

Sweetheart Connection

Love me
so I can
Love
Myself...

Fall, 1997

Volume 5, Issue 4

Holiday
En
Femme
on the
Dignity
Cruise to
Bahamas
Jan 19-
22, 1998

S.P.I.C.E.
VI
Atlanta
Jul 15-19,
1998

Finding Lasting Love

by Dr. Peggy Rudd

A popular song describes why some of us never find love. The lyrics say we are, "Looking for love in all the wrong places."

Where are transgendered people looking for love? Many are waiting for love to come to them through other people, but real love moves outward from the heart.

What does this mean? Simply stated this means that too often we are inclined to say, "Love me so I can love myself." In reality we should be saying, "I want to be lovable. I want to love myself, and then perhaps others will also love me."

Basically most of our problems in matters of love relate to the egocentric nature of humanity. Most people ask first, "What's in it for me?" Or

they say, "If I don't get the love I deserve I'll never be truly happy!" Too much of our self-confidence seems to be dependent upon moment by moment responses from others.

Once we have started to love ourselves, we have opened our hearts for the love that can be freely given by others. We are not talking about the kind of self-love experienced by Narcissus, who looked into a pond, saw a reflection of himself, and fell very much in love with what he saw. From that time forward Narcissus found no room for anyone else. The Narcissus-kind of self-love deprives an individual of the fulfillment which others can bring into life.

The healthy kind of self-love is a self-appreciation necessary for good mental health. If

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California S.P.I.C.E.

by Desiree Liegh

SPICE means so many things in so many different ways. SPICE of life, SPICE in food, but the SPICE I want to talk about is the dynamic conference that was held in Ontario, California, last July. If there is someone who does not know what SPICE stands for, it is Spouse and Partners International Conference for Education. SPICE's goal is to work toward helping and enhancing the communication between couples, enhancing friendships, both old and new, and having a common thread in their life with the gender gifted.

"Getting to Know You" was the theme and that was what we tried to do. Getting to know our spouse our partner, or ourselves and friends. Getting to know as much we could about the art of communications and acceptance.

Dynamic -- that is putting it mildly. That's precisely what all the professionals were that led the sessions. They were knowledgeable, understanding, caring and loving people.

The hotel was very nice and friendly. The meals were good. And privacy was never a concern. Everyone was safe from any undesired public contact.

This was my second SPICE conference. As the wife of a

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U.S.P.S. Again

We had our little finger run into the Postal Services pencil sharpener at the last mailing. Seems the advertisement for the Dignity Cruise was a brow knitting "no-no". As a Non-Profit Educational Organization we are not allowed to solicit our readership for travel, or insurance or etc. etc. This was a surprise after all the work with the Down-

town Main Office. We also now need to hand stamp each envelope indicating our non-profit status. Sheesh! AFTER we had 3000 printed!! I remember when my husband was trying to satisfy the Federal Aviation Authority AND the Post Office to carry mail on the commuter airline he managed. Just about drove him into a rubber room. ❄

Editor's Blue Pencil

It is amazing how insight comes to us. Interesting, too how such achieved comprehensions are not always shattering revelations, but rather more like an extra bit of polish on a gemstone of understanding.

In the process of a marginally painful conversation with a chapter member who had announced initiating mutually agreed upon divorce proceedings, I was delving for his feelings, something he normally keeps closely wrapped and controlled. For an emotional break, I spoke of a recent visit with our son, Jamie, and how he had physically changed from an underweight young man to a robustly strong adult. And, that he seemed happier, for one of his teachers had apparently found the way to his secret mind by introducing him to watercolor.

As most of you know, watercolor is MY "bliss". For decades Jamie had demonstrated repeatedly art was the avenue to any communication with him. I used the term "secret mind" above, for Jamie is brain-damaged and autistic. "Retarded" was one of the diagnoses 28 years ago; we institutionalized him at the tender and disarming age of four. The loss of that boy and all the expectations that had accrued to him at birth was devastating to me. My sense of self worth went right into the toilet. Just when I thought I had gotten everything right, something pivotal went wrong. I took the blame, but could neither understand nor accept such a monumental failure.

The insight I had as I spoke of this tumultuous time in my life was that I had been down that emotionally bloody and rough road twice. The pain and devastation I experienced then was remarkably similar to that which I felt when my husband of 30 years decided to actively participate in his long denied desire to crossdress.

Looking hard at that initially casual statement, testing it for veracity, I found

it to be true. My sense of worth and value disintegrated and permeated me with shame, fear and anger over what was real and what was lost. I was NOT to have the experience of raising a boy to manhood; the person I had married was NOT the man I had expected him to be. Even though both those images were nebulous and unformed, the expectations, the desire, to have these two people be something for me that they could not be, was a central part of my life as I used to day-dream it.

When Jamie left, I was bereft. So much so I refused to hold any other woman's infant or child for even a minute; to do so was to revisit the pain of my loss which was too strong to bear. Not until my granddaughters were born could I surmount that agony. After Jamie left, I didn't stop crying and boring people with excessively detailed recitations about the "Jamie problem" for over a year. It was close to three years before I was able to accept and allow that reality, when I finally KNEW it was not my fault.

It took the same amount of time (more, to be truthful) to achieve the same result relative to my husband and "his problem". Sharing this insight with Robert, he pointed out there had been a third such "road trip" for me... when I came to the sorrowful conclusion that I had to "divorce" my mother for the sake of my emotional and physical health. (Possibly also a fourth, when we lost our dream and the resort; but "that's another show".)

