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Living with a transvestite : A phenomenological study of wives and committed partners of transvestites

Heather Christine Freegard
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**LIVING WITH A TRANSVESTITE:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WIVES AND
COMMITTED PARTNERS OF TRANSVESTITES.**

BY

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**A thesis submitted to fulfill the requirement for the award of
Master of Social Science (Human Services)
At the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University.
Perth, Western Australia.**

Date of Submission: November, 2000.

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Firstly, my thanks to the nine women who are, or were, wives and committed partners of a transvestite, the expert informants for this study. Their generosity, honesty and preparedness to share their most intimate emotions and experiences are awe-inspiring. It has been my great privilege to know them.

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ABSTRACT

Being a man or woman is at the core of human social lives and personal identity, and guides appropriate behaviours such as dress, mannerisms and relationships. Transvestism, or the practice of wearing the clothes of the other gender, challenges societal values and guidelines for behaviour. The attitude of society to this practice has varied from veneration to vilification depending on the period of history and the culture of the people. In western countries, although there is little social or legal repression, transvestism is largely a hidden phenomena. The tradition of comic drag has dominated public recognition of cross-dressing. Hence transvestites are perceived to be freakish or funny.

Transvestites often marry, or form a committed heterosexual relationship without telling their partner of their cross-dressing. Because the public largely ignores the practice of transvestism, women who are married to, or form committed relationships with a transvestite are rendered invisible. The invisibility isolates women from information and social support. Although a substantial amount of literature is available regarding the nature of transvestism and the experience of transvestites, only sporadic attempts have been made to understand the experience of, and influence on, the wives or committed partners of transvestites.

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of living in a committed relationship with a transvestite from the point of view of the woman.

A phenomenological approach to data collection and content analysis identified emergent themes arising from in-depth interviews with nine women who were currently living, or had in the past lived, in a committed relationship with a transvestite. The women were aged between 38 and 84, resided in Western Australia and were of English speaking background. Significantly, some participants had left the relationship. This group of women has never been accessed in previous research hence their input increases the overall knowledge of the experiences of women in relationship with a transvestite.

Women described the disclosure of transvestism by their partner to be a great shock that precipitated a long period of complicated grieving. Analysis of data indicated that the relationships between their partner and the femme identity of the man and the woman, whilst unintentional on the part of the man, was experienced as emotionally and sexually abusive by the women. The women resolved the conflict in various ways. Some re-committed to a renegotiated relationship and some tolerated their partner's behaviour. Most felt trapped within the relationship at some stage. The majority of women chose to leave the relationship.

In retrospect, the women recognised positive changes within themselves as a result of overcoming adversity.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature: . Heather Freegard

Date: . 1st March, 2001

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This thesis describes a study of the lived experience of women living in a committed relationship with a transvestite. The study was accomplished by taking a phenomenological approach to gather and interpret data provided by women who have experienced living with a transvestite in a committed relationship. Qualitative data was obtained through a process of in-depth interviews with such women to provide a deeper understanding and to determine what meanings the relationship has, or had, for the women.

The subject is introduced by providing background information and the significance of the study. Next, a statement of the problem is outlined, followed by explication of the purpose and objectives of the study. The research question is stated. Definitions of terms, and conceptual framework are provided ending with the assumptions underlying the study.

1.2: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Being a man or woman is at the core of human social lives and inner being. Gender is a basic category of social fabric, forming a building block of culture in history. *Living within a society presupposes a gendered interaction, a gendered conversation and a gendered interpretation. Gender, in western society, refers to the ways in which biological sex roles are culturally*

elaborated: to the values, beliefs, technologies, and general fates to which we assign women and men (Warren, 1988. p13).

The desire to have a meaningful relationship with a significant other has been a central concern amongst human beings since ages past. Most adults seek a long lasting relationship with another person. Such relationships provide the stability to structure, and gives meaning to, the day to day struggles and triumphs of life (Taylor, 1996). The four arbiters of western society; law, education, religion, and medicine, direct that which is right, proper, moral and healthy for socially appropriate human behaviour, and the means of social control of, in particular, sexual behaviour (Bristow, 1997).

Thus, society deems that committed relationships will be heterosexual, that is, between a man and a woman and that each will find fulfilment in the social roles determined for the man (breadwinner and protector) and woman (homemaker and nurturer) (Healey, 1996). In the modern world where adult initiation rites no longer exist, marriage, or living together, is seen as proof of attaining adult status. The ideal relationship is one that has been formally recognised (Rudy, 1997). However, whether established with the blessing of the church and registered by law, or not, such marriages are the accepted basis of social and family life in Australia and the rest of the western world (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1993; Hauk, 1977; Healey, 1996).

At the heart of male and female roles in any culture, shaping the adoption and response to particular dress, perfumes, hair styles and mannerisms is the issue of sexuality. It is sexual behaviour that ultimately sustains human society by ensuring its reproduction over time, and links one person to another through kinship systems (Warren, 1988). Thus, the bearing and raising of children is also espoused by the arbiters of society as the expected and valued outcome of a stable, committed relationship between an adult man and woman. Some definitions suggest that a family does not exist unless children are present (Aspin, 1987, Sarantakos, 1996). The family unit is seen as the ideal environment for the rearing of the next generation to become socially adept citizens. Having children is proof of a man's virility and maleness and a woman's fecundity and femaleness (Bristow, 1997; Taylor, 1996).

Over the past three decades, marriage has been largely redefined, evidenced by the growing rate of divorce and increase in de facto relationships, and fundamental changes to family law (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 1998). In former times, marriages were based around economic factors and were considered successful if they survived economically. Personal relationships were of lesser priority and husband and wife roles were clearly defined (MacKay, 1997; Taylor, 1996). Different forces and expectations are present today. Personal fulfilment through the marital relationship is of high priority. Women

have opportunities for higher education, the means of controlling fertility and greater economic independence through employment outside the home. Men are expected to share the homemaking and child-rearing (Dempsey, 1997; MacKay, 1997). Women no longer feel obliged to stay in unhappy marriages. Two out of three divorces are initiated by women (Glezer, 1994).

Although under greater pressure as a result of these forces and expectations, the desire for, and belief in, a long term, committed relationship remain largely unchanged. Also unchanged are the expectations of reciprocal loyalty, fidelity and faithfulness, honesty and trust (Dempsey, 1997; Millward, 1996).

The apparent conflict between society's desires and beliefs in the ideal and what is actually happening to committed relationships in society merits further exploration. Challenges to the accepted social roles of men and women have also challenged concepts of gender identity, that is the perception of oneself as either a man or a woman (Connell, 1995; Tacey, 1997). The arbiters of society have traditionally described maleness and femaleness as a dimorphism, that is, as two forms of the species, each distinct in structure and nature from the other (Tacey, 1997).

The biological sex of an individual is determined by a cursory inspection of the external genitalia by the doctor or midwife assisting at birth, and is forever

stated on the birth certificate (Goffman, 1987). Biological sex is manifested in many ways;

- the presence of chromosomes XX or XY;
- present and functioning gonads; ovaries or testicles;
- relative hormone balance between oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone;
- the structure and function of internal sexual organs; uterus and fallopian tubes or vas deferens and seminal vesicles;
- structure of external genitalia; labia major/minor or penis/scrotum and
- sexual differentiation of the brain (Bancroft, 1993).

The majority of human beings develop with sufficiently congruent aspects of biological sexual characteristics to become fertile men or women. However, there are a significant number of people who have ambiguous chromosomes, for example XXY or XYY, or both ovaries and testicles, or unbalanced hormones, and/or ambiguous internal and external genitalia (Bancroft, 1993). Approximately sixty babies are born each year with ambiguous gender in Australia (Gene find the key ,1999; Smith,1999), which demonstrates the existence of a grey area of biological sex which defies attempts to categorise people into either male or female. Society usually manages this seemingly impossible situation by labelling people who find themselves in the intersex area as abnormal, or deviant, and offers medical intervention to make them normal, that is to be made either male or female (Bullough and Bullough, 1993; Gene find the key , 1999).

Whilst the determination of biological sex is complex, the determination of gender is even more so, for the influences of social interactions and environments are involved, in addition to the biological factors. It is believed that there is a prenatal influence of sex differentiation of body morphology, hormonal function and possible central nervous system development. However these pre-determinants do not completely preordain the individual's beliefs and choices. Inherent predispositions also need social and physical factors in the individual's post-natal environments to complete the development of gender roles and identity. The social development of gender identity begins at birth with gender assignment, that is, it's a boy or it's a girl. From the very first day of life the child is responded to by caregivers in terms of her or his sex (Cahill, 1987) and continues throughout life as opportunities for experiences and social interactions arise or are denied (Goffman, 1987; Money and Wiedeking, 1993). Most people accept and do not question their own, or others' gender identity which is usually congruent with external genitalia (Bancroft, 1993).

Gender identity and gender roles are closely interrelated aspects of gender. Gender identity is the private experience of an individual's perception of being man, or woman, or ambivalent. Gender role is a much more recent sociological concept first appearing in the 1940s (Connell, 1995). Gender role has been defined as the public expression of gender identity, that is,

everything a person says or does to indicate to others or to the self that one is a man, or woman or ambivalent (Goffman, 1987; Money, 1965). The range of behaviours that are accepted as masculine or feminine varies in any given culture at any given time and whilst there may be some overlap, there is an unconscious knowing of which behaviours are acceptable for males and females (Money & Wiedeking, 1993). Other cultures do not necessarily make distinctions between sexual identity, gender identity and sexual behaviour: categories such as gayness, lesbianism, transsexualism and transvestism are historically and culturally determined (Warren, 1988).

The concept of gender role persists and is demonstrated through differences in social situations such as unequal incomes, unequal family responsibilities and different access to social power, even though large volumes of research have failed to identify significant differences in psychological traits between men and women (Connell, 1995). Beliefs about gender, about masculinity and femininity, and about sexuality are closely related with actual gender behaviour (Goffman, 1987).

Western society has been slowly changing attitudes toward people who are different. Beginning in the sixties, the Gay Liberation Movement claimed the rights of homosexual people to associate with others and to be free of discrimination. Gay men and lesbians are less likely to fear disclosure, and more couples are living openly in homosexual relationships. There is

increasing and serious discussion regarding legally recognised homosexual marriages (Gripper, 1996). The evolution of Queer theory has challenged sexual dimorphism by calling into question conventional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories used to describe and sustain it (Jagose, 1996). Queer is difficult to define, as the concept is embedded in ambiguity and political debate. Whilst arising out of the gay liberation movement's efforts to gain legitimacy for homosexuality, the queer movement increasingly comprises all forms of non-normative sexuality including transvestism as a consciously chosen location of openness and possibilities (Doty, 1993). The queer movement is still at the stage of political activism and scholarly debate, and widespread discussion and gradual acceptance of differences is occurring (Jagose, 1996). Whilst there have been great advances made in the acceptance of difference amongst people, the majority are still influenced by past learning, experiences and biases. Changing a point of view that has structured society for generations is not going to occur in a short time. Some people may accept the challenge intellectually but be unable to change their behaviour when confronted by sexual and/or gender difference personally.

Transvestites challenge the widely accepted views on gender identity on two counts. Firstly they seek to find fulfilment of sexual identity by dressing and taking on the social behaviours of the gender opposite to their designated biological sex and gender roles for periods of time varying from occasionally

to frequently. The transvestite does not want to relinquish their male identity and role permanently. Rather he wishes to be feminine and take on a female role occasionally. That is, he feels the presence of a femme identity (Allen, 1996). This practice claims the right to both ends of the dimorphic scale. Secondly, in society where men largely exercise leadership, influence and status, and as most transvestites are male, they seek to relinquish their higher social status to become woman. In other words, they voluntarily relegate themselves, however temporarily, to a perceived lower social status (Bullough & Bullough, 1993).

People who find themselves in the no man's land of different sexual and gender identity are in a difficult position. On one hand the open debate and visibility of people like themselves encourage them to hope for acceptance. On the other hand they are still subject to their own fears and the prejudices of others. They often feel the need to avoid disclosure for fear of being labeled sick, perverted, immoral or insane because they do not fit the accepted dimorphism. They may even ignore their inner perceptions and order their behaviour to be aligned with the expectations of parents, family, friends and colleagues. They may form committed relationships with the opposite gender to conform, or in the belief that such a relationship will cure their mal-alignment (Peo, 1988; Prince, 1967).

The concept of a committed relationship has central ideals of reciprocity and honesty. A transvestite can and usually does, keep his need to cross-dress a secret from his potential partner (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). When one person is committing to a relationship believing in reciprocity and honesty based on incomplete knowledge of the other and the other is committing to the relationship to conform and cure, an imbalance is created, regardless of the degree of affection and attraction between the couple. The likelihood of repercussions sooner or later is almost assured. Whilst the right of the transvestite to have meaningful and satisfying relationships is increasingly recognised, so too must be recognised that their partner also has needs and rights within the relationship. Women who enter into such a relationship unknowingly are faced with all the potential societal and personal prejudices and stereotypical beliefs about transvestism on disclosure. In addition they experience the loss of the partner they had and are faced with the expectation that they will accept and love the new partner. This experience can be extremely traumatic for both the man and woman (Peo, 1984).

Support groups established by transvestites exist for the cross-dressing partner. Such groups usually offer some support for wives and partners, however the focus is primarily on keeping the relationship intact for the transvestites benefit (Hordern, 1992; Kaye & Kaye, 1999; Roberts, 1995). Little information is available to women outside the transvestite support group. It is important to explore the meaning of such relationships when

disclosure of transvestism by the male partner changes the parameters of the committed relationship. In this study the meanings of the relationship following the discovery of the men's transvestism were explored from the women's perspective.

1.3: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is estimated that 1% of the adult male population are transvestites (Bullough & Bullough, 1993) and that 75% enter into heterosexual relationships (Docter & Prince, 1997). Relating this to the demographics of Western Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000), translates these figures to 5,299 men over the age of eighteen and 3,974 heterosexual relationships potentially affected by transvestism.

Stable, heterosexual relationships are valued and couples experiencing difficulties are encouraged to seek help to save the relationship. Individuals or couples seeking to find resolution to marital difficulties arising from cross-dressing often consult marriage guidance officers, clinical psychologists, counsellors, and general practitioners. Beigel (1969) observed that despite most married transvestites denying the existence of marital discord, the number who were separated, divorced or remarried after divorce was more than twice the national (U.S.A.) average. Currently in Western Australia, Vivienne Cass, clinical psychologist, based on her clinical observations, estimates that most, around 90%, of marriages or committed relationships

with a transvestite break up (personal communication, 1997). Currently forty-six percent of marriages in Australia are likely to end in divorce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). Observations made by Beigel in 1969 for the USA are still accurate thirty years later in the Western Australian context. The potential cost to the community both socially and economically is enormous.

Although literature and research is available on the phenomenon of transvestism it is largely hidden. There has been little effort to conduct research about the partners experiences.

As a society we do not understand the short or long term costs incurred:

- the cost to the transvestite of trying to appear normal;
- the cost to the woman of discovering they are a partner to a transvestite;
- the cost to children and other family; nor
- the cost to society of relationship breakdown in these circumstances.

This study is important as it helps to fill a gap in our knowledge by exploring the effects and experiences of women in relationship with transvestites. The woman is the most likely partner to initiate counselling and to initiate divorce or separation (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). Therefore the findings of this study will provide those likely to be consulted with information that can help guide them through the counselling process.

More importantly it tells the story of an invisible group in society. Because transvestism is still a hidden phenomenon in society the partners of transvestites are rendered invisible. There is little, or no, information readily available to such women, nor is society aware that such women exist, making their relationships and potential difficulties isolated from support. By conducting this study, the lives of these women have become visible and their experiences honoured and valued.

1.4: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Little is known about the experiences, feelings and behaviour of women in a committed relationship with a transvestite. Hence it is necessary to obtain knowledge of the effects that living in such relationships has on women. This information needs to be obtained by self-report, to enable the women to describe their own experiences. If more is known about how women experience meaning for themselves in such relationships an increasing legitimate base could be formed for marital research, improved marital and relationship counselling, thus providing a better service to the community. This study therefore begins to collect this information in context, by obtaining experiential descriptions from women who live, or have lived, in a committed relationship with a transvestite.

1.5: PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to provide information on the perception and understanding of women living in a committed relationship with a transvestite and how it affects them. This was accomplished by describing the experiences of women and interpreting the meaning living in such relationships has for them.

1.6: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To describe the experiences of women living in a committed relationship with a transvestite.
2. To interpret the shared meanings women have in living in a committed relationship with a transvestite.
3. To use this information as a contribution to knowledge that may be useful for those interested in improving counselling and support services to couples experiencing relationship difficulties.

1.7: RESEARCH QUESTION

What is it like to live within a committed relationship with a transvestite from the perspective of the woman?

1.8: DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following terms have been interpreted to mean:

Transvestite: a man who for the most part dresses and lives in society as a man and in addition, seeks to dress and act in the manner of a woman for periods of time. He lives in a heterosexual relationship with a woman.

Cross-dresser: An alternative term to describe a transvestite.

Femme self/identity: an intermittent change of identity that encompasses femininity through the process of wearing feminine apparel and adopting a feminine name.

Committed relationship: A relationship between a man and a woman in which there is a strong sense of permanence and determination that the relationship will continue into the future. The relationship may, or may not, be formalised by legal processes or religious ceremony.

1.9: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underpinning the study utilises symbolic interactionism and social ecology. Arising from the field of sociology, this theoretical perspective assumes that society, reality and selves are created through social interactions. (Blumer, 1969; Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1975). Social interactions occur with individuals, and groups, and are influenced by the structure of the community, society and culture (Bronfrenbrenner, 1975; Moos 1976). Therefore, the individual s experiences are the source of meaning (or truth).

1.9.1: Symbolic Interactionism

The symbolic interactionist position (Blumer, 1969, p3) holds that:

- Human beings act in situations in response to the meaning situations has for them.
- The meanings derived from situations arise out of social interactions between people over time.
- When dealing with a situation the meaning is managed by using interpretive processes.

Meaning is therefore, related to the practical aspects of experience and meanings emerge as people interact. Charon (1992, p23) explains:

Instead of focussing on the individual and his or her personality characteristics, or how the social structure or social situation causes individual behavior, symbolic interactionism focuses on the nature of social interaction, the dynamic social activities taking place among persons. In focussing on the interaction itself as the unit of study, the symbolic interactionist creates a more active image of the human being and rejects the image of the passive, predetermined organism. Individuals interact; societies are made up of interacting individuals.

The interactionist position as described by Blumer (1969), is based on the view that interaction consists of an interpretive process. People act according to how they think and according to the way the individual defines situations. Thus the individual is active in the world as actions involve conscious choices (Charon, 1992). This stresses a view of human nature as being reflective,

creative and alive. Subsequently the human capacity for reflection is heavily emphasised.

The symbolic interactionist focus is on the present, not the past. Human beings act in the present primarily influenced by what is happening in the present and are not controlled by what happened in the past. The past enters into the present by way of recall and application of past learning to the current situation (Charon, 1992).

The adoption of a symbolic interactionist approach to the analysis of participants experiences of living in a committed relationship with a transvestite postulates that relationships are constructed through continuous interaction over time. The relationship is seen as an interactive milieu in the present, in which man and woman interact with the social and physical environment, and with each other.

1.9.2: Social Ecology

The social ecology viewpoint posits that the social and physical environment that surrounds an individual provides opportunity for interaction and influences the development of behaviour, beliefs and values. The developing person is considered to be a dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the milieu. Likewise the environment limits interactions to that which the environment contains. The interaction between person and

environment is viewed as two-directional, requiring a process of mutual accommodation and adaptation (Bronfrenbrenner, 1975). The environment is not limited to a single, immediate setting but is extended to incorporate interconnections between many settings as well as to external influences emanating from larger surroundings. The ecological environment is conceived as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These include settings which the person experiences directly and other settings which whilst not being directly experienced influence the person's experience, such as community and cultural institutions (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979). Thus social ecology is the study of the impacts of physical and social environments on human beings and the influence that the individual has on the physical and social environment.

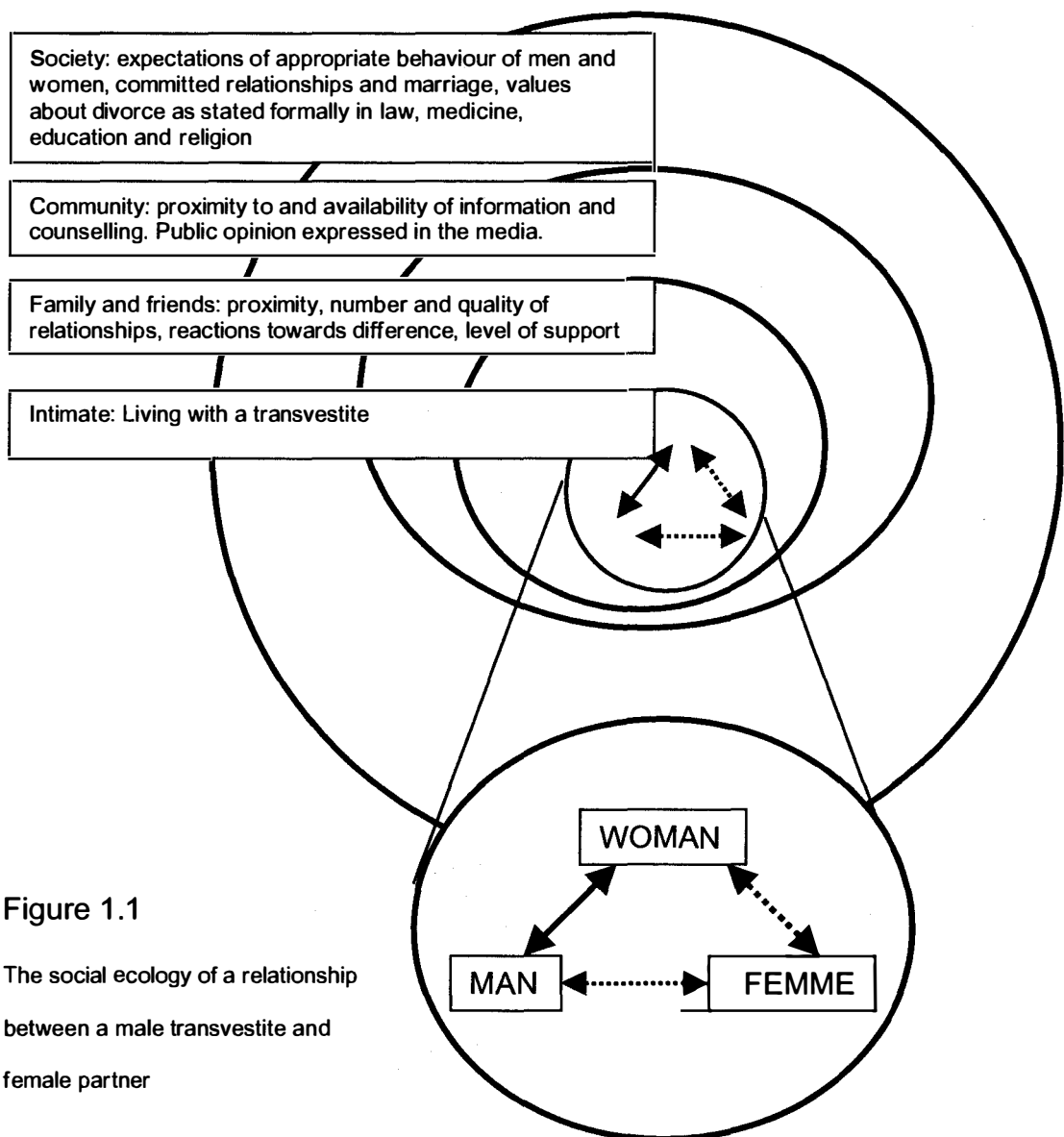


Figure 1.1

The social ecology of a relationship
between a male transvestite and
female partner

Figure 1.1 depicts the levels of a nested ecological system as it may pertain to a couple living in a relationship where the man is a transvestite, showing some of the influences that may impinge on that relationship at each level of the system.

Moos (1976, p28.) suggests the social ecological approach:

- Attempts to understand the impact of the environment from the perspective of the individual.
- Physical and social environments are inextricably related and must be considered together.
- Change occurring in one dimension of the environment affects other aspects of the environment.
- Emphasises individual adaptation, adjustment and coping to the challenges the social and physical environments offer.

A committed relationship is part of, and occurs within, a social and physical environment and develops over time. What happens when one partner divulges an aspect of their self that had previously been hidden, in this study the need of the man to cross-dress? A change is triggered which then affects other aspects of the social and physical environment and the woman adapts and adjusts to the challenges presented by the changed circumstances. That process of adaptation, adjustment and the finding of meaning are the foci of this research.

Any exploration into the social reality of relationships must address values. Whether values are fixed or open to reintegration, they are the basis on which the reality of a relationship is constructed. Values not only give rise to the meaning of a relationship but also to the everyday practices through which a

relationship is conducted. As values shape and are shaped by experience, the types of experiences individuals have within a relationship will contribute to their perception of the relationship. Internalising the values inherent in a relationship can work both positively and negatively for persons within a relationship. On one hand, values provide a set of concrete objectives and expectations in which to work. On the other hand, values may inhibit the expression of unmet needs, as individuals feel obliged to conform to predetermined expectations (Marquis, 1994, p39).

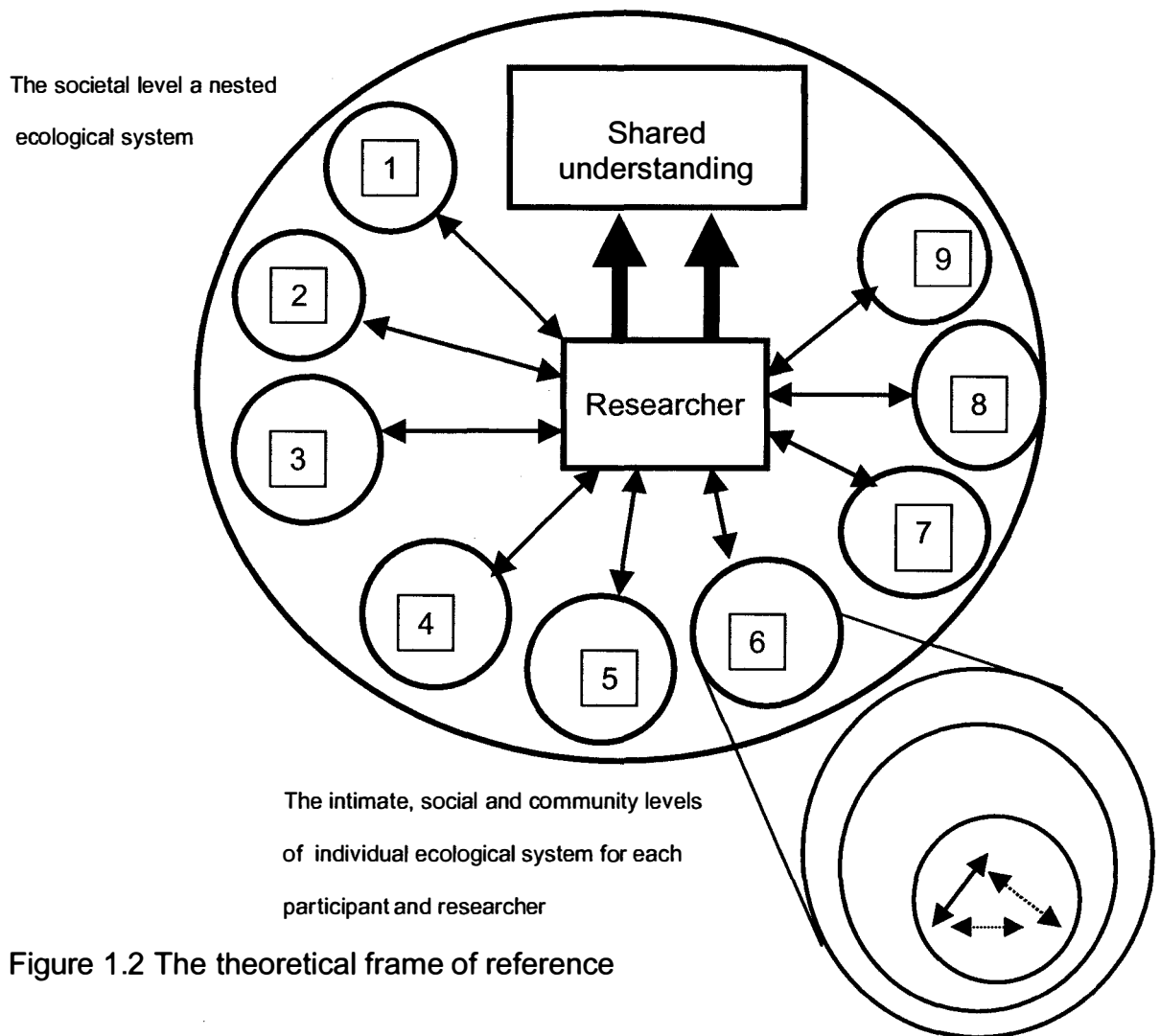


Figure 1.2 The theoretical frame of reference

1.10: ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE STUDY

Symbolic interactionism and social ecology share the belief that individuals adjust to and cope with changes and interactions within physical and social environments and that people act in situations in response to the meaning and value the situation has for them (Blumer, 1969; Bronfrenbrenner, 1979).

Therefore the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher include:

- The researcher has her own ecological existence in addition to the ecological existences of each participant.
- The research occurred within the shared societal context of Western Australia, English language and Anglo Saxon descent.
- Research participants share meanings that constitute the substance of living in a committed relationship with a transvestite.
- The entry of the researcher into participants social and physical environments, and vice versa, would create changes and interactions requiring adaptation.
- The process of adaptation would explicate the discovery of shared meaning.
- Shared meaning would be understood within the shared societal context.

The theoretical framework and assumptions structured the development of the research question, choice of qualitative methodology and interpretation of findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: INTRODUCTION

In phenomenological studies it is not typical to undertake a substantial literature review. As van Manen (1990, p.76) suggests, *it is sound practice to attempt to address the phenomenological meaning of a phenomenon on one's own first*. In this instance the author had read extensively in the area prior to the decision to undertake the study. Therefore, in order to maintain transparency, the literature review will, in addition to basic contextual material, review the literature accessed and interpreted before the study began.

As a means of providing some contextual detail, a review of literature was conducted to present a description of cross-dressing behaviour, definitions of transvestism, and a historical perspective on societies' attitudes towards transvestism. Available literature related to the experience of wives and committed partners of transvestites will then be addressed.

2.2: CROSS-DRESSING BEHAVIOURS: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Just when men and women began wearing different styles of clothing and adopting mannerisms specific to gender is unknown. Regardless of culture or community, throughout recorded history men and women have dressed differently to at least some degree. In cultures or communities where the

difference is minimal the two genders still display different mannerisms and behaviours (Taylor, 1996).

In the common practices of everyday life, the status of being male or female is determined by the anatomy of the external genitalia. If these are concealed, being male or female is inferred on the basis of other signs such as the absence or presence of facial hair or body contours, and voice timbre, in conjunction with clues given by clothing style, haircut, cosmetic adornment, body movements and ways of behaviour. It is assumed that all these factors will be concordant with the anatomy of the genital organs (Money, 1989). Sex, gender and appearance have a close affinity which runs deep in social and psychological expectations of how our lives, and the lives of others, should be (Woodhouse, 1989).

Cross-dressing is a simple term for a complex phenomenon. Behaviours range from wearing one or two items of clothing from the opposite sex, to a complete costume change. It ranges from comic impersonation to a serious attempt to pass as the opposite gender, and from an occasional desire to a need to live full time as a member of the opposite sex (Bullough & Bullough, 1993).

Mythology of most cultures includes instances of gods, goddesses and mortals impersonating the other sex (Talamini, 1982). Examples from Greek

mythology include Achilles, who was disguised by his mother as a maiden, to live among the daughters of Lycomedes to avoid going to Troy and certain death; and Hercules, who, dressed as a Thracian woman, escaped being captured by Hera. The Minyae men, imprisoned by the Spartans; escaped by donning their women s clothes (Guirand, 1968).

The Greeks used sexual disguise as a means of getting close to, and overpowering the enemy. Solon used this strategy to defeat the Megarians (North, 1967 in Talamini, 1982, p3.). These stories, whilst not necessarily addressing transvestism certainly indicate that the dress and behaviour of men and women was sufficiently different to enable disguise and deception.

Also in Greek mythology can perhaps be told the story of a transvestite. Dionysius was a god with both feminine and masculine characteristics. Euripedes described how King Pentheus, or Dionysius, was persuaded to don women s dress in order to spy on the Maenads. Initially scornful and disgusted, once dressed, he felt great strength, comparing his appearance with that of his aunt or mother. Pentheus abandoned his defensive male elements, expressed the feminine side of his character, and developed a sudden increase in power (Sutherland, 1968, in Talamini, 1982.). The followers of the god Dionysius were called Bacchae. The purpose of the cult was to induce an experience which was felt to be ennobling, and of a religious character. Rituals were created to repeat the experiences of

Pentheus and were a device for releasing sexual tensions. During these ceremonies, men and women exchanged clothes and abolished sexual boundaries (Guirand, 1968).

The Romans were also familiar with cross-dressing. In the period 77 — 60 B.C. noblemen and their sons dressed as courtesans, wore women s robes, jewelry and perfumes (Talamini, 1982). Cross-dressing was also common among early fertility cults, and it was probably to distinguish their believers from these pagan cults that the early Hebrews prohibited men from wearing *that which pertaineth to a woman* and women from *that which pertaineth to a man* (Deuteronomy 22:5). Jews were particularly opposed to such practices for they were also used in homosexuality. The penalty for cross-dressing was flagellation. The rules forbidding cross-dressing were not always strictly adhered to as cross-dressing was permitted as a means of disguise during military operations and as part of the enjoyment of festivals and celebrations. Jewish women were permitted to wear male clothing whilst travelling as a means of avoiding attack by gentiles (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Talamini, 1982.).

In medieval times Christian missionaries established a new morality and sought to eradicate fertility rites and sexual excesses. However many of these customs survived, for example Christmas mumming, which consists of men dressing as women and women dressing as men to visit and celebrate

with friends and neighbours. Henry VIII prohibited such actions decreeing that people found in such apparel to be arrested as vagabonds and jailed for three months (Talamini, 1982).

The church demonstrated an ambivalence towards cross-dressing, forbidding the practice, but in certain circumstances permitting, and even encouraging it. Priests of the early Germanic, Greek and Roman regions would wear garments specifically created for women. These garments were designed to express the gentler female principle in man. This early tradition can still be seen in the design of robes, chasubles, stoles and other vestments worn by modern clergy (Talamini, 1982).

In early theatre women were not allowed on stage as acting was considered an unsuitable career for ladies, and all women's roles were performed by boys or men (Ackroyd, 1979). Many of Shakespeare's plays feature cross-dressing as a major component of the plot. In *The two gentlemen of Verona* a girl, played by a boy, disguises herself as a boy, and in *As you like it* a boy plays a girl who plays a boy who pretends to be a girl. During the Restoration the practice of actresses playing the part of a girl disguised as a man was a frequent and seemingly erotic occurrence. During the Renaissance Ariosto (1532/1974) wrote *Orlando Furioso*, an account of the exploits of two sets of twins, all of whom disguised themselves as the other sex.

The practice of cross-dressing continues in modern theatre, used in pantomime where the leading lady is played by a male actor, and revue where female impersonators and drag queens are a common part of the art form (Kirk & Heath, 1984). In film the portrayal of men taking on the role of a woman to continue to be with their children (*Mrs Doubtfire*), or to gain employment (*Tootsie*) continue the long storyline tradition (Garber, 1992).

A number of public cross-dressers were known in France from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Henry III insisted on being known as Her Majesty and liked to wear gowns and jewels for formal court appearances. King Louis XIV and his brother Philippe, Duke of Orleans were transvestites, wearing colourful gowns, jewellery and perfumes (Bullough & Bullough, 1993).

One of the most famous cross-dressing episodes belongs to the Chevalier d Eon, whose surname provided the synonym for transvestism — Eonism. D Eon was a scholar, swordsman and diplomat at the time of Louis XV. He went to Russia on a secret mission disguised as his non-existent sister, Lia. D Eon became popular at the court of the Empress Elizabeth. He later went to England, as a man, to open negotiations for the Peace of Paris where his political enemies spread the word that he was really a woman. When the stories of his daring exploits became known the French and English public waged money as to whether he was a man or woman. At the order of Louis XVI he signed a pledge never to appear in male dress, and was sent to prison

when he disobeyed. At his death Chevalier d Eon had lived forty-nine years as a man and thirty-four years as a woman (Gaillardet, 1836/1972; Money, 1974).

