

anthologia

#1 Gender Edition



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The Gender Edition
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The Gender Edition

Anthologia was launched with the intention of bringing writers with different background and perspectives together to look at a topic of importance and interest. Having a wide range of viewpoints and experiences can help us see the different angles and approaches, giving us a chance to better understand it. It has also acted as a great vessel to showcase some very talented writers!

The Gender Feature was originally published on the Blaidh's Tales website as a blog post (January 2017). Just like The Simpsons on The Tracey Ullman Show, it grew too big for its boots and now has its own format and website.

This issue is a backdated magazine version of the original blog post.

In this edition we see points of view such as the role of motherhood (Sara Elizabeth Smiles), how gender can be defined by the relationships it is in (Simon Travers), how viewpoints can be forced upon us in a hope for a simple explanation (Dan Morgan), that gender bending and fluidity is a common thing in humanity (Thom Boulton) and that women and men can often be stereotyped because of their perceived physical sex (Gayle Letherby).

This edition includes poetry as well as micro-fiction and an article by a world renowned sociology professor.

I hope you enjoy this edition.

- Thom

(Thom Boulton, Editor of The Anthologia)



Notes from the author: 'What makes a woman, is it the life that she leads, the choices she makes? The home is her domain. Husband check, babies, double check. She does all the housework, dishes, laundry, clean clean clean. Puts others first, their needs, their desires. Up all night with the baby and she works, full time, part time, all the time. She's always on call but of course; she wouldn't have it any other way. But what if she doesn't want kids, babies terrify her, she's even had an abortion. As for men well she can take them or leave them. Maybe she's gender fluid or only desires women. Wants sex but not a relationship. Conventionality doesn't define her. Ambition pushes career. Maybe she's a mechanic, an engineer or a pest controller.' (A section from 'What makes a woman?' which is also taken from Motherhood.)

by Sara Elizabeth Smiles

Taken from the collection *Motherhood*

Resting my head back against the bath,
 I breathe in the quiet.
 The drips from the tap echo my
 heartbeat.
 Slow, steady.
 Ahhhh relief.
 I can just be me.
 Not Mum, no, not for these brief
 moments.
 No sick in my hair,
 nipple; mine alone.
 I survey uncharted territory.
 Six weeks since birth, since caesarean hell
 and I'm a beast.
 I've never been so furry
 Legs, armpits, unmentionables.
 Spying the razor I wonder
 who am I shaving for?
 Not the baby who knows me by smell.
 Not my body which will end up bleeding.
 Not my soul which couldn't care less.
 For him? He's not slept much either,
 perhaps he'll appreciate the extra
 warmth?
 Am I doing it for society?
 Maybe.
 Then I hear the screaming
 and that's my queue
 To stop thinking.

by Sara Elizabeth Smiles

Taken from the collection *Motherhood*

My surname is Smiles
 a name and a noun.
 The root of a joke which knows no
 borders
 from Istanbul to Mexico.
 What's the longest word in the
 dictionary?
 Smiles!
 Cos there's a mile between the two S'.

Smiles by name, smiles by nature
 That's what they say
 and it's proven to be true.

Yet, everyone asks,
 what will baby's surname be?
 Uh hello, have you met me?
 I'm not one to follow the norm.
 Hiss, gasp: an unmarried mother.
 The baby will have my name.

He came from me, he's cared for, by me
 and ultimately: I want the world to know
 he's all mine.

by **Simon Travers**

Taken from the collection *Anatomy*

A toast, drowned with a shot
of duty-free fire-water.
Lover, I say that if such
things were possible,
I would start a giant
bonfire and scorch my
masculinity, blow up
heterosexuality with
explosions and loudness,
with news cameras and
television personalities
wearing perspex goggles
telling the children,
“Don't try this at home.”
Boom. Burn it all down.

Not to be a male swan
dancing a female part,
not to exchange roles,
a fabric for a fabric,
first hand for second,
one thing after another;
but because if I am any
kind of a man at all, I am
the guy on the bonfire
lit up by your fingertips,
kindled by paraffin kisses,
a hungry conflagration.
Don't tell me to stay cool.
I can stand the heat.
I'm seeing the light.