It is when expectations take on a luster and impetus beyond reality that we become vulnerable to the pain of loss. How dare circumstances deprive us of our dream when so much was promised at the start. But, being "good girls" with some smarts, we readily followed the lead of the dance and say, "That's the breaks. When handed a lemon, make lemonade." "Que sera, sera" we sing, with resentment boiling in our hearts. We give up a dream we never even articulated, much less ever grieve it out. If we are good at making

"pretty faces", our equally anxious crossdressing husbands have difficulty surmounting their perplexity about us, which then compounds their confusion about themselves. What a mess.

What, if any, is the answer? I like Richard Miller's guide: "Communicate, communicate, communicate. Take very tiny REVERSIBLE steps; go slow." Give each other plenty of room and time. Examine everything, all the wondrous subtleties of the rose's petals AND the complexities of the thorns. Not all of it will be likable, but only realpolitik can yield results that work. Each of us has more capacity for life than we know. Life, of course, is Love's other name.

Responses (via CDSO support list)

Onnalee

The dreams, the goals, the aspirations that we carry with us from our girlhood into our womanhood are such an integral part of us. As you said, unformed and nebulous...yet they are, in part, our very souls.

We are trained, those of us of "our" generation, from birth it seems, to place others' needs above our own, to subjugate our "bliss" when it collides with those close to us, to take the blame when anything goes "wrong". But no one told us how to deal with those "unladylike" feelings of Anger, Resentment and Hate... those skills are learned the hard way or not at all.

So we turn those feelings inward. They are, after all, probably "unworthy" feelings. As "good" girls we shouldn't feel them anyway, right?

So we have an extra cocktail, smoke too much, eat too much... anything to fill that void that eats away at our guts. Chocolate emulates feelings of being in love...have another Hershey bar.

And we smile... all the way to the grave... OR:

WE TALK! We talk to the man that we have focused our bag of mixed emotions on... We talk and talk some more... sometimes we cry... a lot we cry... sometimes we yell... But we keep talking, and talking... and then we talk to other women that howled at the moon... But we don't give up.

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We bandage our wounds, though no longer able to hide them. We learn that to be "self-worthy" is to be feminine. We learn that we have strengths we never knew. We flex muscles never used. We grow. We learn. We learn more about ourselves than we ever

thought possible. And then... the anger starts to melt. The resentment no longer nourishes us... guilt doesn't prod us awake in the middle of the night with a sense of panic.

When we can stand tall and proud with our very own sense of self intact, we finally can look at those goals and dreams and aspi-

rations we brought with us and either tenderly lay them to rest to be replaced with new ones or we realize that they are still obtainable... the only thing we really lost was ourselves... for a little while.

Beverly Rencher, LA

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you constantly doubt or reject yourself, love relationships will be affected. People tend to project their inner thoughts about self, and others are either positively or negatively affected.

In his recent book, BORN FOR LOVE, (Random House) Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D., describes the love of self, as well as the love for others, as something we must continually work toward. But, according to Buscaglia, you must forgive yourself first before your heart is ready for love. According to Buscaglia, "You might forget your own telephone number, but you have an unailing memory for all the things you have done wrong, especially past mistakes." Our chances for love are greatly diminished when we allow the past to cloud the present.

Sharing Life With Another

If you believe you cannot be happy without being involved in a relationship you are already showing symptoms of a person who has difficulty in relationships. This dependency upon love is a "set up" for a clinging, dependent attitude. Another person can not make you happy, make you feel good, or elevate your self-confidence. Ideally you can move from the need for external approval to self-approval. Wanting to share a beautiful sunset with someone is normal. Feeling that there is no pleasure in the sunset when you are alone is not normal or ideal.

Unfortunately, Our culture emphasizes external approval at the expense of internal harmony and honesty. You have heard stories about men who find status within the business world at the expense of personal integrity. You also know about students who cheat on exams in order to have

the best grade and the approval of the teacher. Where does self-approval fit into this?

What is the Source of Happiness?

We believe other people are making us unhappy when they do not love us freely or in the way we want to be loved. Resentment, anger, frustration and fear fill our hearts. Women in a committed relationship with transgendered men may feel many of these negative emotions. These are dangerous emotions capable of leading people toward self-destruction. Since external forces stimulate such emotions, their impact is only an illusion and can be handled or dissipated with some effort. One thing is definite. Keeping negative emotions around is detrimental to love and will almost always harm any relationship.

We need to build bridges from the shadows of pain back into our hearts. True feelings, including love and acceptance, begin within. We must learn to be true to our own identity before others can learn to relate to that identity. Self-approval precedes approval by others. As long as a person has not come to terms with who they are, others will see them as less than lovable. If a person finds little or no internal harmony he can not expect to have a harmonious relationship with others. To state this in simplistic terms we can not demand love. We must create it.

An ancient proverb states: "Master Yourself and You Can Master Anything"

To find love, look in the right places. Look first into all the dark recesses of your own heart. Keep yourself worthy of respect, and you will be able to love yourself. This is not a selfish attitude unless we start to care only about selfish interest. There is

much pleasure in giving ourselves to another person when we feel we are worth giving. The selfish person looks at the world only from the view of what he or she can get out of it. Selfishness is the opposite of self-love, which is motivated by the desire to please another person. The irony is that selfish people really do not love themselves. They love nobody. Self-love helps us know that we are SOMEBODY. To love yourself is to think of yourself as worthy of love.

