



Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition

Katie Rain Hill , Ariel Schrag (With)

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In her unique, generous, and affecting voice, nineteen-year-old Katie Hill shares her personal journey of undergoing gender reassignment.

Have you ever worried that you'd never be able to live up to your parents' expectations? Have you ever imagined that life would be better if you were just invisible? Have you ever thought you would do anything--*anything*--to make the teasing stop? Katie Hill had and it nearly tore her apart.

Katie never felt comfortable in her own skin. She 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.

Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition Details

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From Reader Review Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition for online ebook

Rashmi Tiwari says

A self-involved, badly written Live Journal entry masquerading as a book. Get a ghostwriter. And some self-awareness.

Ashleigh says

Read as digital arc.

Initial impression: "Katie's a badass" and "Whoa, girl, calm down." In the prologue, Katie came on very strong, but she eventually won me over with references to Naruto and Pigfarts.

I have a 5-star biography policy, where as long as your story is real, interesting and makes a fair amount of sense, it should be five stars. I will say that, organization-wise, I appreciated that I read Arin's book first. Katie jumps around a bit and isn't as detail-oriented; I didn't feel as present in the moment with her. It was nice to already have a timeline in mind, so I had a little more information to work with.

Ultimately, Katie was very relatable. She works hard for what she believes in, she gets tangled up in word-choice controversy, and she has a fair amount of relationship drama to share with the rest of us. I was first introduced to her through Inside Edition and, although I totally shipped she and Arin and thought they were the cutest thing ever.... I can't fault her for the way things ended. I haven't handled every break-up with grace either.

Closing thoughts: I love the title, "rethinking normal," because that's what society is going to have to do. What Katie's story comes down to is to things we can all relate to: struggles, relationships, major revelations about ourselves... Just another life, but with more surgeries. By getting her story out there, more and more understanding can take place. It helps that it's interesting. Good work, Katie--keep it up.

Shannon says

As I continue my search for books about transgenders that can be added to our library, I am still learning a lot. Katie Rain Hill's memoir takes the reader on her journey of growing up as Luke and transitioning to Katie. This is the first book I've read which goes into more detail about the surgical process of full transformation of male to female. Katie also has a serious relationship with another transgender teen Arin. This book has so much to offer, but too much on page relationship information to be able to place in our library. I recommend this book for high school and above.

Cole Jack says

Katie Rain Hill is a young college student recounting her experiences as a young trans woman attempting to be an activist in Bible-belt Oklahoma. Hill initially gained widespread public attention because of her publicized relationship with her ex-boyfriend, Arin Andrews, because it was a relationship between a trans woman (Katie) and a trans man (Arin).

Originally Hill and Andrews were supposed to write a combined memoir about their relationship, but after their breakup they ended up both writing their own memoirs with the assistance of different ghost writers. Hill wrote *Rethinking Normal* while Andrews wrote *Some Assembly Required*.

I remember when Katie and Arin's story went viral and them being discussed among my trans community on my campus. In some ways, the "viral" nature of their lives and relationship inevitably colors their narratives. Additionally, their memoirs are obviously aimed at a younger audience (likely, late middle school/early high school). Despite all this, it is worth noting that Hill's immaturity takes away from her narrative and all her goals of providing information about trans experiences. A constant discussion of cute boys, clothing, and attractiveness may be readable by themselves, but they draw away from her overarching narrative and come across less as unique descriptions of her personality and more as a juvenile writer trying to fill pages. Even after a second reading these factors take away from the progression of the memoir.

Since Katie and Arin's memoirs were originally planned to be one memoir, it is natural to compare them. In regards to writing style, readability, and general storytelling skills Arin's memoir is noticeably better than Katie's. I'm not sure, however, how much of this is due to the ghostwriting/writing assistance differences between Ariel Schrag for Katie's and Joshua Lyon for Arin's.

Mothwing says

A trans woman's biography through her transition and life after that. It's not an easy read, especially what happens to Katie at school makes me incredibly sad for her and angry at this dysfunctional institution. I can't fathom how other teachers would just stand by and watch a student being tortured like that, it makes my blood boil. As did people randomly outing her - why would you do that?!

As did this:

I knew their parents had all used God as the reason I could no longer be friends with them, because God sends all LGBT people to hell.

I am a Christian. No, he doesn't, what IS your problem. People not only getting god as wrong as you possibly can from my understanding and then using that warped view to put others down is about the worst thing I can imagine, the worst use of religion, the worst side-effect of organised religion.

I'm glad that things turned out so well for Katie and it lifted my heart to see a trans narrative not ending with a string of sexual and drug abuse and murder, but with a happy person studying successfully, accepted by dear near and dear ones. These stories are rare and I treasure every one. Three stars only because the writing

could have been smoother in places.

