



WPATH CONFERENCE REPORT

I feel as if I'm writing a report about a school field trip. If that were so, it might be titled, *My Adventure in Chicago*. As a school report, I would then write about each session I attended, perhaps including my overall impressions of Chicago (which were more positive than I anticipated they might be). However, I'm choosing to write instead about how different the WPATH conference was from what I expected it to be.

WPATH stands for World Professional Association for Transgender Health, a new name for a nearly-30-year-old organization, formerly known as the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association. This organization is well known among trans people (and vilified by many on this basis) for producing the Standards of Care that most medical and mental healthcare professionals use in providing transition-related procedures to transgender individuals, from hormones to various forms of sex-reassignment surgery.

I was nervous about attending this conference, as I'd submitted a proposal to present a paper, *Appropriate Therapeutic Care for Families with Transgender/Gender-Variant Pre-Pubescent Children*, and my proposal was accepted. I felt as if I was entering the lion's den, despite the fact that various people I know and like were going to be there. Nevertheless, I was conscious of the fact that I'd had to transition under the SOC myself, and as a therapist, have had to modify it to fit my conceptualization of transition. I have always felt an uneasy fit as a member of HBIGDA, now WPATH.

What surprised me most about this conference was the large numbers of transgender people in attendance. I'd estimate that about a third of the attendees were transgender in some way, many of them professionals in medical or mental healthcare fields. I asked a long-time WPATH/HBIGDA member, a prominent transman, if this was a new phenomenon, and he said, no, trans people had always been present at the conferences in large numbers.

However, the larger numbers of trans people entering the professions commonly represented in WPATH (doctors, therapists, social workers) meant that trans presence is no longer solely a matter of community activism, but activism from a professional perspective. My paper is a good example of that – a practical guide for families seeking social transition for their young children. At a professional conference such as WPATH, community activists are not going to be chosen to present papers. For those same activists to become professionals and then present papers will eventually change the organization, from the inside.

I became aware at this conference of a professional schism within the organization – there are those who hold a medical model view of transgenderism as a mental disorder, and there are those who agree with the identity emergence, developmental model that I ascribe to. The former still holds sway to a degree, because this view reflects the original paradigm underlying the formation of the organization. However, the latter now reflects the majority view, which gives me hope that future iterations of the Standards of Care will come closer to representing the holistic nature of transition.

PUBLICATION DONE!

Released in March, 2007, my book *Transition and Beyond: Observations on Gender Identity* is now available. I receive the maximum royalty if you order the book through my publisher, QPress: www.the-q-press.com

Comments from some prominent people:

“Before this book there has been no therapeutic approach that has taken into account my family, people who live the sex and gender paradox of not-man, not-woman. Hurrah!”

–Kate Bornstein, author of
*Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives
to Suicide for Teens, Freaks and Other Outlaws*

“An ideal essential resource for therapists new to working with transgendered and transsexual clients, and a breath of fresh air for those already so engaged. Most highly recommended!

–Jamison Green, author of
Becoming a Visible Man (reviewed below)

“Reid’s book is one of the few I know that sees the trans person in context, in the light of long-held religious beliefs, relationships, and families. *Transition and Beyond* isn’t just vital reading for therapists but for trans people and their families.”

–Helen Boyd, author of *My Husband Betty*
and *She’s Not the Man I Married*

“Crossing over, from client to therapist, from a medical model to a psychospiritual one, Vanderburgh respectfully outlines the process of transition, not just for transgender clients, but for the therapists who serve them.”

–Arlene Istar Lev, author of
Transgender Emergence

BOOK REVIEW

Becoming a Visible Man

Jamison Green (Vanderbilt University Press, 2004)

James Green is an icon to any transman who has done a modicum of research into FTM identity. His book *Becoming a Visible Man* was a long time coming to fruition. Not quite autobiography, but also more accessible than most academic writing on the subject of trans identity, James’ memoir of his transition process offers some excellent, optimistic insights into trans identity, from the viewpoint of a man who has been working toward trans civil rights for nearly 20 years.

“When we change sex, we may confuse, confound, frighten, disgust, and disappoint others, but we can also inspire. We live the dreams others are afraid to live, or perhaps even to dream. We carve out our willful destiny from the imprisonment of roles and bodies that are foreign or intolerable, or at best challenging to us. We may also be prisoners of war—the war between the sexes or the war over sexuality. Where others are praised for self-determination, we are subject to ridicule, even vilification. Are we supposed to feel guilty? Many of us do struggle with terrible guilt over just the act of saying who we are. How dare we take up so much social space by making ourselves a confrontation for others whose lives were just fine before we came along?” (p. 202)

James’ book speaks to all who dare to question their own gender identity, regardless of what conclusions they draw about the nature of their identity. Highly recommended!