Notes from the author: This poem is a protest against defining identity through things, either touchable objects, or intangible concepts. The voice in the poem is a husband in relation to a wife. He is dissatisfied with traditional ideas of masculinity, but that does not mean embracing a 'feminine side'. He is searching for a shared identity within the relationship.



by **Simon Travers**

Taken from the title *Anatomy*

I am pregnant with proclamations of
love.
I waddle; hormonal and aching
with opportunities to declare my delight
in
having you here, having you all.

Don't look for writing in the sky, my
love,
listen for a stream of daughters
crying as I push them from my uterus and
place them in your honest arms.

Let me nurse every compliment, signs of a
promise fulfilled, on my breasts
so they grow and learn their own
language
and sing canons of “I love you.”

One day, you'll walk them down the
aisle,
give them away, and I'll pray for
a revival of kind words and graces,
bouquets
thrown that find their way home.

Notes from the author: This poem is written from a wife's perspective (the author is male). It is about the power of repeatedly telling someone you love them in down to earth ways.

A Cup Of Earl Grey by Dan Morgan (Dorian Sounde)

Taken from the unreleased collaboration between
Blaidh Nemorlith and Dorian Sounde: The Gray Album.

It's like a cup of Earl Grey,
it has to be made in a certain way,
no milk, and two sugars,
placed before all onlookers,
and proud of the day it was strained.

Yeah just like a cup of Earl Grey,
we're not making it any other way,
we all need the same,
engrained in our brains,
any other way would feel so strange.

I want an Earl,
not a lady,
I don't brew it that way,
sometimes I look at it,
and I remark,
"He's just confused, a bit bi-chai-Latte",
I don't dare look beyond the rim,
the precipice of his design,
realign my view-point,
he's out of his flipping mind!
I'm not interested in how long,
he's felt like he's infused with oolong,
no way am I adding milk,
I prefer it without,
we all do,
you tell me
"This voodoo brew, that you chew,
is meant to mix well with milk too",
well, I'm out,
if that's the plan,
you've blown my tiny mind,
Earl grey was better,
when they stuck to one product line,
I've had enough of corporate jockeys,
riding me to hell,
on a trans-infused drink,
Time after time,
you can't sell me this lunacy,
look at me - I'm doing fine!



Notes from the author: I wrote Earl Grey as the result of a simple conversation which was, 'should you add milk to Earl Grey tea'. Whatever my opinion, the chap who asked me was firm in his belief that his way was the only way. I thought how funny it was that he'd ask, yet not requiring an answer, only requiring confirmation that his way is the right way. I thought in the context of tea, whichever the flavour, the sentiment is rather harmless, but when this way of thinking, being, interacting etc is applied to more sensitive matters, such as gender, how devastating and harmful it can be, and is.

Transfigure by Thom Boulton (Blaidh Nemorlith)

Taken from the unreleased collaboration between Blaidh Nemorlith and Dorian Soude: The Gray Album.

How terrific, when Neolithic man,
painted on sugar walls,
felt a calling, lingers on in comic book scrawls.
The man he is woman, and she is him,
and it's the inbetween that you glimpse,
some slippery spectrum sliding South to North,
pole to pole and back in those sugar cave holes,
that moment in time is what labels, it behaves,
your braves bare breasted,
your children's toys smashed,
toilet doors reflecting, when cave walls clashed,
you paint on doors to segregate
ancestors articulated, intent to amalgamate,
but when you deviate, you propagate hate,
let's start en masse, a debate...

CHORUS

Black isn't black
all forms are grey, it's been that way
ever since man begun.
White is white in one kind of light,
Roles and notions all come undone.

It needs to come unspun.

When the screen plays your song,
you can forget about your job,
take off the pale male name tag,
and put your stockings on,
'let's do it all again',
and not just for the men...
Ladies Night has got it right,
but instead of feather dusters, clusters
of cigars and pinstripe suits
line the racks of the heaving bosom.
Mum. Dad.
Interchange.
Single is and the dead leave you lonely,
you're the only one to raise their chubby cheeks,
so you squeak between the gender roles,
bender on the aspects of
being both the mum and the superman that can.



