



**Barkin, Janna. (2017). He's always been my Son: A Mother's Story about raising her Transgender Son. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.**

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Janna Barkin's book, "He's Always Been My Son: A Mother's Story about Raising Her Transgender Son", is a bittersweet, informational, and insightful story that reminisces the struggles, milestones, and emotions experienced through the journey raising her transgender son, Amaya. Barkin not only uses her experience and platform to connect with other parents who may be in similar situations, but she educates, provides resources and data, and includes the perspectives of others that were involved in her child's transition. Her mixture of personal anecdotes with resources and data emphasize the theme of conflicts faced by transgendered individuals, their families, peers, and communities.

Barkin sets her story into motion headlining 'Amaya's Blessing'; a testimony that provides comfort to the reader through reassurance that the personal and intimate stories being told about Amaya are being told truthfully, respectfully, and with consent. The author then takes time to educate readers on pronouns. She defines transgender as "... someone whose gender identity is the opposite of their natal sex. Sometimes the word transgender is used more broadly to encompass anyone who does not identify as gender binary. People may identify as transgender whether or not they have had – or plan to have – any medical interventions" (p. 19). Further, she notes that she

uses “male pronouns for Amaya consistently throughout this book”, regardless of the fact that female pronouns were used until Amaya requested male pronouns at the age of fourteen (p. 13).

Barkin explains that it was very difficult to find information that would guide her and her husband in understanding and supporting their child through his transition. Her lack of resources is reflected in her motivation and insistence on bringing awareness to the struggles and dangers of being a part of the LGBTQ community. Barkin contributes research evidence to her writing when speaking on the issues faced by the members of this community regarding acceptance from society, peer groups, and families. Not only is she directly related to the experience by having a transgender child, but she goes above and beyond by providing “resource information for legal and other assistance; notes on some of the latest research on gender; lists of non-profit and other organizations that support transgender youth and families; lists of medical and other health professionals skilled in working with trans youth; and information about online and local support groups for parents and their children” (p. 15).

Barkin states that there was not an epiphanic moment where she realized that her child was struggling with understanding his gender. She emphasizes the normality of these realizations being a surprise to parents, peers, and/or the child themselves. She explains that in hindsight, there were early signs of Amaya not wanting to be or not acting like a stereotypical girl. She reiterates the importance of supporting a child’s feelings early in life to avoid shaming or holding them back from embracing their harmless differences. She explains that “there is no one way to be transgender” (p. 27), and regardless of her family’s story, every child, mother, family, and community is going to undergo unique steps and subjective experiences in relation to one’s tran-

sition. Barkin raises awareness to the idea that children may have complex feelings about their gender at very young ages and describes the important role of parents, teachers, and other adults to be accepting, to teach other children to be accepting, and to find ways to manage their own personal feelings in a healthy way. Amaya's father, Gabriel Barkin, reflects on his own growth with regard to understanding gender. He acknowledges that as a young man he had very little education and knowledge about what it meant to be gay or transgender. He admits to past usage of words like "fag and faggot" (p. 89), as well as not considering gay/lesbian relationships to be "equal in any way" (p. 92). Illustrated through his love and support for his son, he proves that it is never too late to educate yourself in order to be accepting and respectful of others' differences.

To place an educational and informative focus on the important topic of medical intervention, Barkin refers to psychological, developmental, and behavioural theories to ensure her credibility. Although she makes it clear that it is not your body, but your mind that defines your gender, she demonstrates how going through the puberty of a male or female, but identifying as the other can be incredibly distressing. She acknowledges that hormone therapy and hormone blockers are relatively new technology, but explains how using hormone blockers to inhibit Amaya's periods released him "from the dysphoria that caused his suffering" (p. 102). Barkin provides insights into her conversations with Amaya regarding his breasts and the pains, as well as long term complications of binding. She also provides a fax that she had sent to Amaya's doctor prior to the appointment in order to educate the doctor on Amaya's current state of transition. Barkin discusses the complications that often occur due to ignorance and lack of knowledge in dealing with transgender patients in the medical field. She explains how finding the right prac-

titioner resulted in an insurance-covered top surgery for Amaya. To educate readers, she speaks on the risks of hormone therapy such as becoming sterile, as well as the risk of trans men taking on male health risks such as “hypertension, cardiovascular disease, balding, stroke, and weight gain” (p. 210).

Janna Barkin touched on all the right topics with this book; from the struggles of gendered bathrooms and societal responses to a transgendered individual, to the aspects of mental health, physical health, and medical procedures. As well as reflecting on and admitting their mistakes as parents, stating things they would have done differently, and including solutions for certain issues they came across in their journey. It first appears as if this book is intended to be written-by-parents-to-parents; however, I discovered that its intention lies in its ability to “share and spread information, love, acceptance, and empathy (p. 14). The author maintains that availability and accessibility of resources and education tends to be an ongoing issue and efficiently responds to that issue with twenty-two pages of resources ranging from organizations, hotlines, television programs, books, research reports, resources for schools, and more.

In an academic setting, this would be a beneficial book for those in gender studies or even some sociology fields, such as sociology of the family. I also feel that it is an inspiring and informational read for anyone willing to open their mind and turn its pages. This book is a multipurpose piece containing heartwarming stories, uncomfortable (but, much needed) conversation, and an array of impactful resources. Reading this book feels like you’re enjoying a cup of coffee with the authors and conversing, as well as learning, what it’s like to raise, observe, support, and advocate for the journey of a transgender child. Through personal insights, resources,

and data, Barkin achieves her goal to “provide consistently positive, uplifting, educational guidance to other families, as well as to educators, councilors, transgender people, or anyone else interested in the issue” (p. 15). I applaud the author on her ability to acknowledge that many transgender youth and adults do not receive the same amount of love, acceptance, and support as Amaya, and many face neglect from their families, friends, and communities as they navigate their transitions. This book shows the importance of a healthy support system for an individual going through their transition. That is why Amaya’s parents, as well as their family and friends who shared their stories within this book emphasize the need to advocate for the individuals who do not have their deserved support system.