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Book Review: Trans People in Love

A Project Seven Years in the Making

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Trans People in Love

Edited by Tracie O'Keefe & Katrina Fox
Published by Routledge, New York (2008)
I.S.B.N. -13 978 0789035723

... and listen to the undertones of triumph, sadness and limitless joy in all the voices of this collection.

This is a remarkable book and Katrina Fox and Tracie O'Keefe deserve high praise for having planned it and then ensured its publication. I should, perhaps, not be surprised, since the same team gave us the challenging *Finding the Real Me* and the excellent *Sex, Gender and Sexuality*. We are told that *Trans People in Love* was a seven-year project, starting with a pilot qualitative study of trans people and their partners. The final result reflects the care with which Katrina and Tracie chose their subjects and the creativity with which they collected their material.

As in *Finding the Real Me* there is a spectrum of sex and gender diversity (or a rainbow if you want a less scientific term for the same phenomenon), with M.T.F., F.T.M., S. & M., leathermen, performance artists, writers, musicians, academics, polyamorists, bisexuals and academics showing that love can be as multifaceted as the finest cut diamond, and may be as brittle as the aforesaid diamond or as resilient as Toledo steel.

Nor have the editors restricted themselves geographically. The first-person love stories range from the United States to South Africa, from Scotland to Australia, from Spain to Scandinavia and from Taiwan to Latvia.

I will get my negative criticisms out of the way early so that I can leave you with the true, delicious, flavour of the main text. There seems to have been some meddlesome sub-editing so that contributors who are not American are saddled with American usages and spelling such as the abominable "different than" and the use of "practice" as a verb. The common errors of "miniscule" for "minuscule" and the use of "cohort" to mean "colleague" also occur (a cohort is, strictly speaking, 600 Roman soldiers, one tenth of a legion). There is also a general scattering of the use of the nominative "I" where the correct form would be the accusative "me" so that solecisms such as "look at Brandon and I", "Alan still had not let David and I be alone" and "between Parker and I" abound. All right, I'm a pedant. But that happens to be a banner I will march under any day.

In my opinion the best writing, for style, clarity and grace, comes from the pens of two contributors whose first language was not English. Vidal Rousso is Latvian but his writing is strong, creative and highly evocative. Vidal is an F.T.M. His images are wild, challenging but always exactly right. They go off in the cerebral cortex of the reader like a string of Tom Thumb crackers, and they are the evocation of his explosive love for his Christa. Vidal is one of those truly strong transgenders who sees no need for surgical intervention. He knows who he is and is happy to be himself, describing himself variously as a "trashy Caribbean grunge with sexual overtones" or a "promiscuous Malecon drag queen". I'd love to meet him if he talks as well as he writes.

The other outstanding writer in this collection is Erica Zander, a Swedish F.T.M. whom I had the good fortune to meet when she and her wife T. came to lunch at my home during Erica's three months in Australia. I know that Erica talks well, but her writing is a delight. It is not full of pyrotechnics, like Vidal's, but she lays out her life story in clear, declarative English as she tells us of her progress from androgyne to transgendered woman, the stresses on her wife and marriage and the give and take which has allowed their marriage to continue with the loving support of their children and the extended family.

Some of the contributors to this anthology live on the wilder fringes of society. For instance, Lee "Bridgett" Harrington performs erotic entertainments involving bondage and S. & M., yet his own buttons are pushed by the Bear. He claims to see auras and spirits and is into flagellation, piercing and cutting. He writes of the Sydney Hellfire Club, although his webpage, [Passion And Soul](#) seems to be based in the U.S.A. He says, inter alia, "As a male-identified, female-bodied individual, it's sometimes hard to draw the line between feeling sexy as a biologically gifted drag queen and a tormented man screaming to get away from the longing looks from Kinsey six lesbians and open-ended offers from heterosexual male swingers hoping to hook up for the night." Not a problem I'm ever likely to experience, but it certainly makes for interesting reading.

Carmen, New Zealand-born but long domiciled in Australia, is also a performer's performer. She was one of the earliest artistes in the impersonator world and she's seen it all, kiddo, theatre, sex work, entrepreneurial business, and generous provision of support for charities.

She is flamboyant, larger than life, in her seventies but still prepared to give her all for the sake of those less fortunate than herself. As she says, "I was never a great smoker, drug-taker, or fall-down drunk, but I loved to put on a show and have a party so people could have a good time."

She also calls herself a "trans woman of great passion". Her lovemaking seems to have been of the scatter-gun variety but it has always been true to its truth, and it is based in the warmth and love her extended family always showed her.

