

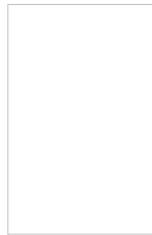
From the inside out: Radical gender transformation, FTM and beyond.

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**From the Inside Out:
Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond**



Morty Diamond (Editor)
Manic D Press, San Francisco, 2004
168 pages, \$13.95 ([10.46 on Amazon](#))

Reviewed by Todd G. Morrison

From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond is an anthology of poetry and short essays written by individuals self-identifying as “gender variant, transgender, third gender, non-gender, monster trans, mtm, genderqueer, transman, trannyboy, ftm, and transsexual” (p. 8). As with most anthologies, readers will consider some entries to be better written, more insightful, and more provocative than other entries. I particularly enjoyed “Transgressive Lust,” “The Conversation,” “Thoughts on Transcending Stone,” “Pecos Bill,” “Often,” “Wondering,” “Father and Son,” “Learning to Be Gay,” and “Dear Breasts.” Conversely, my interest in *From the Inside Out* lagged when I read the following: “American Transsexual Sacrifice,” “A Trilogy of Horror and Transmutation,” “Winter (Transition),” “If I Should Die Before I Wake...Don’t Let Me” and “Punk Rock Carnival Whores: A Story.” (Given the latter’s tangential

linkage with gender – radical or otherwise – its inclusion in this anthology is particularly mysterious.) I trust that other readers may concur with (or reject) these assessments.

An important element of *From the Inside Out* is that it manages to avoid the obscurantism and tortuous prose characteristic of much academic writing on the subject of gender. (The various musings of scholars such as Judith Butler come to mind.) With refreshing clarity, most of the contributors particularize their disengagement from society's hegemonic system of gender; a system which demands congruence between the body and one's psychological understanding of oneself as masculine or feminine (an understanding that often is grounded in definitions promulgated by mainstream society). Contributors also articulate various strategies of resistance to the "rigid gender classifications" (p. 94) promoted by "binary-focused people" (p. 113). These strategies range from modifying the body (and, in so doing, attempting to establish "harmony" between sex and gender) to occupying a state of "otherness" in which one is neither male nor female. Although some of these strategies reflect an essentialist understanding of sex and gender, the book does not accord them less validity than those that are more constructionist. In this regard, the book is admirably impartial.

Another critical strength of this anthology resides not so much in the answers it provides but, rather, in the questions it raises. Assuming that sex and gender are distinguishable, then why is sex more likely than gender to be modified (i.e., why do many contributors manipulate their bodies to be congruent with their gender and not vice versa)? Also, despite their aversion to a binary system of gender, why do some contributors endorse rather impoverished models of masculinity and femininity? For example, Marcus Rene Van comments on studying men and how they move... "the way their shoulders stay stiff and

never sway when they turn” (p. 53). Does one challenge hegemonic models of gender by learning to walk like a man? And what does the phrase “like a man” mean anyway? Similarly, Eli Wadley asserts that life as boy meant “cut-off shorts and no shirt...tree climbing, basketball, ice hockey...cowboys and gladiators...backpacks, toolkits, and fake scar and bruise sets” (p. 100). In contrast, the life of a girl is “bikini halter tops, rainbow terrycloth tube tops...playing tea party and house... [dressing up as a] fairy princess with tiara and glittering wand...handbags, make-up kits, and nail polish” (pp. 99-100). Given its antiquated nature, I was surprised that sugar and spice and snails and puppy dog tails were not added to this list. In addition, what does it mean to talk about one’s “inner boy” (p. 99), especially when the characteristics ascribed to that boy are resolutely old-fashioned? Why would gender variant individuals reify traditional views of masculinity and femininity? Isn’t it contradictory to label oneself a “gender outlaw” (p. 122) whilst simultaneously perceiving oneself as “working in their world as a *male*” (p. 121)? Finally, is it possible to occupy a state of existence that is truly devoid of gender?

In conclusion, *From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond*, is a provocative and, in most instances, well-written book. I anticipate that it would be of particular interest to those teaching on the subject of gender, and would be suitable for use in advanced undergraduate courses on human sexuality.

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