

# **Becoming a Visible Man**

*by Jamison Green*

*Reviewed by Dave Parker*

There are far fewer books about female-to-male (FtM) transition than there are about male-to-female (MtF). When a leading activist and advocate for FtM presents his autobiography, it instantly becomes an important work. When it is well written and insightful, it becomes a must-have book for anyone interested in transsexual experience and history. Green's book exceeds these standards.

No one truly knows how many transsexuals exist or how many are FtM or MtF. FtM transsexuals tend to blend quickly into the community after transition, becoming virtually invisible, while MtF often have much more difficulty doing so. Nevertheless, it is biologically reasonable to expect approximately equal numbers of FtM and MtF. We only know for certain that both have existed throughout recorded history.

*Becoming a Visible Man* is more than just an autobiography. Green blends much of the history of the modern FtM community outreach and the technology of corrective surgery into the story of his early life, transition, and subsequent activism and advocacy. He includes stories of coming out, finding a place in the community, gaining knowledge about the differences between sex and gender, and becoming an activist. He discusses various forms of "treatment," including hormone therapy, various surgeries, and learning to express a new gender role. Sharing his own and others' experiences, he discusses the feelings and reactions of parents of transsexuals and of transsexuals as parents.

Green describes his evolutionary progress out of the closet into very public leadership in the FtM community early in his book. He then moves on into the reality of living in a body congruent with his knowledge of himself. He describes his recognition that "...I could never grow up to be a woman. . . the risks of social and economic loss, the health risks of hormonal changes, and the surgical risks of mutilation or even death . . . no longer seemed as dangerous as a life unfulfilled."

This book is unusual in that Green not only describes the various surgeries that are options to an FtM transsexual, but also points out the risks and benefits to each. He points out that the type and amount of surgery for each individual depends on that individual's emotional needs – their self-acceptance. The book reflects a deep insight into the psychological effects of "hiding" (stealth) and "accepting" a non-conforming gender identity. As a parent, Green relates the trauma of being the "other mother" and of transitioning with the eventual loss of contact with loved ones.

As Green points out through a quote from another FtM friend, "transsexual is not a matter of desire; it is a matter of identity. FtM's are not women who want to be men – they are men who are largely invisible because they were born into a female body."

Green is a very visible man.