Finding a Personal Identity

Relationships tend to magnify inner conflicts. When we find peace within there will be peace with others. We must come to grips with personal identity before others can know us. It is important to find a comfort zone of personal integrity first. When this happens there will be a diminished value placed on acceptance by others. The irony here is that we can search the world over a hundred times for acceptance, but it will come quickly once self-acceptance is realized.

Where the Search Begins

Begin the search for acceptance by accepting yourself. It can be found within your own being. Do not be stifled when other people can not accept you, because self-acceptance is far more important. Even if it takes years to find a comfort zone with your own identity, you must keep searching. Acceptance from others will follow. At some time we may need to have the forgiveness of others, but equally important is the forgiveness we owe ourselves. Love is not about keeping old wounds open. Love is about allowing wounds to heal. It is about moving forward and learning from past mistakes. It is about getting on with life. ☺

Currently running on CDSO:

Questions:

Are all crossdressers totally caught up in the crossdressing?

Are Crossdressers typically carried away with seeing pictures of themselves [dressed]?

Does the visual image they see cause most crossdressers to be aroused?

Sticking Point: The term "Gender Gifted" and the use of the word "gifted" relative to the phenomenon of crossdressing.

"...it certainly is not, in any way, a 'gift'. Too many people are hurt, puzzled, fearful and profoundly confused by this so-called 'gift'."

Friendship Facts

Forming Friendships is a Process that Occurs Throughout Life

- ☞ Parents of teenagers have an average of 4.7 friends. Those entering retirement, however, have an average of six friends.
- ☞ Nursing home residents have fewer friends than those dwelling in the community.
- ☞ As people age, they become more selective when choosing friends. They want to minimize negative experiences, so they increasingly desire the certainty of positive interactions with friends.
- ☞ Healthy older adults maintain a balance of giving and receiving in their friendships.
- ☞ Older adults rarely terminate their friendships. Rather, if friendships fade away it's most often because of diverging lifestyles.

☞ Younger adults often experience a permanent rift when friendships fail. Older adults feel that they can usually revive faded friendships.

How Men's and Women's Friendships Differ

- ☞ Men tend to trust their best friends more than women do, but men's conversations with friends are more impersonal than women's.
- ☞ Women rank conversation as the most important benefit of their friendships. They also value talking about relationships and sharing personal information. Men tend to focus on topical subjects such as careers, sports, and politics.
- ☞ In one study, 50 percent of women respondents and only 19 percent of men respondents had daily or weekly phone conversations with a close friend.

(as of October 30th)

"...gifts' don't generate all the hurt, resentment, anger that cding does."

"... should *they* really be told that we are the more gifted person in this relationship for standing by them and trying our damndest to understand them."
 "Is it more a gift to want to dress in women's clothing, or is it more a gift to understand that wanting?"

The discussion continues, if somewhat erratically, family life being what it generally is. Other "hot" topics have been the effect of crossdressing on sexual functionality (tends to end it for

many, turn it on for others), "tartiness" in dress, full body shaving by CDing men (turns a lot of wives off). Some wives find strong pressures to participate in anal sex. Several have difficulty getting their husbands to *talk* to them about feelings. Of these there are husbands who refuse or cannot bring themselves to speak to *any* one else about their Cding. This leaves those wives and partners in a difficult, if not even untenable place in terms of support or acceptance.

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from Modern Maturity Sept. - Oct., '97

What Friends Talk About

- ☞ Thirty-three percent discuss their mistakes.
- ☞ Twenty-two percent reveal their deepest feelings.
- ☞ Fifteen percent converse about the quality of their relationship.

Conflicts Among Friends

- ☞ Twenty-two percent report that their friends sometimes upset them.
- ☞ When asked to recall acts of betrayal, people most often talked about incidents that had happened decades before.
- ☞ Spouses and co-workers are more common sources of betrayal than friends.
- ☞ More people believe that a friend's act of betrayal harmed the relationship more than their own action.

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We see a continuing problem presented in myriad guises which subsumes to the second question: Who's in charge here, anyway? Many times the answer to that query will see-saw back and forth depending on the issue involved. It is frequently how we define ourselves or our roles in life, by what we control or of what we are "in charge". Add crossdressing to the mix and the issues become volatile to point of explosiveness. How is it in **your** household?

* * * * *

By the time you get this publication, the chance to sign up and pre-pay the costs for the 1997 Holiday en Femme on the Dignity Cruise to the Bahamas will have closed. Your editor and spouse are going. Hey, at our age, we had about given up on ever being able to take a cruise of any kind.

I know, some of you may think that going on such a trip where the guys will be "en femme" just about 100% of the time is going on the cruise for the wrong reason. No argument. BUT... having already met a number of charming and friendly people both at S.P.I.C.E. and last year's Holiday, I can't pass up both opportunities for pleasure. Besides, mid-January is the right time to forsake these frozen Northern climes in favor of hot sun and warm friends.

If we do not meet on board the Dignity Cruise, begin now to make youplans and build your funds for S.P.I.C.E. VI in Atlanta, July 15-19, 1998. Check with your local Tri-Ess chapter; many of them have scholarship funds available to assist wives with the "tuition" or more.

