

Polare Edition 81

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Editorial

by Katherine Cummings, Polare Editor

Some time ago I was asked to write a piece about what it means to be a woman in a queer context (in my case, transgendered). I knew it would not be a simple task. I do not like the use of "queer" in this context although I understand the climate of defiance that sets out to rehabilitate words which have been used against oneself or one's sub-culture. Language has its own inertia and is not easily reshaped by the wishes of a minority. I do not see myself as queer. I see myself as a woman with a somewhat unusual history.

Before considering the larger question, however, it is necessary to know what we mean by "woman" and there is no simple answer, because almost every definition has one or more exceptions. There are legal, social, physiological and psychological definitions and none is more "real" than any other.

Taking physiology as a starting point, if we rely on external genitalia, the usual starting point for the assignment of newborn, there are immediate challenges to definition, as children born with Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (C.A.I.S.) will look female at birth and will grow up looking female although they have XY chromosomes, their internal genitalia are unformed and they are infertile.

Most children born with C.A.I.S. are raised as female and most continue in the female role even after they discover that they have XY chromosomes. Nor can we rely on chromosomes as a reliable guide. There are many variations on the standard XX or XY formats. XXY is not uncommon and there are various other versions of the chromosome layout, including people born with a mosaic chromosome pattern which involves both XX and XY and other variations in their gene structure.

Some babies have a self-explanatory condition called micropenis. If a newborn is considered by doctors to have a penis too small to be functional, parents are sometimes persuaded to allow the child to be surgically converted to female. This entails a lifetime of hormone therapy and a series of surgical operations as the child grows and, of course, "s/he" is raised and socialised as female.

Feminists sometimes restrict events to "women born women" or, in extreme cases even the suffix "-men" is forbidden and the event becomes one for "womyn born womyn". In the light of the paragraphs above, however, and acknowledging the existence of C.A.I.S., mosaic and micropenis children raised as female, these exclusions are really based on "women assigned at birth as women", which is somewhat different.

It is understandable that women who feel strongly that men have dominated and oppressed women for eons should wish to have times and places where they can be sure that the presence of men will not be tolerated, a space where they can speak freely and behave in any way they see as appropriate.

This brings us to the question of transgender. Radical feminists like Janice Raymond and Germaine Greer are totally opposed to the

Feature Articles



Rusty in the photographic exhibition *Assume Nothing* by Rebecca Swan.

Adventures of a Watjarri Nyungar Traveller

Rusty grew up in a big family in Western Australia and explains that being who she is was never an issue for the Watjarri Nyungar people. As long as she can remember her family was always there for her. Then she came to Sydney fell in love with the nightlife.

The Real Possibility of Joy

This autobiography by award-winning writer and screenwriter, Josephine Emery, is reviewed by Katherine Cummings who writes that much of this book will be familiar to male-to-female transgenders however she could have done with fewer descriptions of Josie's sex life.

Look Who's Morphing

Look Who's Morphing by Tom Cho is a collection of short and punchy writings with a biographical element interwoven into what is obviously fiction. It's hard to define where reality ends and fiction begins, unless Cho is playing with his readers and it's all fiction.

Bad Language

Gwendolyn Ann Smith explains the inclusiveness of the term transgender, and how it's opposite cisgender, shuts out our allies, our friends, our partners. It further sets transgender apart from the whole and creates a dichotomy that is not needed.

The Story of "R"

"R" was born with micro-penis. Doctors advised he be raised a girl and he underwent surgery to construct a vagina. When his therapist attempted to turn his problems into gender issues she was following a script that is repeated every time intersex babies are identified.

recognition of transgender women as women. Raymond sees transgenders as an attempt by men to infringe on female "territory" and usurp female rights. Greer simply detests transgenders and derides them at every opportunity. She tried to have Rachel Padman, a male-to-female transgender academic, fired from her post at the all-female Newnham College, Cambridge but the academic board, who had been aware of Rachel's history before they hired her, stood firm.

It is clear that Raymond and Greer and their ilk do not see transgender women as "real" women. Yet if transgender women are really men, as is implied, are transgender men really women? Would the radical feminists welcome female-to-male transgenders, with their beards, baritone voices, male-pattern baldness and gymnasium muscles to their restricted meetings, or would they be seen as traitors to the cause of femininity, and cast into outer darkness or to a special limbo created for the unassignable?

Another area of contention is that of shelters and refuges provided for the homeless and the abused. Clearly it would be inappropriate for male-to-female transgenders to be admitted to male refuges, yet a number of female refuges have closed their doors against transgendered women. I can understand the fears of women in a refuge, who may have suffered abuse from men, finding a person in their midst who, to their eyes, is a man in woman's guise. Yet a transgendered woman may need a refuge as much as a woman assigned her womanhood at birth, and may also be vulnerable to abuse if she is not given shelter.

Anecdotally, the restrictions appear to be based on incidents of inappropriate behaviour on the part of transgendered women in female refuges, and if the anecdotes are accurate then the refuge would have every right to eject the perpetrator, just as they would have a similar right to eject a genetic woman for similar behaviour. But specific examples of inappropriate behaviour in no way justify a blanket prohibition of a whole sub-class of their clientele.

