



Search Medium

Write



Get unlimited access to all of Medium for less than \$1/week. [Become a member](#)



Being trans is a matter of semantics

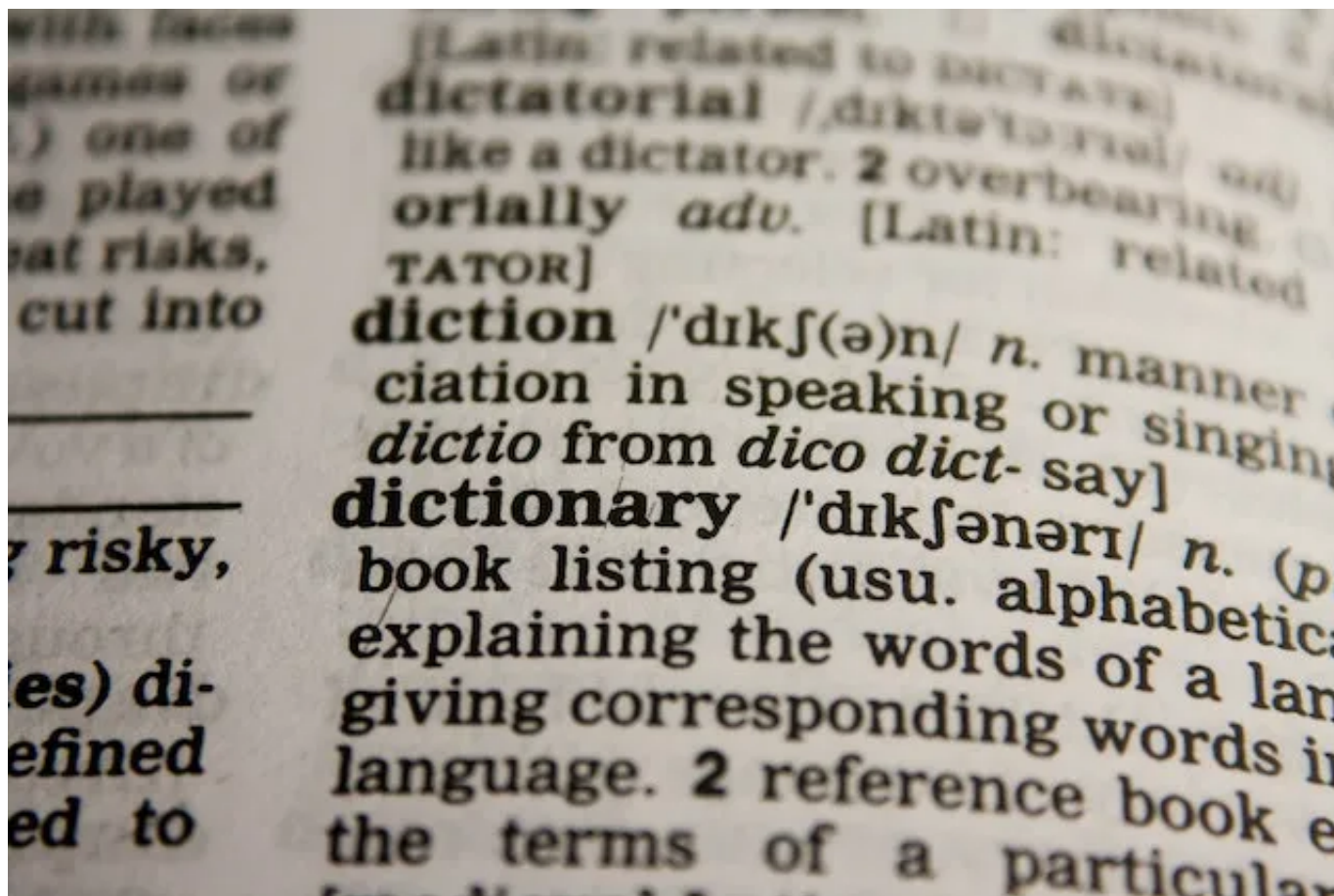


Rejserin · Following

5 min read · 1 day ago

196

1



Is it right to question why someone is trans? Or that gender is a social construction rooted in oppression? Coming out as a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth is a weird experience, partly because you have to overcome what society views as normative gender and partly because as you soon as you start to break gender down the line between cis and trans becomes vague and arbitrary. We are trans because they say we are trans, and we are not accepted as normative because we have been corralled into defining anything other than assigned gender at birth as other.

