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They/Them

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"They/Them" a thesis film by Vanessa Walker UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism (2016)

Abstract:

Taylor's preferred gender pronouns are they and them. Not she or her. Taylor says that confuses people. At their retail job in Sacramento, sometimes Taylor wears a pin on their shirt that says, "Please use They/Them Pronouns." Taylor says still, that doesn't even work.

Taylor says they've always known they've been part of the LGBTQ spectrum, but was never quite able to express that to other people, or themselves. In early 2015, the gender identity "agender"--neither a man or a woman-- felt more and more *right*. Soon after, they made a video blog on Facebook expressing this gender change to family and friends.

With that, their very public gender transitioning process began. It's a journey that some people, even folks who identify as part of the LGBTQ community themselves, don't understand. What does it mean to be "non-binary?" Taylor takes the audience through that journey in *They/Them* as they begin the process of getting top surgery--the removal of both breasts.

The first time we meet Taylor in this film is in their bathroom. It's early in the morning on a brisk November morning in 2015 in Sacramento. Taylor's getting ready for a top surgery consultation in the Bay Area. Taylor is shaving their face with a disposable razor. It's a seemingly mundane task, but one that is indicative of the many physical changes that have happened since they started taking testosterone earlier in the year.

Taylor's partner, Jenn, walks into the bathroom and they begin a conversation about leg shaving. "How do you like, fucking shave in the shower?" Taylor asks Jenn. "There's no where to put your foot." Later, Taylor talks about how they don't miss the societal pressure of shaving their legs. It's a lighthearted, funny conversation between two best friends, but speaks to the larger picture of the gender norms that exist within societies.

Things take a turn in Taylor's story when it becomes apparent that there are bigger, unexpected challenges that are still to come in the face of their transitioning process. Taylor, who is enthusiastic and proactive about the things

they are passionate about, comes across a few road blocks on in their top surgery journey. At the heart of it?

One phone call.

Source List

- > Taylor B. Harmon, main interviewee, FTM top surgery patient
- Jenn Berry, Taylor's partner
- > Dr. Thomas Satterwhite, Taylor's Surgeon
- > Chris Kent, Sacramento State PRIDE Center Coordinator
- > Genomé Rodriguez, Sacramento State PRIDE Center Staff
- > CJ Platenkamp, Taylor's Friend

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Script

<u>VIDEO</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>AUDIO</u>
Black screen	00:00:01:00- 00:00:02:00	TAYLOR "T.B." HARMON:
	00.00.02.00	Our bodies our not our gender.
Harmon on cam	00:00:03:00- 00:00:20:00	HARMON: So what happens when we're born, is like, seriously someone pulls us out however way. And then they look at our genitalia and they go "it's a girl, it's a boy." And then from then on out we are expected to live our lives based on these gender roles that we have that are assigned to us based on our genitalia.
Harmon on cam washing dishes Shot of house cat Taylor sits at computer screen	00:00:20:00- 00:00:58:00	
Sacramento, California establishing shots People walking down streets, person bikes across the Tower bridge	00:00:59:00- 00:01:09:00	
Harmon's living room Harmon walks into bathroom	00:01:10:00- 00:01:25:00	
Harmon in bathroom Jenn Berry walks out of bedroom	00:01:26:00- 00:01:49:00-	HARMON: Hey Jenn. Can I ask you a weird question? JENN BERRY:

Hmm?
HARMON:
How do you like, fuckin' shave in the shower? There's no where to put your foot.
BERRY:
Talent.
HARMON:
Skill. (pauses) I'm just curious. I'm rather concerned.
BERRY:
Acrobats
HARMON:
(laughs) Acrobats.
BERRY:
Acrobatics?
HARMON:
Yeah.

	1	
Harmon on cam	00:01:50:00- 00:02:45:00	HARMON:
Harmon shaving and getting ready in bathroom.	00.02.43.00	When people talk about the binary, in the context of gender, it means our roles that we accept and acknowledge in our society. They means man or woman. It's those two. So when I say I'm non-binary it means that those aren't the options. I am neither of those options. I am outside of the binary.
		I want to do top surgery. Again, the same thing with the hormones. It's like a no brainer. The really uncomfortable relationship I've had with my body, the female parts of my body. There's absolutely no reason why I shouldn't go along with this.
		If any of my transitioning does not happen, I'm probably going to be devastated.
Fade to black		And this is like an even bigger issue with people who are not trans, who are just like "Oh my God you are going under surgery isn't that scary?"
		I'm like "No!" I am so looking forward to the day I wake up from surgery and they're gone.