We will have a lot to talk about!

Ask Aunt Mary...

Dear Aunt Mary,

My husband is only 46, but for the last few years, he has lost all interest in sex. I learned of his crossdressing ten years ago, and I'm still having problems with it, especially since he's rather spend time in front of his computer "chatting" with his "sisters" until two in the morning! When I approach him more than once a month, he says I'm oversexed! This can't be normal for a man his age, transgendered or not. I've been wondering about crossdressers possibly having low testosterone levels. Is this true, and if it is, has anyone tried hormone therapy (testosterone, not estrogen.) I'd slip it into his breakfast juice, if I thought it would help!

Signed: Frustrated

Dear Frustrated,

Many have speculated that lower testosterone levels are a factor in "causing crossdressing. As far as I know, the research data available does not confirm this. The persons tested all were "within normal limits."

What could additional testosterone do for them, should we slip it into their orange juice? Heightened aggressiveness, somewhat coarser skin and hair, deeper voice, and (perhaps) more of a sex drive, are possibilities. This would depend on the individual, the dosage, and myriads of other factors. It's not likely to regrow hair in bald areas. It could cause old-fashioned teenage acne to reappear. It could make them more irritable and even harder to live with. The effect we wives would be looking for (renewed sexual energy that is focused on us) is the most problematical. If there is some physical problem affecting sexual performance, such as prostate enlargement, for instance, more testosterone will make it worse.

Mental/emotional attitude is more important than most physical factors,

anyway, where sexual function is concerned. Some men (not just crossdressers) are self-centered (to the point of being narcissistic) and some are obsessive-compulsive. While crossdressing itself is no longer considered pathological behavior, narcissism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and impotence in the absence of physical disease are recognized psychiatric diagnosis for which various therapies do exist. In simpler terms, crossdressing itself cannot be "cured" because it is so closely linked to elements of the personality, but other recognized disorders that are sometimes associated with the crossdressing can at least be treated.

But let's hang onto our hats, ladies! Before reaching for that secret herbal blend (or prescription drugs, for that matter) make sure he has a thorough check-up to rule out any physical disease. If he is already on drugs for high blood pressure, for instance, that could definitely be a factor. Check with his cardiologist. He's too embarrassed to see his regular doctor? Send him to someone else, such as a urologist! Then see a counselor for help in sorting out personal and relationship issues. Whether he's willing to acknowledge it or not, he does have a problem, and it will take both of you, working on it together, to make it better.

Another factor involved in his lack of interest may be his feelings of injury and rejection, stemming from your failure to jump for joy when you found out that he was a crossdresser. When what is so important to him is such a turn-off for you, hurt feelings are normal enough. That alone is a powerful killer of sexual desire. What is wrong with his failure to empathize with your feelings, which anyone should realize are at least as bruised as his. Some people let themselves harden into punishing, withholding, manipulative types whose pride won't let them apologize and start over. But we have to watch out for ourselves here. Sometimes we are the ones guilty of this!

One last thought... all together now, ladies:

WE - are - NOT -- oversexed! ☞

Crossdressing: Problem... or Opportunity

by Richard Miller

Once, I had a boss who gave me projects to do, then left me alone to complete them; I always knew he would be real help if problems arose. When they did, his approach was invariably that it was NOT a problem but an opportunity for improvement.

As we worked in this way, solutions DID seem superior to what I had envisioned; he always asked me what I had learned. Eventually I realized that it was the process that yielded the better answers. I discovered that viewing a situation as an opportunity rather than a problem created a different mind set.

Most CD couples have issues and questions surrounding the CD subject and frequently do not see any good solutions -- only BIG PROBLEMS! I suggest each couple try to think differently by viewing the situation as an opportunity for improvement.

When a boy is born, his social conditioning begins. He is taught to be strong, not to cry, to suppress his emotions, hide his true feelings; that this is the way boys become men.

When a girl is born, she too, is socially conditioned, but quite differently. She is taught to be soft, nurturing, is allowed emotionality, and to please others. As if it were the only appropriate way for girls to become women.

The only thing wrong with this conditioning is that most of us don't fit our prescribed roles very well. This mis-match is standard issue for crossdressers. His feelings and desires are those that get him branded "wimp" or "sissy" or "homosexual." The resulting conflict between our true selves and the dictates of society induces tremendous emotional stress and considerable pain. His partner is seldom aware of that which the person they love must endure. Such a situation becomes intolerable.

What makes these traits so wrong? What is wrong with a man expressing his feelings, being compassionate and

gentle, acting cooperatively instead of competitively? What is so wrong with wearing softer, feminine clothing? What he is doing is reflecting that behavior generally associated with wives and partners. Why should such behavior be restricted only to women?

Society, through its arbitrary rules, has made those behaviors in males seem wrong. The rigid application of those "rules" is the usual cause of emotional stress in crossdressers. Remove the prejudicial views and the society-induced problems will begin to disappear.

The truth is a man can have and show his feelings. Suppression of such feelings may make him appear hard and strong, even cold, but the action is harmful to healthy development. It is possible for a man to take the best of what the world calls feminine and include it in his life while still remaining a man. He can have it all and the woman who helps him have it all, can enjoy it all, too!

The process of viewing crossdressing as an opportunity rather than a problem needs to be a joint venture of both partners. Neither can do it alone.