Nathan says

I remember seeing Katie on facebook, with Arin her then-boyfriend. A trans couple to inspire all, or some-such stuff. The part of this book I enjoyed the most was when Katie discusses the flaws with how the media treated hers and Arin's story. Focussing on the relationship wasn't the goal either of them had in mind when they began being advocates, but media does as media does and turned it into that. It's something that still needs to be adjusted and I thought it was interesting to see the inner workings of the person on the other end of the camera, why they would go along with media appearances that weren't necessarily helpful due to focussing on all the wrong things.

All-in-all, I'm giving this four stars for its value as an educational and mind-opening tool. I definitely recommend it to people wanting to learn about transgender youth/kids, and for transgender youth themselves to read as a source of inspiration and to see someone like them in action. However, as a book itself, I'd choose to only give it three stars. It's advertised as a "YA Memoir" and people should take that information into account when reading. Often, I'd be annoyed at the focus on crushes, boyfriends, sex, etc. and have to remind myself that Katie is a teenager writing about this and those are very important things to that age group. Other than that, this is well done and worth reading if you've any interest in the subject of trans issues at all.

Emily Mead says

THIS IS A COMBINED REVIEW OF RETHINKING NORMAL AND SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

The reason these books made me angry is because we are still SO far from reaching acceptance and equality.

Memoirs affect me in ways that fiction books don't, because they are obviously very DIFFERENT ways of conveying ideas – they're true, at least in the sense that they're true to the writer.

Both memoirs are from transgender teens.

Arin is a trans boy and Katie is a trans girl.

That's not the only reason I'm reviewing them together, though – it's also because they're both memoirs, and because the writers actually KNEW each other and dated. Their stories are as intertwined as it's possible to be.

Let's get back to why they made me angry.

Both Arin and Katie come up against some pretty awful bullying and mental health issues and really, really difficult times. I guess because being trans often affects who you are on the outside (not necessarily, but often), it's a lot harder to escape notice from the people around you.

And the parents...oh my goodness. I just wanted to shake them and say oh my goodness, this is your CHILD. What are you DOING???? If I ever have a kid, they can be whoever they want. But not accepting something they are seriously trying to tell you, or limiting who they can be around? Some of the things Arin and Katie went through...well, let's just say I don't know how they did it.

As you might guess, religion comes into it.

Okay, okay, work with me, I'm trying not to be cynical. I know that there are many, many, many loving Christians in the world. I know that. I am friends with lovely Christians. So it really bums me out when people use their religion as an excuse for not accepting someone's identity. I'm not going to talk too much about it, because I'll turn into a giant squid of anger, but...yeah, I was not impressed.

In the end, I liked Some Assembly Required more than Rethinking Normal.

It's hard to say things like that when they're memoirs, but ultimately I liked Arin's writing style better than Katie's, and his story seemed to flow better. It was interesting reading parts of their stories that overlapped, though...and how each of the pair had misunderstood or taken things the wrong way.

I'm really glad these two books have been published.

I'm always going on about diversity in YA, and trans characters hardly EVER appear. Non-fiction is one step – I'd love to see more in fiction as well, because the only fiction book I've ever read with a trans character is I am J by Chris Beam.

Some Assembly Required and Rethinking Normal are both intensely powerful stories that will make you cry...but they also give hope that future generations will be kinder, more accepting people.

I. says

Katie seems like an amazing young woman. Some thoughts:

1. The kid who bullied Katie when she presented as a gnc male but told her post transition that she had thought she was a weirdo but now sees she's just a girl... Katie's interest in boys but disgust at the idea of them liking her as a boy... I wonder how schools can better deal with both transphobia and homophobia so that children are better able to figure out who they are and who they want to be. Trans acceptance should not go hand in hand with gender essentialism (to clarify, that it often does is not the fault per se of trans people but because of how deeply embedded these gender norms are in our society)
2. That Katie gets jumped on by other trans people for acknowledging male and female socialization and that people are "assigned" male or female at birth is depressing. Katie is by no means radical and that the simple admission that trans men may have common experiences with women would be perceived as transphobic - particularly when said by a trans woman - is ridiculous. The discourse really needs to move past this because it's so unproductive.

Alenka says

I'm trying not to compare Katie's book to Arin's, which is basically impossible, but it feels unfair to compare them? I'll do my best!

