

Evans, C.B. (2016). I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender Child.  
Ontario: Cheryl B. Evans.

Reviewed by Melissa Reed, MacEwan University

Cheryl B. Evans' book, "I Promised Not to Tell" is a personal recollection of her experiences in raising a transgender child, and how her physical, spiritual, and emotional barriers affected her responses through-out her child's transitioning phase. She passed off her biological daughter's desires to be a boy at a young age, not realizing that instead of being a tomboy, as the family thought, she could actually be transgender. After her daughter hit puberty, she tried to drastically change her appearance, and try to look like all other teenage girls in her class. After being faced with a failed suicide attempt by their daughter, the family went through therapy in which they discovered their biological daughter was actually a transgendered young man. In this very personal book, Evans takes us through her journey, both before and after the discovery of her daughter's need to transition, and gives an in depth look at the lengths she went through in order to give her son the best opportunities for his future. Her main goals in writing this book is to explain the feelings that may overwhelm parents if their child came out as transgender, to challenge societal ideas about what transgender actually means, to illustrate and inform readers of some of the processes involved in the transition phase, and to educate members of the public about the ongoing issues of discrimination, not only by members of the public, but also by our government.

Evans explains the thoughts that went through her head after being told that her daughter

was transgender, and that she wished to start the process of transitioning physically into a young man. Although she points out that every person will go through their own emotional turmoil, most parents will go through phases of denial, anger, and emotional heartbreak before coming around to acceptance. It is important that no matter how the parent feels at first, they always take steps forward to support their child and work towards creating a positive environment for the child to express themselves. Evans shows the importance of finding aspects in your spiritual life to support, rather than criticize, the choices your child makes. The main aspect of most religion's is peace and love, and everyone is deserving of both.

Although transgender is linked with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, it is not actually a sexuality but rather a gender misrepresentation. Evans explains being transgender as being trapped in someone else's body. Imagine waking up one day with the same personality and mind set but being stuck in a different physical form, like the movie "Freaky Friday". Now imagine waking up everyday for your entire life in the exact same situation. She explains that this is just the tip of the emotional problems that a transgendered individual goes through. Transgender is often called "gender dysphoria" in the medical world and is looked at as a mental disorder. Evans, along with support from other LGBT supporters have worked really hard to rewire societies minds in regards to that. Transgender is not a mental disorder, rather it is a chemical imbalance or misconnection in the brain in which the person can not identify with the gender in which they were physically born with; whether it is caused by nature or nurture is still being researched and discussed by reputable doctors.

Evans explains the process of her own son's transitioning process in hopes of preparing parents that may be in similar situations as to what may be ahead in the journey, and also to

educate members of the public of the different process' that individuals can go through in their transitioning phase. She makes certain to point out that every individual will have their own, unique journey and that what is right for one person may not necessarily be right for the next. She spends a lot of time talking about the prescriptions for hormone blockers and increasing other hormones to begin the change. Evans also provides a great amount of resources in Canada for both individuals transitioning, and for supporters, in which they can get help with the process and learn how to express their feelings in a supportive way. The journey is long after starting the hormone treatment; usually the individual must live as the opposite sex, both at home and in public, for a minimum of one year but can be longer depending on the surgeon facilitating the transition, before they have the opportunity of getting the first surgery. The wait and expenses of the top surgery can be quite grueling, especially because the government will only cover the costs if you follow their procedures and use the surgeons they allow. After the first surgery, the individual must fully recover and regain full health before being considered a candidate for bottom surgery. This is a very physically draining operation and requires a very long, exhausting rehabilitation afterwards, and has a greater risk of problems associated with it. This surgery is only partially covered by the government and comes with a way higher cost because it is quite complicated and requires the best surgeons. Wait lists are long as surgeons can only do one surgery a day and there are only a handful in the country qualified and experienced to do such surgeries.

Evans confronts the issues of discrimination against transgendered individuals by first describing her own thoughts and worries about her son's transition, especially in the beginning stages. She talks about the extremely high suicide rates in individuals, both who have

transitioned and are being treated poorly by friends and family, as well as individuals who feel that they are stuck in the gender they were born with and there are no other options for them. The government also limits the capacity at which an individual has control over their own future in regards of transitioning. If an individual is under the age of consent, they must have parental support, and permission to go through any medical treatments. The individual, regardless of age, must be supported by a minimum of two to three doctors that will supervise and facilitate the entire process. The government also makes it hard for an individual to switch over their gender on all identification cards; they make you jump through hoops without much guidance of where to start.

Evans wrote this book, first as a way to express the emotions and thought processes that she went through while her daughter transitioned into her son, second as a way to express to others going through similar situations that, although every individual will go through the process in their own unique way, if you show your love and support you will set the individual up for a better future, and third to present and challenge society's flaws when it comes to facing the topic of transgender individuals. She criticizes herself for some of the thoughts she had at the beginning of her son's process which allows the audience to relate to her on a personal level, and she points out some of the flaws in our medical and political system in regards to transitioning. Evans is an advocate for transgender rights and is actively still fighting to ensure that someday, hopefully soon, other individuals will be able to go through the transition without the stigma and battle that her son experienced. She provides a vast amount of resources for anyone to access, including medical advice, therapy, or support. Evans wrote this book to reach out to all people who is or maybe talking about being transgender, but any individual involved in social sciences

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or psychology could gain valuable knowledge from her work. Evans wrote this book beautifully and made it impossible to put down. She inspires an emotional response and encourages everyone to stand up for equal rights of all members of society. This book is written for an academic of audience of individuals involved in the social sciences which includes, but is not limited to, psychology, sociology, and social work. I would recommend that anyone with an interest in learning more about transgender, or anyone who has a transgender individual in their life, to read this book.