Pivotal to this is the need to understand that the crossdressing is an integral part of the total personality of the man. To attempt to make it "go away by next Tuesday" would be an attempt to stop the man from being the person he really is. Acceptance is the Key.

Acceptance of the continuing existence of crossdressing is essential for successful resolution. There is no other option other than personal repression that would lead to misery and unhappiness.

I had to understand and accept myself as I am, not as society expected me to be. I tried for 50 years to hide, deny and control this part of me and was totally unsuccessful. I needed help and found it in extensive correspondence with other crossdressers. Each man

needs to understand and accept this facet of himself and how it fits into his total view of himself. It is an incredibly difficult process but equally essential to successful resolution.

My revelation of crossdressing caused great anxiety for Marsha. It was an enormous change with uncertain consequences. Now she needed to learn all those ways of thinking about me that I had worked so hard to learn. If she had fought and tried to make it go away, our relationship would have failed. My having experienced personal trauma did not give me the right to dictate how another should deal with the issue. I relieved much of Marsha's distress by making some basic commitments:

1. To remain her husband, not become her "girlfriend." We do a lot together when I am dressed as Rachel, but Richard remains her husband no matter how he is dressed.

2. Not to jeopardize our current lifestyle to indulge my gender desires. We take many, small, reversible steps.

3. To maintain a balance between my needs and hers. If the man refuses to make commitments reflective of the woman's needs, she will then begin asking some hard questions relative to what she can gain from the relationship. If the crossdresser is meeting his needs at the expense of his partner, the process will fail.

Primary is the mutual desire to make the relationship work and that it is already a mutually committed loving relationship. Tough choices may need to be made that require the consideration of the other person's happiness. If a mutual commitment is missing, negotiations may break down into an adversarial process similar to labor/management disputes.

The most difficult part of the process is the need to communicate, communicate, communicate. Unlearning old

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ways of thinking and habits of acting to replace both with new ways and habits is not subject to a "quick fix" approach. It takes lots of talking and even more listening to work through the issues. We had the benefit of starting as good friends who talked about things. That habit made it easier but it didn't make it easy.

What we did, you can do; every couple can do it. If you seek fulfillment and happiness for yourself and your partner, then you do not have a problem but an opportunity to build the intimate relationship of which most people can only dream. The opportunity is in your hands. Seize the day! Seize the opportunity. ☞

This article is a condensed version of an after-dinner talk given by Richard Miller the second evening of S.P.I.C.E. V in Ontario California, last July. If you would want a copy of the complete article by Mr. Miller, please write with an SASE (2-ounce postage required) to the editor.

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crossdresser, I would not miss this experience. Not only do I learn much that helps our relationship and me but my spouse also learns even though he has not been able to attend.

Is this just for the Wives and Partners of the crossdresser? This question is asked many times. No! This conference is built to fit wives, husbands, significant others and couples. There are classes for all. They are separate yet the same.

Anyone who is reading this and did not get to come to the California SPICE should start planning now to attend the conference next year in Atlanta, GA, July 15-19, 1998. IT WILL NOT BE TIME WASTED! IT WILL BE TIME WELL SPENT!

I look forward to setting all of you next year in Atlanta. ☞

This "giggle" from Caryl on the CDSO list serve:

The advantages of living with a CD

- 1 You get to extend your wardrobe.
- 2 You can ALWAYS find a pair of stockings if you want them.
- 3 Same with mascara.
- 4 No matter how scuzzy you feel - you KNOW you look better than 'her'.
- 5 No one complains when you try on five outfits before selecting one.
- 6 "Can I borrow . . .?"
- 7 Shopping together means that when she buys something, a whimper will get you something nice, too!
- 8 You are no longer automatically blamed for lipstick on the towels.
- 9 You can experiment with lipsticks without having to buy.
- 10 In an argument, you could cut her to pieces with a few well-chosen words, but you don't which shows that you love the silly looking ass-- and that makes you feel good!

The disadvantages of living with a CD

- 1 It gets bad when you both go through menopause together.
- 2 Arguments over whose outfit belongs to whom.
- 3 "Can I borrow . . .?"
- 4 She starts giving you makeup tips.
- 5 Complaints about hormone imbalance, tender [breasts] and puffy ankles are met with stony-faced and determined incomprehension.
- 6 She won't do the dishes.
- 7 There comes the day when she starts to look better than you do.
- 8 She wants to be your girl friend.
- 9 Lounging around in leggings and sweatshirt when she's dressed make you feel that you have to go change into something frilly.
- 10 In an argument, you could cut her to pieces with the same few well-chosen words, but you don't, which shows that you love the silly looking ass - and THAT [TICKS] YOU OFF!!

There is a way to continue the interesting and challenging dialogues begun at S.P.I.C.E. V.

If you have the tools, a very good facilitator is running a secure list/serve forum dedicated to SO's of CD's (NO fee or charge.) If you are interested in joining that forum, e-mail

<LISTSERV@HOME.EASE.LSOFT.COM>

and in message text (not subject) write:
SUBSCRIBE CDSO.

Good stuff, Maybelle! Ed.

Crossdressing 101

by Frances Fairfax

important for wives to understand. By now, you and your husband should be talking on a regular basis. ("Yeah, sure!" you might say, but this is important. If the two of you don't talk until there's some big, bad issue to confront, you've let those easily handled molehills turn into Mount Everest!)

