

**THE PRETERNATURAL ROLE OF MAN'S BEST FRIEND: AN
EXPLANATORY STUDY ON BOYLAN'S *GOOD BOY***

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Abstract

Jennifer Finney Boylan is an American trans woman, activist, television personality, author of several books and also a professor. She came out as trans in her 40's when she felt being estranged in the wrong body. The identity of trans people is always a crucial one. They constantly face many obstacles and they are pushed outside the margins, prejudiced not just in their family, society, but everywhere they go. Boylan transitioned after getting married and becoming father of two children. She managed to be both dad and mother to her children. She says, "When you come out with the truth, no matter how humiliating its revelation might be, you couldn't be punished for it". Boylan's Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs is a memoir about seven different dogs she loved during the seven phases of her life. Being a trans has been a burden and a gift in her life. Even when she wanted to transition to live in her true self, she was forced to think thrice because she didn't want her family and close ones to suffer because of her. The canines she owned were a mixed bunch both in appearance and personality, and Jennifer tells about their dispositions, behavior, and thoughts. This present paper deals with how Boylan's love for her dogs she owned, helped shape her life and allowed her to accept herself. It also explains how these dogs became part of her during her crucial moments of growth and transformation from young boy Jimmy Boylan to a middle-aged woman Jennifer Finney Boylan.

Keywords

Trans Woman, Wrong body, Prejudice, Identity, Transition

Boylan explores in her book *Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs* about what should be the most basic topic in the world, but never is: discovering and giving love. It is a worldwide narrative of a fascinating story. It describes about how a small boy grew up to become a middle-aged woman, surrounded by seven memorable dogs at seven pivotal periods of growth and transition. She says she has learned everything she knows about love from dogs. Their love allows us to do seemingly impossible things, such as finding our way home when we get lost, living our lives with humor and daring, and, most importantly, becoming our actual selves. Jennifer Finney Boylan's existence has centered over her canines, and she talks about how her affection for the dogs she has fostered has shaped her life and enabled her to embrace herself in her memoir. Jennifer Finney Boylan realized at a young age that the physique she was born and raised in did not reflect who she was. She was eventually able to tell the truth to her family and the world owing to the love she offered and received from her pets. Jennifer sensed something wasn't quite right as a child. Boylan only felt real surrounded by dogs as the years passed. Boylan conversed with each of them and provided answers on their behalf.

In her New York Times editorial piece, Jennifer Finney Boylan frequently mentioned about her puppy, Indigo. She looks at life through the eyes of her pets in her third memoir, *Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs*. She's always had a dog (or several) pitter-pattering around her, from her upbringing as Jimmy Boylan until her transformation into Jennifer Boylan. Jennifer Finney Boylan is an author, transgender activist, professor at Barnard College, and New York Times contributing opinion writer. Jennifer was born James Boylan in 1958 and spent 42 years as a man before deciding to become a woman. Jennifer has published a number of works, including novels and autobiographies. Jennifer connects events in her life to the dogs she has raised over the years in this book. Jennifer describes the canines' moods, actions, and opinions, which range from amusing to heartbreaking.

James Boylan born and raised in Pennsylvania among his parents and older sister Cyndy, and he understood he was distinct from other males even when he was a toddler. James said he didn't want to attend Haverford High School since he'd miss his pals when his parents enrolled him there. As the author recalls, the true reason was something she couldn't say out loud. She couldn't even speak it to herself, since who could want what she wanted. Throughout Jimmy's boyhood, he was split between enjoying his alone time and yearning for companionship. When the rest of the family is off, clustering around the other child, it's easy to understand how one sibling feels left out. He was truly proud of his sister Cyndy and her incredible equestrian abilities, and his parents had no choice but to transport her and her horse to the shows. He had the option of joining them, but he opted not to. Weekends alone can quickly become depressingly lonely. Even with the help of a canine companion. There was, however, another motive. Jimmy didn't really get it, and he didn't want to spend the time needed to try to describe the gnawing sensation that something wasn't quite right about him. He composed for it by being incredibly amusing, even if he did allow for a little eccentricity.

'Playboy,' the family dog during James' childhood, was a Dalmatian that detested everyone except James' father Richard, who would roll around on the floor with Playboy and stroke his belly. Playboy was a frustrated hoodlum who pursued motorcyclists, bit people, and dumped dung in the living room, which James' ever-patient mother Hildegard had to clean it up. James sensed 'wrong' and believed that the only way to get by was to make the best of a bad situation because he really can not envision how a person could improve at the time. As a result, James had male companions and did boy activities, and the book gives fond memories of those times. Jennifer supports her feeling by quoting a quote of a famous American writer Janet Mock, "I was born a baby, who was assigned male at birth. I did not identify or live my life as a boy. As soon as I had enough agencies in my life to grow up, I became who I am" (Boylan 198). For example, when hunting with Playboy through the woods, James and his friend Lloyd came across an old milk cottage where lesbians began kissing, an intriguing scene to the young guys. James received a Dalmatian dog named 'Penny' for his eleventh birthday, while his sister Cyndy got a Dalmatian dog named Chloe.

Penny couldn't stop herself from eating her own food and Chloe's, and she grew to reach the size and form of a beer keg, earning her the nickname Sausage. Penny endured James's devotion, but he merely tolerated her.