Is there a better way to describe gender variance? From the 1860s onwards terms like uranian and invert came into common parlance to describe anyone whose sexuality and gender identity did not match the gender norms of their societies. To be an invert was to be a literal inversion of societal expectations. The idea that a person could transition from one gender, rather than simply inhabit the opposite sex, came about as medical intervention became safe in the 1910s and 20s. It was the medicalisation of bodies that set the boundaries between cis and trans, not the gender variant people themselves, at least initially.

This history matters because it highlights that often the terms we use are a solution in search of a problem. Why is trans any different from cis? Plenty of cis folk have hormone treatments, genital surgeries, and top surgeries, yet we do not place them in a trans semantic bucket. But, you say, being trans as a piquancy all of its own, that being trans is a complex psychological problem in need of physiological alteration to salve. Yes, to a

point. The fact is that there have been many ways to exist as your gender in the pre-safe medical intervention world, and often those experiences were normative right up until they were not.

Don't get me wrong, I am not decrying medical intervention of gender variance. Having been through the process myself I know its salving powers. Yet, does going through the process actually make me trans, or, is it the externalisation of my gender identity to others that makes me trans in the eyes of the world? Am I trans because I say I am a woman, or am I trans because this is the only language that has been afforded me by the society I live in? I may be splitting hairs on this, but this semantic difference is vitally important, because if it is not the person that is trans but the societal impulse towards them, then the way to overcome trans oppression lies in as much as the semantic framing as it does society itself.

If I am read as a woman and declare myself a woman then I am a woman regardless of process to get there. I think therefore I am. Yet, the moment I declare an assigned male at birth history I am othered, I am seen as trans. Not in any self declaration, but in the framing society has come to accept and internalise. If you are assigned gender at birth it is a prognostication by society that you will exist and inhabit a set of expectations for the rest of your life. To subvert those expectations by declaring oneself another gendered identity is never a problem for the individual, it is a problem for society. Gender as power is controlled by the social whole, and to cross over the gossamer line between genders is othering because society makes it othering.

Some fish have colonies that are born all female, with certain members becoming male over the course of their lives to aid fertilisation. Seahorses have males who gestate the young. Certain reptiles sexes are based entirely on the temperature the eggs were incubated at. Sex in the animal kingdom is wonderful, complex, and varied. It is just in humans where we draw a line at immutable gender and sex. Our semantics only account for those in the in group, cis, and those in the outgroup, trans. English in particular has no way of accounting for the beauty and panoply of human sex and gender.

Why should this matter? Why call into question over a hundred years of trans semantics? For me, it is the perception that trans is somehow other, that to medicalise yourself into your ideal body requires psychiatric evaluation and someone else to sign-off on your inner self. That we see gender as this blanket either/or thing, and not something amorphous that can change over a lifetime. The rigid fixation of gender identity as assigned at birth harms everyone, not just those who trip the light fantastic to the other side.

Yet, there are many trans folk who find sanctuary in the trans semantics we have carved out over the last century. This complex embracing of trans linguistics at once embraces the othering from society, and also provides a radical release from the conformity of norms. To be trans is a political act in a world where to be trans is seen as radical. The whole reason people come out is because there is a need to come out. One never needs to declare you are cis, to wave a cis flag, to drape yourself in cis culture to shelter from hate and harm. Trans language provides relief precisely because society has

made the gossamer line between cis and gender variance a virtual chasm.

I am a woman because I am a woman should be enough, there should be no need for trans sobriquets or other semantic gymnastics just to carve out a place for myself in the world. Yet, it is because society has seen fit to other me, other trans people, that trans and trans radicalism is a semantic thing. In an ideal world there would be no need for trans semantics, no need to come out, simply an ability to just be your gendered self. I would love there to be a removal of the need to use trans semantics, for trans to be an artefact of history, and that to exist as your gendered self is as straight forward as I am woman therefore I am.

