender expression.

To prepare for this session, we asked our participants to send in some questions in advance, directed at our witness:

What steps did you take regarding your voice?

Do you feel safe in (big) cities? How was this for you before your transition?

Do you find it difficult to speak with a higher voice all the time?

Do you experience any side effects from the hormones?

Do you always correct others when they misgender you?

Did you feel the need for a queer community, and if so, how did you find one?

SESSION 4: KARAOKE

As a closing activity, we organized a karaoke session. This gave participants the opportunity to put into practice what they had learned (about breathing, voice control, masculinization or feminization of the voice, etc.). They also learned how to manage their fear of using their voice in public within a safe setting. Additionally, singing together contributed to group cohesion.

Material

- Karaoke set

Ask your participants in advance what barriers they anticipate regarding the karaoke session. For our participants, these were:

I find it exciting to meet new people.

I am afraid of having to sing in front of others (whom I don't know well yet).

I find it scary to enter the karaoke room alone.

I'm afraid my favorite songs won't be available.

To address these concerns, we took the following measures:

- We rented a karaoke box and organized a private session.
- We asked participants to submit their song choices in advance and checked if their selections were available.
- We scheduled a meet-up a little earlier to have a drink together and get to know each other better (the karaoke session was also open to participants from other modules).
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REFLECTION OF THE COACHES

Through the karaoke session, we wanted to encourage participants to overcome other barriers as well (besides using their voice in public), such as going somewhere alone or meeting people they don't know well. Unfortunately, the first karaoke bar we booked was part of a huge complex where other activities were taking place. For several participants, the overwhelming number of stimuli and people proved to be too much. As a result, we decided to rent a separate space for the second session, as even among group members, the barrier to singing karaoke was still very high.

Our decision to have the participants create a playlist in advance during the second phase turned out to be a great success. This helped avoid stress around "will my song be included?" and prevented any awkward pauses between songs.



SESSION 5: STYLING AND MAKEUP AS PART OF YOUR GENDER EXPRESSION

For this session, we collaborated with an experienced personal stylist who regularly works with our target group. She provided our young participants with tips on how to achieve a more feminine, masculine, or androgynous expression through makeup and/or clothing. The approach was accessible and budget-friendly. Below is a brief overview of both sessions.

Workshop 1: Styling as part of your gender expression

Many transgender individuals are searching for a style that aligns with how they feel internally. Some struggle with the fact that others often think in binary terms, while they feel more comfortable with an androgynous expression. Others may want to dress more masculinely one day and more femininely the next. It also became clear that they struggle with "assuming" (making assumptions about someone's gender based on how they dress or behave). While clothing can sometimes be a source of frustration (due to assumptions, as well as the fact that fashion collections are still often highly gendered), it is also a way to achieve a certain body image and often one of the first steps people take in their social transition.

Shopping itself can be a frustrating and even traumatic experience for many trans people. Think about the division between men's and women's sections, gendered fitting rooms, the fear of being outed against your will, confronting your own body in the mirror, not being able to find clothes or shoes in the right size, etc. Having guidance from a personal stylist who helps you find brands, clothing, and colors that suit you can be a solution.

Since a transition already brings with it many costs, we asked our stylist how small, budget-friendly adjustments can achieve certain effects and how you can gradually adapt your style to better align with your gender identity. Below is an overview of the topics discussed and some tips.

1) Color

People often choose black clothing because it is a safe choice: black works for any occasion and is easy to combine. However, wearing bright colors can have a positive impact on your mental well-being. It can make you feel happier, more confident, and more energetic. Therefore, try to choose color more often, even during the darker winter months.

Colors unconsciously evoke associations in us. For example, navy blue, black, and gray appear businesslike, safe, and reliable. Bright colors, on the other hand, look powerful, confident, and creative. These are great choices for parties, dates, or taking on a new professional challenge (though the choice of clothing may depend on the industry). Beige and pastel colors, meanwhile, look soft, approachable, and calm. These colors are also very suitable when working with children, youth, or in caregiving professions. Since the colors of your clothes communicate so much, it is important to consider which color combinations you wear and what message you want to convey to others.