Katie's writing is OK; she's engaging and personable, and she structured the book well. Her memoir jumps around time-wise for a bit and I enjoyed that she didn't start straight from the beginning. I think part of this tactic is to give readers a sense of hope as they read the bad parts, so that they can remember that things turn out OK. Katie's life has not been a cakewalk and she's lost a lot of friends and gone through a lot of familial strife. She makes it very clear that she wants to be an advocate and use her story and voice to help young, transgender people, and basically outlines her very impressive public speaking resume. I appreciated her honesty and was at times surprised by the incredible efforts she made to empathize with others, even when they treated her very poorly.

As others have said, the he-said-she-said stuff that Arin and Katie write about their relationships is a little wearing. I wasn't super interested in the particulars of why they broke up or how many times they broke up or whatever, but I understand that they both felt compelled to tell their sides of the story because their relationship was so very public. Katie never outright accuses any of the media outlets they worked with of using or exploiting them, but she rightly points out things the media did wrong, like focus unnecessarily and rudely on gender reassignment surgery and the couple's sex life. She does a good job of expressing how complicated it is to have a very public life and want to be an open, honest advocate but to also just want to live her life quietly and without the pressure of always being a transgender advocate.

Overall, I felt like Katie did a good job of explaining how complicated her life as a public figure v. private person became, and appreciated her candidness and drive to help others.

Jordan McBride says

I honestly thought that I was going to hate Katie's book after reading Arin's (*Some Assembly Required*). He left me thinking negatively towards her because of how their relationship ended. When I first started reading *Rethinking Normal*, I already knew a little bit of background knowledge about Katie and her transition from male to female. I only made it about a fourth of the way through the book before I had to put it down. I think that my issue was my pre-conceived ideas about the author. After taking a break from her story for a couple of months, I went back and finished the book and I'm glad that I did. Katie's story is focused on her transition. It talks about her romantic life as well, but it FOCUSES ON HER TRANSITION and how the changes made her feel. It also focuses on how her family deals with the fact that she is transitioning. I recommend having both Katie's book and Arin's book available if you teach junior high or high school students. There are a lot of transgender students out there that feel alone and these books might be the thing that helps them get through a hard time. I do recommend that you read Katie's book FIRST if you read both books.

Jill says

I am by no means a trans expert, but I've read my share of trans-focused literature and academic studies. I think Katie does a great job of making the info accessible to younger readers (the target audience). She is

informative and factual while still acknowledging her own biases and the incredible diversity of opinions and experiences.

That said I think she could have done a better job giving a nod to those who aren't white and attractive and privileged - the folks who struggle with discrimination even after they can "pass". What about them? Theirs are not her story to tell, but for her to acknowledge her power and privilege would have been appreciated by this reader.

Gerard Villegas says

Being aware of both Katie Hill and Arin Andrews, I've seen their stories being portrayed in the media and in a variety of magazine publications so it made me curious to read both their personal bios as transgender teens. I've read Arin's book *Some Assembly Required* and enjoyed it and offered it to customers who are dealing with their own children coming out as trans and to have another perspective from someone who is MTF, I thought that this would be another resource to use. Sadly, Katie's book does not hold the same standard of substance compared to Arin's.

Don't get me wrong. Certainly, Katie's book gives a personal account of her experience growing up trans and the hardships that she faced. However what really made this particular book lackluster was the ridiculous reality show teen dramas that overshadowed her story. From the first few chapters where she attempts to explain her cheating mentality (she's in a relationship with Arin while she is seeing another boy while there is potential to date another), it just got too much and I began to grow frustrated with this type of kiss and tell gossip. If anything, I felt I was watching a soap opera than trying to understand her as a trans woman.

I'm sure there are other really great MTF books out that could serve as an alternative resource or trans youngsters but this certainly didn't do it for me. I wish Katie the best of luck but seriously, the girl needs relationship counseling before getting involved with anyone.

Jennifer W says

I should be sleeping, but Katie's story was just too compelling to put down. She's a wonderful, strong, inspiring young woman, and I look forward to her continued advocacy for ALL people. I haven't seen her TV shows/specials, and I don't think I want to, the book is enough for me. I'm so glad that this book is out there for young people to read, but I also think adults can learn a lot from her open and honest introspection about her transition and her teen years in general. If you're confused as to why Bruce Jenner "suddenly decided" to become Caitlyn or why there's such a "fuss" about transgender bathrooms, this book might help you understand a little bit better. But keep in mind that this is Katie's story. I like that she called the book *Rethinking Normal*. Everyone finds their own normal and defines their own normal. Katie, it seems, has found hers, but for other people (transgender or not), the definition is still fluid and still up for (internal) debate. Let's aim for a world where people are given the support and the room to define and redefine normal for themselves.