One of the most interesting pieces is written by "Tiny Belly", a Taiwanese F.T.M. who underlines one of the most prevalent problems of the trans person in love. How does one achieve acceptance from the object of desire who may have all kinds of preconceived ideas about transpeople? Does one come out with the truth at the outset, risking disaster on the jagged reefs of uninformed prejudice, or does one conceal one's secret until the love relationship is established, only to risk losing it all on the grounds of deceit and fraud. Tiny Belly is one of the lucky ones who finds a love partner with an open mind so that revelation adds to previously accepted information rather than undermining it.

Interestingly there is not as much expression of "body-hatred" as one might expect. The phrase is used only once in the book although it is axiomatic that there is dissatisfaction with anatomical facts in most of the cases, and an ongoing need to remodel the fabric of the body to conform with conventional lovemaking requirements. Trans people often make do with techno substitutes for anatomy, or with surgical intervention for additions or subtractions.

It is always interesting to look behind the scenes at the clockwork of trans people ... the mechanisms which make them tick. Tracie refers to the "cuckoo-clock" character of her study, designed to show you the inner workings of a relationship, without disturbing the fine balance of its parts. I think she must be a fine therapist if she achieves for her clients what she and Katrina have achieved for us in this book. And the individuals are to be praised for their openness and generosity in sharing themselves.

It is difficult to say all one would like to say in the narrow compass of a review. I can only enjoin you to read the book. Read the passion and delight of stone butch Isaac Lindstrom, lover and poet, the triumphant transition of Jacob Anderson-Minshall, the tragedy redeemed of Martine Delaney, who tragically lost her soul mate but devotes her life and energy in campaigns on behalf of all of us, the victory over prejudice of Gypsy Teague ... and listen to the undertones of triumph, sadness and limitless joy in all the voices of this collection.

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From Tracie O'Keefe's website:  Tracie O'Keefe is a qualified and registered clinical hypnotherapist (A.S.O.C.H.A., psychotherapist, counsellor, mental health professional and trainer, working from a naturopathic perspective in Sydney, Australia. She trained at a post-graduate level with the National School of Hypnosis and Advanced Psychotherapy in London, U.K. U.K.C.P.-recognised school). Her degree and doctorate were earned at the American Institute of Hypnotherapy in the U.S.A. and issued in co-ordination with the Bureau for Private Post-Secondary and Vocational Education in California. She has been a family and couples therapist, a sex therapist and addictions therapist for many years and a qualified naturopath and medical herbalist, who trained in nutritional medicine with the Australian Institute of Applied Sciences. She holds a Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree in Complementary Medicine from Charles Sturt University. She is also an internationally published researcher, author and editor of the following books. [Read more about Dr. Tracie O'Keefe at her website](#) 

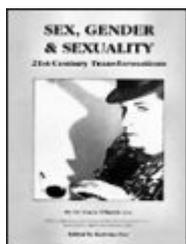


Trans-X-U-All: The Naked Difference

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1997)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0952948209.

From Google Books:  This fresh and concise work takes an exciting look at the world of transsexuals. It explains the whole gender reassignment process from start to finish and includes deeply moving stories written by transsexuals themselves, their lovers, families and friends. Scientific, factual, informative, it provides, in accessible language, a comprehensive guide to the world of transsexuality.



Sex, Gender & Sexuality: 21st Century Transformations

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1999)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 0952948223

From Google Books:  This book dispels much of the mysticism around physical sex, gender constructs, and the diversity of sexuality. As well as considering gay, lesbian, transsexual and transgendered identities, it also looks at the intersex groups, such as hermaphrodites, and people who identify as androgynous or as being without sex or gender.

Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity

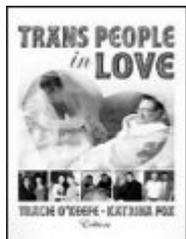
Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Jossey-Bass (2003)



I.S.B.N.-13 978-0787965471

From Google Books:  *Finding the Real Me* is an extraordinary collection of real-life stories told by a wide-range of sex and gender diverse people. These healing tales of struggle and transformation reveal just how creative, resourceful, and adventurous the individuals in this community can be and also helps to bridge the gap between ignorance and understanding. As each incredible story unfolds we become part of the author's journey to self-acceptance and join the celebration of their new life. Page by page, we laugh, cry, and learn to appreciate these wonderful courageous people and the road they walked to be their true-selves. *Finding the Real Me* is a landmark book that encourages us to embrace diversity, to never fear our differences, and to remain always in awe of our amazing possibilities.



Trans People in Love
Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox
Publisher: Routledge (2008)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0789035721

From Google Books:  *Trans People in Love* provides a forum for the experience of being in love and in relationships with significant others for members of the trans community. This honest and respectful volume tells clinicians, scholars, and trans people themselves of the beauty and complexity that trans identity brings to a romantic relationship, what skills and mindsets are needed to forge positive relationships, and demonstrates the reality that trans people in all stages of transition can create stable and loving relationships that are both physically and emotionally fulfilling.

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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.