The family relocated to a haunted mansion in Devon, Pennsylvania, a few years later. James would perform celebrity impressions, play the piano, create songs, imitate people, and make everyone laugh when Cyndy invited her cool friends' to their home. James had attractions to ladies by this time, but they didn't love him 'that way.' James may have appeared to be laughing on the outside, but he was sad on the inside and had considered suicide several times before transitioning. James was a freshman at Wesleyan College, his parents had gotten a dog named 'Matt the Mutt,' who rushed around the house and hunched anything in sight. When James' father returned home from work, Matt the Mutt caused a commotion and pissed on his father's suitcase and Penny, the Dalmatian is upstairs pondering the whole situation. James confesses that he may not always be the most compassionate dog owner when it comes to Penny, but given James' immaturity and difficult youth, tolerance may be in order. James had a large extended family who he adored, and the author provides many stories about them.

I'd spent many hours - both before and after transition - trying to justify my identity, bending over backward to make it plain that I'd really had no choice, that in the end I had done the only thing possible short of taking my own life. Now for my children and their generation, being trans was - what was the phrase? - *just one more way of being human*. Was it possible that what was once something to be ashamed of could now become a source of joy. (Boylan 235-236)

James had relationships with ladies when he was younger, but they were mostly unsatisfied. By 1985, James had moved to New York City with his girlfriend Rachel. Even now, the narrator remembers, it seemed feasible that she could be someone else if only she were liked profoundly enough. Rachel was allergic to dogs, but James' parents had recently acquired a chocolate lab named 'Brown'. Unlike with the family's prior pups, James thought the dog might grow out to be sane, but no such luck. Brown developed a disorder known as 'lick granuloma,' in which she bit her own paws. Of course, the author has seen dogs with this problem before, dogs that begin with their paws and become obsessive and crazed, as if their paws are the canine version of right-wing talk radio. James' father was dying of cancer at this point, and James was planning to enter graduate school at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. James believed that this would be a non-dishonorable method to end the relationship without truly ending it.

During that period, James paid regular visits to his family in Devon, as his father's health deteriorated and Brown yearned for her paws. Brown, on the other hand, laid her soft face in his lap and which made James sought comfort. No one is useless if they have experienced love. James was married to Deirdre Finney and residing in Maine about a decade later, in 1993. By this time, James had written a book, was working at Colby College, and had acquired the next dog 'Alex', a Gordon Setter from his friend Zero. When it comes to being married, the author states that she doesn't know how Deirdre managed to get through to her when so many other women couldn't. She can only tell that she loved her more than anyone she had ever known. But she did not completely expose her heart to Deirdre.

Alex, the Gordon Setter, was a good boy, and James and Deirdre had a strong bond with him. After that in 1999, James and Deirdre got 'Lucy', a Golden Retriever (kind of). Lucy was present when James and Deirdre's two kids, Zach and Sean, were born. Lucy, on the other hand, was never comfortable in the Boylan family home after spending her first months on a paradise pig farm. James once received a parcel from Frederick's of Hollywood when Deirdre and the lads were away. Lucy the dog waited at the bottom of the stairs staring up as James went upstairs to get dressed,

wearing make-up, a dress, a wig, and high heels. "Do you want to go for a walk?" James asked Lucy. "That's what you're wearing?" the dog wondered, raising her head in doubt.

Soon later, James revealed his actual identity to Deirdre and transitioned to Jennifer. Jennifer, Deirdre, and the boys - now nine and eleven - agreed to buy another dog when Lucy died in 2005. Sean desired a puppy, while Jennifer proposed a bloodhound, Deirdre recommended a rescue dog, Zach considered a pug, and Jennifer recommended a bloodhound. 'Ranger' was the name given to a black lab puppy chosen by the family. Jennifer's shift was difficult for the family, partly due to anxieties that the outside world would reply with violence and brutality. Jennifer's homemade pizza and Ranger, on the other hand, brought the family closer together. By 2017, Zach and Sean had grown up, and Jennifer and Deirdre's black lab, 'Chloe', had joined their family. The family moved to New York City at this time, where Jennifer would join the Barnard College faculty. More surprises awaited the Finney-Boylan family, and their shared love, as always, enabled them to go on together.

When I was young, I was haunted by the person I imagined I could never be. Now that I am old, what shocks me is not that, against all odds, I became that person. What shocks me now is that all the boys and men I once was still live within my heart, along with every last dog that ever helped them on their way. (Boylan 103)

The concept of gender is generally based upon social and cultural norms driven by society. If a person is born with a female reproductive organ then her gender is female; while if a person has a male reproductive organ then his gender is male. In other words, gender is determined just by looking at the biological identity of a person. To argue for this representation of gender, it is witnessed by supporting the definition of gender as 'performative'. Bourdieu argues that the definition of gender has to be revised in biology then only we can eradicate masculine dominance from society. According to him, "when various parties contest whether one's sexual identity is natural or cultural, a border between matter and form, which is also a border between what is real and what is supplementary"

(Colebrook 51). The structure of gender is centered between maleness and femaleness; it questions the role of in-between individuals present in society. "Regardless of modern, post-modern or postmodern approaches, something like a gender binary has been fundamental to Western thought" (Colebrook 51).

Thus Jennifer Boylan discusses the importance of accepting one's own self, the internal struggle to trust in one's own worth, and her hard road to accept both her identification and sexuality. But, at the end of the day, it's all about love. Jennifer Finney Boylan relates the storey of her life in seven chapters and seven dogs. She communicates with love, humor, and compassion. She not only writes about the canines and their distinct characteristics and circumstances, but she also gradually chronicles her transformation from James to Jennifer in her forties. Jennifer Finney Boylan's book *Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs* is a wonderfully written memoir about the author's transgender journey. She relates the story through the eyes of her many pets. Each chapter follows the progress of one canine on her adventure. It's a heartfelt book that lets the reader comprehend the authors' serious challenges throughout her life. It's also a good storey that gives hope that bigotry towards LGBTQ people may one day be a thing of the past.

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