Harmon and Berry in living room.	00:02:46:00- 00:03:01:00	HARMON: The suspense is killing me. BERRY: Shaving my legs. HARMON: (Laughs). It's fine, it's fine. I understand. BERRY:
Berry walks into bedroom		So yeah. I put it on the wall, or I lean down. HARMON: I don't miss shaving my legs.
Harmon on Cam Cutaway to both of them at computer desks.	00:03:02:00- 00:03:27:00	HARMON: Jenn is my partner, girlfriend. However we feel like labeling each other at the moment. She and I have been dating for two years almost. Almost two years. She's supported me the whole time. She's kinda like one of those easy to please kind of people. So anywhere from food to my gender identity. I'm like "We're having pizza tonight!" and she's like "Cool" and I'm like "I'm transgender!" and she's like "Okay!"

Berry on cam	00:03:28:00- 00:04:11:00	BERRY:
		Okay!
Fade to black		I mean. When Taylor came out with being non-binary, transgender. I didn't really think much of it. Cause. I mean. Like. That's how they feel. And, you know. It's not me, so I can't be like "Well that's dumb." Because I don't know what their experience and everything like that. So, I'm like. Okay. That's cool. What can you do really?
Fade up from black.	00:04:12:00- 00:05:12:00	HARMON:
Shot of moving car from windshield.	00:05:12:00	There's an accident on I-80 West. Just so you know.
Harmon and Berry on cam		BERRY:
Trainion and Berry on Cam		We are on I-80 West.
		HARMON:
		We are on I-80 West yes we are.
		BERRY:
		So are you excited?
		HARMON:
		For who?
		BERRY:
		Just, are you excited?
		HARMON:
		I don't know. I don't think it's hit me yet. BERRY:
	<u>I</u>	<u>I</u>

		Indifferent?
		HARMON:
		Yeah. Just like. Not that I'm not excited but It's just a consultation.
		BERRY:
		Yeah
		HARMON:
		And like, I probably won't feel anything until we're actually there and I'll probably need to pee. And get my nervous pees out you know.
		BERRY:
		Before you piddle in the seat.
Fade to black		HARMON:
		(Laughs) Oh god. Yeah.
Dr. Thomas Satterwhite on cam	00:05:13:00- 00:05:37:00	DR. THOMAS SATTERWHITE:
	00.05.57.00	Smoking cigarettes. Do you do Nicotine products? No? Any drugs, marijuana?Cocaine? No?
		TAYLOR:
		(Shakes head) I don't even drink. Boring. (Laughs)
		DR. SATTERWHITE:
		Okay great. Well. No!
		The next step is getting a letter. Getting a letter from a mental health therapist.

		Is this the letter? TAYLOR: Yes. I got you! I think there's even two copies of it in case you lose one. DR. SATTERWHITE Perfect!
Dr. Satterwhite on cam	00:05:38:00-00:06:14:00	There's still folks out there who don't understand what it means to be transgender. So that in and of itself is a very difficult thing for folks to understand. And then when you bring into the mix this whole nonbinary thing, their head explodes. Like oh my gosh, what does that mean? I think the problem is a lot of us project our own feelings and ideals and thoughts onto other folks. Like for me what someone says their non binary of gender fluid, it's like, normal. If I can even use that word normal. But it doesn't really bother me. That makes sense to me.
Harmon has back to camera Dr. Satterwhite is examining their chest Cutaway to Berry	00:06:14:00- 00:08:49:05	Dr. Satterwhite: The incision on this side may end up being a little longer than the incision on the right side. But you'll have a nice looking chest. And then dog ears, we

wanna make sure...we won't have too much of a problem actually. But I wanna make sure we get that nice and flat.

HARMON:

Right, thank you.

Dr. Satterwhite:

So with the operation, I make an incision on the lower part of the chest, and I make another incision higher up above the areola. And we take out all that tissue. And it's kind of an ellipse shape. And then I close it so the incision goes along the lower border of the pectoralis muscle. And I think it many ways it accentuates the pectoralis muscle. And I try to go for a straight line incision as well.

