

Winter Clothing Presents Opportunities, Challenges for Gender Expression

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This Week Editor

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As the weather drops down into frigid temperatures, everyone pulls out their coats, hats, and gloves and waddles about their day looking like the Michelin Man (except that one guy named Kyle who always wears shorts).

The androgyny of the season's clothing can be a blessing for individuals who like their style to be perceived as genderless, and many transmasculine students take advantage of the opportunity to cover their curves and cut a more masculine silhouette.

"I dress in varying levels of masculine," College third-year Newt Pulley said. "I don't particularly like things that fit close to my frame. I like things that are looser and more baggy and hide my shape a little bit more. I also like layering things over one another."



College second-year Salem Holter, who likes to blend masculine and feminine styles, spoke about the difficulty of expressing femininity in colder months.

"I like to joke with my friends that I'm femme in the summer and masculine in the winter," Holter said. "I've been trying to incorporate more femme clothes into my winter clothing and vice versa, but it's always really hard because I feel like the more layers, the more gender ambiguous you can be. I find myself dressing more masculine for comfort in the winter, because those are my warmest clothes."

College second-year Cassidy Spencer expressed a preference for tight-fitting clothing for the same reason that transmasculine individuals shy away from it — because it accentuates their feminine features.

"A lot of being perceived as feminine is in body shape and curviness, and baggy clothing, in a lot of ways, serves to hide that," Spencer said. "I really enjoy wearing tight-fitting stuff. I do not enjoy baggy stuff at all, and it's because it doesn't show off my body shape in a way that I like."



Transgender individuals often take great care to curate their presentation, with the goal of finding comfort and confidence in the way others perceive them. For many trans people, the frame created by the clothing on their body works as a gender cue that increases the likelihood they are read as either masculine or feminine, whichever they prefer.

"As an athlete and a swimmer, I've always looked very rectangular, especially with my shoulders, so I often will try to avoid things that will make my shoulders look bigger," second-year Nora Holder said. "I'll avoid things that just make the fabric around my shoulders a lot tighter, and go for things that are looser and kind of avoid definition [around the shoulders] but then bring out definition again around the hips and the waist. For instance, with the outfit I'm currently wearing, I have cinch[ed] the sweater ... and the pants kind of extend out, so it gives my body more of a focus around my hips and helps add more of a shape. ... With being transgender, being able to control the way your body looks can really help you feel comfortable, especially in the winter."

For trans people, accessories often work side by side with the clothing they select to create the looks they want to achieve.

"I found that some days, [I'll wear] an outfit I wouldn't feel particularly feminine in, but once I put on a little bit of makeup — it could just be some eyeshadow, it could be some intense eyeliner with the glitter and the mascara and everything ... even the small bits and pieces help express yourself better," Holder said.

Others' perceptions of a person's gender are not the only factor they weigh in deciding what to wear to best express themselves. Certain items, despite their gendered associations, can help an individual embody traits important to their sense of self.

"A platform shoe is, what I like to say, my instant form of power," Holter said. "Platform shoes, especially my really colorful ones, are often perceived as very feminine. When you dress femme, it's always like the stereotypes [of] feminine [people being] submissive. And for a while I very much was that. My easiest way to come out of it was when I bought my first platform shoe, and I walked around my high school ... I was looking all of these guys who had been homophobic to me and transphobic in the past ... straight in the eye. I was taller than most of them, [and] it was that power moment. It makes me remember that I'm not meek in that way."