Aaron says

I really enjoyed reading both Katie's and Arin's books. I have never had a transgendered friend (At least as far as I know) before and so I was very interested in reading their books and finding out more about transgendered people and how they felt. I am so very glad I read this. I really do feel like reading these two books has helped me to understand people better.

First, I am so sorry for the hell that Katie went through both at school and at home. School was hell for me until my Junior and Senior years because I have always been overweight and battled my weight problem and through that I was always picked on by other people by being called "Good year blimp" and so many other horrible things and they would come up and grab me around the pec area saying things like "Nice boobs" and things. Even though it's suppose to be sticks and stones it doesn't matter because it sure as hell hurts you no matter what. So when she was talking about being picked on both before and during transitioning and being called names and tormented. I could easily relate to that.

I also felt bad about what was going on with her father and family. How he treated her was just sooo sad and made me very defensive for her. Especially when he told Jazzlyn he didn't want an effeminate son or something along those lines. That just pissed me off. I don't have children but I sure as hell would like to think if I had a son who was transgendered or gay that I would love him or her (in transgendered case) no matter what! This is how this book has helped me! To see that we need to listen to our children and how they feel because it isn't something to be blown off there is something important in what they tell us. If we would listen to them more and keep our selves open to them then maybe our children wouldn't have such struggles and have so many problems but be more happier. I know even if a child is transgender that they will have struggles because of their peers but if they have supportive parents maybe it would make their hell period that much more tolerable. I am so glad Jazzlyn was so willing to be understanding and learn about how her daughter felt. I got through my years of torture because of my friends and most importantly because of my parents especially my mom.

Mostly I feel like these are some of the things I got from reading both Katie's and Arin's book:

1. Listen to your children and how they feel and what they say. They are important and what they say is important and if you really listen to them and help them they can lead healthy, happier and better lives. Also, giving them support through tough times (Though sometimes times are very bad) can really make a difference in how they cope with situations.
2. I learned what it is like to be transgendered (at least how Katie and Arin felt) and what they feel and go through.
3. I learned to watch what I say and be respectful of everyone and to be open to people who are going through life experiencing things differently than I am.
4. I learned that LOVE is one of the most important factors when talking with people. That if you love people no matter what gender, sexuality, race or any other detail you can make amazing friends and help support them with what they are going through and beside aren't we here on the planet to love one another. At least I feel I am anyway. If you talk to people with love truly in your heart it doesn't matter what gender, race or sexuality that person is you love them just for who they are as a person.

5. I learned more about myself and how I feel about things. I learned to listen to people and hear their side of the story because you might not know exactly what you thought you knew. In fact you might not know anything at all when at one time you thought you knew it all. I was partially like this but I feel like I have learned better now.

I know there are more things I could add to this but it would go on too long so I am just listing these five. I want to reread these two books again in the future and I hope to see things I missed from before. I feel blessed that I was able to read both accounts because I have learned so much more than I have ever known and I feel that my heart has expanded in love for transgendered people and to try to understand each person based on their own needs and preferences. I hope that if and when I ever meet transgendered people out in my walk in this life that they will feel nothing but love and acceptance from me and that they know I want to know them as the person they truly are!

Kelly says

I read this book first, followed by Arin Andrews' *Some Assembly Required*. I'm glad I read the books in this order because if I had read *Some Assembly Required* first, I might not have enjoyed this book as much as I did. Here's the problem with reviewing this book; because of the subject matter, I am already damned if I say negative things about the book. However, a few times in the past I have angered authors and loyal fans with my Goodreads reviews because of my honesty, so I'm not about to stop now.

I think Katie is a remarkable young woman whose story is one that speaks to all of us on many levels. Yes, her story is about being transgendered, but we don't have to be trans to find a connection. This book speaks to all of us about our quest for identity and our need to have friends and to find a group that we can belong to. I appreciate Katie's candor; she doesn't try to portray herself solely as victim or victor. She's imp

People can read this book to be educated about the trans world or to learn about one person's experience or to learn what bullying does to others or for all of these reasons and more.

What bothers me about this book is the way it is written. Katie was young (20) when she wrote this book, and the book reads like a high schooler wrote it for a class assignment. For teens this is great, but I found it irritating and had to remind myself to enjoy the story for the story's sake and not the writing style.

I never saw Katie with Arin on *Inside Edition*, but after reading how she and Arin were coached for the program, I worry a little about this book and Arin's which was published simultaneously. I believe they are being honest, and I know they are spokespeople, but I hope they chose to write these books more for education and catharsis than monetary gain. I know that's not fair to say since people write books for financial reasons all the time, and there is nothing wrong with that. I was so captivated by Katie's honesty, I can't bear to think Katie was encouraged to write this book so others (ie publishers, etc) can gain from its success and Katie's pain.