The Puritan and French revolutions transformed cross-dressing into a degrading perversion. Oliver Cromwell made erotic indulgences criminal. The French Jacobins made wealth and display unmanly, and the nobles who liked to be pretty were the most obvious symbols of social transgression. Cross-dressing had changed culturally to a closeted sexual preference (Talamini, 1982).

Evidence of cross-dressing has been found in China, Islamic countries, Russia, Egypt and Japan, particularly as part of theatre (Ackroyd, 1979; Talamini, 1982.). The practice of dressing males and children in feminine clothing has long been perceived as a means of deceiving evil spirits for it is believed that the spirits would be less interested in the more inferior woman (Ackroyd, 1979).

Many societies have a third sex category to allow certain people to live outside the accepted gender norms for that culture. In these cultures, the uniting of masculinity and femininity within the one individual is perceived as a sign of spirituality. Such individuals frequently become shamans and are revered for their ability with medicines and predicting the future. Most cultures

expect the shaman to remain single, or form homosexual relationships. Few cultures condone a heterosexual relationship for the shaman. The berdache of North American Indian tribes and the Hindu hijras are examples of this third sex. Similar roles appear in the tribal customs of Siberia, Chile, Oceania, and Patagonia (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Talamini, 1982).

Cross-dressing has appeared throughout history. Its practice varies at different times and in different societies. In some cultures, religious sanction is withheld or it is used to symbolically denote inferiority. Cross-dressing has not always been seen in a negative light. In other societies it is integrated into wedding, holiday, and religious ceremonies. It has been used to draw favour from the gods and to confuse evil spirits. In some societies that practice shamanism, cross-dressing is treated with reverence and respect. Utilitarian value is placed in the use of cross-dressing for sexual arousal, military strategy, and diplomatic espionage. The value placed in these different places at different times however indicate that cross-dressing practices were not considered the norm and the perceived value was in breaking the norm to achieve specific ends. At best it remained as a recognisable and acceptable deviation, but only within strict limits. In western countries, although there is little social or legal repression, the tradition of comic drag has dominated public recognition of cross-dressing. Hence transvestites are perceived to be freakish or funny.

2.3: CROSSDRESSING BEHAVIOURS: SORTING OUT THE LABELS

There are many motives for men, and occasionally women, to dress in the apparel of the other gender. Whilst the behaviours and motives will be categorised it is important to realise that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor do they exhaust the diversity of behaviours displayed by individuals. It is however, useful to differentiate the motives for it assists in understanding the particular situation in which wives of transvestites find themselves.

The most obvious category in western society is the drag queen. Drag queens are gay men who never forget that they are men, but who like to dress on occasion in apparel that society attributes to the other sex. For commercial or social reasons they like to dress up for fun, usually for an audience. They are never confused about their gender or sexual preference. They have no desire to pass, that is, to be so successful in their dress and behaviour to be accepted as a woman, usually making some obvious slip of action or word to emphasise their real gender and/or sexual preference. They have no compulsion to cross-dress and their actions are not connected with fetishism. They often dress extravagantly and with flamboyance and may be accused of mimicking or parodying women (Kirk & Heath, 1984).

A female impersonator is a performer who takes on the role of a female character. This art form is a remnant from early theatre where boys were

apprenticed and trained to perform the roles of women, as medieval theatre was not considered fit or safe for ladies. The Judeo-Christian exclusion of women from an active role in religious ritual and morality plays also required the playing of female roles by boys. The characters of the modern female impersonator are not necessarily erotically depicted and use culturally recognisable stereotypes to make social comment in a humorous manner. Barry Humphries' character, Edna Everidge, who renounced her title of Lady to demonstrate her preference for an Australian republic is a classic example of this art form. Edna is not the only character created by Humphries, who also impersonates a dissolute politician, a returned war veteran and several other characters in his stage shows. The gender identity and/or sexual preference of the performer are not relevant to, or demonstrated in the performance (Brierley, 1979).

A transsexual is a biological male (or female) who believes himself (or herself) to be a woman (or man), and has a strong desire to be accepted as such in spite of his (or her) anatomy. Most transsexuals are biological males believing themselves to be women. Cross-dressing is one part of the process of expressing the individual's preferred gender. Female clothes are only a concomitant to living as a woman, either pre or post operatively. There is no more sexual significance to the cross-dressing than when a woman wears normal female apparel. The transsexual will also seek the opportunity to be employed, socially accepted and marry as a woman. Both male and female

transsexuals are likely to seek medical help to alter their bodies chemically and/or with cosmetic surgery to be consistent with their psychological gender identity (Bancroft, 1993; Kirk & Heath, 1984).

Exhibitionistic cross-dressing, a rare form of severe sexual disorder is also described in the literature. This occurs when a man at least partly dresses in feminine clothes and displays himself to a female stranger in a manner that provokes fear. The partial cross-dressing is not for the purpose of passing as a female but intended to convey a hostile sexual gesture to the victim. The exhibitionistic cross-dresser produces the most serious involvement of cross-dressing in sexual crime. The use of cross-dressing to disguise identity also occurs in crimes of a non-sexual nature such as theft, occasionally (Brierley, 1979).

Fetishistic cross-dressers are a section of the fetishist group as a whole. Fetishism is the experience of erotic sexual arousal associated with objects that are not normally of sexual significance. Some degree of fetishistic cross-dressing is very common in the sense that some female garments and some male garments assume a sexually evocative quality. However fetishism to the degree where sexual competence is wholly dependent on a fetishistic object is not so common. The fetishist either requires that the partner or themselves wear the article(s) to facilitate intercourse or masturbation. The fetishistic cross-dresser rarely requires the complete wardrobe, mannerisms

and personality of a woman to achieve the aim of sexual gratification (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

A transvestite is (usually) a heterosexual man with two gender identities. Living alongside their exterior masculine personality, they have within them a strong feminine personality who occasionally surfaces and completely takes over the masculine personality. Transvestites are gender confused, acknowledging their biological maleness, heterosexual preference and masculine roles, whilst also wishing to express their feminine identity by taking on the appearance, mannerisms and roles of a woman, at least part of the time. The transvestite's desire to free his female self by cross-dressing and imitating a member of the opposite sex is often described as an overwhelming urge. The female self has her own personality and mannerisms. Transvestites are sometimes sexually aroused by, and achieve sexual gratification through wearing women's clothes. This may be fetishistic, but just as commonly the transvestite's fantasy is about so total an image that it cannot be described as such (Brierley, 1979; Kirk & Heath, 1984). However Freund, Seto and Kurban (1996) suggest that transvestites are in fact fetishistic transvestites, and that they are difficult to distinguish from fetishists.

The transvestite wants to pass as a woman and not be read as a man. He likes to be treated in the way he thinks a woman should be treated. A transvestite has no inclination to have his body reconstructed by surgery, and

usually does not want to live as a woman 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Because he finds relief in escaping from his usual masculine personality, the femme self is as far removed from the male model as possible. He is open to criticism that his female woman is more stereotypically feminine than any anatomical or real women (Kirk & Heath, 1984).

For most citizens the different motives and expressions of cross-dressing are unclear. Frequently all cross-dressing behaviour is perceived as being connected with the more perverse attributes of all categories, that is, criminal, immoral, insane, sexually degrading and unnatural, or the object of fear, scorn or hilarity.

2.4: DEFINING TRANSVESTISM

Transvestism is largely a hidden phenomenon, not referred to in popular health books (Llewellyn-Jones, 1991), or very briefly mentioned (Brasch, 1995; Morrissey, 1996). Wellings, Field, Johnson and Wadsworth (1994) in their eight-year survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain failed to recognise the existence of paraphilia or gender dysphoria in the research design. The lack of substantial information in respectable and readily available literature perpetuates the ignorance and myths currently held in society. When mentioned in the popular press transvestism has connotations of scandal or shock and is confused with transsexualism as when stories of men undergoing sex re-assignment come out (Pendrill, 1997).

Hippocrates in the fourth century B.C. was puzzled to find among the Scythians no-men who dressed in women's clothes. He felt this affliction to be sent by the Gods, and caused by constant horseriding, as the affliction seemed only to occur among the rich and powerful, who were the only members of the community to ride. Herodotus attributed the Scythian illness to a curse put upon the male descendants by Aphrodite angry that her temple had been plundered (Hammond, 1882 in Talamini, 1982). Hence, divine origin is the oldest known theory to explain transvestism (Tollison & Adams, 1979).

Ackroyd (1979) offered in his history of transvestism a chronological account of the discussion of cross-dressing and transvestism. Before the advent of clinical accounts, transvestism was generally associated with other deviancies, often as the outward sign of some deeper and more threatening anti-social behaviour. It was often confused with sorcery or homosexuality. Cross-dressing was seen as a symptom of acute mental instability. Krafft-Ebing made a detailed study of transvestism, which he called dress-fetishism. In 1886 he described four categories: 1. The simple obsession for wearing women's clothes, which is specifically fetishistic; 2. The passive homosexual's desire to be seen as a woman; 3. Heterosexuals who cross-dress because of marked or marginal hermaphroditism; 4. People who because of their delusion of sexual transformation, genuinely desire to adopt

the appearance and sentiments of the opposite sex. This work was the first attempt to distinguish between transvestism, homosexuality and transsexualism. Krafft-Ebing also suggested by inference, some possible causes for the conditions: cultural and familial, and/or hereditary.

Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician, first used the term transvestite in 1910. Hirschfeld, with others such as Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, were the founders of sexology. In 1897 Hirschfeld founded the first institute for the scientific study of sexuality. Among his most important works was the study of homosexuality and transvestism. His work was halted by the Nazis in 1933 and as his writings were in German, his material was not easily available to the English speaking world (Francoeur, 1991). His major work on transvestism, *Die Transvestiten*, was translated into English in 1991.

Hirschfeld (1910/1991) described a group of people who did not fit easily into the polar identities of male or female. This group consisted of transvestites, lesbians and gays — or, as he named them, sexual intermediaries — people who had some characteristics of both male and female. He used the term transvestite to describe people who had the urge to wear the clothes of the opposite sex. The tendency is connected with a peculiar sense of shame, even in the early years, leading to a need to keep the activity secret. Hirschfeld described most transvestites as intelligent, conscientious and well

educated, leading responsible lives, participating in gainful employment and accepting civil duties. He considered transvestites to be essentially heterosexual, with approximately 35% being homosexual and a smaller number being narcissists or asexual.

He presented the case histories of sixteen men and one woman to demonstrate the key factors present in a very complex phenomenon. An interest in wearing the clothes, and engaging in activities usually assigned to the other sex became apparent at an early age for all cases, followed by an increased urge during puberty, becoming clearer and more intense at adulthood and then remaining unchanged for the entire life. In the words of case number 3:

..consider myself a man equipped with absolutely feminine passions and inner feelings — yearning is not limited to women s costumes but also extends itself to an absolute life as a woman with all primary and secondary phenomena, naturally without pederasty. This desire is so intense and irrepressible in me that the inability to fulfil it brings me into conflict with life and takes away my happiness, in spite of all the provisos for happiness present in my marriage and in my fatherhood. (Hirschfeld, 1910/1991, p.28).

Sexual arousal associated with being cross-dressed occurred, at least some, if not all the time. For some transvestites, the ability to perform sexually was dependent on being dressed in women s clothing, or their partner wearing the desired apparel. Whilst cross-dressed, the individuals experience a sense of calm, enthusiasm and clear thinking and if unable to cross-dress become

upset, ill at ease, irritable, and despairing. The drive directs itself toward the whole costume, taking great pride in possessing a complete and varied woman's wardrobe with all accessories. The wearing of women's underwear under male attire is not uncommon. Transvestites practice feminine voice modulation, feminine postures and movements, remove body hair to achieve a smooth skin and wear long hair or possess wigs. They also desire to live in women's surroundings, partake of women's activities, and some have fantasies of motherhood (Hirschfeld, 1910/1991).

In 1923 Havelock Ellis placed transvestism into a broader context. He preferred the term Eonism named after the Chevalier d Eon, to take away the emphasis on the dressing aspect of the phenomenon and incorporate the feminine identity factors (Ellis, 1933/1959). Ackroyd, (1979) and Bullough & Bullough, (1994) both suggest that Ellis all but ignored the possibility of female cross-dressers. Ellis also differed from Hirschfeld by considering the phenomenon as not solely a mental aberration, but the survival of a natural tendency, a modification of normal heterosexuality. Ellis, interpreted by Ackroyd (1979), suggested that transvestites are so attracted to women that they wish to become permanently or intermittently identified with them and that this stimulus stems from admiration and affection for the opposite sex.

Medical models locate the aetiology of transvestism in biological abnormality or psychological abnormality originating in abnormal childhood development

(Monro, 2000). Most psychoanalysts base their interpretations of transvestism on the writings of Freud (Tollison & Adams, 1979). According to Tollison and Adams, Freud believed that maleness and masculinity to be the primary and most natural states. In his analysis both males and females consider females and femininity to be inferior. Both males and females have elements of the other sex, which is apparent in both normal and abnormal development. Concerns about the maintenance of masculinity and femininity are at the heart of all psychopathology and are essential to psychoanalytic thinking (Stoller, 1985). Freud gives no direct account of transvestism. However Ackroyd (1979, p27.) suggests that there is indirect reference in his 1905 essay on sexual aberrations:

In all cases we have examined we have established the fact that future inverts, in the earliest years of their childhood, pass through a phase of very intense but short lived fixation on a woman (who is usually their mother) and that, after leaving this behind they identify themselves with a woman and take themselves as their sexual object.

The suggestion is that cross-dressing is a means of alleviating the permanent psychic discomfort of male clothing and reuniting the transvestite with the image of his mother that he has retained.

Robert Stoller, a psychoanalyst was curious about the roots of gender identity and behaviour, and the inter-relationships between biological and psychological factors in the development of gender identity and behaviours. His patients were almost exclusively white, middle-class Americans. From his

case studies he considered transvestism to be a severe disturbance of gender identity with two distinctive and bizarre features; an abnormally strong identification with women, and resulting from this, cross-dressing (Stoller, 1967; 1968). He defined transvestism as: *completely pleasurable; it is fetishistic, intermittent cross-dressing in a biologically normal man who does not question that he is male — that is, the possessor of a penis* (Stoller, 1968, p175). Stoller considered the one consistent factor contributing to the development of transvestism was the mother's need to feminise her son stemming from an unusually strong envy of males which is expressed in humiliating the child on occasion by expressing her wish that he behave, even dress as a girl. The mother is able to achieve this because the father of the boy is either absent or disinterested in the upbringing of his son.

In his book *Splitting*, Robert Stoller (1973, reprinted 1997), described the case history of a woman who believed she had a fully functioning penis. The woman underwent psychoanalysis for at least twelve years. During this period Stoller developed his hallmark theory that perversions, paraphilias or deviations, depending on what label people wanted to use, were an erotic form of hatred. Later, Stoller (1985, p.151) described Transvestism: *A little boy who has already developed a male core gender identity — a conviction, an acceptance, a body knowledge that he is male — nonetheless has a developing masculinity more vulnerable to threat than other boys*. Factors that could threaten gender identity included parental disappointment resulting

in a sense of being flawed, physical characteristics that made the child feel different , a distant and passive father, an absence of an adequate model of masculinity and birth of a sibling who made the parents happy (Stoller, 1985).

Further inquiry into the family constellation and childhood experiences of transvestites was completed by Schott (1995). His results were based on a random sample of a group of self-identified cross-dressers with personal listings in a 1991 issue of *Tapestry* magazine, a non-sexual cross-dressing publication with a circulation of 5,000. The comparison group comprised male graduate students at a large public university. Seventy four percent of the respondents were the eldest male child in their family compared with a national average of 31%. These boys had an undiluted direct exposure to maternal and feminine influences without the intervening influence of an older male sibling, and more immediate than paternal influence. Most respondents reported a father who was remote, unaffectionate, preoccupied with work and emotionally absent. Schott suggests that boys in this situation have difficulty expressing their individuation and separation from maternal influences. He also suggests that transvestism and transsexualism, rather than being separate entities are different points on a continuum of disturbance in the process of normal gender development with transsexualism at the most extreme point.

A behavioural approach suggests that sexual deviations may be viewed as a problem of stimulus control since sexual arousal occurs in the presence of an inappropriate stimulus. Transvestism is caused by the sexual arousal resulting from the wearing of women's clothes, therefore is a problem of stimulus control (Tollison and Adams, 1979). Much of the literature reports incidents where the young male child is dressed as a girl, often as a means of humiliation. These incidents are experienced as pleasurable and spark the child's desire for repeated opportunities throughout life (Hirschfeld, 1910/1991; Stoller, 1985). Not all transvestites report these incidents, neither does the literature mention the possibility of male children who had similar experiences and did not become transvestites.

John Money, an influential professor of medical psychology, who has in more recent years been discredited, challenged the psychoanalytic concept of splitting the ego as a cause of transvestism. He suggested that dissociation of gender identity better explained the phenomenon (Money, 1974). He used a very descriptive title to this paper; *two names, two wardrobes, two personalities* to highlight what he considered to be the essential elements of transvestism; *...with a male personality dissociated from a female personality with two wardrobes and two names to go along with the two personalities. If one meets this person only as a male, one will know only half of his personality. In the female role, she will talk and behave in a way alien to the masculine self.* (p.66).

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) describes transvestism as a recurrent, intense urge to adopt the attitudes and dress in the clothing of the opposite gender. Most transvestites are male. The frequency and intensity of the practice varies from occasional wearing of women's underwear to almost permanent living as a woman. When not dressed *en femme*, transvestites are unremarkably masculine. Although their basic sexual preference is heterosexual, some have engaged in occasional homosexual acts. Transvestites usually have few sexual partners. Such episodic gender transposition is more than the wearing of the clothes of the opposite gender. It involves two wardrobes, two names, two personalities, perhaps even two occupations (Money, 1974).

Money, Docter, Stoller and others so far reviewed consider transvestism to be a medical condition, a psychiatric perversion, which infers that there is something wrong with the person. If that is the case then the hypothesis is, once what has gone wrong has been identified, and much of the literature is focussed on etiology, then the situation can be treated and ultimately cured.

Many psychological and pharmacological approaches have been tried to treat transvestism, all with little success. Tollison and Adams (1979) discuss the treatment methods available to the doctor. Physical therapy techniques including electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), insulin therapy and lobectomies

have been used where the behaviour of transvestites was thought to be associated with cerebral dysfunction. The efficacy of such treatments remains unproven. Pharmacologic treatments have included depressants, anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, tranquilizers and hormone replacement (Brantley & Wise, 1985). Whilst these agents may be helpful in the treatment of behaviours and moods that arise out of the condition, there is little evidence of changes in the actual behaviours associated with transvestism (Tollison & Adams, 1979). Chemical castration by inhibiting testicular function and causing voluntary feminisation by the administration of large doses of estrogen, followed by surgical castration, was advocated in the 1950 s (Tollison & Adams, 1979).

Psychoanalytic therapy focuses on removing the client's perceived fear of castration by developing dynamic understanding and insight into their deviant behaviour. Techniques include free association, hypnotherapy, dream analysis and transference (Cliffe, 1987; Coles, 1986; Coltart, 1985; Leuzinger-Bohleber, 1984; Money & Wiedeking, 1993; Schafer, Barclay & Scott, 1989). Behaviour therapy aims at modifying the transvestic behaviours using aversion therapy. McConaghy (1993) reports that few transvestites persist with seeking treatment for their condition. Those that do, do so to please their wives. McConaghy prefers to counsel the transvestite and their partner to find compromises that are acceptable to both. Frances and Wise (1987) argue that the role of the psychiatrist often seems unclear but

treatment should focus on the resolution of the acute crisis occasioned by the discovery.

The medical hypotheses are based on the premise that any sexual behaviour that falls outside the accepted norms of society is deviant, or an illness, without considering the possibility that the human condition may be more complex than the male-female, heterosexual-homosexual dichotomies. In addition, most transvestites do not wish to change their behaviour, rather they wish society to change so that their behaviour is no longer defined as abnormal or deviant.

King (1993, p3) suggests that,

Implicitly or explicitly, most scholarly, medical and lay commentators on these phenomena have adopted a position of essentialism. That is they have assumed the existences of, firstly, a transhistorical and transcultural condition, and secondly, a group of people who can be separated out from the rest of humanity by virtue of possessing or suffering from this condition which determines their conduct. Moreover the nature, or essence, of this condition and these people is presumed to be independent of our knowledge about them. So science has simply discovered what is given in nature.

King then presents a sociological view. He suggests that the different categories of transvestism and transsexualism can be historically and culturally specific constructions to be viewed within the cultural context in which they occur and form part of the phenomenon itself. In this case science

is involved in the creation of the phenomenon as it describes it. As the labels are created, they are deemed to be deviant, and then open to stigmatisation and social control.

Ekins (1997) took a grounded theory approach to understanding the processes of cross-dressing and sex changing. He described the process as male femaling, a social process set within a social structure. He organises the process into the five phases of the ideal-typical male femaler. Through this structure he describes the issues and problems the cross-dresser faces, such as stigma, secrecy, guilt, personal confusion and developing a personal style.

A journey through the literature on cross-dressing and transvestism is not complete without reference to Virginia Prince. Prince, a Los Angeles transvestite began publishing *Transvestia* a magazine for heterosexual transvestites in the 1960 s. The success of the magazine led to the establishment of groups where heterosexual transvestites could meet for support and social gatherings. He considers transvestism to be related to: *the need to acquire virtue and to experience beauty; the need for adornment and personality expression; relief from the requirements of masculinity and relief from social expectancy* (Prince, 1967, p38). The view of Prince that transvestism is a male, heterosexual phenomenon has greatly influenced researchers and caused much dissent among some quarters of the cross-

dressing community (Bullough & Bullough, 1994). Prince's organisations and publications have essentially three aims. Firstly to provide a secure, accepting environment in which transvestites can cross-dress and engage socially. The second aim is to promote self-acceptance and pride, and overcome guilt. The third aim is to educate society to increase public understanding and tolerance (King, 1993).

Prince, (in Prince & Bentler, 1972, p.903) defined transvestism as a gender variation. He proposed the use of the words *femmiphilia* for the condition and *femmophile* for the person, specifically referring to heterosexual cross-dressers:

The terms, meaning lover of the feminine, are descriptive of this pattern as a gender activity, not a sexual one. The term logically applies only to males; as a matter of fact, there are few, if any heterosexual cross-dressing females.

As an activity of gender expression, transvestism is then not an illness or perversion, rather a:

socio-cultural matter and is in fact the individual's means of dealing with the denial of part of his total humanness required of him by our culture (Prince, 1967, p23).

Prince and Bentler (1972) surveyed 504 individuals, 40% of the total subscription list for a magazine that catered for heterosexual cross-dressers, *Transvestia*. Previous literature concerning transvestism, whilst being sparse, was also biased in that it reported cases that had been referred or self-referred to professional help. It thus excluded well-adjusted males or

those that had not sought psychiatric, legal or medical advice. Prince and Bentler claimed their sample was also larger than the total cases in all the world's medical literature to that point. They acknowledged the limitations of their sampling as they could not be sure whether readers were in fact transvestites, and if they were, that the readers represented an accurate cross-section of the transvestite population. The secretive nature of transvestism means that the dilemmas faced by Prince and Bentler are still problematic for current researchers into transvestism.

Results indicated no significant physical or sociological characteristics that related to the manifestations of transvestism. Sixty-nine percent of respondents considered themselves to be a man who just has a feminine side seeking expression. Twelve per cent admitted a fetish. Seventy-eight per cent considered they had a different personality when dressed en femme. Seventy-eight per cent were, or had been married; seventy-four percent had fathered children; eighty-nine per cent considered themselves heterosexual. Eight-five percent preferred to dress in a complete costume rather than partial dress and fifty percent had told no-one, or just one person, of their cross-dressing behaviour.

Docter and Prince (1997) sought to replicate the 1972 study (Prince & Bentler, 1972) in order to compare the demographics, sexual behaviours, cross-gender identity and use of mental health services in a later generation.

A convenience sample of 1,032 self-defined periodic cross-dressers, all of whom were biological males volunteered to participate in response to announcements made at transvestite club meetings, conventions of cross-dressers, and in magazines and newsletters of cross-dressers across the United States of America. Although a much larger population drawn from a larger number of sites, the limitations that affected the 1972 study were still present, that is the reliance on self-definition and therefore a potentially biased sample. All demographic and sociological parameters presented similar patterns to the 1972 study except for a larger proportion of older men participating in the survey and fewer in the 20 — 30 age group. It was suggested that long term affiliation with such meeting places could account for the older group, and easier access to bars and other social environments which younger men can frequent whilst dressed *en femme* could account for the smaller younger group. Sexual behaviours and orientation were also comparable, the most significant change being the greater number frequently or occasionally appearing in public when cross-dressed. Docter and Prince hypothesise that this is probably related to the decriminalisation of cross-dressing behaviour in the United States of America since the 1972 survey.

Prince claims to have introduced the term *transgenderist* as a name for people who cross the gender barrier, that is live part, or all, their life as the opposite gender to that assigned at birth (Feinberg, 1996). The guiding principle of the transgender movement is that people should be free to

change, either temporarily or permanently, the sex type to which they were assigned in infancy. The explanation is:

that sex is a continuum along which people, if allowed, will flow naturally to a comfortable resting point. What that resting point is depends upon the same complex of mental propensities and chance socialization that leads people to adopt one or another career, hobby or religion (Rothblatt, 1996, p18).

Gender is not dichotomous, biological criteria can be indeterminant, therefore gender can be chosen (Connell, 1987). Transgenderists challenge the dualism of, and boundaries created by, the concepts of masculinity and femininity. The term is also used to draw the distinction between those who reassign the sex they were labelled with at birth, and those whose gender expression is considered inappropriate for their sex. The reasons for changing terminology are several. Firstly the terms transvestite and transsexual have been linked with the medical concepts of illness, psychosis or deviancy, whereas transgender implies nothing more than a healthy form of self-expression. Secondly transvestitism conveys the sense that the only issue involved is that of what a person wears, and does not reflect the need to express self-identity outside narrow gender stereotypes (Feinberg, 1996). Transgenderism has also become a political movement championing the rights of people to become the individuals they want to be, not to be forced into narrow social stereotypes (Califa, 1997).

Queer theory is another movement that challenges the inconsistencies of natural heterosexuality. It questions the seemingly obvious categories such as man, women, femme; opposites, such as man versus woman; or equations such as gender = sex (Hennessy, 1993). The debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities developed out of a specifically lesbian and gay structuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable concepts. Queer theory highlights the difficulties in categorising people by their behaviour and/or personal opinion of sexual identity, sexual preference, gender identity or gender expression, as the identification with, and expression of, sexuality and/or gender changes and evolves over time (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory has emerged as an influential model of thought in debate about empowerment and resistance to domination. The historical roots of queer theory can be traced from the homosexual rights, and the gay liberation movements as they sought to gain control of their own sexual and gender experiences from scientific experts (Minton, 1997). Society is being challenged from many quarters to rethink the concept of difference and to bury many of the stereotypes existing now. These challenges affect the way in which human beings interact in intimate relationships. The results of a relationship between a person who is able to express his or herself in a flexible, evolving manner and a partner who cannot, or has not been given the choice needs further research.

In summary, it is estimated that at least one per cent of the adult male population are transvestites (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). However, since transvestism is often a secret pastime and few seek counseling or treatment, real figures are almost impossible to determine and the estimate likely to be conservative. The incidence of female to male transvestism is even more elusive. Most authors suggest that female to male transvestism is less common (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Hirschfeld, 1910/1991), and some suggest that it does not exist at all (Prince, 1967; Stoller, 1968). The practice is not considered an illness in females (American Psychiatric Association, 1994); society has a more generous opinion of women who dress in a masculine fashion, and the practice is less often seen as a problem (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). In earlier periods of history the practice of women living as men was often as a result of necessity, for many forms of employment were denied women and social constraints were many (Ackroyd, 1976). Recent literature questions the duality of the sexes and challenges society to accept multiple categories of sexual and gender activity, that is Queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Minton, 1997) and that gender and sexual identity are not fixed at birth, but can be both chosen and changed at will, that is Transgenderism (Califa, 1997; Connell, 1987; Feinberg, 1996; Rothblatt, 1996).

2.5: THE EXPERIENCE OF WIVES AND COMMITTED PARTNERS

Whilst the literature on transvestism is not extensive, the phenomenon has been explored and theoretical frameworks have been devised to explain it. The experiences of the partner, or wife, have been largely ignored, or mentioned as an interesting side issue. Literature tends to fall into one of two categories: either the scientific research of medical practitioners or psychoanalysts, or literature written by transvestites using their femme identities.

Prince (1967), Hordern (1992) and Roberts (1995) are all male transvestites who write under their femme name. Prince (1967) describes the dilemma transvestites face; that of recognising the nature of his urges and need to express himself by cross-dressing on the one hand and the desire to have a normal, loving, permanent relationship with a woman on the other. He asks the reader not to let *ignorance, intolerance and selfishness come between you and your husband* (p39) and induce physical and emotional illnesses in her husband. He suggests that by marrying a transvestite a woman gives herself the best of both worlds; she has a masculine husband, and a girlfriend who can understand her many feelings. She also has the advantage of someone who is interested and willing to shop for clothes and explore other feminine activities. Hordern (1992) goes to great lengths to reassure his readers that the transvestite husband is neither a pervert, homosexual or a freak, and that he does not love his wife any less. He also warns the wife that she cannot ban the cross-dressing for that will cause the

build up of guilt and stress, which would ultimately *wreck the marriage, or, at worst, cause the husband to suicide* (p67). He infers that the success or failure of the relationship is her responsibility. Roberts (1995) advice to wives is to be complimented by her husband's disclosure because it indicates his trust and love, and to accept the total man she married. He then points out the positive aspects of transvestism such as their mate being more sensitive and attentive when cross-dressed and likely to be more helpful around the house, willing undertake the cleaning and ironing for example. He also offers advice on negotiating acceptable limits to participation, frequency, privacy and secrecy, budgeting, children and sexual relationships. All advice focuses on the wife providing an accepting environment in which the transvestite can express himself fully as a woman.

In the medical literature Hirschfeld (1910/1991, p130) reported meeting six wives of the 16 male transvestites in his case study analysis. His comment:

The wives themselves — in the course of time I personally met six of the wives — made the impression of being completely feminine. It is admirable how they adapt to their special kind of husbands, in spite of the initial opposition, finally even meeting them half way.

This is a rather glossy summary of the stories mentioned in the case studies.

Of the 16 male case studies, nine included comments about wives or partners. In four cases the wife learnt that sexual potency depended on their husband wearing feminine apparel. Three wives integrated the behaviour into the marriage, the fourth left to live with another man. One transvestite

proposed marriage to a woman and was rejected because of his cross-dressing. Another desired marriage but found it impossible to find a woman who *would understand my natural tendency* (p123). Case study 4 admitted to being able to achieve ejaculation only when fantasising about wearing feminine apparel. There was no indication that his wife was aware of these fantasies or that the fantasies were played out in reality. In addition to cross-dressing, case eight required the added fantasy of rape to achieve sexual satisfaction and felt fortunate to have found a wife who was masochistic. The wife of case study 11 found the situation most trying. Initially hesitant and unco-operative, she later considered her husband's behaviour to be a perversion and finally developed a persecution mania. Hirschfeld noted that at the time of writing, this woman had been in an insane asylum for two years, and dismissed her reaction to cross-dressing as part of the psychiatric illness without questioning the part that coping with the cross-dressing might have played in the development of her illness. The question must also be asked; what were the choices available to women who found themselves in difficult marriages in the years around the turn of the century? Most would have found themselves unable to leave, and of necessity, set about making the best of a difficult situation.

Following 800 hours of treatment and evaluation interviews with 32 subjects, comprising transvestites and their mothers, sister or wives, Stoller (1967) concluded that the women in the lives of transvestites all had a common fear

of, and need to ruin, masculinity and could be placed in one of three categories. First, the malicious man-hater who hates all males, and is angry, competitive and ruthless in her desire to humiliate men whenever possible. It is she who initiates the cross-dressing. The second group does not initiate cross-dressing behaviour, however when they discover their partner's behaviours they are supportive, enthusiastic and participate in teaching the finer points of feminine apparel and appearance. Stoller referred to this group as succorers. The third group in Stoller's opinion, is the symbiote. This was the smallest group and consisted solely of mothers who interfered with their baby son's ability to separate from the mother by excessive maternal hovering.

When considering Stoller's opinion, it is important to consider that all the women he studied shared a conscious and intense pleasure in seeing males dressed as females, and all families were in psychotherapy. Just how many of the women were wives is also unclear as he included mothers and sisters in his study. Stoller's aggressively stated psychoanalytic viewpoint has inferred generalisation of his findings to include women who do not find pleasure in cross-dressing or need psychoanalysis.

Wise, Duplain and Meyer (1981) reported the analysis of 18 partners of distressed transvestites. According to the authors, transvestites only seek psychiatric treatment when their cross-dressing behaviour is discovered by

their partner, or when they are motivated by the onset of gender dysphoria. Using DSM-II criteria, seven of the women had depressive neuroses, 1 had anorexia nervosa and 10 had no clear psychiatric illness. Wise, Duplain and Meyer judged these women to fit Stoller's category of succorer, that is, masochistic and tolerant of the self-centred behaviour of their partners. They suggested the partner of the transvestite maintains some self-esteem by continuing to relate to her spouse, albeit in a humiliating or masochistic way. The women see the relationship as being better than nothing. The authors, whilst acknowledging the need for caution, considered their findings could also describe transvestites' partners who have not been seen in the psychiatric setting.

In contrast, Prince and Bentler (1972) undertook a survey of 504 self-identified transvestites via the readership of the transvestite magazine, *Transvestia*. The findings indicated that 78% were married, or had been married, and 74% had fathered children. Of the 19 — 29% who indicated that they had been divorced, 36% reported that transvestism was the cause of the marriage breakdown. Partners of 20% of the sample were not aware of the transvestic behaviour of their husbands, and 27% of the married sample indicated that their wives were not informed of their transvestism before marriage. The attitudes of the wives who were aware of their partners' transvestism varied between *completely accepting and co-operative* (23%)

permitted dressing *only in the home in the wife s presence* (12%), *only in the wife s absence* (21%) or *completely antagonistic* (20%).

Whilst the Prince and Bentler study relied on responses from self-identified transvestites making it difficult to determine the true nature of the respondents, it was a major attempt to access people who were not in psychotherapy. Particularly related to wives and partners, the information provided was reported by the husband, rather than coming directly from the women. These distractions aside, Prince and Bentler (1972) provide a picture very different from Stoller. A significant number of wives and partners were ignorant of the cross-dressing behaviours at marriage, and some remained ignorant until later in the marriage, therefore could not be accused of initiating or promoting the cross-dressing. Over half of the wives and partners who were aware of the cross-dressing either did not accept it or at best, tolerated the behaviour.

Twelve years later, Peo (1984) completed a descriptive study by directly surveying 55 adult women who were in a current relationship with an adult male transvestite. He used empirical methodology to develop descriptions of the women and their relationships with cross-dressing males. Peo designed a questionnaire that sought demographic information, details of transvestites partner s behaviours, the woman s interactions with her partner and her feelings about the relationship and details of other relationships or partners.

Research participants were located via the letters to the editor section of a range of women's magazines and newsletters of transvestite groups. In addition, in-depth personal interviews were conducted with six women to validate the questionnaire.

The women in this study were demographically indistinguishable from other middle to upper-class American women. The women cared deeply for their partners, knew little about cross-dressing when told of their partner's transvestism and had great difficulty obtaining information that was neither misleading nor threatening. The fear of discovery deterred the women from seeking support from their usual networks, which left them feeling isolated. The women strongly felt that their partner lacked empathy and understanding of what being a woman really meant, and that cross-dressing was more important to the men than the relationship. Women stayed in the relationship because they were dependent financially or socially or had been able to negotiate a satisfactory compromise. Other reasons identified were that the benefits outweighed the negatives in the relationship; or the woman was sufficiently self-assured to not be influenced by her partner's actions; or religious beliefs about the sanctity of marriage held her in the relationship.

