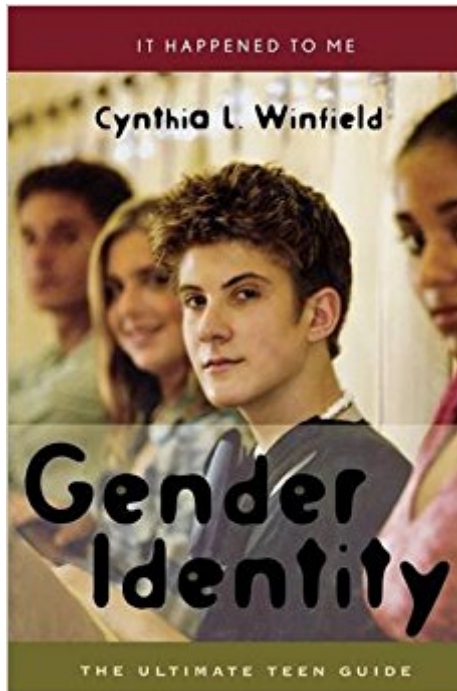




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# Gender Identity: The Ultimate Teen Guide (It Happened To Me)



## Synopsis

Contrary to popular education, gender is no longer an either "male" or "female" proposition. Today, it is increasingly important, especially for those coming into adulthood, to go beyond the concepts of gay, lesbian, straight, and bisexual when examining gender: the way we feel about ourselves and our roles in society. *Gender Identity: The Ultimate Teen Guide* examines what is meant by "sex" and "gender" — from typical gender roles and stereotypes, through those who transcend the usual categories of "male" and "female." Author Cynthia Winfield encourages readers to "think outside the box," to recognize places where they cross gender lines, and to consider whether the time has come to change expectations or definitions within popular culture. The book also addresses: Differences between biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression The quandary of persons who identify as a gender other than the biological sex assigned them at birth Intersex children and the current research The public debate and rapidly changing legal protections for those outside the narrowly defined gender norm Ways readers can make society more cognizant and inclusive of gender variant individuals In addition to historical and factual information and the popular media's depictions of gender issues, the book allows contemporary teens and young adults to voice their experiences through poetry and prose. Questions for teens to consider and places teens can explore such questions in a safe space are also included.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From linguistics to biology, from religious belief to postmodern theory and political action, there's no

other book that I know of that covers all the bases of gender like this excellent, meticulously compiled introductory text. (Kate Bornstein, Author of *Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws*) As part of a series that treats sensitive issues for adolescents, this book begins with Dr. John Money's well-known case of sex/gender reassignment for a baby boy due to a botched circumcision. Winfield, a Massachusetts educator, presents a history of transgender issues, teens' personal reflections, resources, photos, and a glossary. She advocates that all students get involved in education and activism about gender issues and rights. The text is complemented by cartoons by Erin Lindsey, known for the transgender comic strip *Venus Envy*. (Scitech Books News) This topic is quite welcome in the young adult world. Information is power, and those interested in gender identity have had a difficult time finding information. For that reason alone, this book should appear on every library's shelf. (VOYA, June 2007) This book will rock your world. If you are a person of gender; if you identify as human; if you have a brain and a heart and want to expand both, plan to have children, wish you knew how to make a difference or live a more compassionate life, you need this book. Astounding, essential, illuminating information for every person of every age. (Julie Anne Peters, author of *Luna* and *Keeping You a Secret*)

Cynthia L. Winfield, a licensed educator in the state of Massachusetts, teaches eighth grade reading, writing, and language arts. She is also a book reviewer for VOYA: Voice of Youth Advocates.

In the future, when people are less ignorant, we will look back on books like this one as pointing the way to a more civilized view of sexuality and gender identity issues. This is a scholarly work that is written in an accessible style. A wide range of topics are covered, but the unifying thread is an extraordinarily deep intelligence.

