

How Social Media Fuels the Transgender Social Contagion

Being a pre-teen or teen girl was hard enough 20 years ago. Now? Girls are inundated with online content drawing their attention and insecurities toward their bodies. Far from only being told they don't have the right face shape or hair color, girls are now told their very female figure is something to reject.

Online videos gather millions of views and push young girls toward transgenderism. Look no further than [this example](#) boasting nearly two million views. Speaking the visual language of kids, the cartoon was created five years ago and has garnered over a hundred thousand likes. From the YouTube channel Jellie's World, the video is titled "Chest Binding," and that's exactly what it teaches impressionable girls to do.

Depicting the magical thinking of a preteen girl willing away unwanted attention, the video captures disgust with female puberty as the main character's enchanted mirror reflects the torso of a male body builder. And despite depicting binding as excruciating, the cartoon convinces kids of the impossibility of not binding. The animation objectifies breasts by comically transforming them into cute little dancing pancakes suddenly rolled flat by a chef and then worn like a necklace. The breasts figure as removable objects suspended around the neck.

Girls who are self-conscious over their bodies are drawn into this content. The comment section celebrates binding and being transgender with girls confessing that this type of video pulled them into becoming trans.



@ [redacted] 3 years ago

Me a year ago: *Oblivious to what chest binding is and so confused*

Me now: *Knows that I am a trans male and uses a binder*

👍 971 🗨️ Reply

▼ 10 replies

Indeed, peer influence is a major factor for the huge uptick in cross-sex identification today, and it's not without its consequences. Since 2018, when Lisa Littman first put forward the social contagion hypothesis, her work has been confirmed by [findings](#) that suggest social transitioning (including binding) only adds to the problems these young people face: "According to the parents, AYA [adolescents and young adults] children's mental health deteriorated considerably after social transition."

Adding to the social contagion aspect, these online videos use humor to sketch the coming-of-age struggles of viewers. The style is pitched perfectly to resonate appealingly by disarming social anxiety with humor. And as research [shows](#), "previously-viewed content is often chosen to re-watch because of the specific moods it will produce." Re-watching and commenting on the Jellie's World video are two modes of internalizing content, and the comment section shows kids offering social proof for binding. One fan writes how watching and rewatching the video convinced her she was transgender, and she's only one of many in the comments with this story.



@ [redacted] 2 years ago (edited)

Me rewatching this video over and over again: "I'm a cis girl guys!!! Totally not trans!!!"

Me now that i know I'm a trans man: "...still a good vid...know what not to do..."

Update: GOT MY FIRST BINDER!!! IT WORKS LIKE A CHARM AND I'M SO HAPPY 😊

👍 14 🗨️ Reply

The YouTube algorithm seems to push this content onto unsuspecting viewers. Comments below the video record the surprise of those getting the video in their feeds:



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

Jokes on you
This video was recommended on me

👍 1 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

My algorithm is feeding my gender dysphoria

👍 1 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

Damn 🐱 i came here running 😊

👍 1 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

I got recommended this for no reason-

👍 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

Ok but for real tho.
it was in my recommended, andd... I'm a bit curious now. 😊

👍 1 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

you dont know how i found this video, because i dont know either

👍 🗨️ Reply



@ [redacted] 1 year ago

But binders 😊 why not

👍 🗨️ Reply

Jellie's World seems to have a mesmerizing impact on girls, letting them in on the secret world of binding as a way to transform reality. As these young girls become convinced that they are actually boys and begin to bind, they risk not only their mental health but also their physical health. Binders use extremely compressive material that redistributes breast

tissue to the sides. It may seem innocuous—temporary and reversible—but it actually can be quite dangerous.

Jellie confesses to causing numbness in her breasts, a result of nerve damage. That experience leads Jellie to recommend “proper” binders. While this may be the universal default from activists, commercial binders are actually worse than their counterparts, according to [research](#) in which nearly all participants experienced binding injuries and commercial binder injuries were among the worst. Those binding injuries ranged from chest and back pain to fractured ribs, shoulder joint popping, and numbness.

Even the mainstream media are pushing the idea of binding onto anyone willing to listen. The catch-22 *New York Times* headline [“It’s Binding or Suicide”](#) provides first-hand testimony of the double bind those practicing binding long-term experience. Nineteen-year-old John Gendron explains, “I feel like I’m chained to my binder in a lot of ways because as horrible as my experiences are, I don’t feel like I have the option to stop.”

Describing binding as being “caught in a lose-lose situation,” Gendron draws this connection: “I’m looking into top surgery far earlier than I wanted to simply because I’m sick of putting myself in pain first thing in the morning.” What of the young people who feel similarly pushed toward irreversible surgery?

Seeking the innocence of a pre-pubescent world, these girls are misled. Viewers see encouragement to “bind safely,” suggesting they can sidestep all dangers by adhering to a few unproven online tips. When in reality, they are being led down a dark path of psychological and physical pain.

—

Image credit: [Pexels](#)