Peo's (1984) study described the nature of women who married transvestites as essentially no different from women who had not married transvestites. However, the nature of the relationship between the woman and her

transvestite partner differed in that the woman focused her attention on her partner, whilst the partner focused his attention toward his femme self. The women stayed in the relationship because of additional intrinsic or extrinsic factors of the relationship.

Bullough and Weinberg (1988) reported the findings of a survey questionnaire of 70 women married to transvestites. The women were recruited via a transvestite organisation, a transvestite wives support group, an outreach organisation and a group whose members were undergoing counseling. This study, unlike the Prince and Bentler (1972) study, used information gathered directly from the woman. Most women discovered the transvestic behaviour of the husband early in the relationship. Whilst initially supportive, feelings of hostility and resentment developed over time. The greatest fears were that others would find out, and for the long-term welfare of children. Most women did not support their husband's transvestism, however they had developed a relationship that emphasised other positive aspects of their husband's behaviour and minimised the stigmatising aspects. The success of these strategies depended on the husband's willingness to co-operate in the curtailment of his activities.

Further analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire (Weinberg & Bullough, 1988) suggested that the increasing negative feelings over time was a direct result of the husband's increasing cross-dressing behaviour,

increasing elaboration of the wardrobe and a tendency to ignore set limits. Women who had a well-developed sense of autonomy and self-esteem were more likely to consider their marriage satisfactory. Wives who belonged to a support group were better able to cope and maintain their own self-esteem.

A male and a female researcher attended a wife and girlfriend support group attached to a transvestite group for a period of six months (Brown & Collier, 1989). During this time they interviewed seven women. The sample was divided into acceptors, women who participated in their mate's cross-dressing to some extent, and rejectors, who criticised and belittled the behaviour. Significant obesity was noted in the majority of wives that the researchers linked to low self-esteem, evident in all women. Suffering appeared to be an essential ingredient in the relationships described by the women. Partnerships were often maintained by intense denial and sacrifice of their personal sense of self in order to avoid even the possibility of separation or divorce. Five of the seven women had considered leaving the marriage at some time as a direct consequence of their partner's transvestic behaviour.

The papers found in the medical literature described the women, and interpreted their findings from the male, transvestite point of view. The women, and their relationships with their husband or partner, were studied as a means to understand the transvestite and failed to describe the experience of the women in their relationship with their transvestite partners. To this

point, the possibility that the women in committed relationships with transvestites might have important insights and experiences in their own right has been ignored.

Annie Woodhouse is a feminist writer, interested in gender as a social construction, and the relationship between clothing symbolism and sexual politics. In the process of investigating transvestism as an anomaly of the traditional social construction of gender she also interviewed the women partners. In her book *Fantastic women*, Woodhouse (1989) presents the stories of five women. Although each woman has remained in the married relationship, all find it difficult to accommodate the femme identity of the husband and question their own role within the marriage. Living with someone they thought they knew and then discovering they didn't, making decisions about whether or not to tell children, wondering how she has failed as a wife all stress and isolate the woman and the relationship that until that point seemed to be a conventional marriage.

When the relationship is suddenly turned upside down by the discovery that the man she thought she knew is indulging in an activity which she does not understand, that she dislikes and knows little about, the shock can be intense. Compounded by the fact that she has no one to turn to, she is confused and alone (Woodhouse, 1989, p121).

Woodhouse is the first person to research the phenomenon from the woman's point of view and expresses a quite different picture from either the

medical description and analysis, or the transvestite s self promotion. She acknowledges the limitations of her study, being limited to five women, all associated with a transvestite support group. The extent to which her findings can be generalised to other women in relationships with transvestites requires further study. Also the invisible women — those that leave the relationship — have as yet not been found by any researcher.

The study outlined in this thesis sought to address this identified gap by seeking out women who are, or have been, in a committed relationship with a transvestite by using methods that did not solely rely on transvestite support groups to identify and access participants. Thus, women who had left the relationship have been included for the first time. In addition, women who were still in a relationship with a transvestite who was not involved in a transvestite support group have also been included.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1: INTRODUCTION

Methodology refers to the way in which problems are defined and answers sought. The assumptions and interests of the researcher, and the purposes of research shape the choice of methodology (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The paradigm of inquiry chosen for the study is interpretist rather than positivist, as the purpose is to illuminate meaning, in context, from the participant's point of view. The qualitative, phenomenological methodology is presented, with a discussion of qualitative methods in general. Feminist research and its relevance to the study are then discussed. A description of the processes in the research procedure follows. Issues of reliability and validity are examined, as are procedures for the coding and storage of data. Finally, data collection and analysis are discussed followed by a consideration of ethical issues.

3.2 THE PARADIGM FOR INQUIRY

Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1996, p. 13) describe scientific methodology as: *a system of explicit rules upon which research is based and against which claims for knowledge are evaluated*. Thus, a clear statement of methodology allows replication and constructive criticism and is a safeguard against unintentional error or duplicity.

This study seeks to describe and interpret the understanding and shared meanings wives and committed partners have in the context of living in

relationship with a transvestite. It is concerned with the tacit world of committed partners as it is experienced. Research concerned with eliciting meaning from the participants point of view, particularly the views of the powerless and excluded, is particularly suited to interpretist methods of inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Qualitative research seeks to gain insight through discovering as many meanings as possible that are attached to a given phenomenon and their relationship to one another. Patton (1990, p.55) comments:

The interpretist researcher's commitment is to understand the world as it is, to be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence.

The qualitative researcher enters the field of study as a learner, with no pre-conceived ideas or presuppositions. *In order to understand the world of participants: The interpretive researcher creates a dialogue between practical concerns and lived experience through engaged reasoning and imaginative dwelling in the immediacy of the participants worlds* (Benner, 1994, p.99).

On the other hand, positivist research assumes that nature is orderly, objective reality can be captured, the researcher can be separated from the researched, observations are free from situational and temporal context, causality is linear and that enquiry is value free (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). As Munhall (1994, p.12) states, the world is: *structured by*

lawlike generalities which can be identified, predicted, manipulated and controlled. Universal statements are yielded by observation and measurement, by the testing of hypotheses from a specific theoretical framework, all the while, employing specific designs to reduce bias and error from intrinsic or extrinsic variables. The researcher remains detached (Munhall, 1994).

In areas where the understanding and meaning of particular phenomena are of central concern, a positivist approach may not be sensitive enough. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.175) state: *positivists begin an enquiry knowing (in principle) what they don't know, constructivists typically face the prospect of not knowing what it is they don't know.*

Not all phenomena can be measured, controlled for, or manipulated to serve the ends of a particular research approach. Thus interpretive studies are particularly useful when:

Little is known about a domain, when the investigator suspects that the present knowledge or theories may be biased, or when the research question pertains to understanding or describing a particular phenomenon or event about which little is known (Field & Morse, 1985, p.11).

The intention is to deepen the understanding about some aspect of human experience and to communicate that understanding to others. The process moves from the concrete to the abstract, from the idiosyncratic to the realm of

shared knowledge (Byrne, 1995). Leininger (1985, p5) describes the manner and process of qualitative research as: *the methods and techniques of observing, documenting, interpreting attributes, patterns, characteristics, and meanings of specific, contextual, or gestaltic features of phenomena under study.*

Benoliel (1984, p7) describes the function and purpose of qualitative research: *Qualitative approaches in science are distinct modes of inquiry oriented toward understanding the unique nature of human thoughts, behaviours, negotiations and institutions under different sets of historical and environmental circumstances .*

Philosophical foundations and methodologies vary amongst qualitative researchers. Munhall (1994, p.10-11) describes common assumptions that underpin qualitative researchers perceptions of reality and the assignation of meaning.

- Individuals are active agents, creating their own reality and interpreting their own experiences.
- Individuals and specific groups of individual have different histories, different situations in the present and varying perceptions of the future.
- Reality is dynamic within the world and its people constantly changing and evolving.

- Truth is a temporal and cultural interpretation of some phenomenon. In some situations a statement may be partially true or only true for specific individuals.
- Interacting with participants does not mean the suspension of objectivity. Objectivity can be viewed as a perception of its own.
- The subjective experience of the individual or group is valued and described. Meaning comes from the source and is not presumed, assumed or assigned.
- The context of language, culture and society provide meaning to the experience.
- The subjective, self-determined and self-described realities of individuals and groups are honoured and treated respectfully.

3.3: PHENOMENOLOGY AS METHOD

Specifically a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study. Phenomenology differs from qualitative descriptive methods in that the phenomena are studied from the participant's unstructured descriptions of lived experience. Participants do not therefore, answer prepared questions. The content of the data is dependent upon the descriptions of the interactions that were considered relevant by the participants according to what was important and valued. In this way issues are raised without the constraints of pre-determined categories of analysis. An assumption underlying this method is that the reality of the phenomenon under study (i.e. the experience of living

with a transvestite) can be understood through participants' descriptions that reflect their personal realities and meanings. The major goals of phenomenological research are to describe the essence of the phenomenon under investigation, and to compare, interpret, and extrapolate meanings. This includes not only the phenomenon in itself but also the context of the situation in which the phenomenon manifests itself (Cresswell, 1998).

Whilst recognising the probable oversimplification, Taylor & Bogdan (1998, p22) suggest that it is possible to classify all research in terms of either positivism or phenomenology. They view the term phenomenology broadly: *to refer to a tradition within the social sciences concerned with understanding the social actor's frame of reference.*

Phenomenology seeks to understand more fully the structure and meaning of human experience, and to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of everyday experience. The experiences of different people are analysed and compared to identify the essence of the phenomenon. This method allows the researcher a fresh perspective, in this case, the partner's experience of living with a transvestite. Van Manen (1990, p9 -13) describes phenomenology as:

The study of lived experiences .the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness .the study of essences .the description of experiential meaning as we live it .the human scientific study of phenomena .the attentive

practice of thoughtfulness .a search for what it means to be human .a poetising activity.

The goal of phenomenology is the discovery of essences, attributes, meanings and characteristics of humans as persons within historical, cultural and social contexts, rather than as objects in isolation.

A consistent and critical assumption of the phenomenological perspective is its emphasis on language. Language is the medium that both involves and informs experience. It does not exist apart from thought or perception. It both generates and constrains the human and his/her relationship with the world. From a qualitative perspective, language and the ability to express oneself to others is the only way that intrinsic experiences can be described and shared (van Manen, 1990).

Experience and perception are the concern of phenomenology. Perception is the bodily response to an interaction with the outside world, interpreted through past experiences and beliefs. Perception of experience and interpretation from the individual's point of view is what matters, not what is happening (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Transvestism is a little understood phenomenon in western society, the experience of their partners even less visible. The exploration of these

experiences will add to the public awareness of these issues within society as a whole.

The phenomenological method encompasses five elements:

- a. Identifying the phenomenon
- b. Structuring the study
- c. Gathering the data
- d. Analysing the data
- e. Describing the findings. (Parse, Coyne & Smith, 1985, p.16).

Crotty (1996, p158) also describes five steps to phenomenological research using language more sensitive to the qualitative nature of the process:

1. Determine as precisely as possible what phenomenon is being focussed upon.
2. Consider the phenomenon precisely as phenomenon.
3. Describe what has come into view.
4. Ensure the phenomenological nature of this description.
5. Determine the essence of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology is an appropriate method of inquiry into the depth and diversity of human experience in cultural and social context, and where little research has been conducted previously. Phenomenology facilitates the creation of a deeper, thoughtful understanding of the human relationship with,

and the experience of, the world. Human beings crave meaning. Phenomenological enquiry offers a path to arrive at that meaning (Munhall, 1994, p.215).

The world of phenomena is one of conscious, perceptual, living people in constant contextual interaction (Valle & King 1978). Valle (1998, p. 274) describe this interdependency thus:

our being presents itself to awareness as a being-in-the-world, so that the human individual and his or her surrounding environment are regarded as implicitly interdependent, as inextricably intertwined. The person and worlds are said to co-constitute one another. One has no meaning when regarded independently of the other.

There needs to be a recognition that as van Manen (1984, p.9) states:

Common-sense preunderstandings, suppositions, assumptions and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological questions.

The phenomenologist utilises three general strategies: epoche, phenomenological reduction, and structural synthesis in order to understand human experience from the participant's point of view (Keen, 1975). The first step, epoche, is to bracket one's preconceptions and presuppositions by making them explicit, preferably in writing, so that any assumptions are clarified, particularly to oneself (Valle & King, 1978, p.12). Thus, setting aside questions and experiences about what the researcher thought was

understood about living in a committed relationship with a transvestite and to discover what was really being experienced by the research participants allowed the researcher to arrive at a new depth of understanding of the phenomenon.

There is considerable debate whether researchers can definitely put aside or suspend their own presuppositions in entirety. Crotty (1996, p20) suggests that bracketing, as the starting point for phenomenological research is: *a sincere endeavour not to allow one's beliefs and assumptions to shape the data collection process and a persistent effort not to impose one's own understandings and constructions on the data.*

Phenomenological reduction involves the suspension of personal beliefs about the nature and structure of the world in order to study the essential structures of the world (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The researcher was further aware however that one's own experiences may be an important source of phenomenological data. There is a consciousness of the interaction between researcher and participant that is not limited to observer but to being involved (Oakley, 1995).

Therefore the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher about the subject matter and methodology were as follows:

- Transvestism is a little understood phenomenon, and partners of transvestites may be hesitant to express their experiences.
- This group of participants shares social and psychological concerns, which are not necessarily articulated.
- The researcher's previous experience of marital relationships from her own marriage and the observations and interactions of others in committed relationship provide insights into the social and cultural environment.
- The researcher's prior exposure to, reading and knowledge of transvestism provides a link with participants.
- The relationship between participant and researcher, devoid of other agendas and as woman to woman, would facilitate disclosure by the participant.
- The researcher's involvement in the study did not mean the suspension of objectivity.

Marshall & Rossman (1995, p. 83) describe the third stage, structured synthesis, as: *the articulation of the bones of the experience of the phenomena and the description of its deep structure*. Any description remains faithful to the meaning of the phenomenon for the participant.

3.4: FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Traditional research methods within social research, both quantitative and qualitative, invite criticism, particularly the unbalanced relationship of power

between the researched and the researcher (Oakley, 1995) the relationship between gender and research (Warren, 1988) and the presence of error and bias in research (Denzin, 1992). Reinharz (1994, p.4) describes feminist research as tackling the difficult challenges of understanding organisms by seeing them through loving eyes, valuing subjectivity and personal experience and researching dilemmas that have no absolute solutions.

Whilst phenomenology allows the participants to be experts in their experience, the requirements of the research process created difficulties in the conduct of this research. A feminist approach offered means of resolution.

Spender (in Reinharz, 1994, p. 7) states:

at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge, .feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings.

Reinharz, (1994, p. 9) defines research as the *production of a publicly scrutinizable analysis of a phenomenon with the intent of clarification.*

The feminist perspective suggests that biases brought to the research can be used to guide data gathering and to understand the researcher's interpretation and behaviour in the research (Oleson, 1994, p.165).

Asking questions is the basis of all research and interviewing is one popular means of collecting data in social inquiry. To produce data that is valid and not biased there are recommended guidelines for conducting a research interview. These include; the necessity of the interviewer to develop rapport and maintain detachment; the development of a set of questions that control and structure the interview and questions asked of the interviewer should be parried and not answered (McCracken, 1988). These guidelines shift the power in the relationship to the interviewer. The participant accepts the research goals and responds so that their information can be collected for the benefit of the greater good. Data thus collected is rational with a minimum of emotion and sentiment (Oakley, 1995).

How does this paradigm fit with the study? The researcher had been exposed to transvestite relationships in the past, which had drawn her to the subject matter. This created a rapport with the participants, essential for the access of rich, meaningful data. However participants also respected that previous experience and wished to know about the researcher, experiences and observations. In the course of interviews friendships developed and continue past the end of the research process. How can this be accounted for in research? Struggling with these issues led the researcher to make some decisions about the research process, based on the experience of Oakley (1995).

1. The research process would be collaborative and non-hierarchical, with the role of the participants being equal but different to the researcher.
2. Participants would have access to the transcripts of interviews and be free to edit or amend, before analysis by the researcher.
3. As data was analysed written documents would be available to participants for ongoing review and editing.
4. The researcher's past exposure and experiences would be acknowledged.
5. Any questions about personal or subject matter would be answered honestly. Where answers contained personal opinion, this would be stated clearly. Any knowledge of community resources or information would be shared as required.
6. The experience of participating in research would be acknowledged as a potential change agent and explored as part of the research process.
7. Friendships, if developed, would be nurtured and acknowledged.

Researchers would like to believe that whatever is seen, heard, and written as a result of a research experience is unbiased. Since gender is a key organising device in all cultures, male and female researchers will always be treated differently by those they study and thus they will come to know different aspects of the cultures they investigate (Warren, 1988).

3.5: CREDIBILITY AND VALIDITY

The issues of reliability and validity, terms transferred from the quantitative paradigm, have been of concern and discussed in depth by many authors over the last fifteen years (Leininger, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990; Munhall, 1994; Sandelowski, 1993; van Manen, 1990; Whyte, 1984). Leininger, (1985, p.68) states that validity within a qualitative framework:

Refers to gaining knowledge and understanding of the true nature . Of a particular phenomenon .and .that reliability focuses on, identifying and documenting recurrent, accurate and consistent (homogenous) or inconsistent (heterogeneous) features, as . Phenomena confirmed in similar or different contexts.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) prefer to define rigour in terms of credibility, fittingness, auditability, and confirmability. They describe credibility as the criterion against which the truth value of the qualitative research is evaluated. It is measured when the findings are returned to the participants for verification, that is, the people in the best position to judge. Fittingness is achieved by appropriate sample selection. Auditability is achieved when investigators can show documentation that verifies that methodologically correct decisions were made at each stage and process.

Guba and Lincoln (1981, p.126) suggest that confirmability, which equates with neutrality in quantitative research, occurs when the data is reported in a

manner that can be confirmed from other sources if necessary. Confirmability occurs when auditability, credibility and fittingness are established. This perspective has changed over time. Cresswell (1998, p. 201) suggests that verification is a term preferred to validity as it emphasises qualitative research as being a distinct legitimate approach in its own right. He views verification as a strength in that the researcher's immersion in the phenomenon, use of thick description and close relationship with participants add value to a study. Verification can be assessed by the researcher by using at least two of the following eight procedures in any study; immersion over time in the phenomenon, use of triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying research bias, member checks, rich, thick description and external audits (Cresswell, 1998).

Triangulation of data occurred throughout the study. Triangulation is described as *supporting a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree or at least don't contradict it* (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.234). Triangulation of data allows for the discovery of similar and dissimilar phenomena and, in addition, those which change over time and those that differ according to group membership (Mitchell, 1986). In this study data collected via in-depth interviews, a group interview, tape recordings, transcripts, and a personal diary was analysed with the intention of achieving confirmability. In addition the researcher's position and underlying assumptions were clarified and elucidated, member checks occurred at group

interview, an independent, experienced qualitative researcher audited the coding, interpretations and conclusions to ensure that they fitted with the original transcripts and all participants verified the final findings.

Validity in a qualitative study rests on the degree of truth that other partners of transvestites find in the results. It has been postulated that credibility is one criteria against which the truth value of a qualitative research study be evaluated (Sandelowski, 1989). The truth value of this study is based on the confirmed perceptions of women who have experienced living with a transvestite.

Validity was checked on five different occasions during the research process. The primary validity check occurred when each participant read and amended the original transcript. The second validity check occurred when an experienced qualitative researcher independently coded a sample of transcripts. The third validity check occurred when the preliminary findings were shared with participants at the group interview where they had the opportunity to comment, refine and clarify information. The fourth validity check occurred when the final analysis was shared with an experienced qualitative researcher. The final validity check was completed when the final analysis of findings was presented to all participants to verify that their experience was fairly represented and that they could relate to the findings as a whole.

3.6: RESEARCH PROCEDURES

3.6.1: Strategy for Sampling

When obtaining a purposeful sample, the researcher selects participants according to the needs of the study (Patton, 1990). Twelve people initially volunteered, nine of whom agreed to participate in the study. This particular group of people was considered to have specific characteristic experiences, and the ability to communicate adequately and appropriately (Morse, 1991; Walker, 1985). The sample size is small, however a randomly chosen, unbiased sample is contrary to the qualitative principle of seeking information from experts (Morse, 1991). The time involved in interviewing, transcribing and analysing large amounts of data from each participant preclude the inclusion of large numbers or participants.

The power of purposeful sampling lies in its focus of selecting individuals with rich experiences for in-depth study. One can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research from such individuals (Patton, 1990). The sample was selected according to the participant's assumed knowledge of the research phenomenon.

The following selection criteria applied in this research were:

- Women currently married to, or in a committed relationship, with a male-to-female transvestite.

- Women who had previously been married to, or in a committed relationship, with a male-to-female transvestite.
- Speak English as a first language
- Older than eighteen years

3.6.2: Access to the sample

Participants were contacted from a variety of sources, to enhance anonymity of participants and to access a wide representation of experiences. Initially advertisements were placed in the monthly magazine for a support group for transvestites. A clinical psychologist who has a specialist practice in counselling clients with transgender concerns agreed to advise her clients of the study. These sources resulted in four participants. Two participants volunteered having heard of the study by word of mouth. These six participants comprised the first stage of data collection. When data was analysed it was felt that the study would be strengthened by the inclusion of data from younger participants. A series of newspaper articles and radio broadcasts were made notifying the general public of the research and inviting interested people to make contact, particularly women in the 18 — 40 age range. This strategy resulted in six women making contact, of which three became participants.

At the first telephone contact the purpose and structure of the study was explained to the potential participant. An informal meeting was arranged to

allow the participant to meet the researcher and to seek further information. These meetings took place in a quiet public place, such as a local library, coffee shop or park. The meeting place was designated by the potential participant to ensure their safety and personal control. At the end of this meeting the participant was provided with written information and a copy of the agreement to participate. Distance precluded one participant from meeting face to face with the researcher. In this case rapport was developed by a series of letters and she was also supplied with the written information package. A clear statement was made that it was then up to the participant to contact the researcher should they wish to continue. Some participants wished to make that commitment immediately but the researcher insisted that several days be allowed to pass to allow the participant to consider their decision carefully.

In all, twelve women came forward, nine participated. At the informal meeting with one woman it became clear that she was coping with multiple interpersonal and work related issues. She was referred to appropriate legal and psychological counselling and excluded from the study. The second woman did not contact the researcher following the informal interview. The third woman, whilst initially keen to continue with the interview at the time of the informal meeting, later contacted the researcher to say that on reflection she did not wish to participate. She thanked the researcher for the forethought to not continue with the interview at the first meeting.

Eight women aged from 38 to 84 were interviewed. One woman wrote an extended letter, having been provided with the question guide, as distance precluded a face to face interview. All were currently, or had been, living in a committed relationship with a transvestite. All participants spoke English as the primary language and were either Australian born, or had migrated to Australia more than twenty years prior to the beginning of the study. One woman was divorced from, one separated from, six married and one not married to their transvestite partners. The length of relationship with their transvestite partners spanned five to forty-three years. Seven of the nine women had borne children fathered by their transvestite partners. The ages of the children at the time of the study spanned 8 to mid-thirties. Four women still had children living at home. Four women worked outside the home, one woman was a student, two were retired and two chose to stay at home. Two couples maintained separate households.

In addition, the promotion of the study netted a long and detailed letter from a transvestite, and a phone call from a transvestite who considered research that focussed on the experience of wives and partners to be flawed because only one side of the story was being told. He also advised that if his wife should make contact to ignore all she had to say because it would not be the truth. Another phone call from a man who was not a transvestite but felt

alienated from society and wished to tell the researcher of his life experiences was also received.

3.6.3: In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is a: *face-to-face encounter between researcher and informant directed toward understanding the informant's perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their words* (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.77). It is important to clarify the differences between a therapeutic interview and a research interview, in order to prevent the interviewer becoming the interviewee, an easy pitfall. As Patton (1990, p.354) states:

The purpose of the research interview is first and foremost to gather data, not to change people. neither is a research interviewer a therapist. Staying focussed on the purpose of the interview is critical to gathering high-quality data. on the other hand, the interviewer, in establishing rapport, is not a cold slab of granite.

The in-depth interview process used a combination of open-ended questions and active listening (Kemper, 1992) which facilitated empathy between researcher and participant and encouraged the communication of participants' feelings and experiences. The role of participant and researcher are equal in status so that a conversational style is used rather than an interrogative process. The language used is common and natural for the participant (Minichiello et al, 1990).

3.6.4: The interview guide

An interview guide is developed around a list of topics without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions. *The content of the interview is focussed on the issues that are central to the research question, but the type of questioning and discussion allows for greater flexibility* (Minichiello et al, 1990, p. 92).

This technique is used when: *information is required about a topic, when the structure of the topic is known but the answers cannot be anticipated* (Field and Morse, 1985, p 67). Participants were able to respond with and describe feeling states. All interviews were guided by the question what are your experiences related to having a committed relationship with a transvestite? Recursive probes were used to focus the interview and to develop conversational flow. Topics were explored and expanded wherever the participant led. The use of open-ended probes facilitated the emergence of new topics, for example, gaining information and support.

Active listening was used in conjunction with the open-ended questions.

Active listening is defined by Kemper (1992, p. 22) as:

An interpersonal confirmation process involving all the senses in which the (researcher) attends with empathy to the (participant s) verbal and nonverbal messages to facilitate the understanding, synthesis and interpretation of the (participant s) situation.

Therapeutic listening skills include the maintenance of eye contact, open facial expression, an attentive posture, sensitive use of touch and gesture, encouragement and verbal responses that reflect what the participant says (Davis, 1998.). The use of such non-verbal cues enhanced the development of rapport and empathetic understanding. The close attention to emotional and behavioural cues ensured that all questions were covered in a flexible and responsive manner.

3.6.5: The interview procedure

Potential participants that agreed to participate following the informal meeting were contacted personally by the researcher to arrange a time and venue for the interview. In-depth interviews were conducted at a time and place designated by the participant. Most were conducted in the participant s home. One interview was conducted in an hotel room. Participants chose times when their partner and/or children were absent. The choice of a safe and quiet environment assists in the development of rapport and trust (Field and Morse, 1985). Interviews lasted from forty-five to ninety minutes. Participants were aware of the research topic, but not specific questions, to prevent biased data gathering because of prior knowledge (Field and Morse, 1985). Time was allowed before the interview for the participant to relax, develop rapport and to discuss any matters pertaining to the research process. Once the interview commenced no one refused to continue. At the conclusion of the interview further time was allowed for the participant to relax, have any

questions answered and if necessary debrief. Information was provided regarding ongoing support should it be required.

Following each interview, observational records were written on the ease of the interaction, non-verbal cues, and the subjective impressions of the researcher. These observations provided a check on what was reported during the interviews and helped provide insights into the physical, emotional and social environments of the participants and their partners.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a clerical assistant experienced in research transcription. Once transcribed, the written transcripts were sent back to each participant to check that the data was correct. They were also given the opportunity to amend the data if they wished. One participant edited her interview extensively and one clarified several points of fact. All other participants sent the transcripts back unchanged.

3.6.6: The group interview

The group interview is a process of questioning and response from a number of participants simultaneously (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 364). Whilst not replacing individual interviews, it can be an adjunct source of data and a practical method of triangulation. The term focus group emerged from marketing and sociological research and is now applied as a generic term for

all group interviews in general (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 365). Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 365) state, *The group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewer/moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a very structured or unstructured manner, depending on the interview s purpose .* A group interview approach facilitates an interactive process which can uncover ways in which participants think regarding phenomena which have been pre-identified in the analysis of individual interviews (Depoy & Gitlin, 1998). The pre-sensitisation of group interview members to the subject can also encourage points of view to be explored in greater depth. This can serve to confirm the researcher s interpretations, but may also identify further issues to be explored (Kreuger 1988). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994. p365.) explain, the group interview, *has the advantages of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses .*

However the group interview can also present difficulties and requires the interviewer to have additional skills to ensure that the group dynamics are focussed, supportive and balanced.

This type of interview is not, however, without problems. The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive topics, group think is a possible outcome, and the requirements for interviewer skills are

greater because of group dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 365).

During the informal discussions following the interviews, many participants expressed the desire to meet with and talk to other women in similar circumstances. At the completion of the first round of interviews and data analysis a group interview was arranged. All participants were invited to attend. Five participants took part, the sixth being unable to attend due to unexpected family commitments. The venue, a private meeting room, was used to ensure pleasant, quiet surroundings free from interruption. The researcher provided a light lunch during which the participants were able to meet each other and build relationships of trust with one another. Attention to such details as convenient, safe and pleasant surroundings with creature comforts of food facilitates group interaction and data collection. It also responds to the reciprocal obligation of the researcher to participants (Carey, 1994). At the completion of lunch the group interview commenced and lasted for ninety minutes. This was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Preliminary findings were presented to the group for discussion and confirmation. Additional data was collected as the findings triggered recollections and discussion between participants.

Further questions were asked related to the experience of participating in the study and also questions related to gaps in data identified during data analysis. At the close of the group interview afternoon tea was served and

further informal discussion occurred between participants. Participants exchanged phone numbers and addresses to allow ongoing contact past the completion of the study.

The later two participants were also provided with an opportunity to meet each other, and other participants at an informal meeting, although this meeting was not used for gathering data because saturation had been reached. Distance precluded the ninth participant from joining the group interview or the informal meeting.

3.7: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The major source of data in this study was the in-depth interviews. Supplemental data was gathered by the use of a group interview and the researcher's diary. Data collection, data analysis and validation of the data occurred concurrently.

In-depth interviews were tape-recorded which enabled a full and accurate record to be kept. Material was available for analysis and reanalysis at a later date. Access to the original tape recording facilitates greater analytical depth by preserving authentic and contextual information. However this method does not permit the recording of non-verbal data such as body language (Minichiello et al, 1990). As a means of recording such data and supporting

the triangulation of data, the researcher maintained a personal diary of each encounter.

Each tape-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim with careful notation of pauses, laughter, crying, sighs and other significant exclamations. During transcription personal names and place names were changed to protect anonymity. Interviews were typed double-spaced with 3.5cm margins on both sides of the transcript, permitting the recording of codes and researcher's comments.

Each tape was played and replayed as the researcher listened for emotional tone and inflection, in addition to content. The accuracy of the written transcripts was checked. All transcripts were read and re-read to obtain a feel for the responses and to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of the participant (Grbich, 1999).

Data collection and analysis occurred in a circular, non-linear manner. Participant's interviews were analysed through the processes of intuiting, analysing and describing. Data was analysed using Colaizzi's (1978) procedures. Colaizzi's technique consists of seven steps, namely: reading all the participant's descriptions, extracting the significant statements, creating formulated meanings, aggregating formulated meanings into clusters of

themes, writing up exhaustive descriptions, identifying the fundamental structure of the concept, and returning to the participants for validation.

3.8: CODING OF DATA

Descriptions were read many times to sense the meaning and identify themes. Significant statements were extracted and grouped into categories and meanings formulated. Codes were developed to represent common and contrasting information. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method was used to interpret the data. This technique involves moving back and forth among data sets, comparing elements of the data. Codes were grouped into categories, which were reduced and modified to incorporate meanings as they emerged from the data. Data generation was terminated when saturation was reached, that is no new categories or meanings could be generated.

3.9: STORAGE OF DATA

Transcripts were kept in a small, locked filing cabinet. The data gathered from each participant was kept in an envelope file in separate compartments. Each file contained the transcript and demographic information both edited to remove identifiers. Consent forms and original tapes were stored separately in a locked cupboard to avoid the risk of any unintentional identification. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Participants were asked if they would like to choose their own pseudonym, with the condition that it may not be

accepted or may need to be altered should the chosen name be able to be attributed to a real person. Three participants chose their own pseudonym. Where the selection of a pseudonym was at the researcher's discretion, names were chosen at random from a book of baby names (Rule, 1986). Names thus selected were checked to ensure they bore no resemblance to the participant's real name or the name of any other participant. Three photocopies of each transcript were made for the purpose of analysis. Each participant was allocated a different colour paper for ease of source identification. All copies were stored in a separate secure cabinet. Diary notes were stored with the original transcripts.

3.10: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to undertake the study was sought and granted from the Committee for the Conduct of Ethical Research at Edith Cowan University. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of the interview (see Appendix A). Munhall (1994, p.153) describes the most important obligation of the researcher is, *to describe the experiences of others as faithfully as possible*. The researcher undertook to maintain this obligation as the central focus of the work.

Potential participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the interview procedure and expected time commitment. This information was presented in verbal and written form (see Appendix B). Participants were

asked to sign a consent form before the interview began. In addition all participants completed a short demographic form (see Appendix C). The participant s rights to refuse participation at any time during the study, to omit particular aspects of the study and to withdraw from the study without recrimination were clearly stated.

Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used on any forms and transcripts and when using quotes all contextual details would be altered or removed to ensure anonymity. Access to the original tapes would be confined to the researcher and transcriber, and that data would be stored securely to ensure confidentiality. The transcriber signed a confidentiality statement (see Appendix D). Two participants requested that the researcher complete the transcription. These requests were honoured. Participants were informed that on completion of the study the original tape recordings would be given to them, for them to personally destroy.

Participants were advised of the availability of ongoing support from the Chameleon Society, Relationships Australia and also provided with contact details for an experienced clinical psychologist. One potential participant was referred to the Street Front Legal Service and the Western Institute of Self Help to access ongoing help for other interpersonal difficulties and took no part in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions and understandings of women in a committed relationship with a transvestite in order to interpret the shared meanings of the experience. A profile of the study participants is given, followed by presentation of the findings related to the research objectives that guided the study.

4.2: DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS.

Nine participants were interviewed. All spoke English as a first language. Three participants were born in Australia; the others had migrated to Australia in excess of twenty years prior to the study. All had discovered their partner s cross-dressing whilst being resident in Australia.

Participants age at interview ranged from thirty-eight to eighty-four years and they had lived in relationship with a transvestite from five to forty-two years. For eight participants their first committed relationship was with their transvestite partner. One woman had been married and divorced prior to meeting her current partner. One woman had divorced her transvestite husband, remarried and has since been widowed. Two women were separated at the time of interview. All others remained in a relationship with their transvestite partners. Six participants bore children fathered by their transvestite partner.

The length of the relationship before discovery ranged from two weeks to thirty-three years. Time elapsed since discovery at time of interview ranged from three months to sixty-two years. The women had married or committed to the relationship at between seventeen and forty-eight years of age and had discovered their partners cross-dressing when they were between twenty-one and forty-eight years old.

Four participants had reached the equivalent of secondary level education. Four had a tertiary level education. One participant is currently engaged in full-time tertiary studies. Three women were full-time homemakers, four were professionally employed in the fields of business, health and education, one was a student in the field of humanities and one was retired.

Descriptive information of participants is presented in table form in Appendix E.

4.3: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Following the tape recording and transcription of interviews with nine women, significant statements were extracted which pertained directly to the phenomenon of interest (Colaizzi, 1978). Meanings were formulated from approximately 522 significant statements and organised into clusters of themes. These clusters were referred back to the original transcripts in order to validate them (Colaizzi, 1978). This involved ascertaining whether there was anything in the original transcripts that was not accounted for in

the clusters of themes and whether the clusters of themes suggested anything that was not implicit in the original transcripts. Themes were also checked for ambiguity; that is themes that were contradictory, or appeared totally unrelated. No such themes were found.

Resultant analysis identified eleven key themes:

A living grief,
Living with shadows,
Three in the bed,
Living with a transvestite,
What about the children?
Consequences of telling the children,
It s all a big secret,
Is there no one to help me?
At last someone understands,
Getting through the day
Looking to the future.

Each theme encompassed three to seven sub-themes, there being a total of fifty-seven sub-themes. Thus the total experience of these women is described in terms of how living in a committed relationship with a transvestite affected them.