And the goal is ultimately to get the most masculine chest possible, right?

HARMON:

I mean. I just want them gone.

Dr. Satterwhite:

Okay.

HARMON:

To be honest, I'm not necessarily looking to pass. I'm actually really excited about my scars. But I think they're going to be such a story. You know what I mean? I'm not really worried about how it's going to look afterwards.

Dr. Satterwhite:

I would say the vast maj--or I won't say the vast majority, but I would say 80 percent of my patients are probably binary in terms of their gender identity. So they say, I need to have the most masculine chest possible. I don't do, like, a cookie cutter thing, that's why I always ask you what you envision your chest looking like.

Harmon:

So, I didn't realize there was like a, variety? I thought it kinda was cookie cutter. I guess it's kinda silly for me to assume. But yeah go ahead and go for masculine.

Everyone laughs.

Dr. Satterwhite:

Cool so I think we're set. So what we'll do is we'll keep this letter and we'll contact your insurance company to verify the benefits.

Harmon:

Do you want my insurance card?

Dr. Satterwhite:

Yes we're going to make a copy of it. I think we're set. So Taylor it's going to be exciting it will be a fun journey. You'll do super well.

Harmon:
Yes and you will too.
Everyone laughs.
Dr. Satterwhite:
Oh thank you.
Harmon:
Do you want us to stay in here?
Dr. Satterwhite:
I think we're done cause we're just gonna step out and and talk to my staff and just make a photocopy and we're set. And expect a phone call from us in about two weeks after we've verified the benefits. And if you don't hear from us in two weeks just give us a call to see what's going on.
Harmon:
Yeah for sure, I know you guys get really busy.
Dr. Satterwhite:
Yeah but there's no reason why you shouldn't get a phone call. In two weeks.
Harmon:
Okay. Thank you.
Dr. Satterwhite:
Thank you for your understanding.
Harmon:

		I'm easy. Dr. Satterwhite: Cool. Anything else? Harmon: No, thank you. Dr. Satterwhite: It's been a pleasure. Harmon: Me too to you too. Dr. Satterwhite: Us to. We two. Harmon: Yes.
Fade up from black Harmon on cam	00:08:54:05- 00:09:48.08	HARMON: So my case, where I am in my own process of gender and transitioning. Is not the case for everybody. Not everybody wants to transition. Not everybody feels the need to transition. And that's totally valid. Transitioning does not come with the transitioning process. There are plenty of trans people

Fade to black		who are non-binary or any other identity and they won't ever touch hormones. They won't ever go in for surgery. And that's valid. But I think a lot of people especially mainstream, we very much so focus on the transitioning part of being transgender. It's just like you don't have to transition to be transgender. You don't even need to want any of it. It's just those are services you can lean on if you so happen to choose them or if you just need them.
Establishing shot of Sacramento State	00:09:50.00- 00:10:00.00	
PRIDE Center staff Chris Kent on cam	00:10:00.00- 00:10:10.00	CHRIS KENT: Our bodies are not our gender. Society treats us that way. Society does treat us or tell us that our bodies are our gender.
Genomé Rodriguez on cam	00:10:10.00- 00:10:40.00	GENOMÉ RODRIGUEZ: From my own personal experience I did want to go on T. Whether I get top surgery I think will depend on how much I can take society's bullshit. I ideally do have dysphoria, top dysphoria, that I would want to get top surgery. But at the same time I want to be able to love the body that I have. So I don't want to get top surgery. Because you know this is what I was given it's just that it's sexualized to a way that I can't be topless in public even though I would love to just take my shirt off.
Kent on cam	00:10:41.00- 00:11:28.12	KENT: I would say for allies that don't

understand. Or don't get it but they
still want to be supportive. One of the things that I think has always been important for me when I don't understand things is to be okay with ambiguities. And you know I think it's helpful when you think of your other identities too and put them in different contexts. As a white person, there are things that happen within communities of color, they're trying to explain things to me and sometimes I'm just not going to get it. It's not part of my experience. And I have to know that that's okay. Even when I tell people like 'Oh I get it. I totally understand. I understand what you're going through.' On multiple occasions I've been told 'No, no you don't.' Laughs. So I think it's just uh, part of your practice. You have to make that part of your practice. Is understanding that um, there are just certain things that you're just not going to get.

