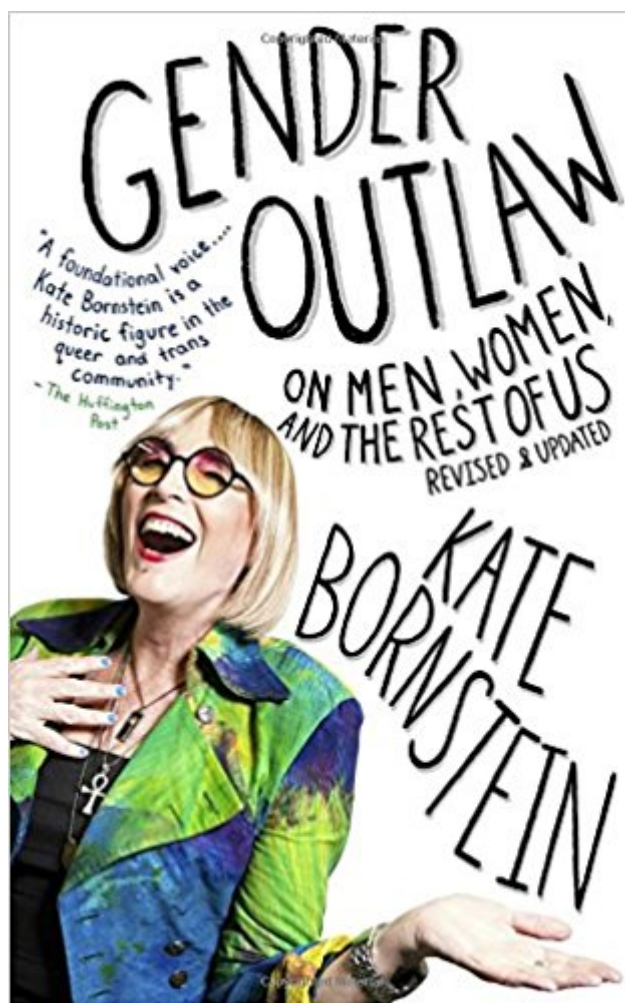


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# Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, And The Rest Of Us



## Synopsis

“I know I’m not a man . . . and I’ve come to the conclusion that I’m probably not a woman, either. . . . The trouble is, we’re living in a world that insists we be one or the other.” With these words, Kate Bornstein ushers readers on a funny, fearless, and wonderfully scenic journey across the terrains of gender and identity. On one level, *Gender Outlaw* details Bornstein’s transformation from heterosexual male to lesbian woman, from a one-time IBM salesperson to a playwright and performance artist. But this particular coming-of-age story is also a provocative investigation into our notions of male and female, from a self-described nonbinary transfeminine diesel femme dyke who never stops questioning our cultural assumptions. *Gender Outlaw* was decades ahead of its time when it was first published in 1994. Now, some twenty-odd years later, this book stands as both a classic and a still-revolutionary work—one that continues to push us gently but profoundly to the furthest borders of the gender frontier. With a new introduction

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bornstein considers herself a gender outlaw because she breaks the laws of nature. A former heterosexual male and now a lesbian woman, Bay Area Reporter writer, and actor who has appeared on talk shows, she has completed the transsexual process, including surgery. As she considers her workplace the theater, about a third of this autobiographical work is devoted to queer theater, including her play, *Hidden: A Gender*. The black-and-white photos were not seen but are

apparently a significant part of this informative and humorous book. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A thoughtful challenge to gender ideology that continually asks difficult questions about identity, orientation, and desire. Bornstein cleverly incorporates cultural criticism, dramatic writing, and autobiography to make her point that gender (which she distinguishes from sex) is a cultural rather than a natural phenomenon. The chapters range from "fashion tips" on her writing style to dialogue between herself and another about the "nuts and bolts" of the surgical process of a gender change (which she has undergone). Confronting transgenderism and transgendered people is not easy for many individuals, but Bornstein does it in a way that sparks debate without putting her audience on the defensive. She suggests that "the culture may not simply be creating roles for naturally-gendered people, the culture may in fact be creating the gendered people." Her discussion of the "parts" of gender is based on respected sources and includes analyses of gender assignment, identity, and roles. Things get mixed up, according to Bornstein, because "sexual orientation/preference is based in this culture solely on the gender of one's partner of choice," in effect confusing orientation and preference. Seeing queer theater as a place in which gender ambiguity and fluidity can and should be explored, she includes in the book her play, *Hidden: A Gender*. Bornstein uses the term "gender defenders" to describe those who work hard to maintain the current rigid system of gender, and she claims that her "people" (i.e., the transgendered) are just beginning to challenge the system and to demand acceptance and understanding. Bornstein's witty style, personal approach, and frankness open doors to questioning gender assumptions and boundaries. -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Fantastic overview of the issues of gender euphoria and the extraordinary complexity of gender and sexual identity and preferential expression of the same. Updated recently and VERY thought provoking. Must read in the current social climate in re gender and sexual issues.