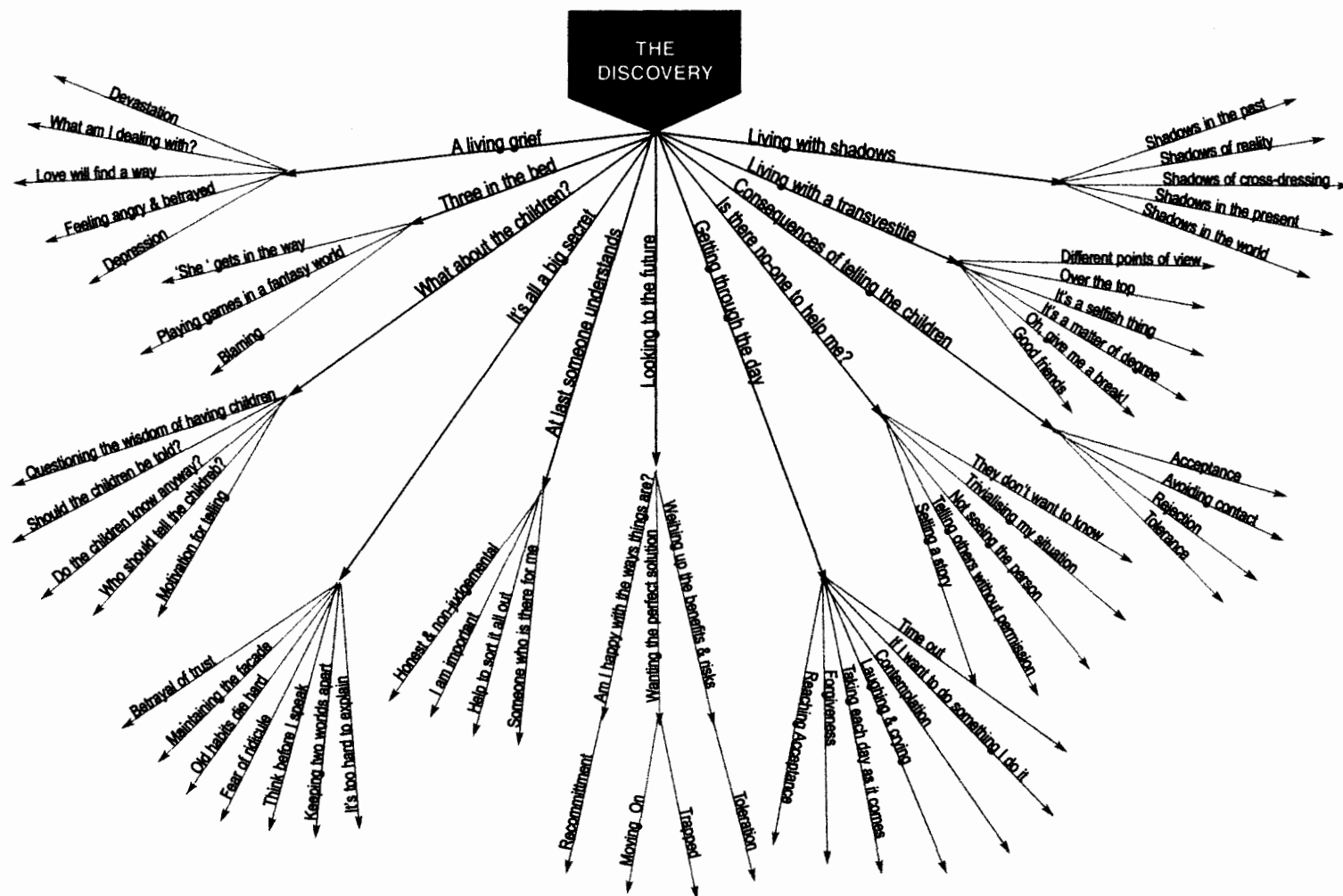


Figure 4.1 Living with a transvestite: themes and sub-themes

4.4: THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH A TRANSVESTITE

An overview of the experience of being in a committed relationship with a transvestite will be presented followed by a discussion of each of the themes with their corresponding evidence. A greater, rather than fewer, number of direct quotes have been used to enable the subtle nuances of each woman's experience to flavour the commonalities of experience. The interview with Vicky was three-quarters of an hour in duration hence the amount of data generated was less than other participants whose interviews were one and a half to two hours in duration. Data from Joanna was also limited as she responded in writing and opportunity for probing was not available. These differences in quantity are reflected in the proportion of quotes used from each participant.

All women had entered into their respective relationships with a sense of commitment as embodied in the traditional Christian marriage service, regardless of whether they were actually married or not. Whilst the age at commitment varied widely, all recalled their expectations of marriage to be a mixture of good and bad to be faced jointly, and their willingness to work at the relationship. Dorothy explained:

Companionship and sexual company and the hope of children eventually and a life lived with good and bad, I expected it all really, but we would be able to stick together in the good and bad. Dorothy, p2.

To a greater extent relationships prior to the discovery of their partner's transvestic behaviour were ordinary. All went through difficult times,

triggered by outside events such as health or financial hardship or family tensions, and/or relationship difficulties, triggered by misunderstandings and mismatched expectations. These times had been weathered with fortitude and determination. Periods of great joy and achievement were also experienced and shared; the birth of children, promotion at work, the purchase of a home. For Isobel this meant:

Three children, worked hard, up and down marriage but then all marriages are, no-one has a perfect marriage. Got the home we d always wanted. Got to the position of the children grown up, going on holidays. Doing things together and it looked perfect. Isobel, p1.

Discovering the transvestic nature of their husband or partner is the pivotal point for women in relationship with a transvestite. Time is from then on divided into before knowing and since knowing .

4.5: THE DISCOVERY

Isobel and (Husband) had been married for 33 years when disclosure occurred.

We d had some friends around to dinner and one of the friend s is a bit of a character and he bought a piece of jewelry. And I don t know whether it was a joke or what. Anyway, this particular night he wasn t wearing it and we (husband and Isobel) were discussing him and I said to (husband) if ever there was a case for a cross-dresser it has got to be (friend). (Husband) said well, how do you think (friend s wife) would feel? and I said I honestly don t know, but I think she would handle it, knowing (friend s wife) . And he said to me How would you handle it if it was you? So I said Well, that s

hypothetical and I couldn't really answer that, and he said What if I were to tell you I was a cross-dresser? and I just laughed. And he said But I am. And then he proceeded to go and get his clothes and show me his cross-dressing. Isobel, p 2.

Stress and distress experienced by the husband precipitated disclosure within three relationships.

He himself went through a very, very bad stage of moodiness, absolutely cross. And he came in one day and he looked — I mean before he came through the door I could tell Oh, he's going to be frightfully morose. And then he must have gone to the doctor first of all, discussed it with her and then of course he needed my help to go and buy whatever he needed. And I in turn had to go and see this same doctor. After 25 years of marriage. Vicky, p6.

Cherie's husband had taken early retirement which had enabled him to be at home whilst Cherie worked. When their son lost his job and was also at home most of the day the tension between the two men was palpable. Cherie and (husband) had also been married twenty-five years.

I decided that I would give up my job and (husband) and I would go overseas for a while. I had been offered another job so I knew I had a job probably sitting in the wings for me and so (husband) and I went overseas. When we were in Europe, Europe of all places, he must have thought it was romantic, I don't know, he told me he was a transvestite. Cherie, p8.

The combination of two stressful events; the sudden death of a much loved pet and the necessity of working and living away from home, precipitated disclosure in Dorothy's situation.

All (pets) are like children and (husband) was working away and she (the pet) was really lost without him, and then she got

sick and couldn't walk one day and so I had to call (husband) home. He took her to the vet and she had cancer and never came home again. Really it was that fast you know. It was awful really, and he was really quite shocked, really quite shocked. After that one day he returned from working away, he told me that he was being pulled in all directions and that he wanted to dress in women's clothes. Dorothy, p4. Married for 31 years.

For Joanna and Georgia the discovery was more accidental. Joanna had been married for 19 years, when early one morning her husband had locked himself out of the house.

I was awoken one night to a knock at the door. Half asleep I opened the door. Here was my husband in women's clothes (my clothes) standing in front of me. Looking back, I don't know whether it was shock or being half-asleep but it seemed ages before I registered. My husband was frantic. Let me in, turn off the lights and go to bed, he told me. I did what I was told without questioning him. I know this sounds silly but at 2am, I was not functioning normally. Not long after he came to bed and asked me did I know what was going on. I told him no. Joanna, p2.

Georgia and her husband, after 15 years of marriage, had just moved into a new home.

I was looking for some (things) in the garage. And there was a plastic bag with women's a wig, a lipstick, big shoes and stuff in it. A skirt, a couple of skirts with the tags still on them. I thought it was an affair. I thought he was having an affair. He had always been a bit of a womaniser so it wasn't really a shock to me. It was a shock to me that he was at it again if you like ... I thought it was an affair. I went in to call my mother. I was shocked and I needed to talk. She wasn't at home so I

phoned my sister. She told me to go out and look again. She said, Go and have another look. Tell me what's in the bag. And when I went back out and had a look and saw the size of the shoes I realised it was him. Georgia, p3.

Appearing before their wives dressed in female attire was used by two husbands to disclose their cross-dressing.

The children were young and we had a very rare opportunity for parents of young children where both children were away for the weekend. A couple of days before the weekend I said to (husband) your wish is my command because we had the house to ourselves and it was special — it doesn't happen very often. I had in mind perhaps a bath together, massage, a long intimate evening. He was very pleased with the suggestion and on that evening he gave me some very strict instructions on what to wear — which wasn't very much and I got ready first. He asked me to sit in the darkened lounge and wait — which was fine. Except I waited and waited. And it took about two hours and by this time I was cold — I put on a dressing gown, I was bored — I started knitting, and got fed up with the whole process. Eventually he came out of the bathroom dressed as (femme name) and that wasn't what I had anticipated. Marylyn, p3. Married 15 years.

Sophie married in 1936 after a long courtship. However, it was not until a week or two after the marriage that her husband made the practice known.

And so I found out quite soon that my husband had acquired a set of clothes. The Clothes he called them and I was I suppose you could say in it almost right from the start. He would come home, and he was smart looking, nice looking — small and smoked a pipe — was never coarse, or anything like that. Always polite, nice person, nice face. And after dinner he

would say, Oh, I think I will go out. And he would put The Clothes on and put make-up on and go out. Sophie, p2.

In contrast, the disclosure of cross-dressing by Jean's partner occurred in two stages. First, it was early in the relationship.

I have known about his cross-dressing, within about a month to a month and a half of starting to go out with (partner). Because he thought that was pretty important that he tell me about that, because at the time of his life it was at the foremost, he had been cross-dressing more than he had ever cross-dressed before. Jean, p2.

The early disclosure allowed Jean to have a sense of joint control within the relationship. She considered the relationship based on openness and honesty. The second disclosure occurred nearly five years later. Over the previous three months she had noticed deterioration in their sexual relationship.

It was changing, getting worse, so one morning I asked him what was happening. He wouldn't reply and I pushed, and pushed. Eventually he told me that he had been experimenting with female hormones. And he hadn't thought it important enough to tell me! Then he told me he had been having sex with men — but only while dressed as a woman and they had used condoms so it was okay. Jean 2, p1.

4.6: Theme 1: A LIVING GRIEF

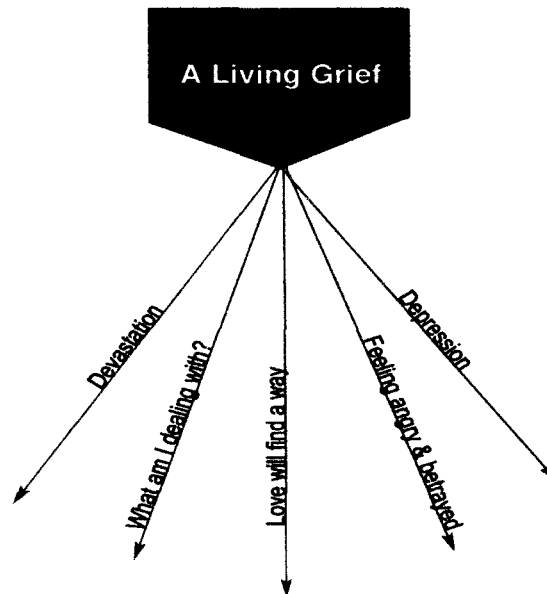


Figure 4.2

Participants used the language of grief to describe the effects of disclosure of their partners' transvestism and changed relationship consequent to the disclosure. The disclosure precipitated a sense of loss. Loss of the husband they knew, loss of relationship, loss of a predictable future, loss of a past.

I feel the losses are that I have lost a husband, and soul mate, and my daughter has lost a normal family life. I cannot tell you how deeply hurt I am, I grieve for what I had in my naivete, and I grieve for what I will never have again. I now realise that my marriage was and is a sham. Joanna, p2.

I have lost my husband. I've really lost (husband). Can't say I've lost my children because I haven't lost them, but I've lost a part of what we had, which was this was their home and they could come and go as they wished. Now it's not. It is still in my eyes, obviously, but not in theirs. Now it's a home where another person lives and they're not as comfortable. I've lost a future, which I don't know where it's going. That's the biggest problem for me at the moment. Isobel, p24.

From participants' descriptions, five emergent themes were clustered under the common theme of personal grief about the experiences. Whilst these themes will be discussed sequentially, for the women the experience was not so simple. Ongoing disclosures, ongoing interactions and experiences added to the losses, each of which needed to be resolved in its own time.

4.6.1: Devastation

I was shocked. I couldn't believe that a person I had known intimately for nineteen years or so could have deceived me for so long. Joanna, p1.

My whole world had been taken and smashed to the ground and I didn't know. And I was absolutely (pause) absolutely floored. Georgia, p3.

and I was so bewildered. I was 21, and as I say I was ignorant and innocent of life I suppose. Sophie, p2.

Each new discovery or disclosure was met with shock. The initial shock regarding the discovery of the other side of their partner was the beginning. More shocks followed; contemplation of separation, confrontation with the femme self, the discovery of other secrets. The

women were also living in the world and responsive to the happenings around them.

It came as a great shock to find that your male partner is not quite there any more. The awful bit was the weekend that he told me that he was going to be a cross-dresser was the time of the (National disaster) do you know what I mean? I mean I was totally shocked by that anyway and I d had a week of grief out of that and at the same time I was grieving to myself, you know, I m losing my partner in some way, and he said to me if you don t like it I may have to leave, and I thought oh God, I hope not after all these years. Dorothy, p5

My world really fell out because one Sunday night he walked in on me, dressed. And all my denial went out the window because I had to face this problem. I can remember that night. I could have screamed at nothing. It was very bad. I hid my head under the pillow. Anyway I got through the night. That night, I remember sort of screaming, not out loud but inside me. Cherie, p13.

4.6.2: What am I dealing with?

While still reeling from the discovery or disclosure, participants realised that they lacked knowledge and understanding about Transvestism and desperately sought information. For some women ignorance was so complete that they had no knowledge of its existence. For others, information was limited to stereotypes depicted in theatre, literature and television. Information specific to cross-dressing and Transvestism and accessible to the general public was extremely limited. Most women

resorted to more general information on relationships, conflict resolution or other sexual preferences such as homosexuality, bi-sexuality and incest.

The lack of information added to the participants sense of isolation.

Inability to name or label the experience isolated some women completely.

I was so na ve that I thought I was the only one married to such a person. Joanna, p1.

... cross-dressing - that s a term I ve never, ever used before — nothing was used in my day. Transvestite was never heard of, in our society anyway. Sophie, p2.

You know women didn t even think of it. I mean today, perhaps yes, they might because we re more in tune with that kind of thing because it s fed to us everyday on television and all the rest of it but not in those days. Oh, no. Vicky, p6.

Stereotypical depictions distressed the women as they tried to fit these to the men they knew and loved, and found the descriptions lacking or unacceptable.

I was very ignorant of transvestism. All I had seen were The Rocky Horror Show and things like that. I didn t know anything about it. The first thing I thought we should do was try and get educated about it. I tried to get information on it. When I first saw the word transvestite I nearly died. I preferred the word cross-dresser. Transvestite was like something freaky or dirty. Georgia, p2

The search for information was limited to written material that could be accessed without disclosing personal details. Women searched the shelves of libraries and bookshops. One woman used the Internet to

search for material. This resulted in exposure to more pornographic and stereotypical material than information.

I started reading books on everything that I could possibly find. There s not a great deal of books to find on transvestism I must admit. I ve studied libraries, I looked everywhere. But I did read books on relationships and males and females and sexual relationships. Cherie, p15.

I became obsessed with transvestism. It was like suddenly I was the one with the obsession, because I just couldn t accept it. When you re living with something you can t accept, it s on you mind 24 hours a day. I used to go 8 hours at a time on the Internet. Georgia, p11.

4.6.3: Love Will Find a Way

This theme refers to the participant s belief in, and commitment to, the marriage. All relationships had experienced, survived and even prospered during and following difficult challenges. Past experience convinced the women that knowledge, discussion, patience and determination would see their relationship grow stronger.

I never, ever thought of him not being himself, so if that s what he needed to do, then that s what he needed to do, and so my attitude was O.K., that s how it is, how can we fit this into the marriage. Marylyn, p9.

And at that age you believe love conquers all. I can remember driving to work reciting my marriage vows, I call upon these persons here present to witness that I Marylyn, take thee (husband) as my lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward. For better, for worse, for richer, for

poorer, in sickness and in health I think I must be one of the few people who can still say their vows. I was trying to convince myself that there was a way through this. Marylyn, p5.

Well, here I was, fifty-one. I still thought that love would conquer all, I thought, Oh, it s a bit of a problem. It s probably just putting a nightie on every now and again, no problems. We ll cope with this. We ll go to the country and love will conquer everything. Cherie, group interview, p5.

4.6.4: Feeling Angry and Betrayed

Anger was directed at the consequences of the disclosure. Participants were angry that they were not able to exercise choice at the time of marriage or commitment. The women had been married from a matter of weeks to forty-two years before disclosure. From their point of view the relationship until the point of disclosure had been based on false foundations which negated and trivialised all their dreams and aspirations. The belief that both partners shared a commitment to honesty within the relationship, working as a team and a shared vision of the future was shattered because they had not been made aware of an integral part of their partner s being.

What I can t accept is the betrayal almost, that s what I feel, that all those things I ve believed in were not real. What he did do, and I ll never forgive him for doing, is he married me knowing there was a mix-up somewhere in his life. Isobel, p9.

I was extremely angry. Extremely angry at being betrayed. I thought that something that important, I should have been told,

when he married me, because I wouldn't have married him. I wouldn't have tried. And my parents wouldn't have allowed it either. I was extremely angry. I felt betrayed, cheated. Georgia, p3.

I was furious. As if taking female hormones had nothing to do with our relationship, of course it would affect me. And it was Okay to have sex with men — or anyone — because he was dressed as a woman at the time and used a condom. That was the last straw. For the last five years I thought our relationship was based on open, honest discussion. Now I knew it wasn't. Jean, p1.

The anger and betrayal felt as a result of non-disclosure spilled over to the expectation of their partners that the woman were now complicit in a situation not of their choice or making.

I was embarrassed, hurt, and angry. All of a sudden his problem was now mine. Joanna, p1.

When I think about what he's put me through just to hide and save his own butt. It just makes me wildly angry that I got put through all this pain because of his problem. Georgia, p7.

The knowledge of their partner's transvestism leads to a reliving and re-evaluation of past events. The re-evaluation causes great distress and fuels the anger.

Wow. I was just angry. I was angry for ages. I would keep bringing up incidents from my past life in my mind. Not out loud. On these walks or just sitting in the bush. Incidents in my past life with (husband) and reviewing them in the light that

(husband) wanted to cross-dress. So many things that came back and I was just getting angrier and angrier at these things. Cherie, p13.

Suddenly past events would come into my mind. Things that had happened that hadn't made sense why these things had happened. And that made me more angry. Georgia, p4.

4.6.5: Depression

Depression was difficult for the women to cope with because it sapped their ability to function and to relate to others. The depression was not always recognised, or misinterpreted by the women.

Somewhere, and I don't quite know where I went into depression, and I was very depressed then for a long time. I did go to doctors and got all those, you're going through menopause dear, you need to be on hormones. None of these things helped. The depression was hard. I must admit that depression in a small country town is hard too. Cherie, p16.

Like at work I'd think, I can't really do this, I'm not good enough to be here. And I was just losing the plot completely. Isobel, p19.

I thought I was going mad. I thought I was this close to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't think, I couldn't sit still, my head felt full of cotton wool, I couldn't laugh, I couldn't take a joke, I couldn't do ordinary everyday things without messing up. I eventually went to my doctor. He said I was depressed. I was so relieved, I thought I was crazy. Marylyn, p6.

Things got dramatically worse, to the point where I was just crying and for no reason. Well, I say for no reason, I know why I

was crying, but I d suddenly start crying and that was getting hard to handle. Hard to handle at work. Hard to handle when I was just out driving the car and I d find myself in tears. And I thought, this is getting silly. Isobel, p8.

Eventually a sense of having arrived at the depths occurred and gradually the ability to regain some control returned.

So I started to get it back again, but it took a while and I think that s where all the crying bit came in. I had to get it all out and feel sorry for little old Isobel and then when I d got over all of that fizzog , I was OK and I could come back to being me again. Isobel, p20.

When I found that it was getting more messy all the time I thought it must be partly me, or some lack in me. I wept copious tears, having to manage it by myself and thinking that I had to manage it by myself. I gradually felt that I was using up valuable energy in weeping. I was gradually realising there was not much point in me crying and wiping my eyes and crying again. So I thought, there was no point keeping on like that, manage it in a better way. Do something about it. Sophie, p9.

However, as in other forms of grieving the emotions of denial, anger and depression return on occasion, although not with the same intensity as before.

So I think I have come out of the depression now and when I say I came out of it and I make it sound easy its probably been twelve months. The first day I felt I was probably coming out was probably twelve months ago but its taken longer than that and I must admit that even though I say these things there are periods and I can put a time to them, I often jump back into anger. I often jump back to denial. Or sometimes I jump back to depression. But they never go back to being so intense as they

were at that time, but I do get periods when I go back to these things. Cherie, p18.

4.7: Theme 2: LIVING WITH SHADOWS

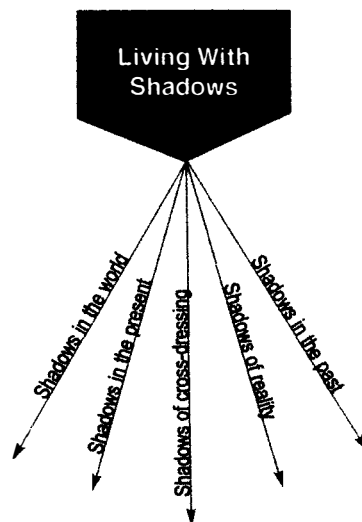


Figure 4.3

This theme describes how the women felt when faced with a new reality that could not be defined or explained in conventional terms. There was a sense that what they were experiencing was not fully exposed. As soon as one aspect appeared to be clarified the understanding would be confused by further disclosure or negated by their partner. Marylyn describes it thus:

I desperately wanted to understand so we could negotiate the relationship. (husband) would explain his situation in one way and I would go away and think about that. As that point began to make sense it would contradict something else he had said or done. When I asked about the contradiction he would get all defensive and say I'd got it all wrong. It was like trying to pin down a shadow. Marylyn, p4.

Shadows came in many forms: shadows of the past, shadows in the present, shadows of reality, shadows of cross-dressing, and shadows in the world.

4.7.1: Shadows in the past

As the women tried to adapt to their partners disclosures and resulting changes in behaviour, events of the past would be remembered. These events were situations where their partner had acted out of character, or seemed strange and lacked a reasonable explanation at the time. With the knowledge of their partner s Transvestism these past situations could be redefined and understood in a new way. The understanding could bring relief as the picture was completed, however new questions would arise.

But sometimes I would feel this tension. I would feel that there was something building up inside him sometimes. Now I understand that it was all connected. Georgia, p7.

Would I rather not know about the cross-dressing? I wish it didn t exist, which is a lot different. It explains a few things like those very, very bad moods. Vicky, group interview, p18.

Specific events in the past, which had caused a sense of mystery, now had an explanation.

When (Son) was about 14, he and I found a bag of clothes stashed behind the shed in the garden. I immediately said they had been stolen and somebody had dumped them. I wanted to ring the police and (husband) was against ringing the police, which is not normal for him. He would have been the first one to take it further. Anyway I asked him if he knew any more about

the clothes and he denied it. So we just left it at that. The police came, took the clothes, end of story. At the time I felt there was a little bit more to it but he wasn't prepared to say any more so I couldn't go any further. Isobel, p3.

He had a top job, and so did I. We had savings. He had gone to the credit company and borrowed all this money without me knowing. Throughout the marriage he has done that about 6 or 7 times. Each time he would say he didn't know what he had done with the money, he just needed extra money. I couldn't get to the bottom of it. We used to sit up the whole night trying to sort it out but I never, ever found out what he's done with it. And I still don't know what he did with it. I suspect some went on clothes but that's the whole thing with all of this. You just don't know what really went on and what didn't. Georgia, p3.

Then there was a process of looking back and realising that some of the things I had taken on trust such as the odd lipstick that wasn't mine, things that had been moved, now had an explanation. The long evenings spent in the garage with me excluded. The kind invitations to allow me to spend a week with my family every now and then were all part of him creating space within the marriage in which to cross-dress. Marylyn, p2.

My clothes were a big source of conflict between him and I before I knew he was a transvestite. He wanted me to wear certain clothing that wasn't me. I must admit I stuck up for that and I never wore the sort of clothes he wanted me to wear but it caused a great deal of conflict. If I bought any clothing there would be one hell of a row about everything. Cherie, p6.

4.7.2: Shadows of reality

Participants were sensitive to their partners needs and intuitively recognised that they had not chosen this way of being.. The women s

feelings were ambiguous; experiencing both compassion about the compulsive nature of transvestism and annoyance at their partner's enjoyment of the cross-dressing to the detriment of the women's involvement.

I do recognise they're coming from a different place, and a hard place. Transvestites are coming from a completely different place. Cherie, group interview, p6.

I think when there is a compulsion like that it is a part that is bigger than any one can control, that probably they don't want to control it, because they like the feeling. So it's an awful mixed up thing. Sophie, p17.

And they enjoy it so much, they wouldn't give it up. Vicky, group interview, p24.

Each time they try to repress it, it always comes again. Jean, group interview, p24.

The compassion had limits. Living with a transvestite tested the women's tolerance, as their partner's needs clashed with their own.

It's an awful drive. Having said that, once they get into it, they are difficult to live with. Dorothy, group interview, p24.

I tried to have the understanding, but I had no conception, of course, of what he was going through. Sophie, p5.

It wasn't the kind of life I wanted. Then at the same time there was this other voice in your head saying, Come on, he can't help it. You've got to be understanding. This voice telling you constantly to be understanding and I just wanted to scream out. I tried. For two years I tried to let him do it when he wanted to do it. Georgia, p9.

Sometimes I want to scream, just don't ever say another word, I don't want to hear another word about it. Go away and leave me alone. At other times I think it's cruel and he must have gone to hell and back, and I should be supportive. Isobel, p15.

Sensitivity to the needs of their partners and their own, highlighted for the women the difficulties they faced.

He is very sorry, and I believe he is very sorry. I don't believe he is purposely trying to hurt. But he's damned if he does, damned if he doesn't. If he doesn't do it, he gets rid of everything, how long will it last before he's going mad, or before he's back to where he was before, buying it, hiding it. And if he does it at somebody else's house, because he knows other people now, and deceiving me behind my back again. Or he stays doing what he's doing and hurting anyway. Isobel, p11.

4.7.3: The shadow of cross-dressing

Each woman struggled to come to terms with cross-dressing. They tried reasoning. Why does specific design and choice of fabric to adorn the body cause such distress? How and why does dress define what is a man or woman? Can thinking be re-framed to accommodate the partner's needs? The women found that transvestism can not be so easily defined.

You go through fighting in your head, cannot accept it. It's only clothes, it's only a dress, it's only material, but it's not. It's much more than that. Georgia, p7.

I don't think I have ever cross-dressed. I wear trousers because I find trousers comfortable and practical for a lot of the things I do. It's really hard to dig a hole in a dress. I wear boots, yeah, so I wear clothes that may seem to be male but I don't actually

try to be a male or take on the presence of a male. I happen to be me who, because of the weather or what I m doing, it is comfortable or practical to wear those things but I don t dress up. I don t wear a male wig, I don t put on whiskers. I don t put on the other accoutrements of a man in the process. I don t change my name. I don t have a major difficulty with the actual clothes. Its what happens in the thinking of the person as they do it is more what transvestism is about. Marylyn, p14.

He would stand looking in the mirror with all this stuff on, touching his hair, acting like a woman. And as far as I was concerned when he was like that he wasn t my man. I didn t know who he was. I wanted him a normal guy. I m the woman. Georgia, p11.

And I sort of wonder why men want to get dressed up in women s gear. I said to a group of them, It s such a pain to get dressed up, and you ve got to put make-up on, you ve got to do this and this and this as a woman. And the guys all sat there and said, Well, we don t think it is. And I said, Yeah, well you don t have to do it every day. And they said, Well, we d like to. Jean, p24.

Questioning and reasoning were replaced with resignation that the femme self was an ongoing part of their relationship. Isobel explained how the shadow of the femme self remained, even when her husband was present.

I can t see (femme name) dressed and then all of a sudden up will pop (husband) because he s gone and had a shower and put back on his male clothes and you see a man. It doesn t work. I know that s (husband) but (femme name) is still in the room. She s still sitting there. She s still in the house. Even when some evenings he will come home and he s just too tired

to change. And he ll sit down here and I will think, this is interesting . And then about an hour later he ll go upstairs and he ll start playing with one of the wigs. So it s not (husband) sitting there, its still (femme name) sitting there. Or he ll go and shave his legs again, or it can be just getting enough on and filing his nails. Its all the things that (husband) never did, and (femme name) does, so (femme name) is here and not (husband). Isobel, p11.

4.7.4: Shadows in the present

Commitment and marriage implies trust and honesty between partners. Acceptance of behaviours and practices is based on the assumption that what one has been told is correct. When previously stated positions are found to be false, or understated, the women began to mistrust everything their partner said or did.

He kept trying to make it sound like it was a small part of his life and he would only need to wear something of mine now and again. Which was a lie. Georgia, p10.

When he told me last year he led me to believe that by telling me all it would mean was that he wouldn t have to be so worried about me coming home from work early and catching him dressed. Other than that it wouldn t make any difference to out life, which was the biggest joke out. Isobel, p3.

Mistrust extends to concerns about the future development of partner s needs and desires. Discrepancies between what their partner says and actual behaviours caused mistrust. Evasive, inconclusive answers or avoidance of discussion do not ease the women s worries.

He was telling me it isn't a homosexual thing, it was heterosexual, which I believe is true from what I've read. He said it's not a sex change thing. He told me it was a relaxing thing. He told me it had nothing to do with sex and he is sitting there sexually excited. And I was thinking how bizarre this is. You can't even talk about it and he gets excited. You know, every time we talked about it he would get an erection. Even the word excited him. And yet he told me it wasn't a sexual thing. It was his WHOLE sexuality. Georgia, p6.

He claims that cross-dressers are not homosexuals but to me it's just a continuum of this issue. I said, Why do you dress up as a woman if you're not interested in men? And he said, Well, that's an issue in itself. So that issue concerned me a great deal. It concerned me that he may be bisexual and having sex with other partners and risking AIDS. I wasn't sure that at some level he wanted to live his life as a woman. He avoided talking about these things, and evaded my questions if I asked outright. Jean, p10.

(husband) can argue black and blue that he doesn't do things. Absolutely, but whether that's transvestism, or just men, I don't know. I just put it all down to transvestism, throw it at him. Cherie, group interview, p6.

Sometimes I would spy on him because I never trusted him or believed him about anything. Georgia, p9.

One consequence of the living with constant stress was evidenced by stress related illnesses.

But I had bilious attacks — three or four times a week it came out in that. Sophie, p2.

I did get a fair bit of asthma, and I'd never had asthma before. Cherie, p10.

It was about this time I went back to the G.P. for a check up at which time my blood pressure was taken, which was about 200/130, and once the tests were in that indicated that there was no physical reason for the blood pressure being so high my G.P. said very gently your marriage is a health hazard . Marylyn, p9.

4.7.5: Shadows in the world

Transvestism seems to cast shadows in the wider world of work and social interaction. Meeting new people, or listening to the relationship troubles of others is interpreted through a questioning filter of knowledge and personal experience. The women question first impressions and seek a hidden meaning in their interactions with others.

I say to myself, who s here that is a cross-dresser? Jean, group interview, p1.

I am looking at people differently. I look at people and think, are you just a very big woman? which is terrible, it really is. That would never have crossed my mind. Isobel, p16.

When my young staff come into my office and tell me their problems with their marriage and I feel like saying, is he a cross-dresser? Cherie, group interview, p1.

And that (wondering if her is a cross-dresser) is very real when you are potentially looking for new partners. Marylyn, group interview, p1.

4.8: Theme 3: THREE IN THE BED

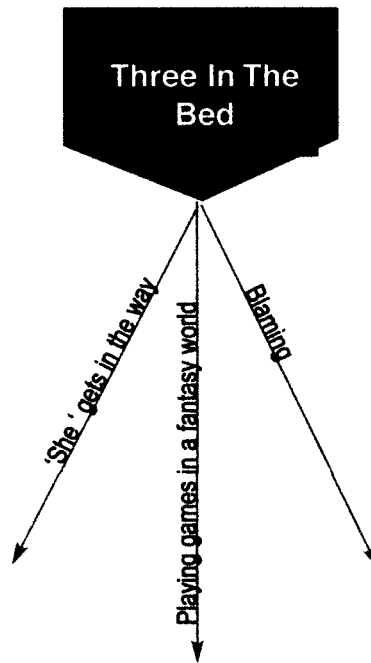


Figure 4.4

The disclosure of cross-dressing had the greatest impact on intimacy within the sexual relationship. Establishing a satisfying sexual relationship following disclosure was challenging for all women. They found themselves questioning the meaning of love, sexual attraction and their own sexuality.

(Husband) and my sex life has not been great and I can accept that, he can't. He seems to think that I should still be there but I'm afraid I'm not and don't think I am ever going to be again because transvestism I think brings into question your sex. It brings into question who are you having sex with and whether (husband) sees that or not, it does that to me. Cherie, p19.

Themes include: she gets in the way, playing games in a fantasy world, blaming.

4.8.1: She gets in the way

Partners were frequently sexually stimulated by cross-dressing. The women's sexual response was not enhanced in the presence of their cross-dressed partner. From the woman's point of view having sex with the femme aspect of their partner caused them to feel as if they were in a lesbian relationship. Or it caused confusion because they did not know how to respond to their partner as a woman and/or a man. The intensity of reaction ranged from extreme distress to neutral tolerance.

I could have gone in there and he would have loved it. Sometimes I did. I put make-up on him and tried to show him how to do it. I put blue eye shadow on and the look of love in his eyes He wanted me to help him it just broke me up. I wanted to help him but I couldn't. I hated it. It's not your man any more. He comes to bed and you're starved and you're a completely heterosexual woman, it turns your stomach. Georgia, p8.

We have not been intimate for over six months and before that it was only every now and again. I cannot sleep with someone who is more a woman than man. Joanna, p11.

Of course the sleeping arrangements changed because I felt I couldn't cope if I saw he always dressed as a woman to go to bed at night. And I thought that this is better, I don't mind as long as I don't see it. That was the reason that we had our own bedrooms. But when sex goes out of a marriage that's the bottom. I mean it doesn't matter what age you are. We live

together, more like brother and sister. Vicky, group interview, p18.

As far as the sexual part of it — it simply hardly eventuated — it just didn't work out. Sophie, p3.

How did it affect our sexual relationship? Well, it was a great turn-off for a while. It took me I suppose about two months to even think about a second relationship again and I certainly couldn't do it if he had anything like women's clothes on, it was a great turn-off. Providing there's no women's clothes around I'm quite happy to play the game. If that's the game, fine. So the nude is much better than that. Dorothy, p5.

Well the first time we were actually together when he was dressed, he really obviously wanted to stay dressed while we had sex. That didn't bother me because he was so excited. Why would I let it bother me? Yes, it was good. And then afterwards he wanted me to gradually undress him, and gradually get rid of the cross-dressing. It didn't bother me, and so sometimes he would wear his wig and his bras and everything and that didn't bother me because I enjoy sex. So as long as it was good it didn't matter. It was not a turn-on for me, but I learnt to accept it. Jean, p22.