Establishing shot of Harmon's apartment.	00:11:28.12- 00:12:08.00	Text on screen:
Establishing shot of Harmon from hallway.		Taylor did not receive a follow-up phone call 2 weeks after the doctor's appointment.
Text on screen		Taylor keeps waiting.
TS of Paco		rayior keeps waiting.
Shot of Harmon's computer	00:12:00.00-	HARMON:
	00:13:19.00	

Establishing shot of Sagramonto	00:12:10 00	And so I took this opportunity to draw myself, in a fantastic fantasy world, witch style with magic and shit and I drew myself transitioned and looking the way that I wanna look. Obviously with my dog. And it's so funny to me in my head it's like 'Yes this is something I wanna do. Witchsona week, imma be transitioned.' And like everybody else, I mean, they were not going through what I was going through. So it was just funny to me that I just posted my shit and I'm like 'WITCHSONA!' and I was really proud of it. Then I saw like everybody else's and I was like 'Oh yeah.' I probably could have done something a little bit more fantasyesk. Which I fine, I'm not like hating myself for it. But it's just funny. To me it's just funny that I was just so transition and the trans stuff that I drew myself looking like this. Yeah it just cracks me up. That' just like a normal looking dude, you know?
Establishing shot of Sacramento underneath a freeway.	00:13:19.00- 00:13:45.00-	It's been three months since Taylor's doctor's appointment.
Text on screen		Taylor hasn't followed-up with the doctor's office yet and they haven't followed up with Taylor, either. Taylor visits a friend.
Establishing shot of Gender	00:13:47.00- 00:15:17.11	HARMON:
Health Center.		Did I tell you? I don't think I told

Harmon is heard talking off camera

Harmon's friend CJ Platenkamp introduced.

The two of them are talking while sitting on a couch.

Fade to black

you about my consultation.

CJ PLATENKAMP:

Nah.

HARMON:

I went and talked to Dr. Satterwhite. It was really cool I was really excited about clam chowder. You know, go to the Bay. Get clam chowder.

PLATENKAMP:

Yeah?

HARMON:

He was awesome. He had fabulous shoes. His shirt was button up. It had paisly on it. This guy.

PLATENKAMP:

This guy's a good surgeon! Laughs.

HARMON:

Laughs.

Yeah he knows what he's--yeah I'm going to trust him with my chest.

But yeah no. I was like super comfortable with him. Like, I haven't gotten any calls yet. And I haven't called them about insurance stuff. They're like, we'll call you in two weeks. And it's been like since November. And I was like

'I gotta follow up with that.' I don't know what I'm gonna do.

PLATENKAMP:

So do you have a surgery date?

HARMON:

No.

They haven't called me to make sure that my insurance is on board with things. They should be. Things should be fine. Right now what's stopping me is like, money.

PLATENKAMP:

Yeah so, you're like waiting for them to get in touch with your insurance?

HARMON:

They should have already gotten in touch with my insurance. I'm waiting for them to tell me what's going on as far as my insurance. So what happens is like, you go to the consultation, and they're like 'Alright, give me your insurance stuff,' your information, your patient stuff your insurance. And then they contact your insurance for you.

PLATENKAMP:

Okay, that's cool.

HARMON:

Then they call you and they go,

		'This is what your insurance says.'
Taylor on cam Video blog Fade to black	00:15:17.11- 00:15:56.11	Yeah, I think it's been a while. Back in November I had my consultation for top surgery. I went to the doctor. And it was awesome. My doctor is really cool. I haven't had any contact with the doctor's office since. I went through some financial struggles where I was doing paycheck to paycheck for a bit and like trying to catch up. I was just like, I'm just not going to call. So they never called me and I never called them. I'm actually going to be calling them pretty soon. I'm actually getting to a point where I'm back on my feet.
Fade up from black Berry on cam Fade to black	00:15:58.11- 00:16:53.00	INTERVIEWER OFF CAM: So, in addition to the money thing, in your opinion, why would someone wait to do such an important thing? BERRY: Why anyone in general would wait? To do something like that? Yeah I would think it's just a matter of being ready. It's like yeah you know you can do it. But it's like some people might come later to thinking this is more or less a permanent thing. This is a major change. Maybe they're just waiting for that moment for when it finally clicks. Sky diving. You're standing there