Outside Reading - Get your hands on Deborah Tannen's "You Just Don't Understand", about the different male-female patterns of communication. She starts with toddlers and goes on from there.

Final - "Crossdressing with Dignity" by Peggy Rudd. Can a crossdresser (can his wife?) move beyond stereotypes, fear, guilt, shame, etc., to find not only self-acceptance but also peace and dignity? Peggy shows us how in this very practical book, full of personal anecdotes and hope. Don't skip over the research summaries and tables in the back. You must have them memorized by the end of the semester! (NOT!)

For light mid-year break reading, browse through "Crossdressers and Those Who Share Their Lives." You'll meet some interesting people through the photos and the text. (No, that's NOT Peggy Rudd's "Melanie" on the cover!)

Spring Semester - (Equivalent: History 300, but don't let that scare you.) "Crossdressing, Sex and Gender" by the husband and wife team of Dr.'s Vern and (the late) Bonnie Bullough; a comprehensive multi-cultural history, right down to current explanations of crossdressing and what to do about it. It's fascinating! This one book will take you all the way to next June and a college degree!

Graduate School - "Vested Interests" is by Harvard English Professor Marjorie Garber. The book jacket calls it a "tour de force of cultural criticism" - and that's an understatement! It's best taken in small doses, but you may not be able to put it down, even if you've never heard of half the books and plays

she mentions in which some form of "crossing" occurs. This one isn't about us coping with crossdressing; it's about our collective culture coping with "crossings" of all sorts. If you have another whole summer to spend reading, just start on "vested Interests".

Religious Issues - available books and articles on this aspect of the subject deserve a course description all their own. I'll get to that another time. ☒

Editor's note:

Frances Fairfax has got the reading list for "Crossdressing 101" exactly right. She beat me to this posting on the CDSO list serve just as we were hammering out the details for the same thing. For Graduate work, we would add only the newest book to hit the stores in September called "Bert and Lori". It is the autobiography of a very learned and educated crossdressing man with a fulsome addendum by his (second) wife. The author also surveys all the literature, both academic and fiction, on the CD subject.

I read JoAnn Roberts' "Coping with Crossdressing" about the second night I was at the first SPICE in Dallas, '93. It was included in the packet of material given each attendee at check-in. I was VERY resistant to reading it at first, even a touch offended to find such a tome included. After a day of conference programs, my mind had been pried open a bit, so I read it. I thought I knew who JoAnn Roberts was... a crossdressing man. The farther I got into this VERY readable book, the less sure I was of that. I began to think that a real WOMAN had written it, so well did it address that which exemplified where I was at in dealing with MY husband's need/desire to crossdress.

Deborah Tannen's book is a must for everyone who is trying to communicate with ANYONE. (Some of her examples are a stitch!)



If you are a crossdresser's partner (or spouse (or a crossdresser for that matter!)), you've had many books recommended to you. Each friend with whom you chat will have a personal favorite, or one she found most helpful when first she began trying to cope with crossdressing, or one that proved most insightful several years later. The list can be prodigious, awesome even. Attempting to consume all the goodies in the "care/help" basket all at once could lead to mental indigestion! I will be so bold as to suggest a spouse's curriculum for the 1997-98 school year:

Fall Semester - Start with the Peggy Rudd classic, "My Husband Wears My Clothes". Take time to digest this one thoroughly. Don't be afraid to enter into your emotions, even the stages you've already "put behind you". For homework, review the communications techniques Walter Bockting taught us at SPICE, then practice them with your husband. Take it in very small doses. You will not be graded and there is no term paper due this semester!

"Coping with Crossdressing" by JoAnn Roberts, who IS a crossdresser; this book is practical and down to earth. Herein you will come to know what an experienced community leader thinks is

S.P.I.C.E. Jar

by Rachel

The theme of S.P.I.C.E. V was "Getting to Know You" -- first to know yourself -- second to get to know your personal love relationship and third to get to know other participants.

I went to S.P.I.C.E. with the burden that the survival of my marriage was depending on me! In one of our many discussions about CDing, my husband had said "things have to change or we go our separate ways." I figured I had to change -- S.P.I.C.E. showed me that the burden of the marriage is shared between us!! It's not all up to me!! That statement seems so simple but it was like a revelation to me. A great burden was lifted from me.

The actual meeting of other significant others was uplifting -- I found it educational to realize other "normal" women were having difficulties coping with CDing. I had often thought there must be something wrong with me that I can't accept this. Just meeting these women helped immensely.

I met one woman who seemed to have everything together but had a couple of years ago been described as "a basket case" -- I reasoned there must be some hope for me.

I felt sorry for the people who sat at my dinner table the first night because I was crying already. It was such a relief to be able to talk with someone about this. The (CDSO/list-serve e-mail) online forum is great and has some advantages over being "face to face", but meeting someone in person has a distinct advantage also.

We learned about assertiveness - about setting boundaries - about negotiating - about active listening - things that help you out in everyday life, not just coping with crossdressing.

A big thing for me was going by myself. Initially I wanted my husband to come but that didn't work out, so I went by myself. And it became my Big Adventure! I proved to myself that I could do something I wasn't used to

doing. I went outside my comfort zone. I realized that if worse came to worse, I could go my separate way and survive. I would be okay. Once I realized that, it wasn't too far a jump to realize that if I stayed in the relationship, it was because I wanted to stay -- not because I was afraid of leaving!