4.8.2: Playing games in a world of fantasy

For three participants the degree of intrusion that cross-dressing had in the sexual relationship was described in terms of a fantasy game that excluded any form of spontaneity, loving touch or reciprocity. The script was written and controlled by the partner.

So in terms of our intimate relationship, that's where the role-playing was played because there ceased to be any spontaneity. Any sexual encounter had to go through this whole procedure of setting the scene, getting the script right, getting the costumes right. I felt very much like I was an actor in a play and again whatever Marilyn needed was ignored. It got to the point in the end — I've never been a prostitute — but I felt that that was what I was doing. I was there to fulfill the fantasies of this person rather than a close relationship between two people. Marilyn, p11.

I said to (husband) the other day, How would you feel if the shoe was on the other foot, and I suddenly decided to wear men's clothing and I began to go out and about in men's clothing and behaving like a man? Oh, no. he said. Vicky, group interview, p12.

And also they're not turned on unless they're dressed up, with you, in bed or tying up. They're different from other men. You are not enough as you are, for them. Georgia, p9.

For the same participants bondage became part of the fantasy games. This became an issue of conflict, in addition to, and in conjunction with cross-dressing. None of the women enjoyed the practice. They found it incomprehensible and totally against their concepts of a loving sexual relationship.

He wanted to be tied up as part of the sex act. He bought special manacles and straps to use. I couldn't understand. How can being restrained and tickled and pinched and teased and humiliated be erotic? If it were done to prisoners it would be

classified as torture and banned by the United Nations. If it were done to animals it would mean imprisonment. I wouldn't do it to my worst enemy. And here was my husband, whom I loved and respected, wanting to be treated like some beastly animal. I did it but it sickened me and made me desperately sad that this could be conceived as pleasurable. But he was ecstatic. He asked if he could tie me up. I was not keen but thought you can't reject something that's not been tried, so I agreed. He tied me to the bed and left me. It was probably for only a few minutes but the panic welled up and I couldn't reason myself out of it and I screamed. He came back and untied me and he was angry and upset and frustrated. And I had failed again. Marylyn, p 15.

That was something that I never, ever came to terms with, and it was very hard to deal with, and that was the fact that he was into what I suppose would be called bondage. And that was I found very difficult to deal with that he wanted to be held tied up. This is something that I have never, ever discussed with anyone because it sounded so strange, even to me. I rebelled against it but he was a pretty firm character, and I think he was so desperate at times. Sophie, p4.

Now I realise that he had a strong interest, not just a strong interest, he was obsessed, with bondage. Obsessed with bondage. And I don't like it. It wouldn't have bothered me if it was something he experimented with once or twice, or now and again. And then he said to me perhaps bondage. He wouldn't have to dress up any more if he just had lots of bondage. But that was way over the top as well. The whole things connected. They want to be subdued. They want to be tied up and act like subservient. They want to be like a female that's going to be taken. They want a submissive role. And being tied up, that gives them that. Georgia, p6.

4.8.3: Blaming

Blame came from two sources, from within the woman, and from their partner. This created a circle of blame, each source feeding the other.

Partners attempted to blame the woman for poor or deteriorating sexual relationships.

He would tell me my approach was all wrong in the bedroom. He would say, if you stop pressuring me, if you would just lie for half an hour first. I tried all that. He just used to go to sleep. He didn't have enough conscience to come around and tell me, Georgia, some of this that's happened in our life, you cry yourself to sleep because I haven't wanted you. It's not your fault. Georgia, p7.

He just couldn't get it up with me and it was always my fault because I'd been nasty in the day, it was millions of things, that it was always my fault. He still puts guilt on me for, or he tries to put the guilt on me for not wanting sex because he's still behaving in the same ways as he was behaving when the marriage was going on. He doesn't see that it's changed, but it has. Cherie, p20.

.. the questioning that was going on in my head Is the way (husband) is behaving my fault? And I mean that this was very much implied, and spoken on a number of occasions, that if I had been more sexy, more sensual, whatever, that there wouldn't have been a problem. Whenever I expressed my needs, it was, You can't feel like that, that is too mundane, that's not sensuous enough. Marylyn, p11.

The women felt the deteriorating sexual relationship acutely. They too tried to find explanations. They felt that there must have been something lacking in themselves.

I thought there must be something wrong with me, that I didn't provoke the right response. I thought I must be at fault. Why would somebody not be satisfied with me? Always I came back to the fact, What is wrong with me? Because it just didn't seem reasonable. Sophie, p3.

It got to the point where I thought, does he still find me sexy? What I feel sometimes is I look too ordinary. Jean, group interview. p15.

I've been separated two and a half years but there hasn't been a day goes by that I haven't replayed, could I have prevented it? Could I have put up with it? Georgia, p12.

Although my head said it was illogical there was still part of the thought process — did I actually so want a relationship with a woman that this is the person I picked for marriage? I have never been in a lesbian relationship so I don't know the dynamics that go on, but very much the questioning that was going on in my head. Marylyn, p 16.

My perception of myself as a woman took a dive, at first. I felt useless. I felt I'd failed. I wasn't attractive enough. I wasn't sexy enough. I wasn't anything enough to have this happen. If I had been better at every aspect he wouldn't have felt the need to introduce another woman into his life. That went on for quite a few months, even to the point where I was beginning to lose faith in me as a person. Isobel, p19.

Cherie sums up the dilemma faced by the women.

I find this transvestism thing puts questions on my own sexuality and that's my biggest worry. I've said to (husband), 'if you want our relationship to continue, you have to forgive me for being straight. I have to forgive you for being a transvestite.' I think he has to let me be the person I want to be, which is straight... but he doesn't see that. He thinks its up to me to fit. Cherie, group interview, p12.

4.9: Theme 4: LIVING WITH A TRANSVESTITE

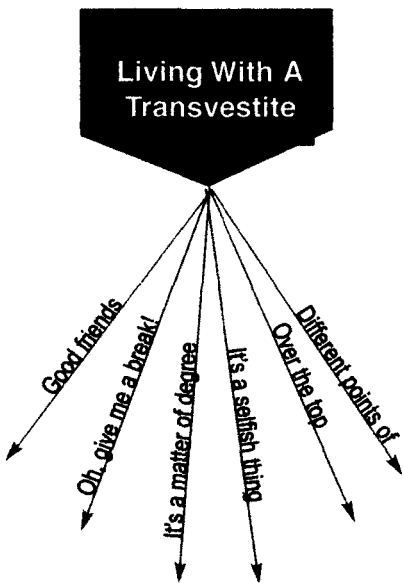


Figure 4.5

In addition to the intimate relationship between man and woman, cross-dressing influenced all dimensions of living, having effects on day-to-day events and interactions with their partner and children, extended family, friends, acquaintances, at work, socially, spiritually and in the community.

I just felt it was infiltrating every part of our life – financial, sex life, family life – just everything. Georgia, p9.

4.9.1: Different points of view

One area of conflicting understanding came from the perception of the femme self. From the partner's point of view the femme self had always been present. However, from the woman's perspective the femme self was a recent addition to the relationship, most often perceived as a third person who was not welcome.

I think its just happened so fast and so out of the blue, the total taking over of somebody by something like this. It's like schizophrenia. He was even talking about his female part, as part of him, as a person, She tells me to do this and she doesn't like me calling him (male name) and she and I was thinking this is scary. Isobel, p14.

Isobel goes on to explain:

If it was another woman, Okay, you'd rack up the odds, she's prettier, I'll have a facial and a hairdo. She's more outgoing, Okay, wake up get off your butt and go and do something. You'd have something you could fight, or you could make the decision not to fight. But this you can't fight because it's the two people, the one you love and one you hate in one, and you can't fight that. Isobel, p28.

The men considered their femme self to be more attractive, gentle, and kinder than their masculine self. Whilst acknowledging the softer aspects of the femme self, the women preferred the man they knew

They're saying they are the same person underneath all of this, but they're not. Their persona changes. They're more caring in some ways, more gentle in a lot of ways. Much more an understanding type person. But it's not (husband) being more understanding, it's (femme name). So it does nothing for me. I

think (femme name) is quite a bitchy type of person. I d say that she s caring in some ways but she can also be quite nasty in others. Isobel, p14.

The manner in which the femme self is presented also created conflict. Most women did not like the femme self, and saw her as a two dimensional parody of a woman.

I don t like (femme name). (Femme name) is prissy, she is opinionated, she s affected, she s very much the stereotype of what I think a man thinks is feminine and to me it misses the point completely. He was described to me as the fairy on top of the Christmas tree and that describes him pretty well I think. I used the word him . I still have trouble thinking of (femme name) as a true person. It s a play act. Marylyn, p5.

I see them them as men dressed as women, I do really. I ll never call him (femme name). Other people call him (femme name) but I can t. Dorothy, p15.

I call her (husband s name). Although his preferred name is (femme name) I could never bring it through my teeth. Vicky, p8.

If the change in personality, mannerisms and behaviour is minimal the partner stays the same in most essential aspects.

Because (partner) didn t change much, it was just (partner). It was just (partner) with all his make-up on. It was just (Partner) walking a bit more effeminate. Just (partner) trying to be a bit more feminine, and I didn t mind the feminine bit because I felt that he was a bit more understanding of you as a woman, because he was trying to be feminine. Jean, p23.

4.9.2: Over the top

One of the immediate consequences of disclosure was the overwhelming rapidity with which cross-dressing consumed the lives of the women, and their men. Now that their transvestism was no longer constrained by secrecy, the men became more open in their practice with increasing frequency.

When he first came out of the closet as they put it, it was like he d been given a great big toy and he had never had a toy in his life. He was totally over the top. As soon as he got to the point of being able to talk freely about it then it was a case of.

Will you come and help me get certain items of clothing? that he hadn t been able to get, and once again I said fair enough, I don t mind helping you. Little did I know that I was just making matters a hundred times worse because when he got all the apparel all he wanted to do was put it on, more and more and more. And we were now at the point where he was to keep buying and wearing, and I couldn t cope. Then he wanted to go out, more and more he wanted to go out and there was no way I was going out with him dressed up. Isobel, p4.

Well, since I found out he feels that he is safe, he no longer hides the fact. He buys the most expensive, exquisite lingerie and insists on wearing it to bed. He has grown his hair long, lost weight, plucks his eyebrows, files his nails, wears perfume (He used to wear mine until I put my foot down). Joanna, p1.

After it came out, it snowballed. From not knowing about it to suddenly knowing about it I think the whole thing increased. He kept trying to make it sound like it was a small part of his life and he would only need to wear something of mine now and

again. I went to the attic and he had everything. He d spent a fortune. He had expensive shoes. He told me if I had gone out and bought something he would go out and buy the same thing. He had far too much stuff. It was ridiculous. I would buy one pair of white shoes for summer. He would go out and buy ten. It s like an obsession. They just can t get enough. I think they even forget half of what they ve got. Georgia, p10.

Once the wardrobe is satisfactory, the men wanted more.

And this is what I find so hard to understand, is that they do one thing and then once they ve got the courage up to do that, like go out to the shops or go out for an evening to a restaurant or something, then they ve got to do something else. And then they ve got to tell somebody else and then they ve got to involve somebody else. It seems as though it s almost dare-devil. They re enjoying the dressing-up but they ve got to have the Adrenaline rush with it. Isobel, p10.

Then he started playing games with his clients. He would wear earrings or long nails in the office and watch the reactions of clients. It looked like he was daring the client s to react. Any sign of noticing was pounced on with glee. He didn t seem to care that perhaps they might not come back again. Marylyn, p 13.

He puts on this pale, soft voice on the telephone and if someone should make the mistake thinking he s a woman on the phone, he keeps on about it for days. Vicky, group interview, p20.

4.9.3: It s a selfish thing

From the women s point of view, their partners were very self-centred. The world revolved around their needs and wants, affecting the relationship financially and emotionally.

I felt as if I had no role in the marriage. I didn t know what was left. (Husband) wanted to be the man in the business — my role in that was to do what I was told and to agree to all his decisions. (Femme name) wanted to be the woman and have the pleasant, exciting side of womanhood. That kind of didn t leave me with much. It left me with the dishes, the role of housekeeper, because he had taken all the good bits. Marylyn, p12.

Marylyn later compared her experiences to that of an incest survivor whose book she had read.

The feeling of being trapped and the betrayal of trust within the relationship was very much my experience, and that was the closest that I came to having that experience explained, It was something that I didn t invite into the relationship and once it was there my feelings about it in the relationship were ignored. Um . And also the distinct need to keep it a secret and not talking about it. Marylyn, p14.

The spending of limited financial resources caused conflict and resentment. The distribution of the couple s resources were not being spent on family commitments, or the woman s and man s needs and wants equitably.

I get mad that he spends so much on lingerie for himself when we are struggling to make ends meet. I can only afford Target

lingerie, yet I know he spends heaps on his lingerie. Joanna, p1.

And they re really selfish with money and all that. He did things like take \$2,000 and just blew it on stuff, while we were sitting without. And he thought nothing of it. Georgia, p8.

Time spent in cross-dressing resulted in other aspects of living being ignored or diminished.

Very selfish. What (femme name) wants, (femme name) gets, and bugger anybody else. Isobel, p13.

(husband) was in his absolute glory at the (support group). He had never been so happy. He was in this group of all these people, he was dressed to the nines and everybody was the same and they were all thinking that he was fine. So he was happy. He couldn t stop talking about it on the way home. I could feel flutterings of disconcertion in that what had I opened up here. Pandora s Box has got nothing to what we ve just started. Isobel, p5.

It s a lifestyle for men and to a very great extent you re excluded. (Husband) thought that I could buy him a lot of clothing and at home in the afternoons he could wander around the house in whatever you call it, dress. That hurt me tremendously. It s like being rejected in your own home, you just can t walk around your house. Cherie, p12.

All through, whenever I spoke of reactions or what the process was doing to me, his standard response was, Well, that s not what I mean, that s not what I intended, you CAN T feel like that. And I d think, Oh well, I can t feel that, I have to feel something else, and yet feelings can t be denied. Marylyn, p9.

Even if the woman involved herself with cross-dressing, the emotional expenditure was inequitable.

I can remember sitting in (support group) and there was all these men dressed as women and I m beginning to feel the freak. I m beginning to feel I shouldn t be there. They were looking at me. I was the one that was feeling very threatened, very alone. Never felt so alone in my life. Isobel, p5.

(husband) wanted me to buy him a nightie. I did buy the nightie for him though it hurt me, even bought a pair of shoes once that he badly wanted. I can t say I ever did any of these things from a feeling of wanting to do them, it was because I was feeling that I ve got to please my husband. Cherie, p11.

The pain of having to buy things for him, and he would stand back and I would be fumbling at the counter for things like bras and not knowing what the hell he really did want. And then coming away with a very dissatisfied customer. Vicky, p11.

He wanted to do all the housework and stuff. He tried to barter with me. He d say, I ll do all the ironing, all the housework if you ll just put up with this. But I couldn t bear to see him in all that stuff. Georgia, p8.

The reciprocity of the relationship changed. The women were expected to be compliant, supportive and nurturing, with little or no apparent reward.

Socially, we would never have friends to dinner without first saying to each other, should we invite so-and-so? Now I m told, someone is coming around, if that person is a cross-dresser, but if you don t like it I can cancel. Which is putting the onus on me to be a bitch saying I don t want them to come. That s manipulating I feel. I feel I m being manipulated. Isobel, p15.

I don't doubt that (husband) loves me, but I also don't think that he loves me in the way that a husband and wife is supposed to love people. I think that he sees me as a mother figure. He loves his mother. I think he sees me as a mother figure, as a provider as I have always been a provider in the family. Cherie, p6.

Cherie elaborated:

After he told me about the transvestism we decided to sit down and write what were our expectations in marriage. Some of the things he said was that he needed a family as a front so he could dress. He needed to have clothing available to him that wasn't available. He needed someone to get the clothes, or he needed a source of the clothing. And he also thought that I was manageable. And the other thing that he wanted me to do was if he ever died or if he fell over or something I could get rid of his dressing gear so that people wouldn't know. I was so hurt about those expectations that he wrote down. I still can't cope with these expectations because it wasn't what I went into marriage for. Cherie, p5.

When asked what had been gained since or by, their partners disclosure of transvestism, the women responded:

I can't see any gains, and I dispute those silly people who write in the paper or write in books that it is so good cos we swap dresses and now we buy make-up together and all that. Rubbish! If I wanted to do that I'd do it with my daughters. I don't take my son shopping. I don't want to take my husband make-up shopping either, and I won't. Other than somebody helps me with the housework now instead of the garden. I suppose there's got to be a positive, somewhere. Isobel, p25.

I don't see any benefits in my situation, other than he is great at interior design and art. Joanna, p2.

4.9.4: It s a matter of degree

Each woman found an invisible boundary that divided acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. For some that boundary differentiated between sexy and non-sexy images.

The type of clothes he wore affected me. I felt I could cope more if he wore something plain, like a twin set and pearls. But he would put on something tarty and that would make me scream inside because it became a sort of sexy thing — a sex thing — and I didn t want it to have anything to do with sex. I could have dealt with it easier if it didn t have anything to do with our sex life. Georgia, p9.

I didn t like him putting on nails. It was like he could do certain things, but not other things. It was like a trade-off. I didn t want him to shave any hair off his body because he was taking away more and more of the man. I hated him putting on the nails. I took all his nails and cut them up to bits. Georgia, p11.

He dresses quite openly. In moderation, I mean I think he dresses moderately. I think it s easier to accept him than if he goes overboard. I think he is considerate of me. Vicky, p8.

I share my drawers and everything you know, with him. Boobs, all those things. Providing there s no women s clothes around (in bed) I m quite happy to play the game. Dorothy, p5.

For others the boundary differentiated between a well dressed, passable woman and one who risked being humiliated, or causing the woman to be humiliated.

I wouldn t like to see him humiliated. And if I have some say in that then I can do that. Dorothy, group interview, p22.

And I said, (partner), if you re going to do something, do it well. If you re dressed like a woman, look like a woman. You ve got to work at it. So I taught him how to walk, how to talk, keep his knees together, all these sorts of things. Jean, group interview, p22.

The first time I went out with him cross-dressed was to a play and the play itself was about cross-dressing. This was the first time I had seen (Partner) cross-dressed and he was dressed like a tart, with high boots, fishnet stockings, short skirt, black wig, make-up going from his ears to his nose up to the eye brows, and I found that really difficult. And you haven t seen him for a while and you want to give him a kiss and then you see him, and to kiss this woman he was quite, not embarrassed but ill at ease. We didn t know how to act. Jean, p3.

It was Okay in the restaurant, but afterwards (partner) opened the car door for me and the ladies behind us just roared with laughter, and even as a child it has always bothered me to be laughed at. Jean, p5.

For some women it was important to them that they were not confronted with the femme self frequently.

Because his cross-dressing didn t confront me because he was living in a different house, and I wasn t confronted by it on a regular basis, it had a lessening effect on the relationship. He was concerned that if we lived together that him dressing would have been more confronting. Jean, p20.

They re very infrequent, They re not anything on a regular basis. Vicky, p8.

Women found it difficult if their partner did not care for his masculine self.

I have a really hard time getting (husband) to buy clothes for his male side. Vicky, group interview, p22.

(Husband) would not look after himself. He wouldn't shave for days. He wouldn't buy himself clothes and wore tatty clothes. I bought him some clothes to show him he didn't have to look like the conservative man. He then bought himself absolutely nothing from then on. So I thought if he doesn't care what he looks like, neither do I and I stopped buying his clothes. Marylyn, p 26.

4.9.5: Oh, give me a break!

There were times when the women just wanted some respite. Tolerance was gone and they wanted their partner gone, either temporarily or permanently, or they wanted to be gone themselves.

You find things to do away from your house so your house doesn't become a home. It's somewhere that you go now and again, somewhere where you keep your clothes. Somewhere where you try to keep your things away from your husband. Cherie, p12.

I sometimes wish he would play golf, it would get him out of the house sometimes. Cherie, group interview, p9.

Sometimes when I'm reading the paper and he leans over I can feel the muscles tightening up and I think to myself, for goodness sake, just go away. Vicky, group interview, p16.

I think, wouldn't it be lovely sometimes if he doesn't come home tonight. Wouldn't it be lovely, and I'll sit there and think about it. Cherie, group interview, p2.

It might be a terrible thing to admit, but sometimes I hope and pray that I might have just a few years on this earth on my own.
Vicky, group interview, p1.

4.9.6: Good friends

With all the emotional upheaval, the women still found comfort from their relationship with their partners.

I think of all the good things and as much as I cannot be intimate with him, we are still good friends. Joanna, p2.

Yet, when this wasn't going on it was lovely. We got on great. He was quite protective of me in other ways. I managed to get myself a job and I felt nervous about getting myself there, and the whole thing, and he bent over backwards to help me. He was very gentle, quite a gentle person. The hard part was, when he wasn't doing all this lying and womanising and transvestic stuff, we were very suited. Very happy. Georgia, p7.

I don't think I would ever change from thinking of (husband) as my best friend because we've been like that together all our life, or more of my life than any other time anyway. Isobel, p12.

It's given us a new start, a lot less wound up. So our sexual life improved, kind of unexpected and it's part of the secret between us. On the whole it's been good for us, mainly because he has great freedom from it. Dorothy, p17.

4.10: Theme 5: WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

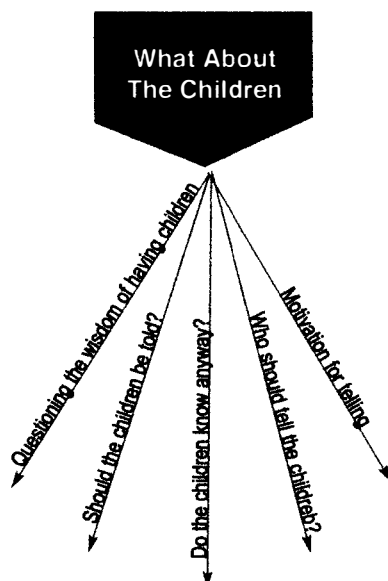


Figure 4.6

Even in the most stable family unit the dynamics and interactions between parents and their children are complex. Whether to tell the children of the transvestism, and if so how and when, was a large area of concern for the women. Each participant was aware of the differences in age, temperament and maturity of each child. Participants identified multiple facets of the dilemma, which are described under the following themes: questioning the wisdom of having children at all, should the children be told?, Do the children know anyway?, Who should tell? motivation for telling and consequences.

One of the complicating factors in the marriage was that there were children, still are children. At the time I became consciously aware of the cross-dressing the children were both

young. Whether to, or how to, tell the children was a dilemma.
Marylyn, p14.

4.10.1: Questioning the wisdom of having children

Underlying fears were about whether transvestism is in any way inheritable and/or the nature of the family environment that would be available for the child.

I just wished that he had confided in me before we were married and I probably would not have married him, furthermore I definitely would not have brought an innocent child into the world with he as father. Joanna, p1.

My daughter has never had a life. I found out when she was six and I feel sorry for her because she s never had a normal family life. And I would hate for it to be passed on through the genes, if it s genetic. Georgia, p12.

4.10.2: Should the children be told?

Concerns that faced the participants and their partners were whether the children should be told or not. The issue was complex. The age of the child had some bearing. Very young children were frequently considered too young to understand, or to maintain confidentiality. Advice not to tell older children either approaching or during adolescence for fear of disturbing the developing sexual identity of teenagers was considered. Fear of how the information would affect the child s emotional development was a prime concern in all situations, regardless of age of child.

I would love my children to know but I don't want them to have the hurt. Whether they would have the hurt that I have is another matter. Cherie, p20.

I know one day he will have to tell (daughter) and I fear for her. I have no idea what it will do to her. What the hell am I going to tell (daughter)? Joanna, p1.

The children were then in their pre-adolescent period and it was something we discussed with the counselor about whether to, or how to, tell the children. The advice we were given was that because they were in this pre-adolescent stage and dealing with their own sexuality and coming to terms with the changes occurring in their bodies, that this was not a good time to tell them. I could accept this reasoning in my head but the heart of the mother was saying, No, this is wrong, they need to know. Marylyn, p 14.

The issue can become further complicated when the children are from a previous marriage. Step-parenting has its own difficulties.

My youngest one knew nothing of it. I didn't want to tell her, she's very prim and proper. She's very into image. She gets very jealous of anyone who shows Mum attention, because she wants to be the main attention. She went through times of liking and disliking (partner) as a person. She was very young. I met (partner) when she was 14, she's 18 now. She's had a difficult time with her Dad and his relationships, so therefore I think she was being neutral with (partner). Not liking, but not especially disliking because she thought he was treating me Okay. Jean, p 14.

4.10.3: Do the children know anyway?

Children are very observant and pick up on the subtle and not so subtle verbal and non-verbal communication patterns between parents. Concern was voiced that the children already knew, however they had not been provided with any explanation or opportunity to talk how they were feeling.

But not being told and not knowing are two different things, and I have a strong feeling that the children knew and I think we did them the greatest disservice by not putting words to their feelings. They have learnt not to talk about such things. Marylyn, p14.

I look at my children, they are both gorgeous kids, and I love them both but I think they re both having relationship problems.

. I think they have problems with making lasting relationships or committing themselves to lasting relationships. You want to protect your children from everything. I wonder sometimes if they know and I was the only one that didn t know. I don t know that. Kids are very bright in these matters. I don t know. Cherie, p20.

4.10.4: Who should tell the children?

Most discussion about whether to tell the children or not was led by the women. When the issue of who should tell, the potential consequences for both the woman and the father had to be considered.

I would like to be able to tell the children. I run into problems with that because I think its (husband) s secret, not mine. But I also think he has made decisions that impact my life with the decision and some things that impacts my life to that extent should be shared. Cherie, p20.

and in fact if I took it upon myself to tell the children then I was taking responsibility for the relationship between the children and their father. Marylyn, p14.

4.10.5: Motivation for telling

The decision to tell or not to tell was driven by many motivations, some healthy, some not so healthy.

One motivation was to tell the children before they found out from another source such as seeing their father dressed en femme in public at restaurants or nightclubs, or hearing about it some other way.

He was determined to tell our son and he did. He rationalised it by saying if he accidentally saw him he would have been shocked. Isobel, p9.

He likes to go to (Hotel) to dance there and he was concerned that he might meet our daughter there. Dorothy, p8.

I told my daughter for a couple of reasons. One because she is so far away out there she feels we do cut her off from family and she would have been more hurt than anything else if she had found out later. Isobel, p10.

Concern for the emotional well being of the children was also considered.

They were being tossed around by the vibes in the air; hearing half conversations and arguments that stopped when they entered a room, and tears in the night. They were very much aware of it but they had nothing to hang on to, no reason, no explanations. Marylyn, p14.

Revengeful spite or anger was another motivation suggested by others for telling the children.

I was challenged about why I wanted to tell the children – was I actually thinking of telling the children because of spite or anger? I was feeling pretty angry at the time. I felt it wasn't the motive. I couldn't honestly say that perhaps it wasn't – so I didn't tell the kids. Marylyn, p 14.

4.11: Theme 6: CONSEQUENCES OF TELLING THE CHILDREN.

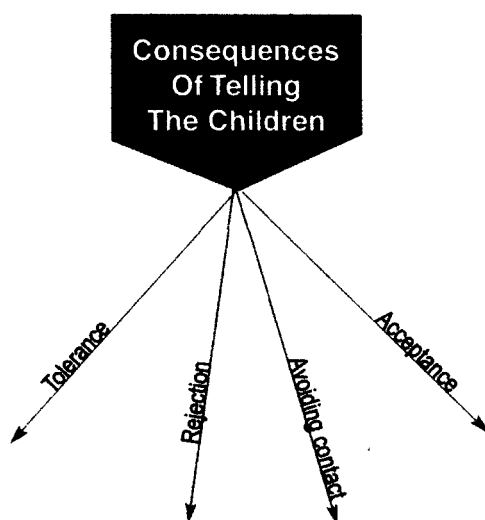


Figure 4.7

The consequences of telling were varied and depended on the age at which the children were told, whether they were living at home or not when they were told, other relationships they had and the manner of telling. There were consequences for both the woman and her partner. Children that had been told were either in their mid-teens or adults, all bar three living away from home.

They (the children) now know, that was accidental, not planned. We just weren't very fair to them. It's an ongoing story. They are happy to know their father but want absolutely nothing to do with (femme name). Marylyn, p16.

Themes address: acceptance, tolerance, avoiding contact, and rejection.

4.11.1: Acceptance.

Children who had experienced cross-dressing in other arenas were accepting.

(Older daughter) is a totally different person from (younger daughter), like day and night. (Older daughter) had been talking to me about one of her friends at university, that likes to once in a while dress as a woman, and he dresses beautifully, as she said, you wouldn't know that he wasn't. And I said to her, well that's for him to be complimented for, and she said The university students just accept this, no problem at all. Well, (older daughter) was so open with this that I said to her Well, (partner) does that and she said to me that she wasn't at all surprised when I told her because of his manners. Jean, p 16.

4.11.2: Avoiding contact

A more extreme response was to avoid any further contact.

(Younger daughter) didn't want to know. If he came in, she went to her room or went out. She didn't want to look at him and definitely didn't want to see (femme name). Jean, p16.

Adult children living away from home visited less frequently. For the women this meant that if they wanted to see the children more, they went to their children's home. For the partner it meant they saw less of their children.

I know that we see less of the children. My son used to come over often, but he hasn't been over for three or four months. One of my daughters who has been the most accepting of them all, can have a laugh and a joke about it but she's not comfortable if (husband) is dressed. And she certainly doesn't want her partner to see. So, if she knows her father is not working she'll ring up and say, Is Dad dressed today, or not? And if I say yes, she says Okay. Now whether that is a test as to whether they were going to come over, or not, she doesn't say, but they never come over. She never says, well, you can tell him to get undressed because we're coming over. She's never said that. So in her mind I think, if he's dressed, well then, she's not coming over, end of story. Isobel, p18.

If I want to see the children, I go to them. If they want to come over, they make sure it's when (husband) is at work. In effect it means I have to put myself out a bit more, but it doesn't mean I don't see them. It just means they don't come here as often as they did. Isobel, p18.

4.11.3: Rejection

Some children were initially very angry, threatening to revoke visiting rights to themselves and grandchildren. In effect it was an ultimatum to the mother to choose between her husband and her children.

We had a family conference. Oh Jesus. They were all lined up there, all the adults, and they were bloody angry. How dare you do that to us! What do you think you're playing? And the works! If you're going to do that we don't want to know you. All your children. So you're not going to have any access to your grandchildren. It was devastating, really devastating. I remember thinking, I sat on that chair thinking, I have to be free

of them, and they have to be free of me. We felt really bad about that because it affected me more badly than it would him and it was nothing to do with me. I had three weeks of real grief, real grief, and eventually the choice I had was to keep my partner or keep my children. Dorothy, p8.

4.11.4: Tolerance

Although not always the initial response, keeping communication open between children and parents can sometimes effect acceptance.

After three weeks I thought it can t get any worse. So over a month I rang them and talked to them and they ve come good, incredible as it seems. And I m very proud of them. It s as if it never happened. We ve all matured out of it. It s just wonderful, just wonderful. It s all worth it you know. Dorothy, p9.

On the whole, children were tolerant of the disclosure, with the proviso that the mother was not distressed and/or they did not have to see the femme self.

She seemed to manage it Okay, but she didn t want to see him dressed if it could be avoided. But if that s what he wanted to do that was fine. So long as I could handle it and I didn t get hurt she didn t mind. Isobel, p10.

4.12: Theme 7: IT'S ALL A BIG SECRET.

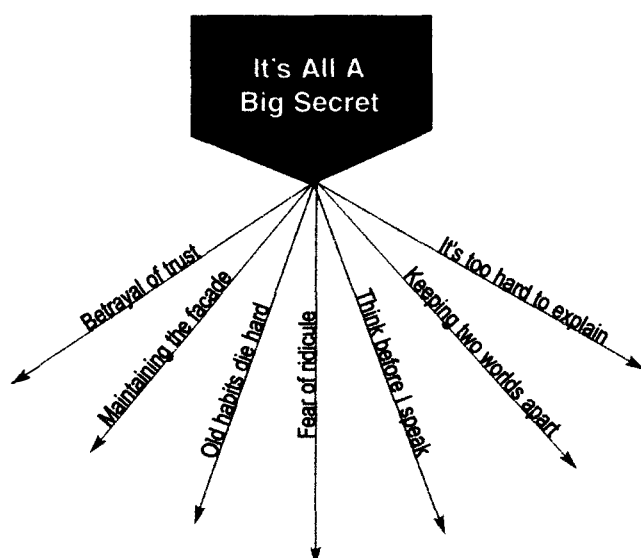


Figure 4.8

Transvestism carries with it a veil of secrecy. The cross-dressing is initially carried out in secret from the woman, sometimes for many years. Once the woman finds out she becomes embroiled in the secrecy. The husband wishes his actions to be secret from others. She fears negative social consequences for both herself and children, and her partner. Consequences of the secrecy are multifarious and far reaching.

Its like a stone in a pond, the ripple effect is enormous and you don't know. When you start down this road you don't know the effect its gonna have on the people, on their lives, on their emotions, on everything. Isobel, p23.

The wide ranging effects are evidenced by the seven sub themes: betrayal of trust, maintaining the façade, old habits die hard, fear of ridicule, think before I speak, keeping two worlds apart and its too hard to explain.

4.12.1: Betrayal of trust

Knowledge of someone's secret infers a responsibility on the knower to respect the confidential nature of the information. When the information is disclosed directly by the person, they are inviting collusion. Although knowledge of their partner's cross-dressing enabled the women to make sense of past events and was the key to taking control of their lives, it was also a burden that separated them from others.

It's (Husband)'s secret, it's not your secret. I didn't have anyone that I could talk to. You can hardly go to people who know your husband very well. (Husband) was involved in the community. Cherie, p14.

And I valued the trust that he gave me by telling me and I guess I also felt I would be betraying that trust if I sought help. Marylyn, p9.

And if people find out about it I would be supportive of him, and also now we have broken up with him there's no way I would harm him by telling people or causing trouble like that. Jean, p28.

I am always the one people run to when they want to talk about their troubles, but when I needed someone there was no-one that I could trust as I knew if this secret got out my husband would be ruined. Joanna, p2

I guess the hardest part of all this is keeping the secret. I would like to speak to my Mum, whom I am very close to, but I dare not. Joanna, p1.

4.12.2: Maintaining the fa ade

The need for secrecy went beyond keeping information about the cross-dressing confidential. There was an expectation that the relationship be seen to be perfect, even when the relationship was in dire trouble.

It was a fa ade, the perfect husband, happy wife, son, daughter, cat and dog — well two cats, in a pretty house with a garden. Many people said I was so fortunate to have such a life. If only they knew. Marylyn, p7.

I worked in the same place that (husband) worked. So of course I was there all day knowing this weird situation that here was my husband walking around — smart little fellow as I say, smoking a pipe and so on, and then coming home in the evening and saying, I think I will put on The Clothes. Sophie, p3.

Part of the devastation — while you re going through that, you re trying to do it while maintaining things as it was before. It isn t as though the world is saying, there, there dear, your spouse is dying. You re doing it and you are going through whilst pretending everything is the same. Cherie, group interview, p17.

4.12.3: Old habits die hard

Whilst the cross-dressing had been disclosed there were still many areas that remained a secret from the woman. The ongoing exclusion of the women caused them to ponder on what other secrets there might be.

Now I never said to him, where are you going? or, what do you do? it was sort of a closed book as far as I was concerned, because I didn t know how to handle it. Sophie, p3.

And if this is just one thing, how many other things are there that I don't know anything about. (Husband) will sit there and say none but I'll never know. Isobel, p9.

He would go out of an evening dressed, and would not come home until three or four in the morning. Where does anyone go at those hours? He would never give a clear answer and I gave up asking. It didn't stop me wondering. Marylyn, p7.

I think he possibly went to prostitutes. He had, has, got an interest in prostitution. And that was hard for me. There was no actual proof. You know the saying, innocent until proven guilty? That was the nightmare of living like that. Never knowing, just wondering. Georgia, p3.

4.12.4: Fear of ridicule

Information shared can never become secret again. Fear of exposure was related to the unknown nature of the reactions of others. Both women and partners felt that any reaction was likely to be negative, at best neutral.

The women were concerned for themselves,

He got me to the (Gay meeting place) one night and I thought, Oh, if my colleagues could see me now! These (people) at (work) think I'm pretty strict and not young. They see you as being this ancient, old bitch, you know. And I'm sitting in the (Gay meeting place) with a cross-dresser. Their eyes would pop out of their head. Jean, p 33.