It has been suggested that separate shelters should be provided for the transgendered, but this would create a ghetto situation which is the last thing a transgendered woman wants or needs.

Transgenders and the intersexed are often clumped together with gays, lesbians and bisexuals but one of the significant differences is that whereas gays and lesbians leave the straight world to join their own sub-culture, transgenders do not wish to join other transgenders but would prefer to be seen as a man among men, or a woman among women.

Transgender is not a sexuality and a transgendered person may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or asexual.

How then can transgendered women be expected to fit into the queer milieu? Are they doomed to be outsiders from straight society at large; from the company of women; from lesbian events; and even denied entry to the emergency refuges set up for distressed females? The problem derives most often from the human habit of generalising, of assigning characteristics to a racial group, a religion or to any recognisable sub-set of humanity.

It is not possible to define with any confidence what a woman is and there will always be disputes where definitions fail. Perhaps the only valid strategy is to allow for self-definition, as we do for Aborigines, and apply similar rules of validity for that self-definition, namely that the self-defined woman is genuinely living the female role to the best of her ability, and that she is generally accepted by the society in which she claims membership.

Shelters and refuges should, by all means, eject or censure those who misbehave whether they were assigned female gender at birth or affirmed it at some later stage. But until they trespass, the authorities should find it in their hearts to be charitable and compassionate to those who find themselves, through no fault of their own, in a world of refuges and shelters, a world whose customs and rules they must learn and respect while much of what they have accumulated in their earlier socialisation is suppressed and put away forever. Segregation is not the answer. Inclusion may be.

Straight, gay, lesbian, transgender, or in any other way queer, let women be women.

Suffer little children

Recently I was invited to appear on Channel Seven's *Sunrise* show to comment on the appropriateness of sixteen-year-old German pop singer Kim Petras having gender reassignment surgery. I pointed out that Kim had adopted a female lifestyle for much of her life, that her parents, who were presumably authorised to make legal decisions for her, had agreed, and that the German authorities had also been persuaded that this was the right route for Kim to take. In the light of Kim herself, her parents and the medical authorities all being in agreement, I asked why anyone else's opinion needed to be sought. I pointed out that most transgenders know in childhood who they are and what they want, and that to spare a transgendered child the agony of puberty, with all the physiological processes which would later need to be reversed was entirely justified whether by delaying puberty through hormonal therapy or by going directly to surgical intervention.

The G.P. that Channel Seven7 uses on these occasions disagreed with me, saying that nobody under the age of eighteen should be allowed to have surgery. This is the cookie-cutter approach to therapy. Everyone is the same and everyone must follow the same route, regardless of individual differences. I couldn't agree less. I would have pointed out that a lot of children are arbitrarily assigned surgically to a gender, virtually at birth, on the agreement of parents and medical authorities, and without any input from the child, but our tiny segment of time on air did not allow for my second comment to be made. I am glad, however, to report that in the following weeks two more cases of young children in Britain (nine and twelve years-old) being allowed to transition from one gender to the other were in the news. The website [Second Type Woman](#) includes a 29 page article titled "[Treatment of Young M.T.F. Transsexuals](#)". The article contains details of a significant number of transgendered children who have been allowed to transition and start the therapeutic processes necessary for reassignment at an early age. These include a Japanese child, diagnosed with [G.I.D.](#) at age six and allowed to transition at seven.

So much for cookie-cutters!

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

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Adventures of a Watjarri Nyungar Traveller

Falling in Love with the Sydney Nightlife

by Rusty Nannup

Article appeared in Polare magazine: October 2009 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Rusty in the photographic exhibition 'Assume Nothing' by Rebecca Swan.

Hi, my name is Rusty Nannup and I was born in Western Australia near a place called Moora. I am from a large family. But I was not born in the town. I was born on Moora Native Reserve. My life was no different from the lives of others who lived around there at that time, but when you are part of a big family you do not notice how cruel the real world is.

Me being who I am was never an issue. As far back as memory goes my family was always there.

As I grew into a young teenager there were some things I could not help but notice. My mother is a Watjarri woman. She, her brothers and sisters all had a happy carefree life until they were rounded up and stuck on a ship, then sent away to Moore River Settlement. Unknown to the people on the ship my grandmother had snuck on board the ship and hid herself until they were way out and she could never be sent back.

So off she goes with her children in the hold of a great big merchant ship. As kids we all heard this famous tale. Mum and her brothers and sisters would have a good laugh at how their mother did what she felt she had to do to stay with her kids no matter what the cost.

Her most famous words were, "Where my kids go, I go."

So now do you wonder where I get the strength to throw caution to the wind (I like that saying). When you come from good stock like I do then you know what to do and have the strength to do it.

Me being who I am was never an issue. As far back as memory goes my family was always there.

Mum would say, "Family is family no matter what."