"Gender Identity" is the first book on the topic written specifically for teens. Thoroughly researched, it deals factually and neutrally with topics that run the gamut from odd to traumatic. The book is comprehensive and informative, and really opened my eyes to how often babies are born "non-standard." I was amazed. And how often surgery is chosen to amend this before the child is old enough to make the choice. I was horrified. This is hugely important. Information like this being shared widely will surely help our culture to become more compassionate about things that are different from the "norm." It's worth noting that previous books were primarily geared to clinical and diagnostic readers, and were unlikely to be read by others. Because of the book's neutral tone, the

reader is left to imagine what it must feel like to be the people who are described in the book. I see this as very beneficial, partly because exercising the imagination is good, and partly because each individual is entitled to his or her own experience. I see no reason to create an expectation of pain or hardship when it may not be necessary. Gender Identity is a well-written book that is definitely worth reading.

Author Cynthia L. Winfield begins her book, Gender Identity with a retelling of the story of David Reimer, a boy (one of a pair of twins) whose penis was completely destroyed in a botched circumcision. Reimer's grief stricken parents sought a solution to this horrific situation by attempting to raise him as a girl. As the world now knows this gender experiment failed miserably. Reimer's story was first used to suggest that gender is malleable until a certain age; but after David expressed how miserable his imposed female identity was, gender theorists have used his story to support the opposite theory, that gender is innate. I give Winfield full credit for naming the "doctor" Jean-Marie Huot who burned David's seven month old penis to a crisp, and she goes into a fair amount of detail retelling Reimer's story, but she gets an important detail very wrong. Winfield dutifully reports, "When the twins were seven months old, they both developed a condition called phimosis, which caused the foreskins on their penises to close, making urination difficult and painful." The fact is phimosis is the natural condition of every infant penis, almost every male left genitally intact grows out of this condition as he ages and the foreskin retracts and becomes mobile as it naturally should. It does not make urination difficult or painful. Phimosis that persists into adulthood can be treated by far less invasive measures than circumcision, but it has often been used as a pathetic excuse for circumcision of children, to gullible people who do not know about natural genital development. My criticism goes farther because Winfield doesn't stop there. In a sidebar titled, "Circumcision: Who Decides?" she proceeds to blandly discuss infant circumcision without ever asking the question, is it ethical to cut off part of a child's natural sex organ? In the context of David Reimer's horrific story this omission is palpably vapid. Recognizing this book is attempting to be a feel-good book about gender for teenagers, I think the author is underestimating the abilities of her intended audience. Some serious areas are glossed over and for teens, who are in all likelihood in a questioning state, this oversimplification could be very harmful. Everything here is la-de-dah, no serious introspection. Parental reaction to homosexuality in their children is never discussed, for teen agers questioning their gender and sexuality this is imperative. I have personally know several young questioning males rushed through MTF transition and surgery, sometimes with their parent's financial and emotional support, because having a recognized medical condition,

(transsexuality) and treatment (hormones and surgery) was preferable for the parents than having a gay child. Some young people may benefit from gender transition and some of those may benefit from genital conversion surgery, but not all. Adults who have expressed regret about social and surgical transition, (ranging from mild to suicide) are never mentioned in these feel-good type books. For a young person contemplating permanent gender altering body modifications consideration of possible regret should be acknowledged. Winfield closes her book saying, "This book is meant to provide an introductory overview of gender issues for any inquiring mind. To learn more, venture beyond the covers of this book." I couldn't agree more. To any young person questioning their gender I would say, Yes by all means question it and question it hard. Don't forget to also question the society you grow up in and what that society does to condone or condemn your expression of gender.

This book is a basic, factual, emotionally balanced, and up-to-date introduction for teenagers to a topic that is much more complicated than most people would guess, a topic that is still evolving with fresh research, a set of diagnoses and personal identity issues with huge emotional and social impacts on a far greater number of teenagers than most people would guess. The book is a well-written and not overly simplified introduction, which serves well as an introduction for adults, as well as for youth. I love that this book is emotionally as neutral as possible, and I love that it is full of references that the reader can pursue to get further information about aspects of gender identity topics that may be relevant to him/her. I would recommend this clear-headed introduction to anyone who needs to begin learning about gender identity issues.

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