I was uncomfortable because I was worried I would meet somebody who I knew. So I found that difficult. In fact we've got to the point that I just don't go out in public with him cross-dressed. I'll go to (private) parties with him cross-dressed, to his cross-dressing parties, I'm happy to do that. Jean, p4.

I have a few close friends but I would never disclose the fact that I am living with a transvestite. Joanna, p1.

For their partners,

You can't invite people to your house, because you don't know what's happening in your house. (husband) gets really annoyed. I have a cleaner and he hates it. He's afraid she'll find something. Cherie, group interview, p10.

For them both, and others by association.

There were two papers, called The Truth, and The Mirror, weeklies in Perth. And they would go to the divorce courts and if there was anything juicy as they called it would be (printed). They were Rags!! That's how they made their living, and so the fact that you could possibly be in that was absolutely horrifying. Sophie, p7.

4.12.5: Think before I speak

The responsibility for keeping the secret is constant and affects daily interactions with other people. The women began to filter what they were saying before speaking to avoid accidental disclosure, even avoiding social contact with others.

I have developed a wariness in relationships with other people. You have to be very careful. You have to be careful that you don't let things slip that you don't want other people to know about. That you don't say something you didn't mean to. One day at work I was talking to (husband) on the phone, and I said, are you (husband) or (femme name)? and I am at work and people standing near. That's the sort of mistake you can make. So easy. Isobel, p23.

And another time I used the femme names of some people, but the couple we were talking to didn't pick up on it. And then you get sort of stilted. You're not relaxed and free like you normally are. It does affect you in a lot of ways. Isobel, p23.

I began using being too busy at work as an excuse to avoid family gatherings. It was just too hard to share our activities, having to think and edit everything I said in case I slipped up. Marylyn, p18.

4.12.6: Keeping two worlds apart

On occasion it became necessary to refuse to disclose seemingly innocent information or state an outright lie, in order to keep the secret.

This is what annoys me. I'm now making up stories to cover, and I don't want to do that and I've never done that before. Isobel, p23.

Just yesterday somebody organised something and it was a commitment for me today and I said I couldn't and they asked why. So I said I was going to give a hand for somebody doing their thesis and they said, oh, what's it about? And they kept giving me a hard time and I knew what was coming so I just sat there and he said, well just tell me if I'm ready to shut up and just not know. All right he said, got your message. Jean, group interview, p7.

We told some friend of ours we were going to see (name of couple). These friends know near enough all our friends. And they said, (name of couple)? We don't know them. And we said, oh, no, no, no. Friends from way back. And just left it at that. But we could see the sort of quizzical look. And you're lying to people and they're your best friends. And you think, is this all worth it? Isobel, p24.

4.12.7: It's too hard to explain

Because little is commonly known about transvestism, the difficulty of trying to explain seemed greater than the benefits of disclosure, and a threat to privacy and personal dignity.

My family certainly never came across anything like this, and I was a very private person. How could I possibly go back to my people? My family was all very straight up, ordinary, suburban people. How would you say to them, look, I've come across this problem that my husband wants to dress like a woman. They would have locked me up. And apart from that, it was perhaps pride. I had a childhood friend, she wouldn't have known what I was talking about — so I kept it to myself. Sophie, p2.

And it is the fact that you can't talk about something, and as I've said I have friends now that I have had for 20, 30 years who have not the slightest idea of my earlier experience. What do you do when you meet them? Oh, I had this terrible early life — they still wouldn't know, those women in their comfortable relationships, they wouldn't know. Sophie, p8.

Sometimes he has to put his make-up on in the morning and he does it in the kitchen. And I'll say, could you put all that away? and he says, Why? because when he does it in the evening I don't care because I'm in the other room. I said, would you please put it away and he wouldn't so I stuck it in the other room. He was quite offended when I came back. I said, do you know why? So I don't have to explain to any idiots who come in. I don't want to explain to idiots. Dorothy, group interview, p7.

4.13: Theme 8: IS THERE NO-ONE TO HELP ME?

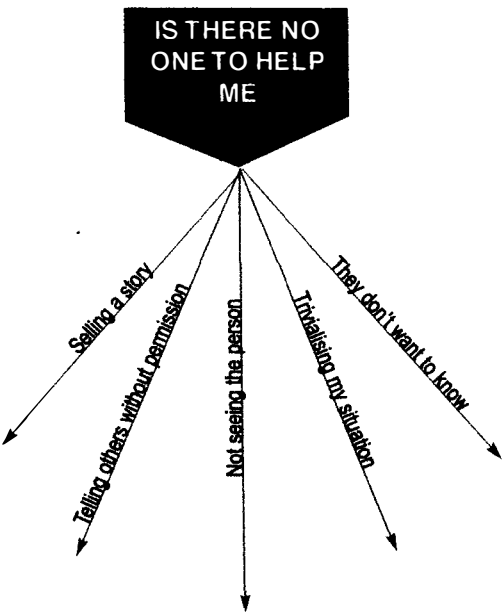


Figure 4.9

Divulging secret, intimate and private information required serious thought and consideration. The women reached the end of tolerance and compassion before even considering the action. For some women this had meant that they had carried and coped with the cross-dressing for up to six years before seeking the support of someone they trusted. The women turned initially to friends, family – usually mother or sister, General Practitioners or counselors and psychologists. Later sources of support came from the support group for transvestites and other wives and partners of transvestites.

The women sought recognition of their distress and guidance on how to proceed and improve their situation, however they did not always find it.

I guess I needed someone to say 'hey, that's how you're feeling, that's O.K.' um... and that rarely happened. Even when

I decided to — rather than keep things secret, which was (husband) s wish — to get help, it wasn t helpful. I told a few people who I thought were friends, or who I thought could help, and they got hooked into the cross-dressing and sort of saw me as an afterthought. So in the end I basically gave up talking to people which denied me to access to support that I needed. Marylyn, p10.

Unhelpful advice or lack of support came in many forms as described by the sub themes I don t want to know, trivialising my situation, not seeing the person, telling others without permission, and selling a story.

4.13.1: They don t want to know

Women who chose to speak with another, did so hoping and believing that the person/s were open minded and sensitive. Not all confidantes were able to meet these expectations. When this happened the woman felt even more isolated and alone.

The male friend just didn t want to know, took one look and walked out the door, didn t want to know anything about it. The female friend was very supportive of me, couldn t imagine that (husband) would do this, couldn t see him doing it, and said as long as she never saw him doing it she d try and forget that he ever did. So where they can do that, they can put it under the carpet and forget that it ever existed, you can t when you live with him. Isobel, p8.

The only person I could think (to talk to was) the matron of a hospital. Why I thought of that I can t even recall, but her name came up. She didn t know what the hell I was talking about. I don t think I did myself really. And I said, I don t know what to

do. What do you advise? and she was very vague. Poor woman, probably wondered what this woman was talking about. Sophie, p5.

4.13.2: Trivialising my situation

The women approached professionals trusting them to be at the least empathetic, and hopefully so provide a means to move from their distress. When this did not occur the result was an exacerbation of self blame and/or anger.

What my doctor said was, well, why can t you just let him dress up and go to bed and improve your sex life? They don t know what they re talking about. Georgia, p8.

We even went to a counselor when I found the dress. She had me putting all these notes on the fridge because I had a problem snooping. Georgia, p6.

I eventually gathered together my determination and went to a lawyer for information and advice. He asked why I was considering separation and although I was a bit taken aback I answered. He said, Is that all? Can t you just shut your eyes? It was as if I was making this enormous decision based on a trivial situation. When I said no, he just shrugged his shoulders. Marylyn, p17.

4.13.3: Not seeing the person

Human beings are fallible and respond to situations through the filters of experience and learning. People who focussed on the behaviour of the cross-dressing partner and/or sought to promote relationship filtered out

the personal experience of the woman. This also increased the women's sense of isolation.

The psychiatrist was not very helpful. I mean, he focussed on the cross-dressing. He didn't see me. I guess he got hooked into the illness and I didn't feel any support. Marylyn, p7.

I went to the (support group), I think on two occasions and each occasion 1 or 2 wives were there and certainly I was put in contact with 1 wife, which I visited. I wanted help to sort out how I was feeling and to again see me — not to see the marriage or the cross-dresser — and so I didn't find that terribly helpful. If anything it just exacerbated the sense of failure to manage and not coping. Marylyn, p8.

They (the family) were laughing. I was hysterical. They're not bad people. They thought it was kind of funny. They imagined him all dressed up and they thought it was funny. I was absolutely mortified. Georgia, p3.

I walked away from my church. They had very strong views on the evil of homosexuality and transvestism. The minister was very vocal in his sermons and I couldn't put up with it. Cherie, p18.

4.13.4: Telling others without permission

Being given information does not come with an automatic right to share that information with others. When information about their relationship was spread without permission, the women felt an increased loss of control.

(when I found out about the cross-dressing) I did the worst thing I could have done — I phoned my mother. She wasn't in so I phoned my sister who immediately told everyone. Before I had

time to deal with it myself it was all around the family. Georgia, p3.

4.13.5: Selling a story

Finding other women who were also in relationship with a transvestite was a great relief. However, speaking with them was not always helpful. Incongruent body language or poor communication skills resulted in the woman seeking help receiving mixed and/or negative messages. Sometimes the women who were providing advice and counsel were in need of help themselves.

A partner was there and she tried very hard to talk about her feelings towards it all with me, but she was so nervous, she was making me a bag of nerves. For all she was saying to me I couldn't believe a lot of it because I thought, you're no more comfortable than I am, you're telling yourself you are but you're not. So I felt dreadfully alone and scared. Isobel, p5.

I went to the support group, I think on two occasions and each occasion 1 or 2 wives were there and certainly the support group put me in contact with 1 wife, which I visited. I guess the wives that were there were the ones that were standing by their man -or woman- and being committed to the marriage. I wanted help to sort out how I was feeling and to again see me — not to see the marriage or the crossdresser — and so I didn't find that terribly helpful. If anything it just exacerbated the sense of failure to manage and not coping. Marylyn, p11.

4.13: Theme 9: AT LAST SOMEONE UNDERSTANDS

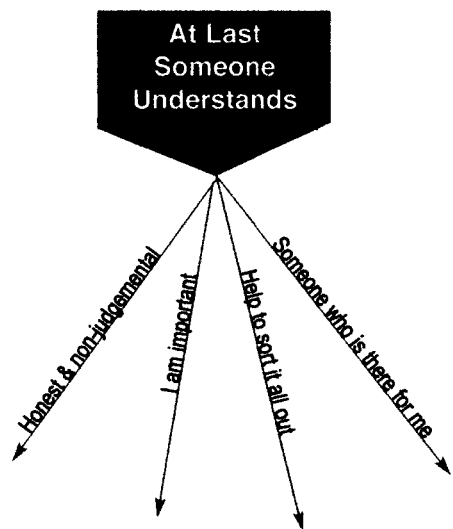


Figure 4.10

Finding the right information and support eases the women's burden. It is also the catalyst that empowers the women to make decisions and take some control of their lives.

I personally think God sent me an angel. This woman came down to (town) to work for a week. And one night over dinner she told me her story. Wow. I couldn't believe it because it was my story. But I didn't say anything. But she came back two weeks later and I told her. I think without that I wouldn't have got through that anger period. It was such a relief to have someone to talk to. Who could just talk about how you felt. Who wasn't condemning you. Who wasn't condemning of (husband) either. It was just someone there. Someone who was sharing. Someone who knew. Then I think I got into ways of probably looking at the problem a bit better. Cherie, p15.

Aspects of helpful support were: honest and non-judgmental, I am important, help to sort it out, someone who is there for me.

4.13.1: Honest and non-judgmental

People who were honest enough to admit lack of experience or knowledge were valued because they didn't trivialise the situation, nor did they hide behind generalisations, leaving the woman's dignity intact.

It got harder and harder and eventually I did go to my General Practitioner who was actually quite wonderful. Freaked out, but wonderful. He had never had to deal with that sort of situation, and he simply said, Its bigger than me, and gave me a referral to a psychiatrist. He then left me to pull myself together and showed me how to leave the back way so that I didn't have to parade my sodden face through the waiting room. Marylyn, p7.

I went to our local doctor. She was shocked at first. She said, of all people. But she didn't make any moral judgement, she was very open and she gave me a lot of support. And gave me a couple of weeks off work, which I needed at the time. Isobel, p8.

4.13.2: I am important

People who kept the focus on the woman, refusing to be deflected, helped the return of self esteem.

The counselor's first words to me were, how long do you think you're going to be able to hold up? I said I had decided to give it at least three months until I made any decisions one way or another. She said, well, I hope you enjoy your breakdown then, because that's exactly what you'll do. Isobel, p7.

That's when I saw my GP and she asked me straight, how do you feel about yourself? and I said, what do you mean, feel about yourself, I'm worried about (husband). And she said, no, you are more important to me at the moment, how are you?

And it sort of brought me up with a shake. Somebody cares about me. I m real, I m human again. Isobel, p19.

The (support group) as a whole is very, very inviting and very caring. I met (man s name) and I ll give him top marks because that night he was so understanding, and I needed someone who was understanding. Isobel, p4.

4.14.4: Help to sort it all out

The women needed to separate the real issues from the emotion. Help to look at their situation from different perspectives allowed them to regain control.

I eventually went to the women s centre after phoning them in desperation one day. After months of counseling I came to realise that this was not my problem. Joanna, p2.

And (the doctor) had a long talk with me and she said, look, its nothing, put it down, put it into the perspective it should be. And I started to look at myself again, as somebody who had been hurt and betrayed and lost their faith in one person, but, hey, stop beating yourself with a bat lady, because you didn t start this. Isobel, p19.

During counseling it came very, very clear that (husband) s involvement in counseling was not to work on the relationship but to get Marylyn used to being married to a cross-dresser. So his commitment was to do whatever was needed to help me do that, with the clear expectation that that was going to be the end result. And it became clearer and clearer that I couldn t meet that expectation. The counselor said why do you bother? She actually gave me the courage and the strategies to leave. Marylyn, p9.

Then I met a person, a man. He was going through his own very difficult period. And he was a rock. And I think that gave me the realisation that this was just going to go on and on and on, and that it was getting more and more difficult. Sophie, p5.

One of the books that I found really helpful to me was this co-dependency book. I see (husband) being addicted to his cross-dressing, that if you are married to someone who is addicted to something you are part of the problem and I have found out that I am a co-addictive to cross-dressing. And that has been really great. It has been great that I have learnt that because I can correct it, which before I knew about the cross-dressing, even though I tried very hard to stop the conflict, there didn't appear to be any way that I could stop it. Cherie, p15.

4.14.5: Someone who is there for me

A place of emotional safety allowed the women to fall apart, trusting that someone was there to help put them back together, and still love them afterwards.

I can talk to him. He just sort of turns off and listens. I told him not to advise me. I said, don't advise, I don't want to know how to solve all these problems, because you can't solve them for me. Just listen. And that's what he did. Jean, p17.

And then I confided in two very good friends of mine who supported me and held me. They didn't understand completely but they just held me; and they literally held me together. Marylyn, p9.

I decided it was time to go back to church and I went back to an Anglican Church. I think that the Anglican Communion service has been part of my healing. Just sitting. Letting the words flow over me. Cherie, p18.

Others let the women put their relationship difficulties aside for a time so that the rest of their lives could function.

As much as I d rather the children hadn t been told, in another way I glad they now know, because I do have that outlet. Others have been helpful, but there s only so much you can say when they don t know the people, when you don t know the person. And they can t have a laugh with me about certain things, or a real gripe about something else. They have been very supportive. Isobel, p29.

I went to my mother and she said, surely there must be some way of patching it up. And I did my best to explain — with signal failure. But my mother was a wonderful, wonderful lady, and she knew me, and I was her youngest daughter and she loved me dearly and she said, well, even though this is all very peculiar, we will stand together. Sophie, p6.

My daughter came home. I hadn t really seen her for a long time. She came home and had matured a bit and suddenly I was in the next generation. She was looking after me. And for about four weeks that was the most wonderful experience because I was being cared for rather than being manipulated. It was just wonderful. I had those four weeks of her just being there for me. I think it was helpful for her at the time and she probably doesn t even know what she did but it was helpful. Cherie, p18.

4.15: Theme 10: GETTING THROUGH THE DAY

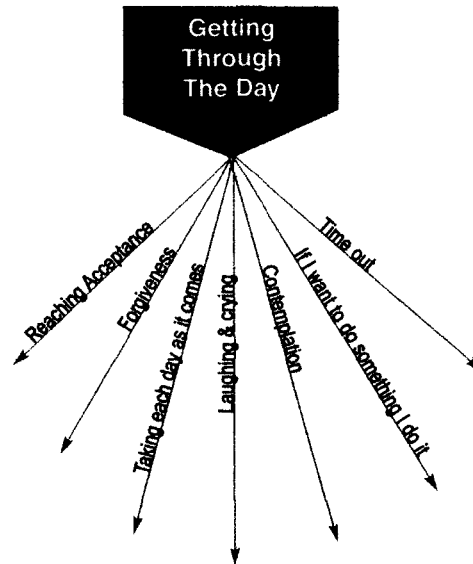


Figure 4.11

The women described strategies and methods of coping that enabled themselves to move through their days. These methods stemmed from an innate self of self efficacy and a growing understanding that the only part of the situation over which they had some control was themselves.

When I found that it was getting more messy all the time I thought it must be partly me, or some lack in me. I wept copious tears, having to manage it by myself and thinking that I had to manage it by myself. I gradually felt that I was using up valuable energy in weeping I was gradually realising there was not much point in me crying and wiping my eyes and crying again. So I thought, 'there's no point keeping on like that, manage it a better way. Do something about it.' Sophie, p9.

The women identified reasoning and action patterns that helped them cope.

Themes included: time out, if I want to do something I do it, contemplation, laughing and crying, taking each day as it comes, forgiveness, and reaching acceptance.

4.15.1: Time out

Engagement in challenging, rewarding activities away from the home allowed the women to put their unsatisfying relationship aside for a time.

The time out allowed their emotional energy levels to be restored.

I had an excellent job that was really involving all of my energies and took my mind off the transvestism for part of the day, gave me an escape so it wasn't so intense. Cherie, p11.

I decided that if others could return to study at a mature age, why couldn't I? I applied for and was accepted into University. Joanna, p2.

I spent a lot of time travelling. I went to lots of conferences. I went away. Sometimes I just had to because the tension got just too bad. Cherie, p13.

Physical activity such as walking also took the women temporarily away from the home. It also provided a positive outlook for the built up frustration, anger and despair.

So on the whole I dealt with it by walking — I lost a lot of weight — walking a lot. Cherie, p16.

4.15.2: If I want to do something, I do it

Most women had spent their committed relationship considering the well being of the whole family unit rather than thinking of personal needs. Finding the courage to make decisions and act on them in their own self interest built self esteem.

I find increasingly the need to make a social life of my own because (husband) s comfort zone is his home. Vicky, p9.

I am starting to live my life for me instead of my life revolving around (husband), which it has done for thirty odd years. Now, if I want to do something I do it. Isobel, p13.

4.15.3: Contemplation

Being quiet and still, looking inwards, also provided periods of respite and opportunity to reflect on the situation.

Sitting in contemplation a lot. Looking at what things meant in the light of this transvestism. Cherie, p16.

I m counting blessings still. I m counting the fact that the kids now seem to be OK, we could have lost them completely. They haven t been put in the position of making choices and hopefully never will be. Isobel, p25.

We meditate a lot. We meditate together and practice yoga together. Dorothy, p13.

I m a great believer in there s a meaning for everything that we do. What it is at the moment I have not got a clue, but somewhere, something s going to slot into place and I m going to know why this has all happened. Isobel, p25.

4.15.4: Laughing and crying

Finding something to laugh about in any given situation helps relieve tension and find a healthier perspective. Crying is also a release of inner tensions.

I shed tears until there were no more tears to shed. Vicky, p6.

We do a lot of laughing. You know the tension goes out with the laughter, it s quite good. Dorothy, p7.

Cherie: Someone has to clean them (clothes) out after his death. Have a little fire out the back. If it was the fire season in (town) you d have the fire brigade up there coming to put it out.

Vicky: I can just see them, Don t ruin that. I ll have that. Group interview, p23.

4.15.5: Taking each day as it comes

During those times when the whole situation seemed overwhelming, the women resorted to the most basic of coping skills — concentrating all energy on the current moment, in order to get to the end of the day. This strategy ensured survival, and for some an opportunity to find satisfaction and pleasure.

I go through each day bit by bit and step by step. I can t look further than the next day. If I did I would get so emotionally upset I don t think I would care to go down that path. Isobel, p25.

Caring and looking after (husband) as he does me. And providing a stable home for him. Which, of course, he does for me. Vicky, p12.

4.15.6: Forgiveness

The ability to forgive was not a common experience for the women. However, for those who could forgiveness enabled them to reach beyond the anger and use their emotional energies to make changes that met their needs.

When I forgave him I forgave him because my Bible told me I had to forgive him. However, I discovered that he is no different for me forgiving him but I am a great deal different, and it was the gate that got me on the road to mending. Cherie, p22.

4.15.7: Reaching acceptance

Acceptance is a point where both head and heart comprehend that their partner is a transvestite and they will always be. Reaching the point of acceptance is a freeing experience.

I gave up trying to understand why he was a transvestite. Trying to understand the why meant that I was looking for some sort of cure, or expectation he would change. I don't try to understand why his hair is curly, it just is. A transvestite is something he is. That freed up so much energy to move forward and allowed me to change. Marylyn, p18.

I'm over here and he's over there. He's got to answer to his God for what he does but I think before I felt I had the responsibility for that. So now I feel that my life is my life and I'm responsible for my life and my life only. So I suppose I untangled myself from (husband). Cherie, p16.

Acceptance can be misinterpreted as agreement to participate or permission to cross-dress by the partner.

I am accepting that (Husband) is a transvestite. I don't think (husband) has accepted that I am accepting that at the moment. He thinks that that means I am going to let him do it all the time. And he often thinks that I will make a decision that he is allowed to do it. That's not acceptance. I've accepted him. That's him and that is what he is going to do. Cherie, p19.

4.16: Theme 11: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

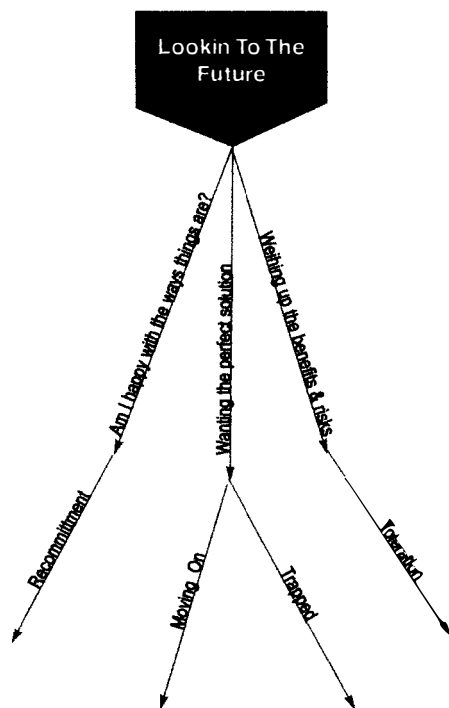


Figure 4.12

The gaining of some objectivity allowed the women to look forward to the future. This was a gradual process explained by the sub themes; Am I happy the way things are?, weighing up the benefits and risks and wanting

the perfect solution and resulted in resolution of the conflict within the relationship as described in the sub themes Re-commitment, Toleration, Trapped and Moving on.

These are the things I have to face now, because I accept that he is a transvestite and that this is going to be in my opinion for the rest of his life. It s going to make a difference to how I view the rest of my life. I don t want to live in a house where we walk around and around each other. I can t see that that is great for me in the future. Cherie, p19.

The point at which the pendulum came to rest directly related to the decision that the women made about her plans for the future relationship with her husband/partner. For some women the pendulum rested in a position and then moved, perhaps several times before the final decision was made. For others the pendulum is still moving, not yet reaching a point of stability. These decision points are described in the related sub themes: re-commitment, toleration, trapped and moving on.

4.16.1: Am I happy the way things are?

Having accepted that their partner was a transvestite and that his behaviour was not going to change, and that the expectation that the woman should change was unreasonable, the women then faced the prospect of continuing living as they were currently for the rest of their life.

So it comes down to the big decision whether I can live with it for the rest of my life. At the moment the answer is no. If things change, or they get better, or more in control, I don t know. If I

sit here now, and I look at the next twenty years of living with (femme name), no, I can't do that. Isobel, p14.

I have no idea what I will do when I finish my degree. I had planned to leave him, and start a new life with daughter, but as the time gets close I am more uncertain. Joanna, p2.

4.16.2: Re-commitment

If the decision is yes, they can live with things the way they are there is a conscious re-commitment to the relationship. Dorothy has been able to make a re-commitment to her relationship with her husband. The re-commitment stems from a belief that the relationship is sufficiently reciprocal to work through the challenges. There is a definite awareness that the woman is in a different relationship, not just a continuation of the previous relationship with their husband/partner.

It took me about I suppose about two months to even think about a second relationship again. Dorothy, p5.

Another factor is a belief that the couple was meant to be together.

I've always been aware that I never owned him. I've always said that so if he ever wanted to go, he could go. Because it's like that he's always stuck around. A lot of hard work, emotional stuff, all the stuff you go through in life. I'm coming through to the end of it now. When you are a seeker you have to find a path in the end. That's where we're going I guess. I guess these are the beginnings of all our lives, you know. Dorothy, p12.

An awareness of benefits to the relationship, positive outcomes for the woman and a demonstrated willingness by the husband to make

adjustments in his behaviour to accommodate the woman's needs made re-commitment possible.

It's given us a new start, a lot less wound up. So our sexual life improved, kind of unexpected and it's part of the secret between us. On the whole it's been good for us, mainly because he has great freedom from it. Dorothy, p17.

I've never left him behind. Sometimes I'll say, up you get, that's it, get up. We've done a lot together and my daughters, who were totally shocked by it all, they've accepted if they want me they need him as well, because he's a good grandfather. Dorothy, p19.

If re-commitment is not possible the women continued to work through the decision making process.

4.16.3: Weighing up the benefits and risks

If the current situation is not bearable the women then look at other options open to them and weigh up the benefits and risks compared to their current situation. It is a complex set of emotional, physical, social and financial factors. Isobel and Sophie explained the dilemmas.

Although I am not one hundred per cent happy, would I be any happier with what I've got, or with something else? Are you going from the frying pan into the fire? Or is peace of mind worth being lonely? It's a big question, a big decision. Isobel, p16.

You look at your friends and you say, fine, they're my friends and they will be supportive and the rest of it but they've all got their lives to lead, and a single person doesn't fit in with them.

It s like a couple of friends of ours. She travels a lot. Now at first we used to invite him over quite a bit. As months have gone on we think less and less of him on his own. Isobel, p16.

Somebody said to me just look on it as individuals living together, which is all very well if you haven t been married to somebody for nearly thirty-four years and you just go and live with them. And I would still have to deal with (femme name). And (femme name) is the third person in the triangle I don t like. Isobel, p12

After five years I realised my health was so cracking up that I wouldn t be able to deal with this any more. How will I deal with this? How will I cope? And you just didn t say, oh, I will leave. You couldn t do that. I couldn t have supported myself. I couldn t go back to my mother and family. Well, it was just totally unthinkable. So I was in this situation where I didn t know what to do. Sophie, p4.

4.16.4: Toleration

If the decision was that the current situation was better than any potential situation the women stay in the relationship and tolerate the situation. The decision does not mean that the woman accepts the cross-dressing, or find it any less distressing. There was a calculated evaluation of the benefits of staying against the potential risks and benefits of leaving. It is a conscious decision to do the very best within the marriage to ensure the comfort and well being of the whole family. Vicky reached this point, establishing a relationship akin to a brother-sister relationship.

As far as I m concerned I have no regrets. I don t think there was, I never had any choice really, and I made the best of that choice. Vicky, p14.

At the moment we re on a very even keel, put it that way. A very even keel. There are times when we disagree but then that happens in most marriages. Vicky, p10.

Well, I don t go short of anything. It s nice to have someone to talk to, someone to wag their tail when you come in. It s nice to have someone in the morning to say, Hello, (husband), or if one of us is sick for someone to say, are you alright? It s nice to watch a television programme together. It s nice to share topics in the paper, or to come in and tell each other what we ve done and where we ve been. Vicky, p12.

I would never go out without having seen that there s a meal, something for his mid-day and see that there s cake for his mid-morning tea, see that he s got clean clothes and clean sheets and all the rest of it. I get pleasure from making a home. Vicky, p13.

4.16.5: Wanting the perfect solution

Having decided that the current situation was not acceptable, the women were faced with separation from their husbands or partners. Attention was directed toward finding a solution that created the greatest gains whilst minimising the hurt to themselves and others. The women sought the ideal solution where both man and woman agree to separate, and remain friends. The welfare of the partner is also of concern.

I feel that if we do separate, or anything like that happens, we ve got both be able to handle it. Isobel, p26.

I fear that if I left him he would commit suicide, or have a nervous break down. Joanna, p2.

When I look at it I suppose out of the two of us, if we were to separate at all, (husband) would probably have the harder time. Whether I could put him in the situation of being that unhappy, I don't know. Probably I would chicken out at the last minute, that's the normal way I go. Isobel, p13.

Finding an acceptable reason to leave was a necessary, but usually an unforthcoming part of the perfect solution. The need for secrecy extended to the need to protect the man from public exposure at separation. However, the woman also wanted to avoid being seen as the guilty party in a situation she considered not of her choosing.

Should we just say, Okay, this is what I want, for him to not be here, but I don't have to wait until he dies, why can't I just go? Cherie, group interview p2.

I'd like it if he was a womaniser then I could say, that's it, and tell him to leave. I say these things but if I really wanted to leave right now, I could. I don't have to wait. I just wish he'd give me an acceptable reason. There's no way I can say I'm leaving husband because he's a transvestite. Cherie, group interview, p9.

I wished that he were gay, I wished for him to want to become a woman because then I could be free. Then I wished he would hit me so that I could leave and have a comprehensible reason for leaving. Marylyn, p20.

4.16.6: Trapped

If a mutual decision to finish the marriage cannot be reached, or the husband does not provide an understandable reason for the separation,

the woman has two choices. The first is to stay trapped in the relationship. The sense of being trapped is a result of being in a relationship that is not meeting the needs of the woman whilst not being able to leave, or unwilling to leave. Women feel trapped for economic reasons such as approaching retirement and closely intertwined financial affairs, or social reasons such as seeking to protect themselves and their partner from exposure to ridicule or pity. Spiritual reasons such as remaining faithful to their vows of marriage, sense of loyalty and responsibility to family were also expressed.

Feeling trapped extends to resentment for lack of choice at the beginning of the marriage, an unwillingness to make the final decision to leave, hope that the decision will be made by someone else, or the situation will change sufficiently to become tolerable.

My experience has left me deeply hurt, hurt to such an extent that if I ever leave my husband there will never be another person apart from my daughter in my life ever again. It has left me unable to trust because the one I trusted deceived me.
Joanna, p2.

I wouldn't wish that on anyone. Because it must be hard for them, let alone their partners. To me it's just one big mess when that happens to someone. As far as I'm concerned they should stay single, or they should let you know. You should never, ever have to go twenty years with someone, create a life and then get that thrust on you, it's just not fair. It's just not fair. Georgia, p12.

4.16.7: Moving on

The final choice, that is to leave the marriage or relationship and move on, is taken neither lightly nor quickly. Women have usually gone through periods of time at each of the previous stages before finally leaving. The length of time varied from two to ten years since the initial disclosure of cross-dressing. Moving on came in several different forms: separation and divorce, separation without divorce or remaining married and living in the same house but living separate lives. The essential element of moving on reflected the woman taking her own identity.

So in 1941 I bit the bullet and I sort of said to him, I can't deal with this anymore unless you try to get help. It was getting very fragmented. We were starting to resent each other. My idea was to him, unless you get help and find out whether you can do something about it, or you must make a choice. And he said he wasn't going to make a choice. So I packed my bag and went. Sophie, p5.

So I went to court and the Judge said to me, Are you sure? Are you sure about this? Are you sure, after five years? which is a laugh now, isn't it? And I said, and I'll always remember it, Definitely! And he said. You have no thoughts about it? Definitely! and so that was that. And I never, ever met my husband again. Saw him sometimes in the distance, but that was it. Sophie, p8.

Moving on has both positive and negative consequences. The grieving process begins again. There is denial.

I can't even say it yet, that I have left him. Georgia, p7.

Further periods of anger are experienced.

I think, because I m older, and I do enjoy a bit of spice in my life, (Partner) had that spice. I thought (partner) would never be boring, but it was not to be. I just wanted to be special in his life and if being special meant accepting his quirks then that s how it would be. Then he lied and cheated on me. From an honest beginning it had a lying, deceitful end. I am a lot wiser now. Jean, p33.

Then there was depression

And then you feel bad because you can t live with it. You can t win in any way . I just feel there ought to be more support and help for the partners. The emphasis is on them. What about us? Here I am, nearly forty years old. I stayed at home he built his career. Here I am, got to get out there, support myself and my daughter and its all frightening. Georgia, p12.

Divorce and separation still carries a stigma.

The divorce was another milestone. Nobody got divorced (fifty years ago). You didn t do that. Sophie, p7.

I mean, you go through the whole trauma of a separation and you go out with the mob, and they re all separated and their reasons are different. And they ask, are you the one that left? and you say yes and then you want to explain because you feel I m not some sort of bimbo that left with another man. Georgia, p12.

You quickly find out who your real friends are after separation. People who I thought would have known me well enough that I must have had a good reason for leaving after all those years

were not sympathetic and demanded to know why. I told them to go and ask (husband). Marylyn, p6.

Friends and acquaintances created explanations that fitted the level of community understanding.

And then they said, Sophie was alright until this man came along, it must have been him. And so they blamed him. He at that stage was perfectly decent and as I say, honourable, a funny word to use these days. They could think that it could only be for one thing that I would leave because he (husband) was such a nice little man. Sophie, p6.

The grieving does pass and then it is time to make the best of the future.

Initially this is a frightening thought.

I m frightened to be on my own. I just don t think I deserved it, you know. I think I should have been given a choice. Georgia, p7.

As confidence grows, so too does self esteem and hope for the future.

I still feel that I can hold my own in company. I m still a person that can be fun, or can have a good talk to, or whatever. Isobel, p19.

And I eventually married the man that I met and we had forty years of very happy marriage. Because we had both been through the mill and could be reasonable, tolerant and understanding of each other, I suppose. Sophie, p7.

Also the other question of truthfulness. I believe the truth sets you free. I believe that s what s happened to me. I wouldn t want anyone to go through what I ve been through, however I believe that I had to go through it when I married (Husband). The truth has set me free to be me, not to be the partner of a transvestite, but to be the person I want to be. Cherie, p20.

Part of the process is that you grow through it. As a person now, who has come out of it — with scars — but I m relatively healthy now. I like me. I like the person I have become.
Marylyn, p 10.

With the benefit of almost fifty years hindsight Sophie reflected:

That five years in many ways an awful waste, and very difficult, but it added to my experience of life in a very severe way. I realise that I am looking back a very long time. For anyone in the situation now it would be quite reasonable to say, well, it s alright for her to talk. She had five years and she was out of it. I can fully understand. I don t know how I would deal with the situation now . It has been extremely interesting for me because it has given me a new insight — it s like coming across an accident and you realise that real people are involved with this. Sophie, p18.

4.17: WISDOM OF THE WOMEN.

The women were asked what advice or comment they would make to other women who found themselves in similar circumstances, in relationship with a transvestite. Not all women felt able to comment. The responses of those that did are shared.

If I have anything to say it would be to transvestites out there,

And that is: be honest with your partners.

If you lose them, it was meant to be.

But more devastating for them to find out 10, 20 or even 30 years later, and they leave you anyway.

Before making a lifetime commitment to someone they have a right to know all your secrets and vice versa.

Only then can marriage ever be considered.

Because somewhere, sometime when you least expect it, life will sneak up and bite you on the bum.

Your secret will be out and you may have lost all that you hold dear.

Signed from someone who knows.

Joanna, p2.

If she were young and independent I feel it would probably be a far better solution for the both of them to go their own way.