Living on the west coast was never really great for me ... too many relatives watching what you did and how you did it. Yet I still loved them all. Why? Because no one ever tried to get rough with or disrespectful to me. Like I said, thank God I came from a big family. But like most young travellers I needed to find my place in life. I left and travelled around Aussie for a while. Where do you go when you're looking for that something that you had all your life?

I came to New South Wales and fell in love with the place and the nightlife.

King's Cross. I love the pace of life. And the high energy. That's what I love about being here. The chances of finding work were fantastic. You were not judged on your skin colour but what you, the person, could do. And I fell in with the Koori People of N.S.W. and never looked back. My own people knew what I was like so it never bothered them that I lived here for so long. I came here in my early-twenties and now I am in my late, um, well now ...

With half of life being spent here, I believe that I have done the right thing. The chances I have had and the things that I've done not only for myself but for other travellers who will venture this way some time in the future all support that view.

Here are some of the things I have done:

- served the Australasian Society for H.I.V. Medicine Inc. as a presenter;
- in the photographic exhibition 'Assume Nothing' by Rebecca Swan, there I am, posing naked in my late-thirties.
- I was on the front cover of the National AIDS Bulletin 1999.
- I appeared on the 'Safe Sex Poster' in all Aboriginal Medical Services and other health institutions Australia-wide.
- I received Gender Centre Trophy for service to my community.

My Surname is 'Nannup'. It's my father's and it comes from the Nyungar language. For all those who have not begun to experience life, I can only say Enjoy!

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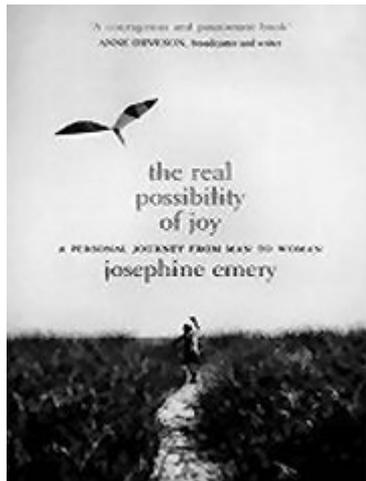
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Book Review: The Real Possibility of Joy

A Personal Journey from Man to Woman

Article appeared in Polare magazine: October 2009 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

Reviewed by Katherine Cummings



The Real Possibility of Joy by Josie Emery

The Real Possibility of Joy: A Personal Journey from Man to Woman

by Josephine Emery
Published by Pier 9, Millers Point
(2009)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1741966107

... the author inserting himself into his favourite films such as: "Dirty Dancing", "The Exorcist", "The Bodyguard" and "The Sound of Music"

Having read Josie Emery's book virtually in one sitting, I find I am ambivalent when it comes to assessing it. As the memoir of an intelligent and educated person who has known the frustration and heartbreaks associated with transition from one gender role to the other, it may help other transgenders striving to reconcile their suppressed reality with a world that is often censorious and cruel.

Emery is an award-winning writer and screenwriter and her name (or her former name, John Emery) has been associated with such prestigious film-makers as Philip Noyce and Scott Hicks. She has been the head of the screenwriting department at the Australian Film and Radio School and Director of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

She was born in New Guinea soon after the end of World War Two but her written record commences with her childhood in South Australia, where her father took up farming.

As befits a screenwriter her account uses many flashbacks and we move back and forth in the structure of her narrative, experiencing the factors which impelled her to take up the various callings of her young manhood, and affected her inner-need to be female by sublimating it in sexual relationships with a number of women, most of them artistic and some openly bisexual.

Much of what Emery writes will be familiar to male-to-female transgenders. The early desire to be female while lacking enough background information for self-acceptance, the deliberate adoption of macho professions and pursuits, proving one's masculinity to oneself, the gradual acceptance of the compromise of cross-dressing in lieu of full gender change. And then the eventual harrowing realisation that there is no other way to survive than to become the person one has always been in the recesses of one's mind, and to go forward after transition to a new life and a new niche in society.

Emery lived and worked in some of the harsher environments of Australia, mining and rigging steel. She enjoyed the camaraderie of strong, tough men, working beside them by day, drinking with them at night, yet always keeping a few items of female gear in her locker for her secret times. Like many of us she sublimated her desire for femininity into a belief, or pretence, that she was a transvestite, and, like many of us, went into heterosexual relationships, and even marriage, in the belief that she could rid herself of the need for the woman within.

Like most of us, she failed.

Personally, I could have done with fewer descriptions of Josie's sex life. I am more interested in the workings of a person's mind than I am in fervid descriptions of sex, such as, "I would wake no more with that crowbar between my legs and the fierce need to plunge it into a quenching pool of female flesh." For those who want to know what others do for sexual gratification and enjoy purple prose and soft-core porn, I will simply say that Josie deals frequently with the kind of recreation where two or three gather together and do things to each other in bed.

Josie also spends a significant amount of space talking of her sleeping dreams and confused illusions, and these spill over into areas of spirituality and even religion; areas I have no interest in and little time for. But if that's your thing, again, there's plenty of it.

