



## My Body Is Yours

**Michael V. Smith**

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*Identity, specifically the danger of defining oneself according to the values and visions of others, is the thematic pulse of Smith's memoir.*

To read Michael V. Smith's *My Body Is Yours* is to accompany him on an intimate journey in which he struggles to create his own definition of manhood. Raised in a blue-collar, small-town environment, Smith suffers anxiety about his effeminate body and homosexuality and struggles to find himself within the limited definitions of what it means to be a man. Later, that search manifests itself in compulsive sexual encounters in which he routinely puts himself at risk, swapping one addiction for another, until finally rejecting those behaviors in self-defense, self-preservation, and ultimately, self-creation. As he discovered and illustrates for the reader, "Nobody can live such a caged life and be happy."

Regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic background, or any other superficial definition, readers will appreciate Smith's forthright presentation of his most intimate history, revelations that avoid sounding confessional but instead read as honest recollections and observations. This journey is fraught with villains and dangers. Anyone who has wrestled the demons of addiction, depression, or anxiety will identify with and take comfort in Smith's precise rendering of those realities: When depression comes, it feels like you've always lived it. The emptiness is so acute, it can convince you that you've never had a reprieve from it.

Smith also tackles the weight of mortality and family, specifically the decline of his alcoholic father, with whom Smith had a difficult relationship. These moments are reflective of universal truths and familiar narratives, despite the more alternative earlier subject matter. He writes of the routine moments marking his visits to his father in the hospital: "We witness these moments while they are happening, making of them a narrative, a small whispering voiceover in our heads, because we want a sense of order, want to believe that random shit can make sense."

*My Body Is Yours* is organized into eight sections, spanning Smith's childhood to adulthood. His writing is clear, often humorous, unapologetic, and engaging throughout. Smith is a sympathetic narrator who has started a conversation that should be continued across a wide audience.

AMANDA SILVA (Summer 2015)

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