

**Shehner, Lorimer. (2019). This One Looks Like a Boy: My Gender Journey to Life as a Man. Vancouver: Greystone Books.**

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“This One Looks Like a Boy” by Lorimer Shehner is an autobiography that tells the story of the author’s lifelong gender struggle as a trans-man. Shehner uses an intensely personal narrative to frame the events in the book, while simultaneously using his now more extensive knowledge to elaborate on them by providing insights into his past and present thought processes which assist in providing the audience with some explanations. The temporal perspective that the author provides is instrumental in bringing the reader into the experience of a trans-individual; an experience that many people would not be easily able to sympathize with. As the events of the story unfold several important themes begin to emerge. The first being that the author was acutely aware of his gender identity from the very early stages of childhood, a fact that is important for the reinforcement and legitimization of gender identities as involuntary facets of one’s identity, as well as highlighting the impact over his life course. Second, that since the author’s gender identity is far outside the accepted norm of society, the gendered lens that falls on everyday interaction was much more apparent and important to him. Thirdly, the author is aware that while all trans-individuals face struggles in their life, some experience more as they are further marginalized by factors such as race or economic class. The book embeds all these ideas into a personal narrative that reinforces the impact of each issue.

Shehner communicates that from his earliest memories he was aware of his true gender

identity and as the book progresses, he reinforces the impact that this awareness had on him as his life course continued to move forward. The inception of the book is Shehner telling the story of his earliest memory which he was standing in the boy's line instead of the girl's line one day in kindergarten. He recalls that his answer was "I'm supposed to be a boy" (p. 4) when he was questioned by the teacher as to why he stood where he stood, this highlights the fact that his gender identity as a male was just as instinctual as any of the other kids', his only differed by not matching his physical appearance. In the proceeding chapters Shehner provides more examples of choices he made throughout his life that reinforced his true gender identity. In his childhood he felt comradery with the girls, but it was not as intense as the kinship he felt with the other boys and this motivated him to engage in male-dominated activities such as basketball and skateboarding as these reinforced the maleness of his identity. Later in his life he decides on attending the University of Calgary as he recognizes them as having the most feminine-presenting basketball team. At the time Shehner tells the audience that he was still in denial about his true gender and consequently bases his decision on what school will help to mask his gender struggle, an event that is unique to a trans experience in life. Many years later Shehner pursues a career in policing and he highlights that a large part of this decision was based off gender as becoming a police officer would eliminate the daily struggle of wearing clothing that he would identify with while also masking his gender identity. The impact that being trans had on Shehner was consistently significant throughout his life course and he explains that it was the deciding factor on many important decisions. The events that the author decided to highlight in his life are significant as for a non-trans person they seem mundane and ordinary, however, to people like the author, they are much more nuanced and Shehner does an effective job of communicating this type of struggle to

the audience.

The lens that gender casts on day to day life is universal among humans, however Shehner communicates the fact that for those who struggle with gender, the lens is more apparent and tangible. A strong example of this idea is when Shehner suffers a broken ankle when attending the University of Lethbridge. During this time, he begins to use excessive eating and alcohol consumption as coping mechanisms, while this is not out of the ordinary for any given person what is unique to Shehner's experience is the fact that the subsequent weight gain he suffered resulted in his body becoming more feminine in appearance. The gendered lens that is on people's bodies and the resultant expectations of what a male and female body "should" look like added more stress onto the author's situation and this is due to the fact that he had heightened awareness of gender expectations and the consequences of him presenting as more female which was in conflict with his male identity. The influence of the gendered lens continuously impacted Shehner throughout this life and he attributes this to his heightened awareness of gender expectations.

While the book is very personal to the author, he finds the room to highlight the privilege that someone like him possesses, trans or not, and reflects on the more marginalized people of society. From as early as his adolescence Shehner highlights that his position as a popular, capable athlete awarded him a social standing that helped him to escape some of the struggles he was facing. He remarks on this fact:

I was popular and I enjoyed it, but I lived in constant fear of someone learning the truth about me. I had the high social standing that came with being an athlete and a good student. No one teased me, bullied me, or made me feel like the outsider I knew myself to be. I was keenly aware of the privilege I enjoyed as a white, middle-class, non-marginalized person, and I was terrified of losing it (pp. 55-56).

Shehner holds several different privileges and positions of power and influence, author being one of them, and fortunately, Shehner uses these platforms to vouch for the more marginalized people of the world. The most direct example of this is when his career as a police officer brought him into leading the Diversity Relations Unit where he was charged with strengthening the relationships between the police department and the marginalized people in their direct jurisdiction. When he writes about this time in his life the author reflects how easily his experience as a trans person could have resulted in him homeless or worse and how fortunate he was to end up where he is now. It is through these times in the book that Shehner communicates his purpose for writing his book which is to share the experience of a trans person throughout their life and attempt to alleviate some of the struggles that anyone may be experiencing by connecting with them through the book. The experiences that he shares are not exclusive to trans-individuals and provide guidance to anyone who is struggling with something in their lives.

One of the few limitations of the book is the lack of external sources to back up some of the claims that Shehner makes throughout the book. While these may have taken away from the intimacy and immersion of the narrative, I believe that the author is proficient enough that he could have worked it into the book. Additionally, someone without an athletic background may find it hard to relate to some parts of the book because sports analogies and the athlete mindset is used with some frequency and may alienate anyone that is not involved with sports. One area that I feel could have used more in-depth exploration is how Shehner's eventual transition into male impacted his wife, Jennifer. While the impact on his children is expanded on, the audience is not told how Jennifer's identity was impacted by the transition of her life partner. "This One Looks

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Like A Boy” is an intensely personal autobiography that sheds light on the struggles of a trans-individual over their life course. The gendered lens that exists on everyday life is made evident in the author’s telling of his personal experiences. Lorimer Shehner uses his unique position of power as an author to relate his life’s story to the more marginalized people that he interacted with throughout his life. The issues that I have chosen to highlight are relevant to all Canadian citizens today as the conversation around gender, sex, and sexuality is growing and becoming more relevant than ever before. Anyone that is interested in the life course of individuals who have experienced life’s milestones through a different light will find value in this book and I would recommend it to anyone that enjoys autobiographies. Those who study in the fields of psychology, sociology, gender studies, and social work would also find this book informative.