Josie's family follow a familiar pattern, blowing hot and cold, bigoted and understanding, cruel and compassionate by turns, as many families do. She ploughs on, self-obsessed and self-doubting, exultant and depressed, artistically and financially triumphant, then living on a pittance with the bitterness of failure. Like most of us she rides a rollercoaster of determination and uncertainty.

We never gain a real understanding of the women in Josie's life. They are cardboard cut-outs and the only surfaces we see are those

that face Josie (or her previous persona, John). Uniformly they turn from her when they understand the depth of her need to be female. For some, her cross-dressing is okay as a sex-game, or as a symbol of their domination over a sissified male, but as a life pattern it repels and nauseates them, as it does her mother, her children, and her siblings. Josie's father, incidentally, is the archetypal abusive male, bullying his wife and bonding with his sons when he doesn't feel like assaulting them.

Toward the end of the account, when Josie has successfully negotiated transition in her workplace (fortunate to be in an institution which was both "arty" and educational) she indulges in what I can only see as a spiteful need to prove that she is better than anybody around her. Invited to a Christmas lunch at the home of a trans woman she insults the home of her hostess by describing the bird feeder "covered in droppings" and dogs which "came and went" causing Josie and her newly-met friend "Tracy", to "sit carefully to avoid contamination". I was the hostess on this occasion, There are no droppings on my bird feeders, and my gentle, friendly dogs do not contaminate. Josie came to my home as an invited guest, because I thought she might like to spend the day with people who could understand the difficulties of being newly transitioned and alone at Christmas. In return she sneers at the appearance of my other transgender guests and invents discomfort in the "non-trans" people present. Is this her idea of humour? It seems more like gross discourtesy and an intolerance of, and unwillingness to accept, human differences.

Josie also tells of falling head over heels in love at this lunch with the stunningly beautiful "Tracy" who turns out to be transgendered, much to Josie's surprise. She pursues Tracy for the next several pages, but even in her romantic throes she presents herself as the dominant and talented partner. The identity of the subject of her crush is unmistakable despite her disclaimer at the beginning of the book that the women she has been closest to, (Diana, her wife, Mandy, a lover, and Tracy, her soul mate) do not exist as I have described them".



I do not know "Diana" or "Mandy", but I agree that "Tracy" does not exist as Josie describes her. The real "Tracy" is a multi-talented and highly successful writer and composer, witty, energetic and creative, yet she comes across in Josie's eyes as a lovelorn sex-toy, desperately in love with Josie's residual masculinity.

There are enough throwaway lines and clues to ensure that anyone who knows "Tracy" in real life knows who is being talked about. This seems both unfair and unethical. Either you use a person's real name (preferably after showing them the passage and asking permission) or you make an effort to disguise the character by changing venues, characteristics and events, as well as names. Or you leave them out completely.

Josie's relationship with "Tracy" founders on Josie's unwillingness to remain male and so she goes forward to reassignment and then plunges into a desperate campaign to attain a male lover via dating services. Oh, dear. The campaign is not what one would call a success and Josie becomes increasingly concerned that she may be assaulted in the street, or even murdered. She attributes this to her appearance but it is more likely that it relates to the area in which she lives, and possibly her own insecurity which can often cue strangers into aggressive behaviour.

It seems that Josie is, and always has been, desperate to excel and is self-obsessed with the need to see herself as superior to those around her. Yet she always retains cobwebs of self-doubt which remain unswept in the cornice of her mind. This self-doubt is borne out in the closing passages of the book where, after suffering one too many confrontations in public, she sets out to remodel herself facially, undergoing revisions in Thailand to almost every part of her face (hair and hairline, frown lines, brow level, nose, upper lip distance from nose, Adam's apple ...).

The revised version of Josie looks in the mirror after recovery and sees "a wide-eyed, smooth-browed, tilt-nosed beauty with a pouting mouth ...". It is not recorded whether she actually kisses her own reflection. She draws attention to the high rate of suicide in post-op transgender women, apparently unaware that it is forty times higher in pre-operative transgender women, and in one passage she appears to endorse the ridiculous idea that women naturally speak with a terminal rise. The terminal rise is a recent, culturally imposed, and highly irritating characteristic of some women who appear to be asking permission to voice their opinions by turning every statement into a question.

For a professional writer she commits unfortunate errors. She seems to confuse "effete" with "effeminate", "uninterested" with "disinterested" and does not understand that pronouns which are the object of a verb take the objective case. We are subjected to solecisms such as "This thing defies gravity!" he said to my brother and I" and "There was nothing left now between my wife and I". If I were charitable I might assume she had illiterate editors. But why should I be charitable? She has been charitable neither to me nor to my transgender friends. To put a small spin on an old saying; the enemy of my friends is my enemy. Nemo me impune lacessit.

