



Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition

By Katie Rain Hill

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In her unique, generous, and affecting voice, nineteen-year-old Katie Rain Hill shares her personal journey of undergoing gender reassignment. Now with a reading group guide!

Katie Rain Hill realized very young that a serious mistake had been made; she was a girl who had been born in the body of a boy. Suffocating under her peers' bullying and the mounting pressure to be "normal," Katie tried to take her life at the age of eight years old. After several other failed attempts, she finally understood that "Katie"—the girl trapped within her—was determined to live.

In this first-person account, Katie reflects on her pain-filled childhood and the events leading up to the life-changing decision to undergo gender reassignment as a teenager. She reveals the unique challenges she faced while unlearning how to be a boy and shares what it was like to navigate the dating world—and experience heartbreak for the first time—in a body that matched her gender identity.

Told in an unwaveringly honest voice, *Rethinking Normal* is a coming-of-age story about transcending physical appearances and redefining the parameters of "normalcy" to embody one's true self.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 8 Up—Like most transgender children, Katie, who was born and raised as a boy named Luke, was aware of her difference early on, though it was years before she found the word to describe herself. Other family problems made it easy for her to withdraw into a serious depression without being noticed. When Katie finally came across the word "transgender" and read descriptions of what it meant, she risked everything and reached out to her mother, who was supportive and relieved to understand her child better. She promised to help Katie make the transition to her internally identified gender of female, if Katie promised not to kill herself. The book opens with Katie starting college. Having chosen to be an out and open transgender activist while still in high school, she decided to "go stealth" at college, a term used to describe transgender people who prefer not to be identified as such. The writing style is open and straightforward, although much of the dialogue is awkward and extraneous. The book starts out a bit slowly and picks up significantly in the later half. This is a worthwhile addition, given how few transgender memoirs there are for teens.—Nancy Silverrod, San Francisco Public Library

Review

Katie knew she was a girl on the inside, even when she was a suicidal kid named Luke growing up in a disjointed family in Oklahoma. Bullied relentlessly at school and unsupported by administrators, other students' parents, and even her own father, Katie finds an ally in her mother, who stands by her child as she starts dressing like a girl, legally changes her name, and travels to get genital reconstruction surgery the day after turning 18. Along the way, Katie becomes an advocate for transgender teens, appearing on TV with her trans boyfriend Arin Andrews, whose memoir, *Some Assembly Required*, is being published simultaneously. Katie's story provides solid information about what it means to be transgender and to transition, as well as "Tips for Talking to Transgender People" in the back matter. Part of what makes Katie's story so extraordinary is that many of her struggles are entirely ordinary (she cheats on Arin, for example, lying to him when he finds out through Facebook). Being so open—and openly imperfect—makes Katie relatable on a human level, not just as a spokesperson. (Publishers Weekly July 21, 2014)

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In a warm, conversational and sometimes-irreverent memoir, a young transgender woman discusses friendship, family and romance, as well as gender, transition and coming out. Readers may recognize author Katie Rain Hill as one half of a transgender teen couple whose relationship was profiled on television's *Inside Edition*. (Arin Andrews, the other half, has written his own memoir, *Some Assembly Required*.) Here, the author, a college student at the time of the book's publication, recounts significant moments from her life

so far, including being bullied in middle school, coming out to her mom and transitioning as a teenager, and meeting new friends at college. Hill tackles both painful and joyful experiences with a light touch, and background information about gender and physical transition is woven seamlessly into the narrative. Reading Hill's and Andrews' memoirs side by side, readers will notice differences in the way the two—now split—describe their relationship. Of particular interest to celebrity-savvy readers is the way both narratives differ from the version of their relationship shown on television, a contrast Katie likens to "a business proposition, like Katniss and Peeta in *The Hunger Games*." Will both educate cisgender readers and strike sparks of recognition in those questioning their own gender identities. (Kirkus Reviews August 15, 2014)

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"Once I began reading Katie's bold, beautiful unflinchingly honest memoir, I couldn't put it down. I felt as if I could reach out and touch her." (Susan Kuklin, author and photographer of *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*)

"In this powerfully honest book, Katie Rain Hill explains it all for you. If her story of growing up transgender in Bible Belt Oklahoma doesn't touch you, you may be made of stone." (Ellen Wittlinger, award-winning author of *Parrotfish*, *Hard Love* and *Love & Lies*.)

