

How to Craft a Truly Gender-Neutral Suit

By Whitney Teal



Photo by Bill Phelps, courtesy of Bindle & Keep

The process of fitting all manner of female-assigned bodies for androgynous, gender-neutral suits is equal parts bespoke tailoring and caring, body-positive therapist. Daniel Friedman, founder of [Bindle & Keep](#), has developed a technique that perfectly straddles the line, garnering him an esteemed reputation among LGBTQ clients (who now make up 90 percent of his business) and a starring role in the Lena Dunham-produced documentary, [Suited](#), a film about his Brooklyn custom clothier.

[Suited](#), which was inspired by Grace Dunham, the filmmaker's genderqueer sibling, catches Friedman and his partner, Rae Tutera, in action. The feature-length film premiered at Sundance Film Festival earlier this year, and will be broadcast on HBO beginning June 2016. ([Watch a clip of the film here.](#))

“When people put on suits, everyone has very different triggers regarding their bodies and how clothes should fit on their body,” Friedman told GayWeddings.com. “A lot of that has to do with gender socializing

and gender identity, or just having your body out in the world and wearing clothes for 30-odd years and feeling like you don't fit in.

“Really the whole process of what we do, it's really a psychology more than tailoring in the sense that we really sit down and investigate how people feel about their bodies,” he said.

Friedman said he was spurred to create this approach after meeting Tuteru, a transmasculine person who came to work for him five years ago. Working with women was always an interest of his, but Friedman had no way of knowing how in-demand his gender-blind services would be.

“It took a while of doing many, many fittings, Rae and I. I developed a very special and cool way of communicating design fit and measuring women's bodies for androgynous suits,” he explained.

The trick, Friedman said, is rethinking the archetypical suit shape.

“If you think about the paradigm masculine figure in our culture, look at Superman—giant chest, tiny little waist,” he said.

“If I put that shape on a lot of our masculine-presenting female clients, or even our transmasculine clients, they would find that extremely triggering and very feminine feeling, so what we do is we respond to that and we invert that relationship. We bind the chest a little tighter, give a little more room in the waist and the effect is the same, but the triggers are not as loud and people are much more comfortable.”



Photo by Caitlin Mitchell, courtesy of Bindle & Keep

Comfort is of utmost importance to Bindle & Keep's clientele, many of whom are shopping for suits at a disadvantage: some are new to suit-wearing, and unfamiliar with a traditional, snug fit; many are scarred by negative experiences shopping for androgynous clothing, and are suspicious of the industry. Friedman calls this the "wearing curve."

"There's a lot at stake, it's a very emotional experience," he said. "You realize when you put that suit on, it's not the fix-all panacea that people thought it was. *You're* still wearing it. All those years of feeling about your body, your gender and your place in society.

"It's a very complicated set of feelings that you experience when you put on a suit for the first time. Some people are ecstatic; some people are disappointed."

Knowing what each suit means to his clients, Friedman is careful to craft the silhouette they want.

"We have this saying in this company: We can be gender-blind, but we're not gender-stupid," Friedman explained. "That really gets to the point of saying, look, we can make you a suit that doesn't factor in any specific anatomical, gender-specific type of measurements. For example, no busting in the chest, we don't triangulate the curvature of the hips to exaggerate it.

There's really no such thing as masculinity in my book, it's just cut."

And just as his suits are so much more than clothing for his clients, Friedman's clients have become so much more than customers to him.

"Before I got into this business, I didn't really think that highly of myself," said Friedman, who began this career after leaving architecture when lead poisoning diminished some of his cognitive abilities. "I had all kinds of very negative feelings about my self-worth, and now my clients have, in a sense, saved me. They've given me a new life. I bring pleasure to people, and I make them feel good about themselves."