Josie Emery

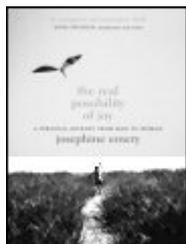
From [Josie Emery's website](#):  Josephine Emery, Author, Screenwriter, Editor, Script Editor, Media and Publishing Strategist was born in Cairns, North Queensland. Her early life was spent on a coconut plantation west of Lae, in Papua New Guinea before the family moved to a back-blocks farm in South Australia and sent Josie, then known as John, to boarding school in Adelaide. She went on to work in gold mining, exploration, desert construction and forestry before taking a degree and becoming a writer and university teacher.



She is the author of five books and six movies, and has also been Director of Literature at the Australia

Council for the Arts and Head of Screenwriting at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, and has worked as a features journalist.

In 2001 she moved from Adelaide to Sydney, underwent gender transition, emerging as Josephine, and developed a notable career as a change-agent within the literature sector before returning to writing with the 2009 release of her memoir:



The Real Possibility of Joy: A Personal Journey from Man to Woman

Author: Josephine Emery

Publisher: Murdoch Books (2009)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-1741966107

From Fishpond Books: This is a searing account of the author's physical, spiritual and emotional journey from man to woman. Josie has lived and loved as a man and as a woman. This is the story of her voyage from his days working in desert mining and construction camps through to the struggles with her family and eventual reconciliation with her dying mother. It is the story of his loves and his marriage as a man, of fatherhood, and his passage through the barriers of gender and sex. The story of the shock of discovering her need - as a woman - to be with a man. An account of personal spiritual discovery, *The Real Possibility of Joy* opens up the mystery of what it means to be human and captures the joy of living one's own, hard won, personal truth.

Katherine Cummings

Katherine Cummings is a writer and transgender activist, currently working at the N.S.W. Gender Centre as Librarian and Information Worker. Her autobiography, *Katherine's Diary*, based on a two-year series of radio talks she gave on Radio National's "Health Report", won the Australian Human Rights Award for Non-Fiction in 1992. It has since been expanded and updated and was re-issued at the end of 2007.

Katherine edits *Polare*, the quarterly magazine of the Gender Centre and writes for it. She is currently putting together a collection of her essays, short stories, poems and book reviews to be published in mid-2013 under the title *The Life and Loves of a Transgender Woman*.



Katherine transitioned in 1986 at the age of fifty-one.



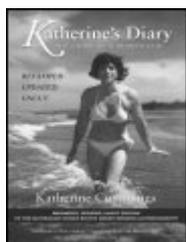
The Life and Loves of a Transgendered Lesbian Librarian

Author: Katherine Cummings

Publisher: Beaujon Press (2014)

I.S.B.N.-13: 978-098036535X

From Polare Magazine Review: The publication of this collection is a timely reminder that there is still a lot to learn about gender identity, its causes, aetiology and expression. To redress common misconceptions, prejudices, and targeted violence, ethically focussed education is critical. Of overriding importance is the acknowledgment of the truth of all 'real-life' experiences and within this framework Katherine's lifetime experience, retold through cleverly assembled vignettes (essays, book reviews, verses and poems), is central. The book's content is varied and provides the reader with decisive personal viewpoints centred on the paramount issue of gender identity.



Katherine's Diary: Revamped, Updated, Uncut Edition

Author: Katherine Cummings

Publisher: BookSurge Publishing (2008)

I.S.B.N.-13: 978-1439215456

From Bookpod Book Store website: "I think that I was irrational, even insane, at the time. My transsexualism had taken hold of me with such obsessive force that I could not concentrate on anything else. There I was, a fifty-year-old professional academic librarian who had desperately wanted to be female ever since memories began ..." In 1986 John Cummings became Katherine Cummings and a whole life changed. In this painfully honest account of John's transformation into a woman, Katherine tells of years of fantasising behind locked doors, of the betrayal felt by her family and the final relief of surgery. *Katherine's Diary* covers a lifetime of self-discovery and self-destruction told with acerbic wit and crisp observation.

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Book Review: Look Who's Morphing

Is Tom Cho Playing with His Readers?

Reviewed by Sydney-based writer and editor of *Andromeda Spaceways In-Flight Magazine*, Edwina Harvey
Article appeared in Polare magazine: October 2009 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Look Who's Morphing by Tom Cho

Look Who's Morphing

by Tom Cho
Published by Giramondo Publishing Company (2009)
I.S.B.N. -13 978 1920882549

This is a collection of writings from Tom Cho. I hesitate to call them short stories, because there appears to be a biographical element in most of his offerings, so interwoven into what is obviously fiction that it's hard to define where reality ends and fiction begins. Unless Cho is playing with his readers and it's all fiction?

The inspiration to this anthology appears to be the author inserting himself into his favourite films such as: *Dirty Dancing*, *The Exorcist*, *The Bodyguard* and *The Sound of Music*. Film and television series references are liberally scattered throughout the text.

Cho's offerings are frequently short and punchy, running for only two or three pages, making the anthology easy to read if you're time-poor. His observations can be quite amusing, and this seems to be more his style in a collection of "Dinner with" writings. "Dinner With My Brother" seems to be a set up for a joke, while "Dinner With Auntie Ling and Uncle Wang" with Auntie Ling's observation that when she wants escapism she

watches Star Trek films and when she wants reality she watches National Lampoon films, was, in my opinion, one of the best pieces of humour in the piece. By comparison, Cock Rock - at over thirty pages the longest piece of writing in the collection - seemed to be nothing more than a young man's self-indulgent sexual fantasy.