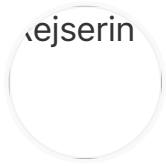
Transgender

Femism

LGBTQ

Gender

Gender Identity



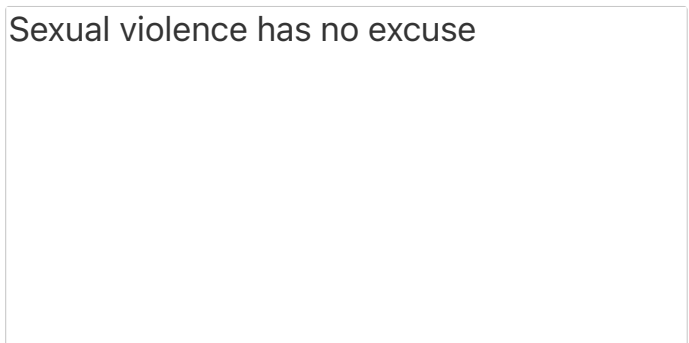
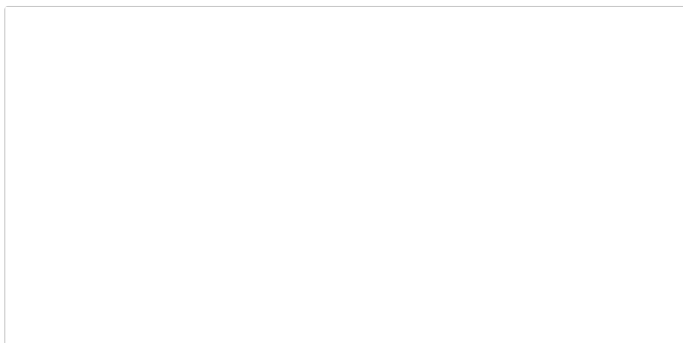
Written by Rejserin

292 Followers

Writer, researcher, and generally curious



More from Rejserin



Rejserin

Rejserin

Is it okay to be moderate in an age of extremes?

Over the last week I have been variously called a crypto-TERF, pathetic, and...

6 min read · 2 days ago

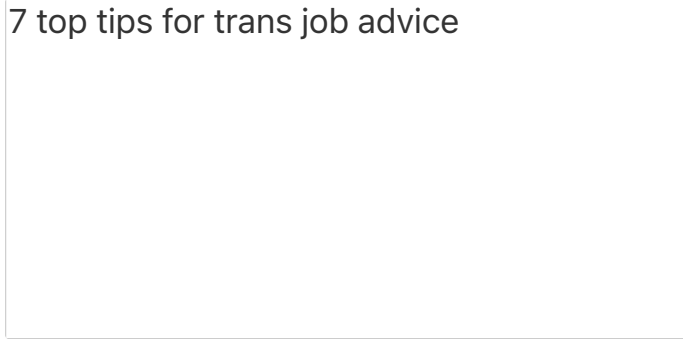
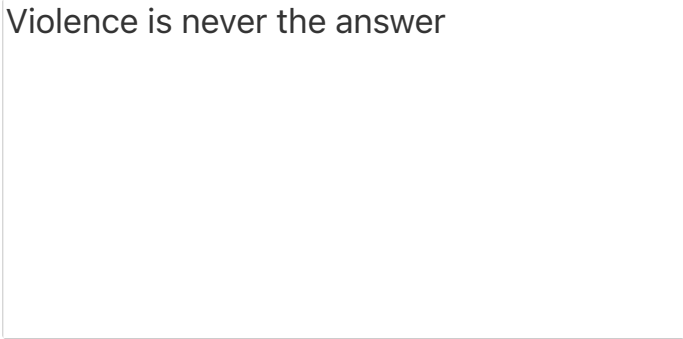
101

Sexual violence has no excuse

Rape is a weapon, of war, of patriarchy, of domination over other bodies. There is no...

4 min read · 4 days ago

139



 Rejserin

 Rejserin

Violence is never the answer

Over various Prides across the world many speakers and causes will be spotlighted....

5 min read · 5 days ago

 51 

7 top tips for trans job advice

One of the biggest fears a trans person has after coming out, even after years of...

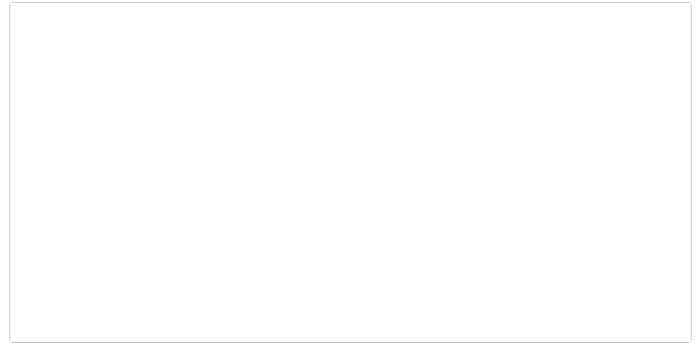
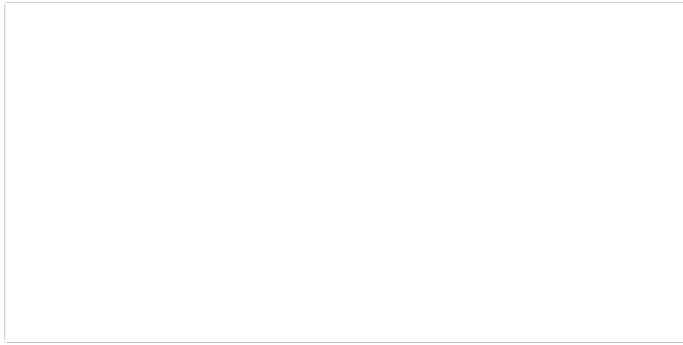
5 min read · Feb 24

 230  1

See all from Rejserin

Recommended from Medium



Devon Price

James Finn in Prism & Pen

My Completely Quotidian Top Surgery Experience

Part 1: Why it took me so damn long to just let myself live. Plus: why are plastic surgeons...