The taking of hormones was a big topic; this proved to me that some women had more concerns than I did.

One group meeting was with a panel comprised of three crossdressers; they would answer questions from the group. I asked a question (which was totally out of character for me) about helping me to understand why I don't see this "softer more compassionate"

side of my husband -- but when he writes about crossdressing, it usually brings out his Macho side. They [the panel] said it sounded like [my husband] had some work to do about integrating his male and female side. A little light came on; I had work to do to improve me and our relationship but he had work to do, too! He wasn't Mr. (miss) Perfect.

Some of these things are so simple, so elementary, that you would think that they would be obvious. But they weren't obvious to me.

Next year's S.P.I.C.E. is July 15-19 in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm going to do my best to be there. ☒



A Letter From Walter

University of Minnesota

Twin Cities Campus
Program in Human Sexuality
Dept Family Practice and Community Health
Medical School

Dear Onnalee:

I am writing you to thank you and Beta Gamma/Tri-Ess for inviting and sponsoring me to participate in the 1997 SPICE conference in Ontario, California.

I very much enjoyed being a part of SPICE, and learned a lot about the perspectives of women in relationships with crossdressers, as well as about some of the couple's issues that people face. I was impressed with the commitment of participants to support one another in the process of coming to terms with crossdressing in their lives and relationships. Above all, I feel I have met some wonderful people and saw how SPICE makes a difference!

Again, thank you for allowing me to be part of SPICE. I plan to promote SPICE to my clients and other contacts in the field. Also... for the Sweetheart Connection... I plan on writing (an article) in the near future.

Sincerely,
Walter Bockting, Drs.
Coordinator of Transgender Services
Program in Human Sexuality

Self Esteem

by Julie Freeman

(The following article, written by Julie Freeman, was first published in Devil Woman, the newsletter of the Diablo Valley Girls. Julie's e-mail address is Julie39@ibm.net)

When significant others first find out about their partner's crossdressing, many believe at first they have somehow failed their partners. In some way, they must not be satisfactory or there would be no need for the crossdressing. Many times they believe they can "cure" the crossdressing if they somehow just do a better job at being a wife. When this does not work, as it won't, their self-esteem plummets and sometimes jealousy of the crossdressed persona may develop. As the crossdresser becomes more adept with makeup and wigs, as his wardrobe expands and he becomes more attractive, her feelings of worth and significance may dwindle even more.

She may begin to rage at her partner, not even understanding why. And he, bewildered and confused by this rage, may begin to withdraw from the relationship, afraid to make things worse. His intention was never to belittle or ridicule his partner, but she does not know this. Both partners in the relationship need to understand where the need to crossdress come from before the issue of self-esteem can be addressed.

The last thing on most crossdressers' minds is to make their partners feel worthless and insignificant. Rather they are trying to emulate their wives by being the best women they can be. It becomes then important for the crossdresser to realize how his partner may be affected by his developing femininity. Some wives have no problems with their husbands' other persona; in fact, they take his growing appreciation of their needs as a true compliment and the better "she" looks, the better the wife may feel. But not all wives understand the motivations behind their hus-

bands' desire to look attractive and take it as a personal affront to their womanliness. It therefore becomes necessary for the crossdresser to reassure his wife or partner that his need to crossdress is not related to her ability to be a good wife.

When wives understand the crossdressing phenomenon and realize they are not responsible, positively or negatively for the behavior, they can then start to make crossdressing a positive force in their relationship. Why not make use of each other's abilities? Crossdressers love to receive advice from their wives and partners and learn from them. Perhaps he can help her with makeup; perhaps she can help him with choosing a wig. Suggestions on outfits would not be out of hand for either.

So make lemonade out of lemons! Both can learn from each other. Whatever works in the relationship, let it work! Be willing to share with one another. It will not only help the crossdresser perfect his image, but it will also help raise the woman's self-esteem as she realizes how she is valued and appreciated. ☞

The Sweetheart Connection is published four times yearly. No boundary trashing. No bashing of any kind.

Our guideline for every issue will be that which shapes productive resolution to many problems:

1. What is going on?
2. Who's in charge?
3. What do you want?
4. Where do we go from here?

Each quarterly issue will deal with all four questions but will focus on one question in turn.

Subscription costs are: \$12 yearly for four issues, or a wife/partner may join Tri-Ess separately from her partner for a cost of \$10. She will receive membership and the Sweetheart Connection. If she chooses to receive The Femme Mirror, her annual cost will be \$25. Letters, comments and articles are encouraged and may be sent to the editor:

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The Sweetheart Connection
P.O. Box 8591
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Slot Machine

By Linda Kaye



When Vanessa and I got married, we drove to Las Vegas for our wedding trip. Having never been exposed to the bright lights and thrills of Vegas, I was excited by the trip, and discovered that I was Hooked on 5-cent machines.

I had never gambled before, and the noise and flashing lights of the casinos draw you in, just as the porch light seduces the moth to its brightness. Even if you don't gamble, it is such a different environment from anything you are used to; that you feel excited and glad to be there.

It is easy to see how some become addicted to gambling, because it continually ensnares the player with the promise of "winning the big one." Every time you drop your nickel, or quarter or dollar into a slot machine, you feel certain that the next pull on the arm of the machine will bring you vast wealth. You can't believe that you won't come away a winner. In small doses, I don't see much wrong with this, and I enjoy dropping those nickels in, but when it becomes obsessive, you have a problem.