While all writers draw their inspiration from somewhere, I was disturbed that Cho drew so heavily on well known movies as points of reference in his writing. Why couldn't he draw more on his own imagination? The blur between apparent fact and fiction left me feeling disoriented; I was happy to be entertained, but as the reader, had I become the butt of the joke?

Tom Cho

From [Tom Cho's Blog](#):  Tom Cho is an artist who lives in Melbourne, Australia. He writes fiction, freelance as a writer and perform my words onstage. He's also produced arts projects, both as an independent producer and for Footscray Community Arts Centre, Melbourne Fringe and other organisations.

His first book is *Look Who's Morphing*, a collection of fictions. Published by Giramondo Publishing, *Look Who's Morphing* was released in April 2009. It was shortlisted for the 2010 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (South East Asia and Pacific), 2009 Age Book of the Year (Fiction) and Melbourne Prize Trust's 2009 Best Writing Award.

He has won numerous grants and awards for his fiction. His fiction has been published in Australia, U.S.A., Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Italy, France and Sweden. He regularly performs his work at festivals and other events, and has a PhD in Professional Writing from Deakin University.

He freelances as a writer, analyst and editor, primarily for the not-for-profit sector. His clients have spanned a range of sectors including the arts, community, health, business, local government and tertiary education. One of his specialties is writing funding proposals for not-for-profit organisations. I also write corporate and sales brochures, website content, speeches, case studies, annual reports, feature articles, media releases, and much more.



This interview with Tom Cho was part of the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2009 and is Courtesy of Melbourne Prize and YouTube



Look Who's Morphing

Author: Tom Cho

Publisher: Giramondo Publishing (2009)

I.S.B.N.-13: 978-1920882549

From Amazon Books:  Tom Cho's collection of fictions and fantasies is all about morphing and transformation. Through the shape-shifting, we follow the narrator on his surreal adventures, which include dirty dancing with Johnny Castle, a rambunctious encounter with television's Dr. Phil, a job as Whitney Houston's bodyguard and another as a Muppet, a period in service with the von Trapp family in *The Sound of Music*, a totally destructive outing as *Godzilla*, and that high octane performance as a Gulliver-sized cock rock singer, complete with cohort of tiny adoring girls. As these fantasies of identity, sexuality and power unfold, the narrator, his family, and everything around him, morph and change, to the moment when the collection reaches its climax.

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Bad Language

Gwendolyn Ann Smith on Terminology

by Gwendolyn Ann Smith, [The Bay Area Reporter](#)

Article appeared in Polare magazine: October 2009 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Gwendolyn Ann Smith

Da Vinci Code author Dan Brown has released his latest 'Oh my God there's a secret conspiracy and you can find the clues all over the place' book. In this one, *The Lost Symbol*, his Harvard expert of symbology takes on Masons, Washington, D.C., and presumably anything else that he can spin into a story.

Those who are transgender, myself included, are all too familiar with being labelled with identities we ourselves do not accept.

What struck me and several other transgender identified people is the following paragraph from *The Lost Symbol*.

The act of tattooing one's skin was a transformative declaration of power, an announcement to the world: I am in control of my own flesh. The intoxicating feeling of control derived from physical transformation had addicted millions to flesh altering practices ... cosmetic surgery, body piercing, bodybuilding and steroids ... even bulimia and transgending.

Transgending? I understand what he's trying to say here, but, really? In that short paragraph, Dan Brown has reduced the entire experience of being a transgender person to the level of steroid abuse, piercing and bulimia. I dare say that Brown's entire knowledge of being transgender stems from using the name 'Danielle Brown' on a book he co-wrote with his wife, and titled *187 Men To Avoid: A Guide for the Romantically Frustrated Women*.

Allow me to get a little lexical for a moment.

The word 'transgender' is believed to be initially coined by Virginia Prince as early as the 1950s, specifically to refer to someone who adopted the gender opposite the one he or she was assigned at birth, up to but not including undergoing genital reconstructive surgery.

Over the ensuing years, the term underwent a change, being used as an umbrella term to cover a wide variety of individuals: anyone who transgresses or transcends gender norms has been considered to be a part of such a group. In some recent years, the term has also started to be viewed as somewhat dated, with many adopting the term 'gender-queer'.

'Transgender' still does not appear in all dictionaries, and my spell checker will stumble over it as I proof this very article. Many use it as a noun, some as an adjective, and some as a verb, but Brown is the first to use it as he has.