· 17 min read · Jun 1

My Neighbors Ended Free Childhood Health Care Over Anti...

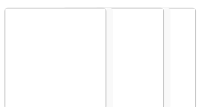
Antisemitic, Islamophobic accusations of Satanism also played a role

· 7 min read · 3 days ago

2.4K 24

2.8K 25

Lists



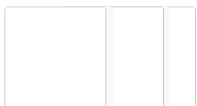
Work 101

26 stories · 21 saves



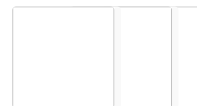
The New Chatbots: ChatGPT, Bard, and Beyond

13 stories · 44 saves



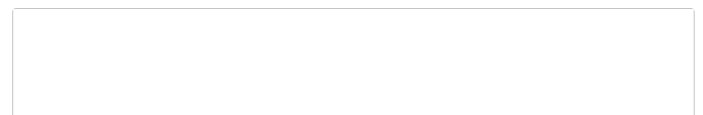
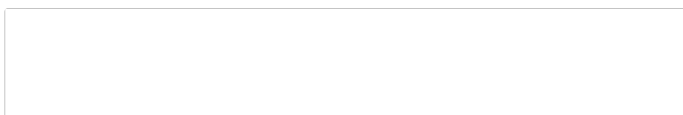
Some of My Favorite Personal Essays

17 stories · 133 saves



My Kind Of Medium (All-Time Faves)

38 stories · 29 saves





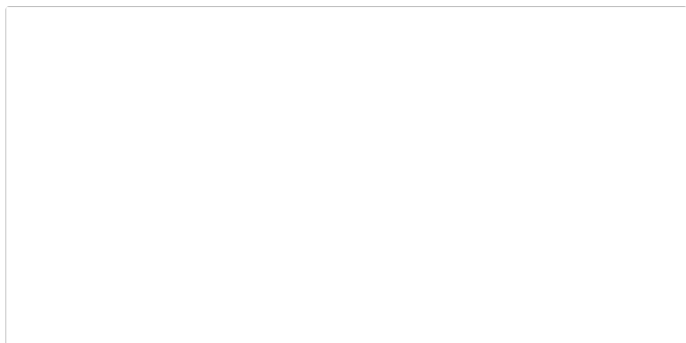
Jude Ellison S. Doyle

Category Crisis

Panics over detransitioners and the word “queer” show just how much we want life to...

· 8 min read · Jan 20

1K 8



Katie JgIn in The Noösphere

If Women Really Want Equality, Why Men Still Do Dangerous...

Spoiler alert: this isn't the gotcha argument some people think it is

· 7 min read · 2 days ago

3.3K 55



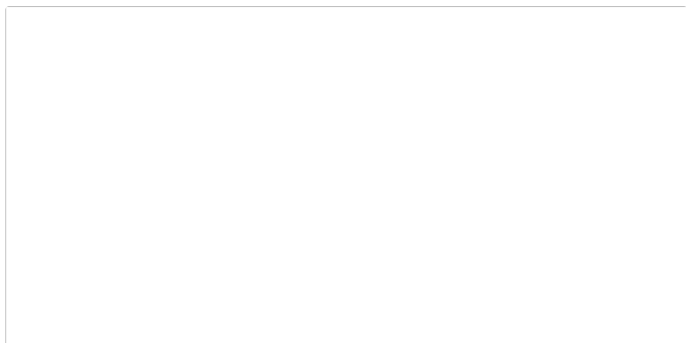
Nathan Chen in Prism & Pen

My Aunt's Confusion Over My Sexuality in 11 Questions

A Journey into Innocent, Ignorance, Family, Love and Unraveling the Twisted Threads of...

· 6 min read · Jun 1

1.6K 21



Johannes T. Evans in Prism & Pen

The Relief of a Queer Audience as a Fruity Stand-Up

Explaining one's existence takes up time.

· 7 min read · Jul 5

315 2

[See more recommendations](#)

[Help](#) [Status](#) [Writers](#) [Blog](#) [Careers](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms](#) [About](#) [Text to speech](#) [Teams](#)