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# Gender Failure



## Synopsis

"Being a girl was something that never really happened for me."â "Rae SpoonIvan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon are accomplished, award-winning writers, musicians, and performers; they are also both admitted "gender failures." In their first collaborative book, Ivan and Rae explore and expose their failed attempts at fitting into the gender binary, and how ultimately our expectations and assumptions around traditional gender roles fail us all. Based on their acclaimed 2012 live show that toured across the United States and in Europe, *Gender Failure* is a poignant collection of autobiographical essays, lyrics, and images documenting Ivan and Rae's personal journeys from gender failure to gender enlightenment. Equal parts hilarious and heartbreaking, it's a book that will touch LGBTQ readers and others, revealing, with candor and insight, that gender comes in more than two sizes. Ivan E. Coyote is the author of six story collections and the award-winning novel *Bow Grip*, and is co-editor of *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Ivan frequently performs at high schools, universities, and festivals across North America. Rae Spoon is a transgender indie musician whose most recent CD is *My Prairie Home*, which is also the title of a new National Film Board of Canada documentary about them. Rae's first book, *First Spring Grass Fire*, was a Lambda Literary Award finalist in 2013.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (16 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

I can't say enough good things about this book. Firstly, it's written by two authors, who each have different lived experiences and approaches to gender. Though they both reject our culture's

insistence on a gender binary system and both share many commonalities, having two writing styles and approaches makes for an interesting read that never gets complacent. Secondly, the short format, which Ivan Coyote has mastered (do go read everything else Coyote has written too, because the use of language is so wonderfully succinct), means "big" topics like chest surgery and pronouns are broken down into smaller components, making for a rich reading experience. Both grapple with being gender nonconforming, and explore how various alternative and mainstream communities react to them, their bodies and their gender (or non-gendered) presentations. I know my experience of using one will never be the same after reading Ivan Coyote on how hard it is to use public bathrooms (or washrooms). Coyote discussed many things I'd never considered before, including their genuine fear. This is a topic very much in the news of late, with Austin recently approving gender neutral bathrooms. While this book is certainly political, it is in the "personal is political" sense. Both authors evolve over the course of the book and, to my reading, want the reader to form their own conclusions as well. They both constantly confront their own stereotypes and beliefs around gender, packing and unpacking them, exploring why one gender choice or pronoun or practice works for them at one point in time, and doesn't in another. The only negative thing I can say about this book is that it made me wish I'd caught the live acts, but these words are as alive as words on a page can be.

There are some really amazing elements of this book, and I'll start with those -- the open, honest narrative from the authors is huge. I trust them both as narrators, to just share their human experiences with me, through the written word. I had a boss who used to say, "People like to be talked up to, not down to" and I feel like both authors pass the test there. For me personally, I read because I like the connection. Some people go home and pick up their cat; I go home and pick up a book. So I pretty much have to trust an author to relay their genuine human experiences, to share with me and connect to me as their reader -- that's the unspoken agreement here. There was one place in the book where I felt that one of the authors kinda broke that trust, and that was when all of a sudden Rae is talking about dating men. And I was like, "Hey, weren't we were JUST talking about your upbringing, and how men didn't make your heart race, but women DID, and now you're looking to date men??" It wasn't that I need to approve of the fluidity of anyone's sexuality -- it was the fact in the middle of the conversation, my narrator pulled something out of left field and apparently just left me out of the conversation. I was like "huh?????" I actually found it to be a breach of author-reader etiquette, and was only able to bridge over it by reminding myself that Rae Spoon is NOT primarily a writer, but rather a musician. So, that small bit of politeness toward, and trust in

the reader, to clue us in that there had been a new direction in who Rae was now looking to date, likely would not have been an obvious move (as it might be to a more practiced communicator).

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