



## Clarion Review

Biography

### **Trapped: Living With Gender Dysphoria**

Jennifer Brown

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Jennifer Brown's *Trapped* may accurately be called a biography of two lives. Brown was actually born as a boy David. After decades of feeling uncomfortable in a masculine body he began his gender transition from David to Jenni in his forties. Brown's memoir describes the ramifications of this change for herself her wife (whom she married when she was David) and their family.

Growing up as David Brown struggled to conform to the demands of mid-twentieth-century British masculinity. David was a sensitive child who compensated for perceived failures in manhood by pursuing athletic feats in his twenties. Later in life he pushed himself past the limit at work and with anti-pornography activism avoiding his inner pain with constant activity. In a vivid illustration of the costs of repression the effort he expended fleeing from his true self made him physically sick and debilitated.

As someone who has dealt with gender dysphoria all her life Brown writes about her experiences as David as if they occurred to a separate person. She uses a third-person perspective to describe the male portion of her life. This distancing technique and the use of passive voice vividly evoke the alienation and helplessness of this time.

Only when she came out of her shell as Jenni did Brown begin to feel happier. But the debut of her new feminine self caused consternation to her wife and children. After months of emotional turmoil Brown and her wife decided to remain married in a "sisterly" relationship. With such loving support Jenni was able to deal with transphobic mockery gender reassignment surgery (GRS) and other challenges. She matured into a confident healthy woman.

Brown's memoir lacks perfect spelling and punctuation but it compensates for its technical imperfections with a compelling depiction of the author's quest for selfhood. Those who are looking for a medical account of hormone therapy and GRS will not find it in *Trapped*.

Instead Brown writes with painful honesty describing her transition as an emotional even spiritual journey:

*“[My psychotherapist] had meticulously broken down the conflicting walls inside—David who loathed Jenni and Jenni who wanted rid of her jailer—to finally rebuild both as one person a person beginning to feel strong again being able to emerge from the desperately dark tunnel I had been in.”*

Brown’s unsparing prose familiarizes her minority experience and helps readers understand it as part of the universally human endeavor for self-knowledge. *Trapped* is well written and accessible for a first effort and it could be a useful addition to collections on gender and sexuality.