? Start going by female pronouns. Buy girl clothes. Find a support group. Legally change my name.

These were some of the items on the list Katie Rain Hill handed to her mother when she was fourteen-year-old Luke, an Oklahoma high school student struggling to become more comfortable in her body. Unfortunately, this was not the first time Katie tried to come out to her mom. In fact, when she was just a toddler, Katie used to pull on her penis and tell her mother that it wasn't supposed to be there. For years of her childhood, Katie was prescribed drugs like Adderall, Cymbalta, Prozac, and Xanax, all to treat a problem that would have been solved if someone had just taken the time to hear what she had to say. She was seen by countless therapists and mercilessly teased in school, but no one could figure out what was really wrong. In reality, nothing was, aside from the fact that she'd been assigned the wrong gender at birth. Katie Hill was seen by countless therapists and mercilessly teased in school, but no one could figure out what was really wrong. In reality, nothing was, aside from the fact that she'd been assigned the wrong gender at birth.

"Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition" is the story of Katie's journey from a confused little boy to the first openly transgender teenager to graduate high school in her state. From descriptions of the "hiding hoodie" she used to disguise her body and attending a virtual school to escape her bullies to gaining international media attention along with her then-boyfriend, Arin Andrews (who is also trans), Katie's memoir is an extraordinary educational tool for anyone who wants to understand more about the transgender experience. Her compelling personal journey and relatable modern voice make her story accessible to readers who have never experienced gender dysphoria, and allow her to casually and efficiently define terms such as sex, gender identity, gender expression, romantic attraction, and sexual attraction, as well as the differences between them. She explains that being a woman is about more than liking pink clothes or baby dolls; it is an immutable truth one feels in the core of oneself, and which could and should not be ignored.

The timing of the publication of "Rethinking Normal" could not be more appropriate. This year saw the release of "Transgender Dysphoria Blues," an album inspired by the personal struggle of Laura Jane Grace, the front-woman of the band Against Me!; positive results in puberty suppression trials in trans teens; and the continually increasing visibility of trans icons like Carmen Carrera and Laverne Cox. However, for every happy ending like Katie's, there are women like Zahara Green who continue to face discrimination and victimization in their lives every day. In her book, Katie teaches us that no amount of suppression or medication can make the world a safer place for the trans community. What we really need to do is what she needed the adults around her to do all those years ago: Just listen. (Edge Magazine)

Rethinking Normal is Hill's story of struggle and triumph as a transgender woman. Born a boy, Katie always knew she felt uncomfortable in her own body. For years she was tormented in school and teased relentlessly. Finally, in high school, Katie, born as Luke, discovers online the term *transgender* and decides to open up to her family, peers, and the world. Katie begins to dress as a woman, wear makeup, and eventually undergoes gender reassignment surgery to fully transition. More judgment and prejudice ensue, yet Katie overcomes numerous obstacles and navigates the troubled waters of college life to accept herself.

Written in a conversational tone, this memoir is a fast and fascinating read. Katie's emotions are raw and gripping, and her fight to be accepted is awe inspiring. Some moments are described in seemingly melodramatic language, yet it is an authentic voice. Sex, suicide, and some violence are discussed but offer an opportunity for teens and young adults dealing with similar situations to relate. The book also includes a list of resources, such as books featuring transgender and other LGBTQ individuals, websites, and information for parents. Further, this is the perfect title to foster acceptance regardless of age, gender, or orientation.—Kaitlin Connors. (VOYA December 2014)

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About the Author

Katie Rain Hill is a student at the University of Tulsa majoring in anthropology and sociology. She wrote this memoir while studying for exams, writing term papers, working part-time as a pharmaceutical technician, and advocating for LGBTQ rights. *Rethinking Normal* is her first book.

Users Review

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