This leads to a bigger debate, however. When you have a term like transgender, how do you describe those who are not transgender? Some, for example, feel that not having such a term is to doom transgender people to being somehow 'singled out' as something different: The very nature of not having a polar opposite term sets up those who are not transgender as being 'the standard'. There is logic in that, I suppose, though I don't think having the term 'right handed' has ever made a sinister southpaw feel any different. Nevertheless, a term has been invented to fill this gap: cisgender. 'Cis' is a Latin prefix referring to being 'on the same side', and comes to us from the vocabulary of chemistry. In this usage, it refers to gender identity and physical sex being 'in alignment' it is a sort of opposite for 'transgender'.

It initially came out of the Usenet before making it into texts in the middle part of this decade. Likewise, it has led to the birth of 'cissexual' as an opposing term to 'transsexual', and even 'cissexism' as a means of declaring the state of belief that transsexuals are inferior to 'cissexuals'.

Now here is where I become a stick in the mud. You see, while I do see the point of such terms, and can see the value in same, it also

seems that they're not so often used in the somewhat clinical way described above. Ironically, they end up being used as yet another tool to divide rather than simply classify.

I mentioned above about transgender being an umbrella term, and one that is often used somewhat broadly, One of its strengths is that it can include a wide variety of gender presentations, identities and expressions. You can presumably save yourself from having left out someone, unless they wish to be left out of said term.

But cisgender, used in the same way, shuts out our allies, our friends, our partners. Rather than levelling the field, it further sets transgender apart from the whole, and creates a dichotomy that honestly is not needed.

This is something that the transgender community, and frankly many other communities, does on a regular basis. At one time it was 'cross-dressers' versus 'transsexuals', then it was 'transsexuals' versus 'transgender'. There have been some who have adopted even more baroque terms such as 'women born transsexual' or 'Harry Benjamin Syndrome' to further distance ourselves from each other.

Another problem with 'cisgender', as pointed out by activist Helen Boyd, is that it is rarely used without a sneer. It is a term that tends to get used to point out that someone is transphobic or, at the least, clueless about things transgender. Perhaps like Dan Brown at the top of this article.

Yet by using it this way, and reinforcing its use as a snarky, snide term for those who don't 'get it', you make the term useless for neutral use. No one would want to be called 'cisgender' if it automatically implies a certain oafishness upon the person wearing the term.

Many years ago: I learned a proverb: It's not what you call me, it's what I answer to. Those who are transgender, myself included, are all too familiar with being labelled with identities we ourselves do not accept. Why should we, therefore, feel we can so easily label others?

Gwendolyn Ann Smith

From Gwendolyn's website: Gwendolyn Ann Smith is a graphic designer, desktop publisher, web designer, writer, and transgender activist.

She writes transmissions for four major L.G.B.T. newspapers in the United States, *Baltimore Gay Life*, the *Bay Area Reporter*, *Between The Lines*, and the *Philadelphia Gay News*. Individual Transmission pieces are also often printed in *Express Gay News*, the *Houston Voice*, the *New York Blade*, the *Southern Voice*, and the *Washington Blade*. In addition to these, she has contributed to several other publications and online forums over the years. Her website contains a vast number of her writings that are of interest to transgender people and our allies.

Gwen has spoken publicly since High School, and has presented on transgender-related topics since 1994. She has spoken in a number of different clubs and forms.

Gwendolyn Ann Smith also founded the Transgender Day of Remembrance in 1998, a day which occurs annually on 20th November. It is a day to memorialize those who have been killed as a result of transphobia, or the hatred or fear of transgender and gender non-conforming people, and acts to bring attention to the continued violence endured by the transgender community. The Transgender Day of Remembrance was originally organised to memorialize the murder of Rita Hester in Allston, Massachusetts, however since its inception, it has slowly evolved from the web-based project started by Smith into an international day of action. In 2010, Transgender Day of Remembrance was observed in over 185 cities in more than twenty countries.



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The Story of "R"

Another Intersex Life Brutalized Beyond Redemption

by Joanne Procter, O.I.I., New Zealand

Article appeared in Polare magazine: October 2009 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



... a rational person should understand his anger.

"R" had his hand

and forearm swathed in plaster. Two days earlier he'd tried to punch out the reinforced glass window in his front door. That one angry punch had broken most of the bones in his right hand. It was just the last of many angry punches. "R" radiated anger.

"I'm not a lesbian," "R" replied. "I'm a man! I don't have any identity issues!"

Aggression was in the way he walked. Belligerence was in the silver-studded leather jacket hanging from his shoulders even on the hottest day. Anger was in the tremble of his voice. It glared like bitter razors from his eyes.

He was in his early twenties. Melbourne born. A tiny baby with a micro-penis. An officially undersized willie that, unlike a fish, could not be thrown back. It is part of a medical mythology that is passed around the profession like an urban

legend. "Boys with micro-penises can't grow to be real men if their willies are too small to insert into a vagina," runs one myth. Another is they'll grow up thinking they are not "proper" men. They might even think they're female.

When babies are born with micro-penises, physicians pinch the organ between their thumb and forefinger to ensure that its stretched length is over three millimetres. If not, the baby's testicles may be removed, a vagina fashioned from the baby's colon and the boy raised as female. "Real men" do not have micro-penises.

