

The Lives of Transgender People

Genny Beemyn & Susan Rankin

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There are few surprises in this report for those of us who have been allies or activists for many years, but this book is the best I have seen so far to help those outside our community understand transgender at least a little better. It should be required reading in all gender studies courses.

Fortunately, the authors use the term transgender in its broadest meaning. One surprising result of their study is expressed as follows: “In our survey, respondents offered *more than a hundred* (italics mine) different descriptions for their gender identity besides the traditional categories of men, women, and transgender.” Many, or perhaps most, of these unique categories are somewhere under the relatively new category genderqueer.

This is the most difficult of all for those of us who have spent much of our lives in a binary world. We understand male and female. We may even understand transition from female to male or male to female, although it may be outside our personal experience. It is the hundreds of “in-between” genders that are difficult to understand. If you share this puzzlement, “Nina Here Nor There” by Nick Krieger (available at Amazon.com) is an outstanding book by a transgender writer whose experience places them firmly in the genderqueer category somewhat on the male side of the middle between male and female.

Authors Beemyn and Rankin do a pretty good job of explaining this category through exposition and anecdotal segments quoted from survey participants. The size of their survey group (about 3500 respondents) provides a higher statistical probability to their conclusions. The breadth of their survey – incorporating diversity in gender, ethnicity, race, and religion – further validates that transgender is endemic to all populations.

I heartily recommend this book to anyone who wants to better understand the path our transgender friends have taken – or will take – in their lives.