



# **My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely**

*Kate Bornstein*

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## **My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely** Kate Bornstein

Kate Bornstein brings theory down to Earth and provides a practical guide to living with or without a gender. The workbook includes quizzes and exercises that determine how much of a man or woman you are, and gives you the tools to reach whatever point you desire on the gender continuum. If you don't think you are transgendered when you sit down to read this book, you will be by the time you finish it!

## **My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely Details**

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# **From Reader Review My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely for online ebook**

## **David says**

A fairly charming tour through the world of no gender. This book is certainly not a complete or scholarly guide to ideas about gender, instead representing a single point of view told in a casual, magazine-like fashion, but it's rather pleasant point of view. Kate Bornstein, as she describes throughout the book, was born male and eventually transitioned to female and created an identity for herself as a transgender lesbian. Later one, her partner Catherine became David, isolating her from the lesbian community and destroying her established identity. She eventually came to realize that essentialist identities don't really work, especially when they exist in binaries. She writes this book to help guide readers who have questioned their status as "real men" or "real women" into a place of comfort in experimenting with newer, more flexible gender identities.

Bornstein's primary idea is that of a "gender pyramid." She says that since gender essentially means "category," there are a multiplicity of genders, tied to the ways we and society identify herself. She claims that not only are boy, man, and ftm distinct genders, but also white collar man, blue collar man, and so forth, with each subculture and each stratum of society having different ideas of what a "real man" would be. These genders are structured in a pyramid, with the identity of straight, cis-, middle-class white Protestant man on top, and lesser identities on lower and lower levels of the pyramid, wielding less power in society. She claims that our expressed gender is a form of communication, and that we all make subtle gender shifts every day to establish a role with each person we interact with. By that logic, she says, we could all be described as "transgendered."

This is where I have qualms with the book: in suggesting that we are all transgendered, she tends to trivialize the issues of those people who truly can't be comfortable with themselves without passing as the "opposite" gender, and considering that the transgendered are a ridiculously oppressed minority as is, one shouldn't write things that could be misappropriated to further suppress them.

Despite some flaws, I really enjoyed Bornstein's personality and the format of this book. We need more works on gender deconstruction that aren't in utterly dreary academic formats.

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## **Kennedy says**

I've long considered myself "queer," but I'd never really consciously thought about or questioned my gender identity and presentation until I found myself in a long-term relationship with a genderqueer person. I picked up this book not only to better understand and support my partner at the time, but also to investigate my own gender identity and how I defined my personal "queerness" through my gender presentation and identity as well as through my romantic and sexual preferences. I worked diligently through the exercises--the book really is a "workbook" and there are plenty of writing prompts, activity suggestions, and quizzes to encourage readers to think critically about gender on a personal level as well as as a greater social construct.

After finishing "My Gender Workbook," I was still very much the same person. I hadn't had any major gender epiphanies--I still identify as a cis woman--but I felt much more confident in my identity and presentation as a queer woman. I used the prompts in the workbook to create and define my personal gender identity rather than trying (and failing) to fit into a "standard" queer/lesbian "look"--chapstick, femme, butch,

etc.

This was a fantastic resource and I honestly enjoyed what was honestly sometimes a painful learning process. I highly recommend it to anyone who feels like they could use a little help understanding gender on a personal or social level (and really to everyone because for real people do not think about gender enough and it's a major problem).

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### **Grace says**

Kind of the worst excesses of 90s rad queer liberal-in-disguise culture. The absolute low point (besides a protracted and explicit account of Bornstein's online BDSM conversations) is a quiz she has where she shows you how privileged or not privileged you are essentially. Bornstein asserts here that bpq people and BDSM enthusiasts are more oppressed than lesbian or gay people. Also she says that people with penises are automatically privileged for having penises (not true! and reflecting internalized transmisogyny on her part!). She assigns people with penises 250 privilege points (ugh) but assigns white people only 10 privilege points for being white (????!!!!!!) To Bornstein, gender is a fun game to play with. Interestingly, at one point she includes a little quote from a queer woman of colour who notes that it is impossible for her to play with gender because of racist misogyny. If only Bornstein actually listened.

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### **Jackson says**

This is a great book for someone exploring their gender or trying to understand gender. I would definitely recommend it for teens.

One thing, though, I kind of think this book and Bornstein's other books create and support the narrative that cisgender folks use to justify their appropriation of trans identities. This really sucks and pretty much drives me crazy and sucks cause I do actually love Kate Bornstein--I just really hate the way that trans people's bodies and lives get used as a this example for cis folks to learn from and I think we pretty much get sold out in the process. I don't think this is Bornstein's intention and I still think she has some great things to say that can help some people understand and accept themselves.