The practice of rearranging babies' genitals and raising them as one or other sex is called "paediatric gender assignment." It's one of the medical devices used to conceal the existence of biological diversity in human sex development.

Doctors in Melbourne had attempted this with "R". Had tried to trick him into thinking he was a girl. They'd failed. And that's why "R" was angry. Sometimes he vented by punching holes in walls and windows. Eventually his partner, fearing for herself, persuaded him to see a therapist.

On his second visit the therapist thought "R" might like to discuss his gender identity issues. She wondered if he was having difficulty dealing with his lesbianism.

"I'm not a lesbian," "R" replied. "I'm a man! I don't have any identity issues!"

"That's what I mean," the therapist answered. "You've got a vagina, you were raised as a girl, but you identify as a man."

When "R's" therapist attempted to turn his problems into gender issues she was following a script that is repeated every time an intersex baby is identified.

"Gender" was once a grammatical term relating to the practice of endowing inanimate objects with the properties of male, female or neuter. In the 1950s, feminism adapted it to describe the way men and women become socialised into their respective roles.

Expatriate New Zealand psychologist, John Money, expanded the feminist concepts by inventing terms like "gender expression" and "gender role behaviour." He also coined the term "gender identity." Money believed this developed in infants as they "deciphered a continuous multiplicity of signs that pointed in the direction of their being a boy or a girl."

On one occasion Money attempted to raise an identical twin boy as a girl after the infant lost his penis in a botched circumcision. Money claimed success throughout the 1970s and refused to publish his experiment's failure when he became aware of it. Consequently the belief that all humans learn to identify themselves as male or female according to the way they are raised became entrenched. It's reason? Doctors believe in the myth of paediatric gender assignments and psychologists think transsexuals have disordered identities.

It is also why transgenderism and psycho-feminist gender theory are not science – they are pseudo-scientific narratives. The most recent product of an ancient cultural bio-variant phobia, only lately cobbled together from John Money's theories. To this day its primary

function is the erasure of biological variation in sex formation.

All attempts to mislead "R" into thinking he was a girl had failed. "R" had not deciphered the continuous multiplicity of signs that pointed in the direction of his being a girl, including his possession of a vagina, to conclude that he was female. The attempt to give him a disordered "gender identity" had failed miserably.

In the view of his angered therapist "R" couldn't win. He was a lesbian. He had a disordered identity because it wasn't the one gender theory had predetermined for him. The exchange made him even more angry. He stormed out and made his enraged way home. At his front door he eyed up the glass window pane for a moment. He screamed his outrage ... and he punched.

"R" had his hand and forearm swathed in plaster. Two days earlier he'd tried to punch out the reinforced glass window in his front door. That one angry punch had broken most of the bones in his right hand.

But a rational person should understand his anger.

This story is real. "R" is a real person, and he still lives somewhere in Australia, still struggling with what the surgeons, the doctors and the psychologists have done to him. If the medicos had all left "R" alone as a newborn he would have had a very different life altogether a much happier life no doubt.

There is a perfectly good reason why "gender theory" is called a "theory" — it is something that people have made up without any reference to actual observed and proven facts as a product of wishful thinking in the same way that other systems of belief such as ideologies and religions are made up out of nothing.

In other words, "gender theory" is a "gender" fiction that medicine and psychology agree to pretend to believe in as if it were actually true. And so intersex lives are brutalized beyond redemption in order to perpetuate what is nothing more than a very big lie. O.I.I. Australia offers author Jo Proctor of O.I.I. - N.Z. our deepest thanks for sharing with us the story of "R".

Micropenis

Edited from [Wikipedia](#)  Micropenis is an unusually small penis. A common criterion is a dorsal (measured on top) erect penile length of at least 2.5 standard deviations smaller than the mean human penis size, or smaller than about 7cm (3 inches) for an adult when compared to an average erection of 12.5cm (5 inches). Micropenis is usually recognized shortly after birth. The term is most often used medically when the rest of the penis, scrotum, and perineum are without ambiguity, such as hypospadias. Micropenis occurs in about 0.6 percent of males.

of the atypical issues associated with micropenis, most are issues of reduced prenatal androgen production or effect, such as atypical testicular development (testicular dysgenesis), Klinefelter syndrome, Leydig cell hypoplasia), specific defects of testosterone or dihydrotestosterone synthesis (17,20-lyase deficiency, 5 α -reductase deficiency), androgen insensitivity syndromes, inadequate pituitary stimulation (gonadotropin deficiency), and other forms of congenital hypogonadism. Micropenis can also occur as part of many genetic malformation syndromes that do not involve the sex chromosomes. It is sometimes a sign of congenital growth-hormone deficiency or congenital hypopituitarism. Several homeobox genes affect penis and digit size without detectable hormone variations. In addition, in utero exposure to some estrogen based fertility drugs like diethylstilbestrol (DES) has been linked to genital variations and/or a smaller than usual penis (microphallus).

After evaluation to detect any of the issues described above, micropenis can often be treated in infancy with injections of various hormones, such as human chorionic gonadotropin and testosterone.

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