TIPS

- If you prefer to play it safe, combine a black piece of clothing with another item in a bright or soft color.
- Limit yourself to a maximum of 3 colors per outfit (different shades of the same color count as one color).
- There are 4 types: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Your type is unchangeable and depends on the color of your skin, hair, and eyes.
- In Belgium, people are usually either "pink" (summer/winter) or "yellow" (spring/autumn) types. Each type pairs well with different colors.
- To find out which colors suit you, hold them up to your face. What effect do they have? Do you look more energized, or do you appear paler? Certain colors (such as fuchsia and royal blue) suit every type.
- For accessories and shoes, it's better to choose a neutral color or one that appears in your outfit.
- When selecting belts and shoes, it's best to choose the same color.

2) How to achieve a more feminine style?

- Limit yourself to one oversized garment per outfit; otherwise, you might end up with a boxy silhouette, which can look more masculine. For example, pair loose trousers with a fitted t-shirt, or combine skate pants with a feminine-looking shoe and a halter top.
- When choosing clothes, it's also important to consider the fabric. Non-elastic synthetic fabrics don't move easily with your body. You might be tempted to buy a larger size, but these pieces often fit too loosely in other areas.
- A garment with tailoring creates a more feminine silhouette.
- Shiny fabrics often look more feminine and dressier, while thick, sturdy fabrics tend to look more business-like.

CAMOUFLAGE YOUR BELLY

By using high-waisted trousers or skirts in a sturdy fabric (e.g., jeans).

A V-neck helps to visually narrow the upper body.

Tuck your top into your trousers and pull it out slightly to create a "puff effect," which helps to camouflage a possible belly. The same goes for pleats around the belly area.

Shift the focus to your waist by wearing your belt slightly higher or using prints in that area.

Wear soft, light fabrics.

Don't button cardigans or jackets all the way up; this way, you can wear a smaller size, allowing the garment to sit at your waist, making you look slimmer

LEG LENGTH

Women generally have relatively longer legs than men.

You can visually elongate your legs by:

- Wearing short tops
- Not folding pants
- Avoiding $\frac{3}{4}$ pants
- Choosing high-rise and skinny styles, which also appear longer

An A-line and pants with wide legs (elephant leg pants) look more feminine.

EYE CATCHERS

Prints attract attention. So, pay attention to their placement on the clothing.

A belt also draws attention and can be worn intentionally either higher or lower.

A long necklace makes you appear slimmer. It can end at the belly, chest area, or somewhere in between, drawing attention to that spot.

SHOULDERS

Thin straps will visually broaden the shoulders, and vice versa. So, it's better to avoid spaghetti straps if you don't want to accentuate your shoulders.

A boat neck broadens and looks more masculine.

A round neck or V-neck is more feminine.

Depending on where the shoulder seam sits, you can create a different optical effect. For a more feminine look, choose a seam that falls on the shoulder rather than a dropped shoulder line.

FEMININE MODELS IN BIGGER SIZES

Italian and Spanish brands run small.

German and Dutch brands are generally larger.

The brands Only and Pieces also offer plus sizes and are budget-friendly.

In Belgium, larger shoe sizes can be found at Jules Schoenen in Boom, Schoenen Reyskens in Genk, and Spartoo (online).

HOW TO MAKE LARGE FEET APPEAR SMALLER?

Shoes with laces and/or different colors tend to make feet look smaller. Sneakers that are entirely white and lack laces, on the other hand, can make feet appear larger.

Choose shoes and pants in the same color if you want to appear taller.

Round-toe shoes make your feet look shorter, while pointed-toe shoes make them appear longer.

If you're tall, opt for a finer model of sneaker rather than a shoe with a heel.

3) How to achieve a more masculine style?

Where the focus in feminizing style is on accentuating the hips and curves, for men, the focus is on creating an angular silhouette. This is because the societal ideal for men typically consists of narrow hips and broad shoulders.

SHOULDERS

You can visually broaden your shoulders by using:

- A round collar
- A collar that sits close to the neck

LEGS

Do you want to appear taller but are relatively short?

- Avoid folding your pants (or only fold them inward).
- Wear shorter tops.
- Avoid heavy fabrics.
- Know that there are also invisible insoles available for men.
- Wearing one color from head to toe makes you appear taller.

Choose wider pants, as skinny models tend to look more feminine.

Workshop 2: Make-up as part of your gender expression

In this workshop, which was primarily focused on trans women, participants received a demonstration on how to apply makeup in a natural way, including techniques to camouflage shadows caused by facial hair growth.

Their feedback afterward was that they found it interesting to learn about this, but felt that it seemed like too much work to integrate into their daily routine. For some, it was still a bridge too far at this point, and they felt more comfortable experimenting with clothing.



ATTACHMENT: JOKER CARDS