And if that situation wasn't there, then they should each try and look after one another as (husband) and I have done.

Vicky, p15.

If you want the relationship to go on between the two of you,

Keep it controlled and out of sight.

Once you open the box and condone the cross-dressing

To the point where you help with shopping, or help with advice

It gets out of hand. It gets out of control.

Because they can't control it,

And you certainly can't control it.

Isobel, p26.

Face the truth

Allow yourself to be angry

Allow yourself to be you

Acknowledge that you have a right to your opinion

You have a right to say no

You are not a bad person for saying no

You are a good community person

You are a good person

Build up your own self-esteem

Forgive yourself and your partner

Cherie, p22.

Grieve, if you can for what you believed your partner was.

Grieve for what your beliefs were.

Its quite a freedom at the end of it, you can let go a bit.

Expect loyalty

Know that he cannot change

Dorothy, p17.

I don t think I m any wiser now than I was then.

And I don t think anyone could be.

So what you take out of it,

I still come back to it,

I thank God it hasn t left me bitter and hating.

I can only hope, for the rest of his life

He was able to in some way

Come to terms with whatever he had to come to terms with.

Sophie, p18.

4.18: POSTSCRIPT

Following the completion of the findings to this point, all participants were given a copy and asked for their feedback, particularly regarding accuracy of reporting and interpretation (Appendix F). If any misrepresentation had occurred they were asked to offer suggestions on how the error could be rectified. In addition they were given the opportunity to say anything else

about their experiences, the research process and their life following the interview.

All participants acknowledged the accuracy of the findings.

I think you captured a very complex issue with great clarity and sensitivity. Joanna.

It puts forward our case with clarity. Why didn't I have something like this to read when I was fighting to find a path through. Cherie.

(The interview material) has been fairly represented, and I appreciate the opportunity of sharing with other women the pain and bewilderment that all apparently suffered. Sophie.

Congratulations upon an honest account dealing with a subject of an extremely private and sensitive nature. Vicky.

As I read the quotes I would think, Oh, that's my interview and then I would see that it was someone else saying what I felt. Georgia.

4.18.1: The research process.

Telling the private story of an aspect of lived experience alters a person's life. In the context of social environment, the process of interview, group interview and thought creates new and different relationships within the environment at different levels that require symbolic interpretation and action. As a researcher, one strives to ensure that the participation is positive with neutral or beneficial outcomes. Most experienced positive outcomes and appreciated the opportunity to participate. All were adamant that their stories be told and shared with as many people as possible.

Being able to share and be supported in their experience was the most common positive outcome.

I have gained knowledge of how this has affected others. At least I don't feel totally alone in my feelings. Jean.

Very supportive — to know I was not alone with my problems and that other women were having the same thoughts and feelings as I was. Isobel.

It validated my experiences and feelings. I was not an incompetent, or failed female. On the contrary I had coped with a bad experience that had taken everything I had. Marylyn.

It has all been positive. It has helped me resolve my feelings. Dorothy.

For those able to participate, the group interview provided opportunity to meet with and talk about their experiences in an environment that ensured confidentiality, understanding and acceptance. Many women exchanged contact details so that they could support each other later.

It is appreciated that I can now reach out to someone with similar problems. Vicky.

Talking to other women was something I desperately needed to know what others had done, that I was not alone. Now I have that. Georgia.

Sharing my experience with other women has made me very conscious that the passage of so much time (since the 1940 s) has not altered the present situation of so many women who still feel betrayed, rejected and cheated. I am very aware that I didn't have the added burden of endeavouring to protect

children of varying ages (and temperaments) and for that I am profoundly grateful. Sophie.

Participation has helped me to work through my problems with being the wife of a transvestite. It has helped me by meeting other women in this situation, and defining my journey towards the me in the situation. Cherie.

Distance precluded Joanna from participating in the group interview, and had to rely on contact via letter, which meant that she had to cope alone. For her this created some periods of distress, however felt the pain worthwhile because of the potential benefits.

(Participation has been) very distressing at times but if it helps someone else down the track it was worthwhile. Joanna.

Jean now wants this particular episode of her life to finish.

I just want this finished and everything over . His spirit, or maybe hers, keeps getting into my head from various sources and I wish to be well rid of it. At times I feel selfish in my attitude. Yet, I think that is just being female and also my strong sense of fair play. There doesn t seem to be any fairness in this one! Jean.

4.18.2: Life after

Developing strength and independence was a theme expressed by several women. Georgia is now able to contemplate her future and take positive steps to achieve. She is now studying so that she can be financially independent. Joanna also used education as a means of developing confidence and independence.

I am enjoying my last semester an Uni and I am now wondering whether I will ever leave him. But I have grown in myself and know I have the strength and resources to stand on my own if I need to. Joanna.

Cherie has found a sense of hope and inner peace, tinged with regret.

I have found me. I have walked away from being the wife of a transvestite to being me. I still live with my husband and view the future without a lot of hope for our continuation. Hopefully I will find life for the new me rewarding in the new century. I still find it difficult to make decisions based on my needs — not our needs — but, one step at a time.

For others the present and future hold many of the challenges of the past.

I have no doubt that transvestism is a progressive thing, not necessarily becoming easier but harder — so we keep trying. Vicky.

We are still together and quite happy. We have the same problem that all our resources go in his direction and none for me and that keeps me angry. When I m angry I don t want to know sex, but its bearable on the whole. Dorothy.

Isobel has coped with the most drastic of changes. In less than three years she has lived through her husband admitting his transvestism, the femme self taking control of both lives, to legal separation as he began to live full time as a woman. He has then traveled to Asia to undergo a sex change operation and returned expecting to continue their relationship as a lesbian couple.

We are now legally separated as (husband) has had the complete sex change operation and is now living as a woman.

We still have contact but this is sometimes difficult as she still wants to come back and start our old partnership again. Will not accept that it is over. The children are having a hard time accepting her. Maybe in time it will happen. I am coping on my own, lonely, but that is the price of peace of mind. Isobel.

From the distance of time, Sophie has a sense of unreality about her experiences and deep gratitude that she has led a blessed life since.

With me it has an almost unreal quality about the whole experience, for I have been much more fortunate in life after living through a NIGHTMARE ; sharing so many years with a loving husband, who helped me to rise above all the trauma which had happened.

Marylyn too has found that time heals.

As the years pass, the hurt fades — bit by bit. I can even be generous with (husband) now, forgiving and understanding his pain too. My life is now good, and it is just that, my life. Marylyn.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1: INTRODUCTION

Using qualitative methods, data gathered has been analysed into categories and themes to explicate the underlying meanings and for ease of understanding. All data are closely interlinked and mutually dependent. These links and interconnections are described diagrammatically. Diagrammatic representation of the findings is of necessity static and two-dimensional. The experiences of women in relationship with a transvestite were neither two dimensional or static; hence the pendulum has been used to represent that experience.

Suspended from a freestanding fixed point, the pendulum swings in many planes, settling into a regular, criss-crossing pattern as it seeks equilibrium. Whilst limited by the page to representation in two-dimensions, the pendulum in this study is a free-standing pendulum that swings in many directions as it follows its pattern to equilibrium, and the reader is asked to visualise the pendulum swing in three dimensions. The pattern is shared by the women, but is individually experienced. The pattern describes the journey, or process, of adjustment to the knowledge of their partner's transvestism and the resultant changes that reverberate through all aspects of their relationship and affects family, work and social life.

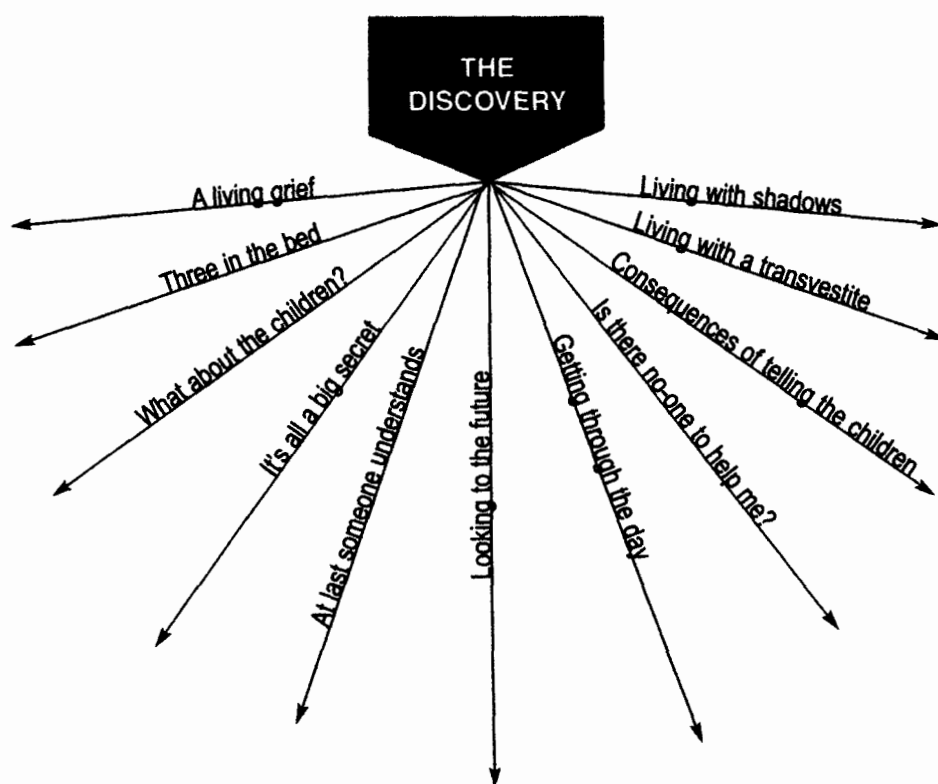


Figure 5.1

The pivotal point of the pendulum is the point in time of discovery of their partner's cross-dressing behaviour. For all the women it was a fixed point in time, although occurring at differing points in the relationship. The pendulum head comprises the weight of knowledge of that behaviour. This knowledge alters the woman's perception of herself, her relationship with her partner and others, and challenges core beliefs and values.

The pendulum traverses many aspects of the women's lives. As Georgia stated, *my whole world had been taken and smashed to the ground*. Self-identity, the intimate relationship between the man and woman, family relationships including children, and also relationships with friends, colleagues, even strangers were changed. The traverse of the pendulum through different aspects of life also describes a process of coping and adaptation in an unfamiliar world. The pendulum eventually slows and reaches a point of equilibrium. For each woman the pendulum comes to rest at a different place, the point of resolution.

The partner's disclosure of transvestism abruptly changed the lives of the women. The news was received with shock and confusion. The relationship between man and woman was changed irretrievably. A third party had been acknowledged and made visible. Woodhouse, (1985, p583) explains:

For the wife, marriage to a transvestite can comprise aspects of the eternal triangle because, whilst there is not another woman in the literal sense of the term, figuratively there is, in so far as the husband is utilizing cross-dressing for sexual pleasure, bringing a personal reality to his fantasy of the ideal woman.

These responses are common among wives and committed partners on disclosure and discovery of their partner's cross-dressing (Bullough and Weinberg, 1988; Cairns, 1997; Peo, 1984; Taylor, 1977; Woodhouse, 1989).

5.2: GRIEVING FOR THE LOST RELATIONSHIP

The human reaction to significant change and loss is that of grief. Grief refers to the responses which arise when a person has suffered a loss (Kalish, 1985). Shock, disbelief and an overwhelming sense of collapse and disintegrating of the world is the first of seven emotional stages of transition as a result of change described by Hopson, Scally & Stafford (1991, p22).

They describe the shock as:

a kind of immobilisation or a sense of being overwhelmed: of being unable to make plans, unable to reason, and unable to understand. the more unfamiliar the transition, the stronger the sense of immobilisation.

The experience of grief is not restricted to physical death and can be experienced when a relationship of importance is lost through changed circumstances, separation, divorce or abuse. For example, Joanna grieves for *what I will never have again*. The period of grief and mourning that follows loss touches on what it is to be human and to have a relationship. Intensity of feelings and duration are variable according to degree of importance the person attached to the lost object (Nolen—Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). According to Parkes (1972, p5) *The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love: it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment.*

There have been many attempts to describe and categorise grief (Bowlby, 1980; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1972; Pollock, 1987; Worden, 1982). Most models suggest at least three phases in the grief process. The early phase includes shock, disbelief and denial. Dorothy explained this when she said, *It came as a great shock to find that your male partner is not quite there any more*. The grief process progresses through preoccupation with thoughts of the person, or relationship, loss of interest in other activities, loss of self-esteem and fear of going crazy (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson. 1999). Marylyn could find no reason for her emotional state and behaviour other than she was going mad. There is a period of great sadness, yearning, fear, anger, loneliness and depression. Cherie was, *just angry. I was angry for ages*, and also admitted to depression. Other women, whilst describing symptoms of depression had not recognised that they were depressed.

The person experiencing grief may also develop physical distress such as muscle, head, stomach or chest pain, become vulnerable to illness and feel a lack of energy (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson. 1999). Physical ailments linked by the women specifically to the stresses caused by transvestism were bilious attacks, asthma and high blood pressure.

As the grief resolves, the relationship and the person are remembered in a more realistic view, and the good times can be remembered with pleasure. There is a return to normal functioning and range of emotions. The person

develops new, or renews, social relationships and takes on new activities as a unique individual. Over time, recurring episodes of grief come less frequently, are of shorter duration and of less intensity (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson. 1999). Cherie described this very well when she said, *I often jump back into anger denial depression. But they never go back to being as intense as they were at the time.*

Stage theories of the grief response to loss and change typically describe the bereaved person as a passive passenger on a journey that must be endured, and over which they have little or no, control. Neimeyer (2000, p39) challenges this concept and suggests that the grieving process is an active coping process, rich in choice centred around the task of grief. His model is based on the view of humans as active makers of meaning and engagement with the world.

people seek to construct meaning systems that are internally consistent, socially supported, and that offer a degree of security in helping them anticipate and participate in the important experiences that comprise the narrative of their lives (Neimeyer, 2000, p87).

The grief experience challenges beliefs and values in unique and idiosyncratic ways. Sophie demonstrated this when she said, *there was not much point in me crying and wiping my eyes and crying again. there was no point keeping on like that, manage it a better way.* The challenge of assimilation and adaptation demands many choices and decisions to be

made both internally and in the context of ongoing relationships with real and symbolic others. Neimeyer's theory of grieving provides a framework that explains the active, multi-directional and inter-related nature of the women's adaptation to living with a transvestite.

Whilst many aspects of grief are universal across all forms of loss there are some unique aspects pertaining to loss of relationships. Loss of, or significant change within, a relationship demands some emotionally charged decisions by one or both partners to alter, or end, a relationship that had once been mutually chosen. For example, Marylyn felt as if she had no role left within the relationship as her husband had claimed both the masculine and feminine roles. As Sophie discovered, the woman is the person that makes the decisions about the ultimate fate of the relationship: *he said he wasn't going to make a choice. So I packed my bag and went.*

The longer the relationship, the greater the investment. Patterns of emotional and social interaction and connections, financial commitment and systems, rearing children and grandchildren, are all investments in which the lives of man and woman are intertwined. The greater the weaving, the greater the change required in adapting to new situations. This is demonstrated by the initial reaction of Jean who felt able to negotiate how the relationship could develop, and still had a separate existence from her partner. Five years later however, her grief was intense as she unravelled the private and public

networks developed over time, following the discovery of the deceptions that had occurred.

The shock of disclosure and acknowledgment is not evenly shared between man and woman. For the men, acknowledgment of their cross-dressing needs had occurred previously, in most cases prior to the commitment to the relationship. They had become familiar and comfortable with the femme self, albeit secretly. They anticipated that disclosure to their partners would allow the femme self space to exist and be expressed. For most, the timing of disclosure was of their choosing, even if not specifically planned. Regardless of occurring voluntarily or not, for the men disclosure signalled the beginning of a new phase of their life free of deceit that enabled development of their cross-dressing lifestyle.

For the women, initial disclosure and acknowledgment occurred simultaneously. They were not aware of their partner's cross-dressing needs and considered their relationship to be of a conventional, heterosexual nature. They did not know the femme self who seemed foreign and unwelcome. They simultaneously lost their relationship with their partner, as they knew it; personal values and beliefs were challenged and their familiar lifestyle and relationships with the wider family circle, friends and colleagues disrupted. Disclosure signalled the end of something valued to be replaced with shame and fear for an unknown future. The resultant mismatch of

perception and expectations caused discord and conflict between man and woman. Isobel description of a visit to the support group highlights the conflicting responses: *So he was happy, he couldn't stop talking about it on the way home. I could feel flutterings of disconcertion Pandora's Box has got nothing to what we've just started.*

The shock caused by disclosure was extreme. The disclosure was unexpected. The nature of the disclosure was unfamiliar, and the implications for their intimate relationships were unknown. Whilst the initial shock is generally the biggest and had the greatest impact on the women, their lives continued to be punctuated by a series of after shocks, as the day to day effects of their partner's behaviours became apparent. The increasing frequency of the cross-dressing, the increased visibility, awareness of the financial and time invested by the man, facing expectations of increased participation, the changed reciprocity were all continuing shocks experienced by the women.

5.3: THE CHANGED RELATIONSHIP

The nature of Transvestism both challenges, and demands strict adherence to, sexual and gender differences. The challenge lies in the transvestite's desire to alternate between the masculine and feminine roles at will.

In the masculine role he takes on a masculine vocation and is successful, yet nurtures a capacity to slip into a feminine role. In

the feminine role transvestites tend to adopt extremely feminine images (Brierley, 1969, p30).

That is, the Transvestite forms a combination of gender role extremes. The inability of the person to express their softer, that is traditionally feminine, aspects whilst in the masculine garb and role describes an inability on the part of the person to blur or integrate their need to express a range of emotional and behavioural traits and roles.

It is almost as though this identity has to be put on before permission can be granted to do supposedly feminine things — from housework to being more emotionally open. In this respect, transvestism reflects traditional gender roles whereby masculinity and femininity are entities in and of themselves, mutually exclusive and fixed (Woodhouse, 1989, p139).

It is ironic that in the Transvestites challenge to society's gender differentiation, they actually strengthen the divide by forming very strict criterion for themselves and others, as to what is, or isn't, feminine. Vicky's conversation with her husband demonstrates this: *I said to (Husband) the other day, How would you feel if the shoe was on the other foot, and I suddenly decided to wear men's clothing and behaving like a man? Oh, no. he said.*

The female partners of transvestites in this study accepted, by and large, society's definition of traditionally masculine and feminine behaviour, dress and mannerisms. They had integrated the socially accepted norms and felt comfortable within established parameters. As Georgia explained: *I wanted*

him a normal guy. I m the woman. They found it difficult to comprehend and adjust to their partners need to behave in such divergent ways. Even more constraining, and a source of great conflict for wives and partners was their mate s criticism and desire to control what they wore and how they behaved. As Cherie stated: *My clothes were a big source of conflict between him and me. He wanted me to wear certain clothing that wasn t me. if I bought any clothing there would be one hell of a row about everything.* The Transvestites image of femininity was transferred to their mates by the expectation that they would dress and behave in the manner perceived as feminine.

(Transvestism) relies on contrived appearance and a masquerade which bears little relation to most women s experiences of daily life. It says nothing about the sexual division of labour, still less about the dangers posed to women by male violence. The complaints voiced by wives of transvestites are not simply along the lines of wanting their men to be men. They felt the kind of femininity portrayed by their husband s cross-dressing was nothing to do with their own lives as women, wives and mothers. In fact they thought it was quite the opposite of their own lives, an escape from the everyday pressures (Woodhouse, 1989, p144).

Beigel (1969, p110) observed that the transvestite can often present as a very convincing woman and that on occasion he found it difficult to differentiate between the real woman and the transvestite. He eventually found the key:

The real girls merely tried to augment their attractiveness: the pseudo-girls strove for perfection, availing themselves of every means that suggested femininity.

Not only did the men desire to enjoy the best of both worlds, they expected their women to also fit their expectations of femininity, regardless of the women's needs and desires for self expression and achievement.

All women reported a healthy self-identity prior to the discovery. They were physically fit and healthy, actively engaged in their relationship, effectively running households, rearing children and grandchildren, and living and working in the broader community. None had any psychiatric or psychological problems that interfered with their daily life. This is in contrast to the literature based on clinical studies and case studies. These reports seem to be based on the assumption that since transvestism is deviant, then there must be something psychologically wrong with a woman who has a committed relationship with a transvestite (Calogeras, 1987; Hirschfeld, 1910/1991; Stoller, 1967; Warnes, 1984; Wise, 1985; Wise, Duplain & Meyer, 1981). Calogeros (1987, p528) claims: *their marriage seemed to function as a cure — in the sense of functioning as a safety valve — in containing their complementary transvestite pathology.* This assumption could be caused by one of two factors: the women described in the literature did have psychological problems and the symptoms were exacerbated by the changed relationship, or the preconceptions of the doctors clouded their objectivity.

Woodhouse (1985, p584) in her discussion of the literature suggests a *heads I win, tails you lose* approach by such authors. When they could not ascribe a psychiatric diagnosis to the women they used denigrating psychological terms instead. For example Wise, Duplain and Meyer (1981, p1222) suggest that:

the characterological styles of the women varied from predominantly hysterical styles of denial, repression, and dramatic behavior to more passive-dependent coping strategies .

Studies undertaken in non-clinical settings (Brown, 1994; Docter, 1988) suggest that low self-esteem and high dependency are not general characteristics of women in a committed relationship with a transvestite. Docter, (1988, p192) concluded that the women in his study were: *an unremarkable group of women who unexpectedly found themselves in a marriage with a transvestite husband.*

5.4: CHALLENGES TO SELF-IDENTITY

That the women were psychologically healthy should not be of any great surprise. The definition of a transvestite acknowledges that the man is *unremarkably masculine* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p531). The relationships were, on the whole, satisfactory in most respects. A commitment was made with an ordinary, sensible man who fulfilled his heterosexual role adequately. That the women accepted their spouse or partner as the man he represented himself to be is also unremarkable. Docter

(1988, p181) questioned what the motives for selecting a transvestite for a mate might be:

A key question concerning any kind of marital difficulty is what the motives, needs, and personality characteristics of the partners may be. We must ask, what led them to find and select one another as partners in the first place?

His research led him to conclude (p183):

The partners think of each other as reliable and stable, not sexually demanding, and as sharing conventional attitudes especially where intimate relationships are concerned. when the husband's transvestism becomes evident to the wife, either through accidental discovery or disclosure by the husband, most wives report feeling stunned and amazed.

All women expressed in various ways they had expected, and thought they had, a traditional heterosexual relationship involving companionship, a normal sexual relationship, the birth and rearing of children and material comfort achieved through teamwork and hard work.

Some literature exists describing the effect on the heterosexual partner when their spouse comes out as either homosexual or bi-sexual (Buxton, 1994). Whilst differences are obvious there is similarity in that both situations involve a triad; in the bisexual situation that involves the bisexual partner, his/her same sex partner/s and the heterosexual spouse. For the relationship between a transvestite and his wife there exists the woman, the man as his masculine self and as his femme self.

Buxton (1994) identified seven major issues men and women face in a heterosexual - bi-sexual/homosexual relationship. These are the damage to their sexuality; negation of their concept of marriage; conflicting spousal and parental roles; destruction of their own self concept; breakdown of trust and integrity; possible family break-up and disintegration of their belief system. As partners celebrate their true sexual orientation, spouses feel bereft of their marital mate. Most spouses gradually realise that the hidden sexual disparity has already harmed their sexual functioning and self-image. The coming out tends to confirm their perceived sexual inadequacy and create doubt about their womanhood. Some spouses doubt their own gender orientation.

The same issues are evident for the respondents in this study. Marylyn and Cherie questioned their sexual orientation. All women questioned their role in, and the value of marriage. All women with children experienced conflict of loyalty and needs of the children, their partners and themselves. The sense of trust and integrity that the women had felt in their relationship was destroyed, as Isobel explained: *What I can't accept is the betrayal almost, that all those things I've believed in were not real.* Considering separation and divorce and the resulting family break-up became a reality for all women. For some it became a physical reality. Destruction of their own self concept occurred for all, although their underlying personal strength saw self-identity and self-confidence re-emerge. The added difficulty that these women faced

was that the man they married ceased to exist in a very real sense. When the femme self is present the male self disappears. The two people occupy the same physical body. In addition, the femme self seeks to continue a sexual relationship with the woman. This can become difficult for the woman as she is confused about her sexual role and unclear about her attraction to the femme self, as Jean explained, *It got to the point where I thought does he still find me sexy? What I feel sometimes is I look too ordinary.* Accommodating her partner's new sexual identity requires drastic changes in her behaviour and thinking. By the time her partner has disclosed his preferences he has largely accepted himself. For the woman she is dealing with completely new information that requires assimilation and adaptation.

Women lose their sense of control as the two persons in the one body exert more influence in the relationship. They feel outnumbered. Isobel described the difficulty adapting to the two identities: *I can't see (femme name) dressed and then all of a sudden up will pop (husband) because he's gone and had a shower and put back on his male clothes and you see a man. It doesn't work.* The women acknowledge the futility of denying the femme self and try to accept the changed rules underpinning their relationships. Almost all their energy is directed toward accommodating her partner's new identity, with little heed paid to their own needs. Marylyn described her desperate need to understand and negotiate the relationship. Cherie could not invite people to her home: *because you don't know what's happening in your house.* As the

women focus increasingly on supporting their husbands cross-dressing lifestyle, they gradually absorb the transvestite perspective — becoming the spouse of a transvestite, defined by his identity. Georgia explained this when she stated *it was infiltrating every part of our life — financial, sex life, family life — just everything*. The struggle to cope with all of the demands placed on them raises an awareness of how much the women have been affected by their husbands double life. They see the irony of scheduling quality time together around the transvestite agenda — time previously spent as a couple engaging in family and community affairs. Buxton (1994, p73) described the equivalent experience for wives of homosexual and bi-sexual men, as they attempted to adapt to the relationship that had become a triad.

Most often, the wife is responsible for scheduling her husband s gay activities into the family calendar of child-care, household tasks, careers, family excursions and couple activities, reflecting the traditional caretaker role of women. In addition, some wives take on their husband s gay-related needs

Further literature describes the women in relationship with transvestites as having poor self-confidence (Brown, 1994; Brown & Collier, 1989; Feinbloom, 1976). The women described in these studies were either attending counselling as an attempt to resolve their marital difficulties and/or attending support groups for transvestites. Those attending counselling admitted that their relationships and lives were stressed. Women participating in support group activities do so mainly in an attempt to understand their situation and

find support, that is, they are also experiencing stress (Woodhouse, 1989). Stress can cause manifestations in previously healthy people just as it can cause disturbance in unhealthy people (Hobfoll, 1998) and yet no link between the women's symptoms and the stress they were experiencing was suggested. The women in the current study all described periods of stress and resultant psychological distress, as a result of their relationships, not because that was their natural state. Their underlying psychological health enabled the women to adapt to the new circumstances. Neimeyer (2000) suggests that feelings have functions that signal the individual's state of adaptation. This contrasts with the concept of emotion as symptomatic and in need of treatment (Weiss, 1998) that underlies clinical analysis.

Attempts to regain a sense of order and control lead the women to understand what it is they are dealing with, and understand what their partner is experiencing. The need to understand leads the women to search for information about transvestism. This action has been identified in several earlier studies of women in relationship with a transvestite (Bullough and Weinberg, 1988; Cairns, 1997; Peo, 1984). However, women discover that accurate unbiased information is difficult to find in the general community (Cairns, 1997), as Georgia and Cherie discovered: *There's not a great deal of books to find on transvestism. I've studied libraries, I looked everywhere.* Most texts and journals are only readily accessible via university and hospital libraries. Once obtained such material can be difficult to interpret

and understand. *Reading the academic literature may leave women feeling inadequate, frightened, and further stigmatised* (Cairns, 1997, p303). Individual transvestites (Horden, 1992; Prince, 1967) or societies for transvestites such as the Beaumont Trust in England, or Seahorse Club in Australia generally produce community based literature. Such sources provide information, advice and reassurance which is described by Cairns (1997, p301) as *overwhelmingly positive and clearly intended to normalize the phenomenon*. Accessing such avenues for information can be daunting. For people unfamiliar with large libraries, finding the information can be difficult. Approaching staff for help runs the risk of being publicly identified and linked with Transvestism. Knowing about, and finding, the support groups can also be difficult for the woman who does not know where to start looking. Using the Internet to search for information can be fraught with difficulties. Not all women, particularly those in rural and remote areas have affordable access. For those with access, the myriad of pornographic and adult services sites do not provide the information the women seek, and make the task of sifting and sorting useful information time consuming and distressing, as Georgia found: *When I first saw the word transvestite I nearly died. transvestite was like something freaky or dirty.*

5.5: SEXUAL IDENTITY AND SEXUAL COMPETENCE

The challenge to self-identity and competence intrudes on the women's sense of sexual identity and sexual competence. For the participants, that

wearing women's clothes becomes more sexually arousing for him, than the presence and actions of a loving woman demeans and derogates the woman's sexual role. The solitary sexual satisfaction of a cross-dresser partner can often deny the woman's needs and rights for satisfying sexual experiences within the relationship, for example Georgia's experience: *It's not your man any more. He comes to bed and you're starved and you're a completely heterosexual woman, it turns your stomach.* Bullough & Weinberg, (1988), Doctor, (1988), Doctor & Prince (1997) and Peo, (1984) all found similar reactions. Hunt and Main, (1997, p46) reported: *a perceived self-centredness seen in the transgendered person by the partner. The wives described themselves as feeling abandoned, left out, not needed or simply being used.* Marylyn, for example, equated her sexual role with prostitution, and sexual experience as incest.

Concerns about their own sexual orientation is referred to by inference, or in passing, in several papers investigating the experiences of wives of transvestites (Bullough & Weinberg, 1989; Woodhouse, 1989) but only specifically investigated in one. Hunt and Main (1997, p40) conducted a very small preliminary study to explore the parameters of the phenomenon noted on a number of occasions in clinical practice. *If the husband is not playing the culturally defined masculine role in love-making, indeed if he is looking and acting like a woman, does that make the relationship a quasi-lesbian one?* The study consisted of qualitative inquiry and analysis following

interviews with two wives of transvestites and two wives of transsexuals. They found that the wives of transvestites did experience some sexual orientation confusion, whereas the wives of transsexuals did not. These results must be interpreted cautiously as the study had several serious flaws. There were significant differences between the two very small groups of women. The wives of transvestites had experienced sexual trauma in childhood and had discovered their spouses cross-dressing, whereas the wives of transsexuals had no history of sexual trauma and had been told of their spouses transsexualism before confrontation. Exposure to sexual trauma in childhood and adulthood can and does have life time consequences, one of which is confusion about one's sexual orientation (Wyatt, Newcomb & Riederle, 1993). Lesbian fantasies and concerns regarding sexual orientation are not limited to partners of transvestites. All that can be clearly confirmed by this study is that the experience of sexual orientation confusion sometimes occurs among women in relationship with transvestites. Whether this is a factor of childhood experiences, latent sexual confusion or as a direct result of the current relationship with a transvestite is not clear.

A satisfying sexual relationship is an important aspect of a successful marital, or primary, relationship. A satisfying marital, or primary, relationship is a factor in overall happiness. There is a positive reciprocal relationship between sexual satisfaction and closeness, or quality of relationship (Young, Luquis, Denny & Young. 1998). That is, a relationship that is perceived to be

emotionally close is also likely to be sexually satisfying, and a relationship that is sexually satisfying is likely to have the qualities of emotional intimacy and mutuality. Conversely relationships that do not meet the sexual needs of one or either partner and/or is lacking emotional intimacy is likely to cause dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Schafer, Wickrama & Keith. 1998). Vicky explained: *When sex goes out of marriage that s the bottom. It doesn t matter what age you are.* To be treated inequitably by one s partner or to disagree over fundamental marital roles is a threat to an individual s identity and is a source of psychological distress. Another consequence of stress within a primary relationship is decreased self-confidence resulting in loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Isobel found that *my perception of myself as a woman took a dive, at first. I felt useless. I felt I d failed.* A person s belief that they are unable to act effectively within their environment is a precursor to depression. Long-term experiences have a cumulative effect. Over time partners become less effective and experience little success in day-to-day affairs. They become increasingly unsure of their abilities and in their control over life events. (Schafer, Wickrama & Keith. 1998).

5.6: STYLES OF COPING

Coping refers to the processes used to deal with stress, solve problems and make decisions. Individuals develop and use an array of cognitive (e.g. positive thinking), or behavioural (e.g. seeking information), or avoidance (e.g. denial) strategies that they find helpful in responding and adapting to

stressful situations. The process of coping involves both appraisal, ie. thinking, and action phases in order to minimise or eliminate life stressors (Anderson, Anderson & Glanze, 1998).

Coping strategies are often categorised as *effective or ineffective and applied wholesale, regardless of differences between individuals and situations. Yet there are many inconsistencies and contradictory findings in the coping literature which indicate that coping strategies cannot be labelled thus* (Oakland & Ostell, 1996, p139). Different coping strategies can have different outcomes when used by different people, or in different situations. Oakland and Ostell observed that regardless of coping strategy used, if the required internal or external resources were perceived to be available and adequate, then that particular coping strategy was effective. This comment is reflected in the experiences of the women in this study. For example, Vicky and Isobel found reliving past events and searching for information enabled them to cope with the present because it helped them understand their partners behaviours. The same practices made Georgia and Joanna angrier, and Cherie experienced both understanding and anger at different times.

Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan and Coyne, (1998) argue that the strong focus on individual emotional distress and individual coping strategies masks the importance of social interactions in coping with life stress. They suggest that coping should be re-conceptualised as a communal process, and may explain

how some families and other social groups are resilient in dealing with stressful life events and others are not. Lyons, et al (1998, p583) define communal coping as *a process in which a stressful event is substantively appraised and acted upon in the context of close relationships.*

Communal coping occurs when one or more individuals perceive a stressor as our problem versus my or your problem. The well-being of family members and relationships is a key element in coping with stress and many couples work co-operatively to address life stresses within the context of the relationship. There is little distinction between individual and communal coping efforts. Communal coping is more likely to be part of a larger set of benefits and obligations within an ongoing relationship (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan & Coyne, 1998).

The three main components of communal coping are a belief in, and commitment to a joint approach, two-way communication and discussion about the circumstances of the stressor and co-operative action to reduce the stress on all parties. All women in the current study described successful use of communal coping in their relationships prior to the disclosure of transvestism. All had a high level of commitment *through the good times and the bad* as Dorothy explained. Yet, despite successful use of communal coping strategies in the past, the changes that occurred as a result of the disclosure of transvestism could not easily be accommodated.

Reibstein (1997) suggests that commitment to the centrality of their relationship, mutual dependency, pleasure in each other's company, being heard and valued, periods of undivided attention to each other and appreciation of the other partner's efforts are all essential elements of successful marriages. Gottman (1994, p.39) claims

As long as there was five times as much positive feeling and interaction between husband and wife as there was negative, the marriage was likely to be stable over time. In contrast, those couples who were heading for divorce were doing far too little on the positive side to compensate for the growing negativity between them.

Gottman (1994) described criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling as the four horsemen that portend a failing relationship. The women were subjected to all of the four horsemen throughout the relationship, often for protracted periods. For example, Cherie and Marylyn were constantly criticised for their choice of clothes and blamed for sexual inadequacies within the relationship. Isobel, Joanna and Georgia were subject to hostile humour and put-downs. The partners of Isobel, Vicky, Georgia and Jean all denied responsibility for their actions and excused themselves because it was all beyond their control. The partners of Sophie, Marylyn and Georgia refused to engage in discussion or share joint responsibility for the relationship break-down. In other words, communal coping failed because the problem was

perceived as a joint problem by the women, however the men were reported as acting as if the problem belonged solely to the women.

5.7: EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Exposure of an individual to protracted criticism and blame, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling causes harm.

When a woman participates in mutually responsive and loving relationships, she becomes psychologically connected. Disconnection occurs when the environment and the available relationships are unresponsive to, or negating of, the woman's experience (Weingourt, 1996, p17).

Such experiences within an unequal relationship in the long term are abusive. Emotional abuse *constitutes those behaviours, not involving physical force or harm, that serve to reduce the victim's status and render the victim more easily controlled by the abuser (O'Hearn & Davis, 1997, p375).*

Loring, (1994, p1) defined emotional abuse as:

an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the person are constantly belittled.

