

Live true: My transgender life in adland

By [Sienna Lee](#), issued by [Brave Group](#)

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I'm a 39-year-old mixed-race transgender female. I am transgender because of a condition called Gender Dysphoria, which causes a discrepancy between a person's physical sex and their gender ID. When the two are in equilibrium, the term for that person is cisgender. Medical science currently has no reason as to what causes Gender Dysphoria. Transgender people are trans by nature, it's not a lifestyle choice. Although I was assigned male at birth, I identify as female. My pre-transition life was me pretending to be a guy, failing at it every day and in turn being made miserable for 36 years.

Having grown up in the '80s and '90s, trans people weren't portrayed in a positive light. What little exposure there was, was monstrous. Think of the film *The Crying Game*. It was also filled with mockery and humiliation, and when I think of this, I'm reminded of Chandler's constantly ridiculed transgender mother in the TV sitcom *Friends*.

Aside from the fear of coming out to my parents, I wondered what toll this would take on my career. I was self-employed at the time at a small agency called 1 Tight Ship. My business partner, fiercely supportive, gave me the encouragement I needed in those early days. As fate would have it, it was just the two of us in a shared office building. I found I had a chrysalis of sorts, a safe space to bloom and present as my preferred gender. The day I walked out my front door, make-up on my face and a skirt hanging off my skinny, awkward frame, I felt a sense of calm wash over me and rightfully so. This is the real me. I lived my life and was now happy for it, because the weight of not being my true self was being lifted off my shoulders.



Sienna Lee - a Brave Group graphic designer

Transition is like an endless mountain to climb, but with everything overwhelming in life, break it down into smaller pieces. Take it a step at a time and at your own pace. Transitioning is not a race. There's no right or wrong way to approach it and you do what's comfortable for you because you are doing this for yourself.

Back at the office, my major concern was can I use the shared female bathroom? Should I stick a sign on the door to warn cisgender women when I'm in there? My business partner loudly exclaimed it is not Nazi Germany, you are under no obligation to explain who you are. So, I used the bathroom and that was the anticlimactic end of the story.

I left this agency a few months later and began work at More, one of the biggest agencies I had worked for. In my CV, I list that I am a transgender female. I do this for reasons of personal safety. Gender Dysphoria still makes me feel like I don't look feminine, even though I had been on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) for about a year and never really had the stereotypical broad, heavysset male features to begin with. My voice gives me away... which is why I am often quiet. But regardless of the sound of my voice, it is my female voice because I am female. Management and HR at More were very supportive, and I experienced no transphobic or bigoted behavior in my three-month period working there.

I moved on to Fairly Famous where I was embraced like a much-loved family member, I had never felt more at home. It sadly came to an end too soon and it reaffirmed how fortunate I was to have been part of companies that are

compassionate and understanding of my ongoing transition.

It is sometimes daunting to see past everything else one is feeling or experiencing because of Gender Dysphoria, but the acceptance and open-mindedness I've received from my employers has reminded me of my talents and skills.

Transitioning does not change your capabilities. If you are creative, you will still be creative. If you loved chocolate, you still will. If anything, transitioning makes you learn that self-love and self-respect does exist and is *crucial* to our day-to-day functioning, something some cisgender people take for granted. Transitioning simply puts trans people on the same baseline as our cisgender counterparts. The suicide rate in the trans community is disturbingly high because those who don't acknowledge that they are trans are forcing themselves to live a lie which leads to a fragmentation and breakdown of the self.

I worked at two other agencies thereafter and, again, I was acknowledged as my preferred gender. I occasionally received compliments for my outfits. As small as this seems, it remains exhilarating. I think it's easier for people you've just met to treat you as they see you. I found that people who knew you before you transitioned can find it difficult to acknowledge or remember that your packaging has changed and to refer to you in accordance. Exercise patience in these instances.

I'm currently at House of Brave, which is part of Brave Group. I have only experienced one minor issue around being misgendered, but open honest communication is always key if you find yourself in a situation where someone has mistakenly or intentionally offended you. I believe we need to respect each other, regardless of our gender identity, sexual preferences, ethnicity and religion. My journey towards my inherent truth is supported by friends, family; and I have a career amongst progressive thinkers where I can show up and make my work and story do the unexpected.

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