

Transister: Raising Twins in a Gender-Bending World

Kate Brookes

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Transister is a powerful memoir about a mother's stand for her daughter's right to be her authentic self.

Television anchor Kate Brookes's unflinching memoir *Transister* is about raising a trans child in a transphobic world.

Brookes, who grew up in a dysfunctional home with a mentally ill mother, was determined that her family would be "normal." But even in the womb, her twins were polar opposites. Jacob was calm; his twin (who was assigned "male" at birth) kicked and thrashed. And as they grew, so did their differences. Jacob loved sports, trucks, and superheroes; he was embarrassed that his twin preferred Disney princesses and Barbies, wearing dresses, and styling the hair of anyone who would allow it. Brookes felt guilty that one of her children was unhappy, and that they felt feminine yet were expected to dress and behave like a boy. Jacob, too, endured teasing at school because of his twin.

In time, Brookes learned how being transgender cuts to the core of one's personhood. As a parent to a transgender child, she too struggled, and her feelings conflicted: she recalls being happy, sad, "petrified," courageous, accepting, and guilty—all at the same time. Her dreams of family stability were complicated. But she also loved her child and was able to lean on supportive family members, friends, medical and mental health professionals, ministers, and rabbis.

But the book goes beyond the family's story alone. Statistics are shared to undergird Brookes's expressions of concern for her daughter, including a note that LGBTQ+ children experience 91 percent more violence and are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted than their cisgender and straight peers. And the book notes that Black and Latina transgender women face even greater inequalities. Brookes became frightened for her daughter upon learning that almost 30 percent of transgender teenage girls reported having attempted to kill themselves—a worry amplified by the memory that her daughter, while she was still in kindergarten, already felt like she wanted to die.

Sociopolitical commentary is included as well, making the book more timely. Brookes reports on how controversial and polarizing trans issues have become, and her narrative is tense with segues into the statistics that kept her awake at night. She notes that transgender issues have become a matter of life and death and expresses concern for trans people who are cast out by their families, churches, and friends. Still, touches of humor are present as a relief from this heavy subject.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (June 30, 2023)

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