Notes from the author: Transfigure uses historical notions to underline how fluid gender truly is. It uses the amalgamation of humans and animals on cave walls, the cult vibe of Rocky Horror Picture Show, stereotypical notions of what things are male and female, the image of Baphomet and the recent issues facing transgender people who have been given prison sentences to do this. The overall theme of the poem is that we all identify with different aspects of the feminine and the masculine through different moments in our lives, our gender is constantly changing.

CHORUS

Black isn't black
all forms are grey, it's been that way
since O'Brien sang fictional.
White is white in some kind of light,
roles play on the stereotypical,
it all seems so hypocritic...

...ALL the boundaries merge, we're on the
verge
of rediscovering ourselves.

and from the clouds
comes the settling of dust
revealing a Baphomet bust.

and the creature shows
both the robust and rigor
combined, truly transfigure.

Black is not black.
White lies.
The only colour present
is the grey conjunctivitis eyes.
Blurred is.
Blurry is the flurry,
that festinates,
quick, hurry!
Before another criminal ends up dead
in Her Majesty's quarry.

CHORUS

Black isn't black
all forms are grey, it's been that way
since 1897.
White is white, hidden within light,
time to unpick oppression.

Invalidate this transgression.

Gender, Knowledge and Representation

some reflections and examples from a researcher and writer

by Gayle Letherby

As a feminist sociologist I have spent almost 30 years as student, teacher, researcher and writer interested in the gendered aspects of the production of knowing making. Historically the focus of (male) academic endeavour in the social sciences and humanities, as well as the physical sciences and technology, was men and male experience. Although it is important to note that not all men were represented and in addition to being gendered the history of knowledge production has been structured also by age, ethnicity, class, sexuality and dis/ability; in that the experience and views of the adult, white, upper middle class, heterosexual, able bodied male have been labelled as 'norm'.

Additionally, and equally problematic, has been the unquestioned adoption of the so-called 'scientific' method as the best way to study both the physical and the social world. Objectivity was desired and believed possible and the 'expert neutral knower' (the researcher) was expected to generalise from research to wider social and physical populations. From this perspective 'the truth is out there' for researchers to discover independent of observer effects (e.g. Letherby 2003, 2013). The earliest critics of this 'scientific' approach were themselves male and although they were critical of the claims to objectivity and the search for the 'truth' their research still tended to focus on male experience and the sexist aspects of the approach were left unchallenged (Morley 1996, Letherby 2003, 2013).

From the 1970s feminist researchers began to criticise male-dominated knowledge production and the methodological claims made by researchers who argued that their work was objective and value free. Feminists acknowledge also the need to be sensitive to differences between women and of similarities, as well as differences, between female and male experience. So, sometimes there is more that women and men share (in terms, for example, of the class or 'race' based nature of their experience) than what divides them. Additionally, as the development of and debates surrounding feminist approaches to research and knowledge production have taken place during a period of increasing inequality for many worldwide '[f]eminism remains inherently contradictory because gender is only part of people's lives. In order to transform unjust gender relations, more than gender must change' (Ramazanoglu with Holland 2002: 68).

Alongside my fascination with how we come to know what we know, and whose meanings matter the most, I have spent the last three decades researching various (gendered) experiences within the social world. My interests are eclectic and I have researched and written about areas as diverse as institutional racism; working and learning in higher education; the transition from medical student to junior doctor; food as a lifestyle motivator for vulnerable populations; death, loss and bereavement and more. Here thought I will mention two other areas.

My primary substantive area of research has always been reproductive and non/parental identity – that is the status and experience of people who do and do not parent - and I have undertaken research on (amongst other things) pregnancy loss; infertility and involuntary childlessness; teenage pregnancy and parenthood; and motherhood, fatherhood and imprisonment. In all of these projects I have been concerned with male as well as female experience, not least to challenge the myth that reproduction and family life is ‘women’s business’. Another key interest is that of travel and transport. Work here includes projects on the social and political aspects of rail travel; the relationship between gender, emotion and journeying; travel, transport and respect; and the significance of the school journey to lifelong learning.