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### **Maxine says**

As a (young) academic, I'm often unable to read "intro to gender" books without ranting to the disembodied author about oversimplification and glibness. This book does not have those faults--rather, it is an honest, sometimes intense, but always funny and compassionate look at how we are gendered and what we can do about it. This old edition does have some hiccups when read now, particularly the sections on the freedoms of cyberspace--the online arena hasn't quite retained the utopian vibe Bornstein once found in it. But that's a minor quibble: even as a cisgender femme female, I found much to think about here. I can only imagine how helpful and interesting it might be to someone more actively questioning gender. I'll probably have to read this again, and that's a recommendation in itself!

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## **Danni Green says**

This was the first gender-related book I ever read, when I was about 18 and had absolutely no consciousness of anything outside the gender binary. It changed my life forever and it remains one of the most important books in my life. I re-read it every couple of years just to make sure it's still a part of me, and I get something new out of it every time. It's also a COMPLETELY different book from the updated "My New Gender Workbook" by the same author, and I highly recommend seeking out the original as it is full of insight and information that did not get included in the update. Even if you are 100% secure in your gender identity, this book will offer you new ways to think about gender and the world in which genders exist. Easily one of my top 10 books of all time.

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## **Jamie says**

Q: GENDER:

Options: Male or Female

This question on demographic surveys has irritated me for as long as I can remember. Who cares? Why do you need to know? And shouldn't there be more options? How about, "Other"? Reluctantly I choose female. That is who I am biologically and what I look like. But my personality rarely matches the social expectations associated with that biology and appearance.

As a young child, I was very verbally advanced and never shy about expressing myself. I was also considerably independent; so much that my mother often sadly commented that I didn't make her feel needed. It doesn't take long once you go out into the world and start interacting with society to learn that these traits are not considered "lady-like". My interests and disinterests tend to fall short of those expectations as well. All of this has just intensified as I've gotten older.

I enjoy "girlying it up," but when you look like that, then speak and behave as I do, you are bound to find a lack of acceptance. This issue has caused me great problems in employment and personal relationships. In dating men, those gender expectations inevitably rear their ugly heads as they expect me to eventually start acting like "a real girl". And female friendships are often difficult to form because I don't have the common grounds on which to properly bond. To extrapolate this issue, I have never wanted children and nothing more than the failure to reproduce disqualifies you from being, "a real woman". I was told this would change when I got older but, my stance has just strengthened with time.

I have never wanted to be a man, felt I should have been born a man, or that I was a man trapped in a woman's body. But the problem is, nearly everything about \*who\* I am as a person, does not (from a socially defined perspective) match this gender, female.

I enjoyed this book, and if you are reading this review, I imagine you will too. Because the author approaches gender as fluid and with many possibilities, there will likely be parts that you take and leave. Not everything resonated with me personally, but much did. Many times, I paused reading to either write on the exercises or simply reflect on thoughts about some of my own experiences. It asks a lot of questions and shares a lot of stories. It is, at the very least, a good starting point for this discussion. I finished reading this book feeling good and less alone on this subject of "no gender," which is how I more accurately feel about myself.

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## Akiva says

Read in college, for leisure. A lot of other books and blogs I was reading referenced *My Gender Workbook*, so I was excited to finally get my hands on a copy. Sadly, it's not really what it says on the tin. Rather than presenting different options and asking difficult interesting questions, *My Gender Workbook* has a strong agenda, all the exercises push you towards that agenda, and there's not a lot of other interesting stuff, especially if you're already familiar with the (101-level) arguments. I ended up skimming it.

tl;dr: Good for people who haven't ever thought about it before; less good for people who already have significant angst.

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## Kelsey says

I'll start out this review by saying that this book would probably be a good book for someone who feels like they don't fit into either of the two traditional social genders. With that caveat, the book has some serious problems. Two in particular really stand out:

First, the theory of the book was awfully underdeveloped. The author's basic argument is:

1. Not everyone fits neatly into the traditional bi-polar gender theory. (or that the author didn't fit into it), therefore,
2. There is no such thing as gender. It is just socially constructed hegemony that oppresses freedom and self-expression.

While I can certainly buy the argument that some people don't fit neatly into traditional gender roles and therefore that gender roles can be very oppressive to some, the argument does not automatically follow that gender does not exist or that it is oppressing everyone. But the author makes these logical leaps and never looks back. While I might be open to the idea that gender doesn't exist, there seems to be a lot of reasons why it does. There seems to be a statistically significant amount of clumping of characteristics among people of specific genders. Furthermore, there are the physical characteristics that seem to have some effect on gender expression, an argument that the author admits briefly and then ignores in the development of the theory. Finally, gender seems to exist in almost all cultures. While these arguments are not conclusive, I would have liked them to be addressed.

The author then goes on to create a system of gender based on a theory that gender and power are intertwined, and that people with a collection of more characteristics of "ideal gender roles" have more power in the system. The theory seems incredibly bulky, perhaps because power is added in, which even if you agree with the author's argument, power would be a by-product of following the gender rules, not part of its definition. In fact, this theory really fails to describe gender at all, and it is not until the end of the book that the author casually defines gender as essentially any category. Therefore, every time you change your personality or appearance, you have changed your gender. Not only is this description unhelpful because it is overly inclusive, it comes 200 pages too late, leaving the reader confused by statements like "there are an infinite number of genders" or "gender doesn't exist". As you can see, however, these two statements are not

consistent with each other.