Rarely recognised by its victims, it is a widespread form of violence. Couples in most relationships exchange insults on occasion in the midst of an argument or as an expression of frustration. *Emotional abuse is distinguished*

from occasional outbursts of anger by virtue of the intention attributed by the victim (or by an informed observer) (O Hearn & Davis, 1997, p.376).

Emotional abuse is the clear and consistent use of demeaning language and behaviour over periods of time which lowers the victim's self concept and self esteem. Emotional abuse can be either overt or covert, and can be intentionally or unintentionally inflicted. Overt actions include belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticising, blaming, sulking, withholding affection, ignoring, isolation from family and friends, monitoring time or activities, restricting access to resources, accusations, ridicule: threatening, expressions of disgust and coercion. Covert mechanisms of abuse include denigration, negation, denial of person's feelings, thoughts or beliefs, negative labelling and subtle threats of physical and/or emotional abandonment (Loring, 1994; O Hearn & Davis, 1997; Royse, 1994). The women reported experiences such as finding unexplained debts (Georgia), inequalities in spending (Joanna, Dorothy), criticism and argument about choice of clothes (Cherie), rejection of emotional response or opinion (Marylyn), blaming (Georgia, Cherie) and demands to participate (Isobel, Vicky, Sophie) which are comparable to the descriptions provided by Loring, O Hearn and Davis, and Royse and occurred on numerous occasions over time.

The identification that a relationship is emotionally abusive can be difficult for the victim. The abusive partner rarely exhibits all of the abusive elements listed. They may have many traits and qualities that are admired or liked. The

victim frequently rationalises that the good outweighs the bad and/or the bad doesn't happen often (Royse, 1994). Georgia explained: *Yet, when this wasn't going on it was lovely. We got on great.* And for Joanna: *I think of all the good things and as much as I cannot be intimate with him, we are good friends.*

Participants all experienced at least some degree of blame laid at their feet for the man's need to cross-dress, their inability to find the practice acceptable and/or the stressed state of the relationship. The women internalised this blame and felt guilt for not being flexible enough to integrate the cross-dressing into their lifestyle. Woodhouse (1989, p91) also identified elements of abuse of women in relationships with transvestite men:

But how do we define harm? The transvestite may not be harming his wife in any physical sense; nevertheless, although they (transvestites) argue their activities do no harm to anyone, many of the wives can be seen as carrying a considerable psychological burden.

Woodhouse, (1989, p88) also notes that abuse of women is enacted further in the literature about such women. Firstly there is an invisibility in much of the literature about wives and partners of transvestites : *often appearing as no more than shadowy figures attempting to cope with a problem.* Secondly the wife is blamed for the situation she finds herself in (p90): *her problem, then, is not simply that her man is a transvestite, but rather that it has highlighted and brought to the fore problems in herself.* There is little

discussion in the literature of the psychological health of women before disclosure of transvestism by the partner, therefore making assumptions about cause and effect dangerous.

5.8: SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse occurs when a person feels violated or demeaned following unwanted touching, fondling, kissing, unwanted sexual intercourse or other sexual acts, being coerced to observe sexual acts or pornography, being coerced to exhibit yourself or watch the exhibitionism of others (Royse, 1994). Marylyn described her experiences in terms of being an actor in a play: *I felt very much like I was an actor in a play. I've never been a prostitute — but I felt that that was what I was doing.* Wyatt, Newcomb and Rierdale (1993) suggest sexual abuse refers to sexually oriented contact that was not desired, or coercion. Most wives of transvestites found the linking of cross-dressing with sexual activities distressing. The most positive response that participants expressed was neutrality. None found cross-dressing sexually stimulating. Participants were all exposed to the expectation that they would participate in such sexual activities and all on some occasion succumbed to coercion. Other studies (Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Docter, 1988), whilst identifying some women who found sexual activity with their cross-dressed partner sexually stimulating also found the majority did not. Bullough and Weinberg (1988, p97) found:

Some wives were vehement about their refusal to have sex with a man dressed as a woman: No way! I d feel like a lesbian! other women were more understanding: Since he likes it, I try to respond, as long as every time we make love he isn t cross dressed. Most wives who had sex under these circumstances said this was something that they tolerated and that it made responding difficult.

Such experiences fit the definition of sexual abuse.

A significant number of participants were also exposed to sadomasochism. Bancroft (1989) explains *the sexual response to the infliction of pain, psychological humiliation or ritualised dominance or submission is the basis of sadomasochism.* The masochist takes the passive role and submission is commonly achieved through various forms of bondage. Bondage involves being tied up, or constrained, and at the mercy of the assailant without means of self-protection. In most cultures sexual dominance is seen to be essentially masculine and part of the sex role stereotype. For women the sex role stereotype is one of submission, or at least passivity. Male masochism challenges the stereotypes. As Baumeister describes, (1989, p 188):

Masochism is an unusual form of sexual pleasure and one that runs contrary to the norms and morals that govern prevailing attitudes about sex in our society.

Masochism appears to play a part in transvestism (Brierley, 1969; Chivers & Blanchard, 1996). The fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p531) states: *An associated feature of Transvestic Fetishism may be the presence of*

Sexual Masochism and conversely (p529): *Some males with Sexual Masochism also have Fetishism, Transvestic Fetishism, or Sexual Sadism.*

Chivers and Blanchard (1996, p98.) reported their clinical impression: *the sexual inclinations of some transvestic patients encompass the desire to assume a submissive/receptive role.* Fantasies of being put into passive roles, being bullied into a female role and bondage seem to be common fantasies (Brierley, 1969; Buhrich & McConaghy, 1976) and a common practice among transvestites (Baumeister, 1989; Buhrich & Beaumont 1981; Hirschfeld, 1910). Horden, a transvestite himself, (1992, p20) suggests:

A M-to-F transgenderist wants to escape from the guilt feelings he has been taught, as a member of the master male sex, to have about his desire to wear feminine clothes. What better excuse for so doing than to be ordered by some more dominant person to do so.

To be placed in bondage requires the complicit participation of another person to take the dominating role. In this study the men expected the women to take this role. For participants this was neither a sexually stimulating or acceptable practice. They had no desire of their own to play that role, were reluctant to do so and only agreed after coercion.

Transvestite literature suggests that cross-dressers have a considerable preoccupation with the wearing of constricting garments such as corsets, tight bodices, high-heeled shoes and tights (Biegel & Feldman, 1963; Brierley,

1969). That the Transvestite considers wearing such garments sexually pleasurable suggests a form of self-inflicted bondage. Whilst these garments may be standard feminine attire, the wives and partners found no pleasure in wearing them, certainly did not find their clothes sexually arousing, and could not understand why anyone, particularly a man, would go out of their way to use such garments. Jean said: *And I sort of wonder why men want to get dressed up in women s gear . Its such a pain to get dressed up and put make-up on.* Peo (1984) and Woodhouse (1989) also found that women found these behaviours incomprehensible.

In June 1997, delegates at the XIII World Congress of Sexology ratified the Valencia Declaration on Sexual Rights (The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc., 2000). The document claims for all individuals, the rights of freedom from coercion, exploitation and abuse, autonomy, integrity and safety, sexual equity and equality, sexual health, objective and factual information, education, free association, freedom of choice and privacy. *Human sexuality is the origin of the deepest bond between human beings and is essential to the well-being of individuals, couples, families and society. Therefore the respect for human rights should be promoted through all means. Sexual health is a basic and fundamental human right.* (Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Inc., 2000, p2).

Just how these rights are negotiated within a sexual relationship can be problematic. The transvestite has the right to practice his sexual preferences without discrimination and claims that he has been denied that right throughout the relationship. However, all bar one of the women were not informed of their future husband's sexual preferences prior to commitment, which negated the women's rights to freedom of choice, autonomy, education and information. Resolution of such a dilemma can only come with compromise on both sides, or dissolution of the relationship.

The degree of coercion that is acceptable within a committed relationship can be difficult to judge, particularly when involved in the relationship, for loyalty, sense of duty and the desire to please and appease are complex motivators. For example, Dorothy provided help and advice on dress and make-up to prevent her husband being humiliated in public. Cherie describes the coercion when agreeing to buy feminine clothes for her husband: *I can't say I ever did any of these things from a feeling of wanting to do them, it was because I was feeling that I've got to please my husband.*

5.9: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Moving the focus away from the intimate relationship between man and woman highlights the effects of Transvestism on other aspects of the couple's lives. All bar one couple had children. No study has as yet focussed directly on the experience of children of transvestites. Meaningful research is difficult

to construct, and ethical considerations could make the research difficult to approve. Studies reporting children's experiences second hand through the eyes of either the transvestite or their partner offer mixed reports. Talamini (1982) reported that 37% of his sample of wives had informed the children of their father's cross-dressing. There were no reports of any adverse effects of such disclosure although there are no details of the ages of the children at time of disclosure. It must also be considered that being told of a parent's behaviour is one level of exposure, but witnessing frequent episodes of cross-dressing may have different impact. Talamini reports that only one child had seen the parent cross-dressed. Whilst there is no evidence of positive effects that knowledge of Transvestism brings to a parent-child relationship, neither is there any evidence to suggest that such knowledge is profoundly disturbing, for example, a father's cross-dressing is rarely mentioned as a factor in psychiatric case studies (Brierley, 1969).

The potential consequences of telling children of their father's cross-dressing were of great concern to the mothers, as it was for mothers of children in previous studies (Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Peo, 1984; Woodhouse, 1989). Concerns centred around how the information could affect the child's psychological, emotional and sexual development and the effects on the father-child and mother-child relationship. In addition concerns were raised regarding the possible inheritance of Transvestism. The action of telling cannot be rescinded. For most women, this worry resulted in delayed, or no,

disclosure. Transvestite support groups offer little advice on the matter, preferring to list the complexities, benefits and risks of both telling and not telling, and suggesting that the final decision rests with the parents (Horden, 1992; Rudd, 1990). For example, Roberts (1995, p84) answer to the question should we tell the children? read as follows:

The short answer is No. Most professionals recommend that children be kept out of the crossdressing issue. A child lacks the power to get out of the situation if it makes him/her extremely uncomfortable. This helplessness can turn to frustration and then anger at the crossdressing parent. It may not even be wise to tell adult children unless there is a compelling reason. On the other hand, many parents have told their children about a crossdressing father and the anecdotal information shows no adverse reaction from the children.

Bullough and Bullough (1993) suggest that most therapists recommend not telling children, for given the current level of stigma attached to transvestism, it is too much of a burden. This position was communicated to at least one participant, Marylyn. All except one father were reported as not wishing children be told. The mothers who felt that the children should know had a dilemma. If they did tell the children, they were taking responsibility for the future relationship between father and child, and they were telling another person s secret.

5.10: THE SECRET NATURE OF TRANSVESTISM

Secrecy went further than the immediate family circle. It involved keeping the secret from parents, close friends and work associates. For Estes, (1992) secrets are stories, events that are kept hidden from others, sometimes for many years, sometimes almost a lifetime. Most secrets are focussed around violation of social or moral codes of the culture, religion or personal value system and revolve around shame. The underlying fear of disclosure is rejection, being considered an undesirable person, disruption of relationships, or harm. This describes the secret of Transvestism. For the women, there was another layer of secrecy — the secret they were holding was not their own, but the secret of their partner. Cherie said: *It s not your secret. I didn t have anyone that I could talk to.* And for Jean, *There s no way I would harm him by telling people* Keeping the secret was a great burden. It gradually separated the women from family, friends and associates and inhibited social interaction. It became simpler to avoid contact to prevent inadvertent disclosure, and/or the stress of vetting conversations before uttering words. Both Isobel and Marylyn articulated the *wariness in relationships* and avoidance that occurred around other people.

In addition the transvestite partners had continuing concerns about secrets still unidentified from the past, *..how many other things are there that I don t know about?* (Isobel), and continuing unexplained behaviours in the present

Never knowing, just wondering (Georgia). Separation from family and other sources of support and comfort have been identified as forms of emotional abuse (Loring, 1994; Royse, 1994). The responsibility of keeping the secret led to mood swings, sudden absences in conversation and odd reactions to movies, conversations, which then had to be excused and explained, typical behaviours of an abused person (Loring, 1994; Royse, 1994).

5.11: ACTIVITIES OF GRIEVING

Within his theory of grief Neimeyer (2000) identifies five activities of grieving that enable the mourning individual to adapt and find a place of resolution. These activities are to acknowledge the reality of the loss, open yourself to the pain, revise your assumptive world, reconstruct your relationship to that which has been lost and reinvent yourself.

5.11.1: Acknowledge the reality of the loss

In this study, the women found accepting the reality of the loss difficult because the relationship alternated between being changed and difficult, and just the same as it had always been. This was because the presence of the man they knew and loved alternated with the presence of the new femme identity that they did not know, and did not love. Each time the man they knew appeared, it was possible to pretend that all was well and let old dreams and hopes reappear, only to relive the shock as the femme self asserted herself again. As Georgia said, *Yet, when this wasn't going on it*

was lovely. We got on great. Alternating shock and hope is eventually replaced with a numbing sense of unreality and absurdity, which defies understanding, leaving the women feeling helpless and overwhelmed. Attending to feelings of sadness, desolation, and anxiety had to be balanced by attention to the practical tasks of the home and work. The practicalities of daily life also provided much needed respite from the anguish. For Cherie, work meant, *for part of the day, gave me an escape so it wasn't so intense.* The ability to manage eventually led the women to realise that they had both the strength and abilities to cope with change. Joanna, for example, has managed mature age university studies.

5.11.2: Open yourself to the pain.

Keeping the secret meant the women faced the pain alone. Their partners, whilst aware of the pain, were unable or unwilling to alleviate the suffering. They were suffering too, and aware that their actions were causing distress. Others outside the immediate relationship were often unaware that the women were grieving for a lost relationship for, to the outsider, the relationship appeared healthy, if not ideal. Maintaining the facade of normality cost the women access to emotional support, *You're doing it (grieving) and you are going through whilst pretending everything is the same.* (Cherie). If aware that something was wrong, friends and colleagues did not associate the pain with a strained relationship. In their state of ignorance friends and relations would admire the perfect husband/partner for

his sensitivity, or provide the woman with advice to be grateful, *Many people said I was so fortunate to have such a life. If only they knew* (Marylyn).

5.11.3: Reaching out to others

The women all reach a point when the secret could no longer be tolerated. The decision to tell children were the most fraught. Whilst mothers wished the children to know, they were worried about the consequences to the children. All children were adult at time of telling. Those with young children had not yet disclosed. The women reported mixed responses ranging from complete rejection to toleration and acceptance. It would seem from the women's responses that the quality and strength of the children's relationships with their father prior to disclosure largely influenced the reaction of children. Other important factors were the apparent effect of the cross-dressing on the mother and whether the child could choose to be exposed to the femme self or not. The response and effect of Transvestism on the children of transvestites is an area of research needing further attention.

In the process of telling others, grieving became both a personal and public act. Social networks comprise individuals with their own complex personalities, coping capacities and beliefs that affected the degree of support available. The motivations for telling others were varied and ranged from disclosure to avoid the risk of discovery and seeking support and understanding. Each woman turned to parents, siblings, close friends and

health care professionals at some stage. Reactions and responses were mixed. No one category provided consistently supportive or unhelpful attention.

Receiving negative responses further delayed access to support. In the first instance immediate support was not forthcoming and secondly the women hesitated before approaching anyone else in fear of receiving further rejection. For example, Marylyn s response to poor support was, *So in the end I basically gave up talking to people .* Inadequate support and information led to increased isolation and confusion as the women tried to integrate the rejection and incongruencies, resulting in disempowerment.

5.11.4: Revising the assumptive world.

On the other hand, positive support enabled the women to begin revising and reinventing their world. The main ingredient of positive support was acknowledgment of their situation and recognition that their reactions were normal. The women did not seek solutions, they wanted the space in which to create their own.

Telling their story to listeners who cared about the person enabled the person to name and shape the meaning of their unique experience. After sharing her story with another wife of a transvestite, Cherie felt, *I got into ways of looking at the problem a bit better.* It opened up avenues for obtaining factual and

unbiased information. It assisted the women revise the assumptions and beliefs on which values, relationships and life style were based, for example, Isobel, ... *started to look at (herself) again*. Sharing feelings and stories of loss with others was healing, and allowed the women to reach some perspective from which they could make decisions. Marylyn, for example, was able to clarify her and her husband s expectations through counselling which enabled her to make difficult decisions about leaving the marriage.

5.11.5: Reconstruct the relationship to that which has been lost

Having accepted the reality of their partner s transvestism and the changed relationship as the consequence, reconstructing the relationship with their husband or partner was the most challenging task because it involved the maintenance of a real life link with their partner. The man was neither dead, or absent. In most instances he was still living in the same house as the woman. Even when separated or divorced, he was still involved in parenting children, or other family relationships, so that co-operative ways of continuing contact were required.

All women felt trapped at some point in the reconstruction of the relationship. For some women being trapped is a period that lasts for an extended period, perhaps years. For others it is a transition period where values and beliefs are redirected, resources gathered until a definite decision can be made. Feeling trapped is a very disturbing experience, engendering resentment,

bitterness, anger, recrimination and blame directed at their partner and on occasion, themselves. Joanna has been left hurt and, *unable to trust*, and for Georgia it was, *just one big mess*. Women were trapped by a number of circumstances. Approaching retirement meant that a formal separation or divorce would financially disadvantage both partners. Deeply held religious beliefs and values precluded separation or divorce. Difficulties clarifying the benefits and risks of leaving when younger children were involved, feeling responsible for finding a solution made some women feel that separation or divorce was not an option. Sometimes the daily grind of survival and the emotional turmoil left no energy for thinking and decision-making.

Re-commitment occurred when both partners realised that their new relationship could not be a variation on their previous relationship, but one that had to be re-negotiated. The new relationship was based on acceptance of the man's need to cross-dress, valuing the primary relationship, a respect for each to have autonomy and a joint redefinition of the non-traditional relationship, or as Dorothy said, *I've always been aware that I never owned him*. Reconstructing the relationship meant that to some degree the woman had to come to terms with the femme identity. The degree to which she could, or could not, succeed had a large bearing on how the relationship was reconstructed. The degree of success was directly related to the willingness or ability of the husband or partner to recognise and support his partner's needs and to maintain his cross-dressing at level which was both acceptable

to his wife, and met his needs. Re-commitment was achieved when both partners participated in communal coping strategies.

For most women re-commitment was not possible. Some were able to develop a sense of balance between the losses in their relationship and remaining benefits so that toleration was possible. Vicky expressed this, *as far as I m concerned I have no regrets. I made the best of that choice.* The price of toleration was loss of intimacy. The resulting brother-sister relationship provided companionship, stability and security based on a tacit understanding that each person needed greater autonomy and external sources of individual expression, and accepted responsibility for attending to their partner s creature comforts.

For those who could neither re-commit nor tolerate living together in relationship, the final decision was to leave the relationship. This was not an easy decision and not made quickly or lightly. All women made repeated attempts to re-commit and/or tolerate the changed relationship by use of reasoning, reminding themselves of their commitment and accommodating their partner s wishes, as Georgia explained, *You go through fighting in your head, ... Its only clothes, its only a dress, its only material, but its not.* All eventually sought assistance from a counsellor or initiated joint counselling. Most tolerated an intolerable situation for a long time before electing to leave the relationship.

Whilst physical separation and divorce are the most obvious forms of ending the relationship, there was some variation among the women. Five relationships have ended in some form of physical separation, all initiated by the woman. A sixth woman has established an emotional separation whilst maintaining a joint household, a compromise that she developed in response to her sense of being trapped. Cherie has, *walked away from being the wife of a transvestite*, whilst still living in the same house as her husband.

Moving on presented its own challenges. The decision to change the relationship by physical, or emotional separation changed the manner of interactions between man and woman which made public that which had been private. The relationship had failed. That failure could not be easily explained without divulging the husband's secret, which the women were loath to do. However, the women were distressed at being blamed for relationship failure, as Sophie explained, *They could think that it could only be for one thing that I would leave because he (husband) was such a nice little man.* With the public announcement of failure, was a private sense of defeat, fuelled by the puzzled condemnation of friends and acquaintances. Georgia explained, *you feel bad because you can't live with it. You can't win in any way.*

Recognition that the relationship was no longer viable resulted in actions taken to separate, both physically and emotionally. This decision was taken

on all occasions by the woman, although all had put considerable energy into making it a joint decision. *And he said he wasn't going to make a choice. So I packed my bag and went,* is how Sophie described the final decision making process. The break-ups were experienced as a great loss, even though the relationships were beyond repair. This set the scenario for another experience of grief that had its own trajectory or resolution.

5.11.6: Reinventing self

The process of reinvention began as soon as the women embarked on the journey of survival. Progress was initially imperceptible, as their distress was overwhelming. It is only in retrospect, or to attentive and supportive others, that the women's courage and abilities to cope and adapt become apparent. Neimeyer (2000) identified some key strategies useful in healing grief. These strategies include taking the time and allowing feelings to be experienced, making use of healthy stress relief methods such as walking and meditation, and confiding in supportive others. Letting go of the need to control others, practicing spiritually uplifting rituals and identifying and accepting positive changes within the lifestyle are also helpful. The women in this study identified similar strategies that they used to heal and reinvent themselves. Vicky, Isobel and Sophie described crying copious *tears until there were no tears left* and allowing themselves to feel the pain and hurt and anger. Cherie made use of both walking and meditation as means of healthy stress relief. All eventually found confiding in another supportive person the key to

healthy resolution. Letting go of the need to control others, practicing spiritually uplifting rituals and identifying and accepting positive changes also helped Cherie, Sophie, Marylyn and Vicky obtained a sense of freedom and power. The future became something to look forward to, or at least not to be afraid of. Joanna recognised, *I have grown in myself and know I have the strength and resources to stand on my own if I need to*. Most importantly for the women, they liked themselves as human beings, as Marylyn concluded, *I can even be generous with (husband) . My life is now good, and it is just that, my life*.

5.12: GAINING STRENGTH FROM ADVERSITY

Developing strength from adversity is a well-recognised phenomenon.

Denzin (1992, p83) describes those life experiences which radically alter and shape the meanings of a person's life as epiphanies. The epiphany occurs when and where the person confronts and experiences a crisis. These occurrences challenge cherished personal and public values which causes a change in personal values and understanding.

The epiphanic moment leaves a mark on the person's life. There are four forms of epiphany: the major upheaval, which changes life for ever; . The cumulative, which refers to the final build-up of a crisis in a person's life; the illuminative moment, in which the underlying existential structures of a relationship or situation are revealed; and the relived moment, wherein the person, after an event occurs, come to define it in consequential terms.

The experience of living in a relationship with a transvestite exposed the women to one, if not all the different types of epiphany. For example, the women experienced the major upheaval of initial and later disclosures, the cumulative effects as the changed relationship affected all aspects of life over time, the illuminative moments when understanding occurred, and the relived moments when episodes from the past were relived and re-evaluated in light of new knowledge.

Positive outcomes from these moments can include changed life structure, including new directions and priorities, altered views of others and the world, the development of supportive networks, and the finding of meaning or life purpose. The act of survival highlights the person's abilities to cope with adversity through self-reliance. Relationships change, with a perceived increased freedom to express emotions and opinions, and also an increased understanding of the suffering of others. (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; McMillen, 1999). Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) suggest that posttraumatic growth can simultaneously increase well-being and distress. The women's experiences described in this study attest to these comments. All the women expressed some degree of personal growth development. Georgia and Joanna returned to study, Cherie, Marylyn and Sophie restructured their lives, Dorothy restructured her relationships with her husband and children, Vicky developed social connections beyond the relationship, and Jean and Isobel made major changes in their relationships. They all identified the distress that

these actions caused, but all recognised the benefits and personal growth that has occurred.

5.13: OTHER POINTS OF VIEW

Findings in this study confirm the range of experiences previously identified (Brown & Collier, 1989; Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Peo, 1984; Woodhouse, 1985; Woodhouse, 1989). However placing these findings within the context of the grief experience as described by Neimeyer (2000) leads to a description of the experience of being in relationship with a transvestite male as a more actively engaging process whereby the women seek and ultimately reach a point of resolution. This was possible because women who had left the relationship were interviewed. Previous studies have all recognised the limitation of limiting their participants to those women attending or connected to a transvestite support group and still in a relationship with a transvestite. The experiences of women who had left the relationship identified previously unidentified dimensions of their experiences. The identified context of grieving can now be applied to the experiences of women described in prior studies to be seen as part of the grieving process.

Weinberg and Bullough (1988) conducted a mail survey study of 70 women accessed via a transvestite organisation, a transvestite s wives support group, an outreach group and those undergoing counselling. Results suggest that women in relationship with transvestites struggle with two corresponding

social adjustments; management of stigma and adjustments to the husband-wife interaction. Stigma is:

the difference between what others believe we are and should be and what we really are, when what we really are is something they might perceive as bad, immoral, or perverse, if they knew about it (Weinberg & Bullough, 1988, p86).

The authors suggest the greatest fear of wives is that outsiders may treat her as if she also possesses the stigma. Whilst the women in the current study did have many concerns regarding secrecy, those concerns were more about protecting the men. The women knew that at worst, they would be offered pity. However, they did fear for the men's reputations if disclosure occurred.

Weinberg and Bullough (1988) proposed that women pass through a series of stages of adjustment to the husband-wife interaction. These stages encompass; discovery characterised by shock, confusion and self-blame progressing to resentment, anger and rejection followed by attempts to understand through reading and seeking counselling. Next, the woman makes a passive adjustment by setting limits on cross-dressing behaviours that are tolerable whilst serving as a confidante and finally active participation including helping with dressing, make-up, clothes shopping and accompanying her en femme husband in public. They also comment (p102):

Some women never see anything positive about their husband's cross-dressing. In fact, some women appear to get more and more hostile as time goes by, probably because some of their husband's increase their participation in transvestism.

It is interesting that the authors did not see fit to place the distressed women within their proposed stages of adaptation model, preferring to address this group of women as an afterthought. In addition to not adequately incorporating data from negative wives, the proposed stages model focuses on the adaptations required by the wives and pays no attention to the adaptations required by the transvestites to preserve equality within the relationship.

The context of adjustment and resolution through grief proposed in this study presents the women's view as an appraisal of the benefits and abilities of the relationship to sustain her psychologically and physically, and of her abilities to accept and respond to her partner's needs. It is a more active, woman-centred description than that of Bullough and Weinberg (1988), or Docter's (1988) patterns of marital adjustment as games. Docter proposed that adjustment to cross-dressing took the form of interactive games between husband and wife such as the isolation game, the personal growth game, the double message game and the mother game. Whilst there is an attempt to present a balance, these games are described, and outcomes explained, from the transvestite's perspective. There is a clear message that the responsibility for the success or failure of the relationship rests with the women's ability to adapt to the Transvestism. The personal growth game with its emphasis on the struggle to understand and respond to the needs of each other, fits closest to the re-commitment phase described in the current study.

The isolation game best fits the trapped phase in the current study, with its emphasis on loss of intimacy and communication, and increasing anger and hurt from the women. Whilst elements of the double message game and the mother game were identified, the games in their entirety were not obvious.

Docter (1988) considers his sample of women to overrepresent partners who accept or encourage cross-dressing as a result of his sampling techniques. Survey forms to be completed by women in relationship with a transvestite were included in a research package sent to sixty-four married transvestites participating in a larger study. Such methods depended on the husband giving the information to the wives to complete. Eight indicated they preferred their wives not to participate due to relationship difficulties. Of the remaining couples only thirty-five surveys were returned. Explanations were not forthcoming about the reasons for non-return but it is not unreasonable to consider that antagonism, rather than acceptance, would have been at least one of the reasons for non-compliance.

A much quoted grading of wives appears in Prince (1967, p68). He provides an arguably arrogant and biased opinion based on:

wives whom I know in person and those whose attitudes I have come to know through conversations with their husbands or through correspondence.

Six grades of wives, equating performance and acceptance on scales used by schools to measure performance are suggested: A (excellent), B (good), C

(average), D (fair), E (poor) and F (total failure). The Excellent wife is one that loves her husband unreservedly, is thoroughly conversant and comfortable with cross-dressing, and participates socially and intimately with cross-dressing activities. The Failing wife is one that is horrified and disgusted by the perversion, refusing to discuss let alone participate in cross-dressing activities, most often leaving the marriage taking the children with her. The wife graded D, E or F is considered inadequate and transvestites married to such women are considered unfortunate.

The A to F scale (Prince, 1967) bears little resemblance to the findings as described in this thesis, or in previously mentioned studies. There is no recognition of the needs of women in relationship with transvestites and full responsibility for maintaining, and blame for failing is placed fully on the women as expressed by Prince (1967, p36).

You could hardly wish him to carry a burden of unhappiness, frustration, and guilt around with him for the rest of his life. You would want to relieve him of those burdens, keep him happy and healthy as long as God grants him a stay on this earth.

The only similarity is that there is a range of responses and attitudes, ranging from acceptance to rejection.

Methods used for recruiting participants in the current study attempted to gain access to a group of women not previously addressed. Women who were neither in clinical settings or directly associated with support groups for

transvestites were recruited through the use of community newspapers and talk back local radio to advertise the study. Secondly, as a result of these recruitment strategies women who were no longer in continuing relationships with a transvestite came forward, a perspective also not previously explored. It was hoped that the neutral tone of the recruitment strategies would also encourage women who were completely accepting to come forward but none did. The fully accepting wife or partner seems to be a rare phenomenon. Woodhouse, (1989, p126) comments:

Certainly such reactions (acceptance) are not found among the majority of wives attending the Partners Support Group at TV/TS. It could be argued that fully accepting wives are hard to find, simply because they do not need to attend a support group. However, none of the transvestites ever indicated the existence of such a wife at home. If they had, they would have been strongly encouraged by others to bring her to TV/TS meetings.

These comments are relevant to the current study as recruitment via a support group in Western Australia failed to contact a fully accepting wife, as hoped and expected.

5.14: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample group was a purposive sample, rather than a random sample.

Women who responded and agreed to be interviewed may not represent the possible range of responses, particularly women who are completely accepting of their partners behaviour. These women may not have been

tempted to respond because they do not see the behaviour of their partner worthy of comment.

The choice of recruitment strategies made recruitment of English speaking women most likely. There was diverse background as regards wealth and security. However, nobody from the very wealthy or very poor came forward, nor did anyone from the many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds that call Western Australia home. That other cultures experience transvestism is clear from the literature, but they may view it differently and/or there may be cultural reasons for not responding to a public request for participants. However the study did include women without connection with a transvestite support group, and others who had left the relationship, groups of women never accessed before, so that new information and new perspectives were added to the body of knowledge.

It must be acknowledged that the emotional state of bereavement itself may have influenced participants narratives. Data was collected from participants who were no longer in a continuing relationship with a transvestite. Their retrospective accounts of experiences may have affected accuracy. Women still in a continuing relationship with a transvestite were likely to report positively on their experiences within the relationship, as they were a vulnerable group in relation to their dependency on the relationship for security and self-worth. Despite these limitations, however, triangulation of

data occurred, both positive and negative cases were identified, and an inclusive model developed. Although the sample size was small, involving in-depth interviews of nine women and a group interview, over one hundred and twenty pages of data was collected. This allowed content analysis to reach the point of saturation, and persistent patterns and concepts to emerge from the data which could be grouped to form major themes.

Analysis of data gathered for this study confirmed and expanded findings in previous studies conducted in non-clinical settings.

5.15: SUMMARY

Research into the experience of transvestites women has been at best, sporadic. The experience of women living in other than Western, English speaking cultures is an area for further research, as is the effect and influence of transvestism on children. This study is the first, to the researcher's knowledge, that accessed participants who had left the relationship. Further studies that also contact such women are needed to compare or verify findings. In addition finding women who are completely accepting is a challenge that has not as yet been fully realised.

This study undertook to describe and analyse the experience of living in a committed relationship with a Transvestite, from the woman's point of view. The use of phenomenological methodology allowed the women interviewed to

be the experts. Analysis of the in-depth interviews identified core themes that described grieving for their relationships and lifestyles lost by the disclosure by their transvestite mate. The secretive nature of transvestism, and the loss of equality within the relationship complicated the grief. Issues relating to emotional and sexual abuse were also identified.

Also described was the process by which the women faced the changes within the relationship and adapted their lifestyle and/or themselves to cope. It described essentially a journey of hope, determination and triumph under emotionally difficult circumstances.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ am willing to participate in research concerning the experience of wives and committed partners living with a transvestite.

The research consists of audiotaped interviews with the researcher who will ask questions regarding my thoughts and feelings related to living in a committed relationship with a transvestite. I understand the interviews will take approximately one hour, depending on my needs. I will have opportunity to review what I have said, and to clarify or expand anything I have said. In addition I will be able to comment in a collaborative manner on material developed by the researcher.

My participation in the study is voluntary and I realise there may be no direct benefit to me, although the information I give is likely to benefit others who are involved with Transvestites in the future. I understand there is a small risk that I could become emotionally upset due to the very personal nature of the subject and that I am free to obtain counselling and support should the need arise. I may stop the interview at any time and I may decline to answer any question.

All information is confidential to the researcher and her transcriber. My identity will not be revealed on any transcript or cassette tape. I am aware that the tape cassettes will be returned to me at the conclusion of the study, so that I may personally destroy it.

I have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study realising that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I understand that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my identity is withheld. I will be provided with a copy of the final report should I want one.

Participant s signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher s signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

OPEN LETTER TO WIVES OR COMMITTED PARTNERS OF TRANSVESTITES

Dear Sister,

I am currently enrolled in a Master of Social Science programme at Edith Cowan University. My thesis topic is Living with a transvestite: a phenomenological study of wives and committed partners. The reason for this study is to explore and describe the experience of living with a transvestite from the perception of the partner, a much neglected viewpoint. I am seeking women who are in a committed relationship with a transvestite to participate in a series of informal interviews.

Participation would involve being interviewed by me. I am seeking ten women who are willing to tell their story. It does not matter whether you are accepting of your partner's action or whether you find it disturbing. I am interested in recording the variation of experiences and finding the common themes. As a woman who has been closely associated with the issue, and aware of the lack of information readily available for wives or partners, I would value your

participation in the study, with the aim of developing some material for use by transvestites and their wives or partners.

I understand that for some women, this may be difficult due to the very individual emotions arising from relationships, and I would certainly not wish to cause any discomfort by the request. If however, you are willing to be interviewed, your information will be very much appreciated. You can be assured that if you become involved in this study, your information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and your name or identity will not be disclosed. Interviews will last approximately one hour, in your home, or place designated by you, and at a time convenient to you. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to talk about this further, contact me by letter, phone or e-mail. I will then contact you to arrange an initial meeting to discuss the research process and answer any questions you may have. An appointment will then be made for the first interview. Remember you may withdraw from the study at any point.

Thank you for considering this request,

Yours sincerely,

Heather Freegard.

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name (Psuedonym)

Age at time of interview

Nationality

Occupation

First marriage (committed relationship)	Yes	No
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Year of marriage (commitment) to your partner

Length of time you have known about your partner s cross-dressing

How many children (by this or other relationship)

Ages of children	Boys	Girls
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How many children currently live with you?	Boys	Girls
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APPENDIX D

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: TRANSCRIBER.

I _____, in my position as transcriber for the research study Living with a transvestite: a phenomenological study of wives and committed partners will be privy to information that is of a highly sensitive and personal nature. This is a privileged position and I undertake to treat all material with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality. I will not disclose the nature of the information, the identity of any person or the places mentioned in the course of the taped interviews to anyone.

Signature of transcriber: _____ Date: _____

Signature of witness: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Total number of participants: 9

	Range
Age at interview	38 — 84 years
Duration of relationship with transvestite	5 — 42 years
Length of relationship prior to disclosure	2 weeks — 33 years
Time elapsed since initial disclosure, at time of interview	3 months — 62 years
Age at commitment to relationship	17 — 48
Age at time of disclosure	21 - 48

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK — FINDINGS

1. Has the interview material provided by you been fairly represented? If not, how can this be rectified?
2. How do the overall findings relate to your personal experience?
3. What has being a participant in this study meant to you?
4. Time has elapsed since you spoke with me. Could you provide a brief outline of where you are at now, in terms of your relationship and experiences of living with a transvestite. With your permission I would like to include this in the final version of the thesis.
5. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Name:

Date:

Signature.