

Reflective and insightful account of gender identity dysphoria



Marion Arntzen, Kari Kahrs

***De usynlige kjønn* (The invisible gender)**

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According to the authors, the aim of this publication is to provide insight into and knowledge about gender identity, gender expression and gender diversity.

Some children, adolescents and adults experience themselves as different, and a growing number have the courage to step forward. Parents, teachers, and health professionals as well as the rest of society are expected to look upon these people, referred to in the book as transgender, with respect and understanding.

In the book's eleven chapters, which are short and easy to read, the authors clarify concepts such as *gender identity* and *gender expression* as well as *transsexualism*, *transvestism* and *transgender person*, in addition to communicating the difficulties transgender people experience at different stages of life and in different relationships.

At several points the authors express criticism of the Norwegian Directorate of Health's recommended treatment for transsexuals, which does not include transgender people, and view these treatment options as creating an artificial barrier between the two groups. They applaud the amendments to *Standards of Care* from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health which for the very first time recognizes all transgender people, as well as those who are not cisgendered, and their need for and right to receive trans-related health care along the same lines as health care for others.

Throughout the book the reader acquires a solid understanding of the difficulties experienced by transgender people in childhood and adolescence, and the challenges they experience as adults, particularly in relation to partners, are realistically portrayed. Although

the authors give the reader a clear insight into the problematic area of gender identity dysphoria, they give no explicit answers to other questions they raise. These questions are strongly linked to the claim that all gender expression is natural, not abnormal, for people in all cultures throughout the ages, but at the same time the need for public health initiatives for trans-related adjustments is highlighted.

In 2011 the authors published *Mann er da kvinne* (We're women after all). In addition Marion Arntzen was responsible for the TV series *Jentene på Toten* (The Toten girls) from 2009. The authors' strong commitment to helping transgender people combined with Arntzen's solid platform from her work at *Stensveen Ressurscenter* (Resource centre) means that the reader can believe their message and feel empathy for those who experience so many difficulties in their lives.

I would first and foremost recommend the book to people who work in kindergartens and schools, but also to adolescents and adults who have questions about their own gender identity or that of children and friends. It is not a medical text but will undoubtedly be useful for health professionals who are challenged to show greater tolerance and openness regarding questions of gender identity and sexuality.

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