With my friend and colleague Gillian Reynolds I published two books on this second set of topics. We began the second *Gendered Journeys, Mobile Emotions*, by recounting an experience we had whilst working on the first. Thus:

Working together on the 7.04 from Stoke-on-Trent one Monday morning we were sharply reminded of one persistent gender stereotype. . .

SCENE: Gillian and Gayle sitting opposite each other at a table. Each is reading through some (different) notes. Gayle’s large work diary is on the table. The Train Manager walks down the train and Gayle says ‘tickets Gillian’. As he clips the tickets the following exchange takes place.

Train Manager: Good morning, having a ‘Girl’s Day Out’ are we?

Gillian: No

Train Manager: Oh, I’m sorry I thought you were together.

Gayle: We are, we are going to work together.

We feel sure that this exchange would not have taken place if we were two men. Just as we assume that doctors, solicitors and artists are male (and put ‘lady’ or ‘woman’ before such a noun if the job is undertaken by a woman), we ‘naturally’ assume that all commuters are male and that women remain more ‘appropriately’ in the private sphere . . . (Letherby and Reynolds 2005: 152 and Letherby and Reynolds 2009: xvii)

The traditional ‘masculine’ approach to knowledge production includes writing in a traditional academic style which excludes and denies the personal. If we accept though that the ‘personal is political’ we should acknowledge this in our work and with this in mind I have always been a strong advocate of auto/biographical research and writing. So whilst I have always attempted to give a voice to individuals whose experience has not always been given the attention I, and they, think it deserves, I have always reflected on my own values, beliefs and identity and the significance of this to the ‘findings’; the resulting knowledge.

Such an auto/biographical approach makes it clear that when researching and writing about our self the traces of others are always present and when focused on the lives of others our own personhood (not least in terms of gender) is - whether explicit or implicit – part of the story (Letherby 2014).

Academics have long been concerned with issues of impact and influence both within and beyond higher education. So as a sociologist my hopes are that people will read my work and use it in their own and that the research and writing I do will inform (when relevant) teaching, professional practice and policy. Not all of this is possible all of the time but like others I am always interested in finding new ways to get my message across. In recent years I have been to engage more both with social media and with different, arguably, more accessible forms of presentation. At the end of this piece I include links to some examples. But first here is a piece of fiction that you can see relates to my interests in gender and family. I hope you enjoy it.

Hard Labour

I once worked eight-to-five, an occasional evening and a few hours over the weekend. Now I'm on duty 24/7.

I'm exhausted.

Thank goodness for mum. She feeds, baths or plays with Harry and Ben whilst I clean up and throw some vegetables and meat in the slow cooker to prepare a supper that doesn't need three minutes in the microwave.

I'm exhausted.

I always scoffed at stay-at-home women who bemoaned their lot. How hard could it be? I boasted about my plans for creativity but haven't opened the art supplies I bought during the last months of pregnancy, my artist's eye useful only for deciding which primary colours to dress the children in.

I'm exhausted.

The twins' faces light up when Sam arrives home, devaluing my daily grind in a heartbeat. I am uninterested in talk of office politics my own workplace all consuming. I once enjoyed sex, now I'm just grateful there's somebody else to do the night feed.

I'm exhausted.

The mother and toddler group is a lifeline. There's always a pair of arms to relieve me of at least one son. My new friend Alice is as overwhelmed as I. She describes her cracked nipples, I wince, grateful for formula feed. I admit to wearing yesterday's underwear, the rest are in the washing basket. We reminisce about our lives BC (Before Children) when we were smart, intelligent people with separate identities and varied lives. Now all our energy, our effort, our conversation, is devoted to our children.

I'm exhausted.

A rare night out. The babysitter arrives early and I dress alone. I listen to folk music in the car, rather than children's favourites. Straightening my jacket I flick banana off the collar as I ring the doorbell. Sam is talking with friends. We wave. The hostess introduces me to a neighbour. He smiles asking the usual icebreaker; 'what do you do?'

'Me, I'm just a househusband,' I reply.

For more from this author see:

<http://arwenackcerebrals.blogspot.co.uk/>

<https://www.abctales.com/user/gletcherby>



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