wonderful and answered so many questions that I had about being transgender. I didn't agree with all she proposed but definitely some things to consider- she has a great sense of humor!

This book has totally changed my viewpoints on gender! Coming from the perspective of someone who was already conscious of the system and pitfalls Kate describes, this book still provided me

with fresh insights into how gender shapes our society and how society shapes our genders. I love it!

Kate Bornstein has written a fabulous book about what it means to be differently gendered. Her experience of being male, being female, being something else entirely, has lead her to ask the question "What is gender, anyway?" This book is the beginning of an answer to that question. Boornstein does not pretend to know the answers to the questions she raises. For the most part, the critical act in this book is raising the questions at all. And even when she has worked out an answer for herself, she is extremely clear (with herself and with the reader) that the boundaries of that answer pretty much end where her body ends and the rest of the world begins. Her experience acts as a prism through which she views everything else about the world (about theatre, about "the lesbian community", about straight marriage, about loving, about medicine and therapy). Her sideways view of things that had previously seemed solid to me helped me re-orient my vision of the world as it is, and as it might be. Come to this book with an open mind, and reading it will open your mind even farther. It is absolutely not required that you agree with everything she has to say, that you interpret her observations the way she does, that you experience the world the way she does. Whatever answers you find for yourself, traveling with this author through her world of questions is a ride which should not be missed.

The subtitle of the book is, "on Men, Women and the Rest of Us." Bernstein's book is not just about a man becoming a woman, but it puts into doubt the whole sex/gender system. Bernstein does not use the term, "biological sex," but refers to all gender identity as "gender": biology does not have any primacy. She pokes holes in the binary gender system by questioning why one has to be one or the other of these, or even remain stable in one gender. This "fluidity" is different from ambiguity, in which it is not clear at a given moment which gender one is. This book is liberating for those who feel they might not fit in no matter what kind of operation they had. As the New York Times says, instead of being hostile about gender liberation, Bornstein is sweet, sincere, lucid. Her sometimes anthropological point of view is useful in lifting up age-old cultural assumptions about gender and orientations in a section she jocularly calls "The Rulebook." Gender can be assigned, attributed, there can be gender roles or an experienced identity. Bernstein suggests fifteen other models in addition to the usual gay, straight or bi- orientations. The list is fascinating, including: multiple partners models, differently-abled bodies models, reproductive models, models based on sex act preference...leading up to the heading of sex without gender. After setting up the rules, Bornstein

enthusiastically dismantles them. Are there solid definitions of male and female? In addition to the usual two sets of chromosomes there are five other sets. If gender equals what hormones you have, you could buy your gender at any pharmacy. In addition, she tells us several times that in some other cultures it is normal for someone born one gender to assume the gender of the other. She mentions more than once that a gender transformation often accompanies the process of becoming a tribal healer or shaman. Bornstein namedrops many people of transgressive gender that you can look up - many of whom have written books. In addition, she provides a fascinating bibliography. Her questions are possibly the most interesting part of the book. "Do you `feel like a man'? Do you `feel like a woman'?" she asks. "What does a man feel like? What does a woman feel like?" There are many other considerations like gender and politics, oppression, etc., but the list is too long for a short review. There is a play included which I did not think was very good although parts were interesting. Nevertheless, I would enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone interested in transgressive gender issues.

Important in it's way, but somewhat dated now. The whole theater-activism section at the latter end of the book was truly wince-inducing. Still, Bornstein makes some valid points about gender but nothing truly original. A pioneer I suppose.

A must read for everyone cis, straight, trans... This book was smart and funny, but it really asked the most important questions. Love yourself and you don't need a label to know who you are.

I bought this for a friend, who found it informative and useful. I have every intention of reading it, but so far, I haven't. So there you are, for whatever that's worth.

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