To summarize the problems with the theory of the book, the author rejects the leading theory on gender because a small subsection of the population does not fit into the theory. However, instead of tweaking the traditional theory to account for the outliers, the author instead creates a theory that accounts for the previous outliers while failing to take into account the majority of the population that now does not fit into the new theory.

The second major issue I have with this book is the abusive rhetoric and angry undertones that run through it. The author seems to take an anarchist perspective in many parts of the book, complaining about the system just because it is the system. In several parts of the book the author creates an us versus them situation, often unnecessarily. However, even the author admits that there is no "them," leaving the reader confused at who is the enemy even while the author tells us to fight against them. In essence, the author comes off as a bitter ex-lover scorned by the world that rejected him.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, was the author's occasional use of Nazi rhetoric. While the U.S. certainly is not the kindest to trans-gendered or non-gendered people, it is inappropriate to compare the discrimination currently faced by trans-gendered people with the mass genocide (that included "social deviants" like transgender people) that occurred at the direction of Hitler. There are times when such comparisons are appropriate, but they should be reserved for when genocide is actually occurring, not as a way of inciting anger for one's own personal agenda. While the author is certainly not the first or the last to make this mistake, I still find it incredibly inappropriate and off-putting.

Surprisingly, this book failed to take into account the fact that people could be different, even though that is the premise of the book. The author states that it is wrong for the world to discriminate against people who don't fit into the traditional gender roles, but in the same breath the author dismisses people who follow traditional gender roles as oppressed, underdeveloped, and narrow-minded. The author even goes so far as to say that people who closely fit into traditional gender roles are of limited value to society. While I agree with the author's argument that people should not be discriminated against because they don't fit into traditional gender roles, likewise I believe the author undercuts the moral authority of the book by not offering the same respect to traditionally gendered people that the author desires for himself.

On a lighter side, there are several things that made this book enjoyable. The author did a great job letting his voice come through in the book, and by the end of the book, one almost feels like they know the author well.

Additionally, the book was written in 1998, and the author seems to be very interested in the Internet revolution that was taking place at that time. This comes through in the book in a quaint and endearing way, reminding the reader of the Internet chat room era that has now long since passed. The author even uses some Internet conventions in the book, something that could theoretically annoy some readers but which I found endearing and especially apt for the author's familiar writing style.

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## **I\_Am\_Strechd\_On\_Your\_Grave says**

There is so much to think about when you first come out to yourself and this book helped me so much! It made the journey to discovering my gender-identity exciting and fun. I think this workbook is helpful for anyone questioning their gender and for anyone who isn't, because you learn a lot about yourself and the way that gender is constructed in the process.

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## **Lisa says**

Was a while ago that I read this, but it was very interesting at the time. There was a lot of quite clear information and thought-provoking material. It's one of the few books about Genderqueer and Trans issues that presents a viable middle-ground.

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## **Kelsey says**

This is so accessible for people who have very limited knowledge of gender dynamics as well as what being genderqueer really means. This was one of the first books I purchased in my college career and it helped to open my eyes. I don't know that I recommend it for the seasoned gender studies student, but for someone exploring themselves and others this is a great, and humorous way to do so.

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## **Eve says**

Really not into it to be honest, it bugged me because of the tone and some of the underlying assumptions in the questionnaire. In the end I only read to the end of the questionnaire, and skimmed through the rest and kept being met with stuff that just.... bugged me! The book just wasn't for me I guess. I have thought so extensively and stressfully and analytically about gender, and had my fair share of gender angst also, so for as much as I could find good theory I was also overwhelmed with underlying theory that I could argue big holes into, and the tone was too camp for me to engage with. Some people will get a hell of a lot out of this book though, I know it, and so I have donated my copy to the library because they didn't have a copy in stock.

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## **Charlie Hailey says**

I oscillated between 3 and 4 stars just because this book is definitely full of some of the harmful, liberal queer theory that just doesn't reach the heart of gender/sexuality/oppression. I can't help but flinch when I read the words "heterosexual lesbian" and I just can't get behind that as anything but harmful. That being said, this book absolutely helped me develop insights into the nature of gender and also brought me a lot closer to understanding the purpose and arguments of queer theory. Bornstein's formula for gender as power + identity + desire is phenomenal and his observation that gender does not exist, therefore there are infinite genders is what gave me some revelations about the way I view gender nihilism as a whole.



tl;dr good book, some great points, you WILL have to suffer through the unironic use of the term sapiosexual

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## **Autumn Ellen says**

This is an engaging introduction to / guided reflection on gender. I didn't agree with every argument and model in the book. That being said, I appreciated the panoramic overview of gender and found the exercises to be very helpful in practical terms. I went in as a cis woman with a lot of half-buried discomfort around my gender and came out the other end having found myself to be a transmasculine nonbinary person. It was a healing experience for me.

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