		looking out this plane. It's like 'Ugh I'm not ready to jump yet.' Until finally it's like, 'Let's go!'
Fade up from black Establishing shot of bridge	00:16:53.00- 00:17:06.00	
Harmon sitting in chair with cell phone in hand	00:17:08.00- 00:17:38.00	Phone rings. VOICE ON LINE: (Actual person)
Taylor waits for over 15 minutes on phone.		Browinstein and Crane, please hold.
Recording occasionally says a recorded line		VOICE ON LINE: (Recording)
ecoraea line		Thank you for holding, we will be with you shortly.
Harmon sitting in chair Waiting music stops	00:17:39.00- 00:18:24.00	HARMON: Hello? Hello? Hello? Please talk to me. Laughs. Mean it's been 17 minutes. Almost 18 minutes. I'm not hanging up.
Harmon sitting in chair They hand up and call back again	00:18:26.00- 00:20:43.00	VOICE ON LINE: Dr. Crane and Dr. Satterwhite's office. This is Courtney. HARMON: Oh Hi. This is Taylor. I had a consultation back in November. Um.

VOICE ON LINE:
Okay. What's your last name?
HARMON:
Harmon. H-A-R-M-O-N.
Sorry I didn't call earlier. I wasn't ready.
VOICE ON LINE:
Okay. One second.
HARMON:
Harmon. H-A-R-M-O-N.
Sorry I didn't call earlier. I wasn't ready.
VOICE ON LINE:
Okay great. So I have your chart here. What questions do you have?
HARMON:
I was just wondering whatI was just wondering what my insurance situation was. VOICE ON LINE:
Okay. Do you know if they were looking into your insurance for you? Have you got on that list yet?

VOICE ON LINE:

Yeah I gave you office my information stuff. I think you guys

took a scan of my card.

HARMON:

Okay let me take a look. I do see your card in there.

Okay, so let's see.

It looks like your insurance hasn't been verified yet. I'm going to add you too the list and then let her know you're checking in and then she'll take a look at that and then let you know and e-mail you a break down.

HARMON:

Okay.

VOICE ON LINE:

Were you on the list for scheduling yet? Or were you waiting to hear back from your insurance first?

HARMON:

I was waiting to hear back from my insurance first.

VOICE ON LINE:

Okay, I will add you to the list and check in with her and let her know that you're all set to go. You're just waiting on insurance.

HARMON:

Okay. Is it kinda normal for insurance to take this long?

VOICE ON LINE:

Yeah. Yeah. It does depend on the

	Г	7
		plan. Sometimes there's an exclusion.
		Inaudible
		So it just depends on the plan type you have.
		But we are in network with Anthem Blue Cross so that's good.
		But we'll know more once she looks into your insurance for you.
		HARMON:
		Okay, thank you.
Fade to black		VOICE ON LINE:
		You're welcome. Bye.
		HARMON:
		Damn though. It's March. That's what I was worried about. That's why I didn't want to call. Because it's kinda scary if my insurance is taking four months to be verified. Oh well.
Timelapse of Taylor in room	00:20:44.00- 00:21:31.00	HARMON:
	00.21.31.00	Being trans and transitioning is all about waiting.
		Just constantly waiting. You're waiting for appointment. You have to see new doctors most of the time. Some doctors can be assholes and be like 'I don't feel comfortable with this hormone replacement therapy. And it's like 'Why, you do it for other people all

Fade to black		the time, this is normal.' Waiting for getting your letters to even get surgery. Waiting for insurance to kick in. Waiting and waiting and waiting all the time. I'm gonna do everything I can to get top surgery and get everything I need to get done. Like but there's always a possibility it won't happen. Becoming myself, as like, Hallmark, like as depressingly Hallmark as that is, is a huge deal to me, as it should be with everybody.
Text on screen	00:21:34.00-00:22:01.00	The cost of top surgery varies. Expenses can range between \$3,500-\$9,000 dollars or higher. Taylor didn't get a follow-up e-mail from the doctor's office. Taylor still don't know the status of their insurance. Taylor eventually called the office again, but had to leave a voice message. The office called Taylor back soon after. Taylor couldn't pick up, so the office had to leave a voice message. They continue to play phone tag.
Credits	00:22:03.00- end	A FILM BY Vanessa Walker CINEMATOGRAPHY Vanessa Walker

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