Thinking about this, I began to see a correlation between the enticement of the slot machine and some relationships between a transgendered man and his wife/partner. I'm thinking specifically about one couple, in which the husband is the slot machine and the wife is the

player. There is that continual promise of agreement, but when she pulls the arm, she continually loses. What am I talking about?

This: the transgendered husband is always promising to honor their agreements about his dressing and behavior, and the wife is always believing he will. She believes that she will be the winner in this. Instead, the false light of his promises destroy, just as the moth is destroyed by the burning porch light. His promises are artificially bright, to entice her to believe him and let him do what he wants to do. However, once ensnared, she pulls the arm, only to find that the promise is empty. An example of this is his promise, in their negotiations, to honor a specific boundary. "I promise I won't go to the mall dressed," he says. She loves him and she believes him, yet, one day, while she is at work, he takes the day off, crossdresses, and goes to the mall. Even if the trip to the mall is benign, the breaking of this promise is malignant. He has persuaded himself that this boundary was okay when he agreed to it, but he's now sure that it wouldn't apply because he has changed his make-up or his clothing style and surely, no one will recognize him. He can't see that in breaking this promise, he is destroying the fragile trust between husband and wife. The wife is "pulling on that slot machine arm" and she's losing.

This couple continues to negotiate their relationship and she sets boundaries and he breaks them. He wants more and more, she wants less and less, but she is seduced by her belief that if he is happy, she will be, too. She continues to drop her nickels of hope into the one-armed bandit of his promises, and she comes up empty-handed. Then they negotiate a new set of boundaries and the cycle begins again. And, like some gamblers, she continues to believe that she will win in the end, when in actuality, both the slot machine and the players are losers. A loving relationship

is one where both partners are winners. There is give and take in every relationship, but honest, open communication is the key to being winners. Likewise, a promise is a promise and should be kept. When a promise is broken, so does the relationship become broken. The trust is gone, but in this particular case, the wife is ensnared and continues to hope, to gamble that maybe "this time", he'll keep his promise and honor their agreement. The ove is two-sided here - she loves him and he loves himself, too. As she seems willing to live like this, there is nothing that anyone can do, because she won't stop the gamble.

But there is hope for others, if both partners will agree to be unselfish. Promises must be full, not empty, and they must be given in good faith. One partner cannot continually come away with all the nickels; they must share. Yes, there is a gamble, but it is one in which both come away winners. Real love for each other, combined with faith and communication, are the keys to overcoming empty promises and false hope. It is at this point that each partner will see that the bright lights and thrill of the slot machine are really artificial, and that the commitment to each other is the true way to richness. ☞

Linda Kaye is married to Vanessa Kaye; together they have written a book: "Life With Vanessa": how to integrate transgenderism into a positive relationship.

Visit the Tri-Ess/
S.P.I.C.E. web
page at <http://www.tri-ess.com>.

Fording That Egyptian River

by Onnalee #9147

August 20th...

It is easier to give myself permission to do my "bliss", painting watercolors, if I leave my job/home. My position as an on-site apartment manager means that I am here to be interrupted any time, if not all the time. Therefore, every Wednesday (almost) I join a group of other ol' ladies like me at the downtown YWCA, where we gather, gossip, paint and encourage one another. This somewhat sporadic activity began right after SPICE II in Chicago, '94, where I made the goal proclamation to create a body of work worthy of a one-woman show. I figured at one a month I might be ready in five or six years. My database now shows 225 pieces, 80 of which are currently hanging in a suburban gallery; the opening was on Saturday, October 4th. Almost all of these paintings happened at the "Paint Y's" group in the company of these women.

My attendance at "studio" fails when the month changes and I am occupied with collections and turnovers. Or -- when I am gone, to SPICE. I had never explained in any detail to these colleagues exactly what SPICE really was, telling them only what the acronym stood for and that it was a "women's support group". Just didn't want to "deal" with whatever I believed their reactions and questions might be. Until today.

As I told the Fairfaxes at that same Chicago conference, when they encouraged me to "bring Robert along next time", "No way, because if Robert is at SPICE with me, I probably will never open my mouth", a statement that surprised both the Fairfaxes and ME! I have been working ON me ever since. On returning from SPICE V in California, I spent six hours "de-briefing" Robert on its events and happenings and finally realized I was now strong enough to have him attend SPICE with me. I am now ready to share that re-

markable event with him. Today, my strength expanded, I shared the truth with these kindly and gentle women of Wednesdays.

We were gathered at the home of our "mentor" for a potluck picnic. As it was cold and rainy, we had collected in our hostess's dining room to "kaffe klatch". Asking for their forbearance and attention for the next 20 minutes, I prefaced my agenda by saying that I wanted to FINALLY share something with them I felt they were entitled to know. I then read aloud "Onnalee's Oddyssey" in its entirety (that booklet sent in my place to SPICE IV, '96.) The response at the end was one of awe, admiration and shock. Not at the particulars of what they heard, but that I had been on such a path. Lovely ladies all, they were warm, sympathetic and tried very hard to understand. They were each and all VERY SUPPORTIVE.

Hot Diggety Dog! I got me another support group! Not as involved with the "issue", but every kind word helps. And that's what I did "in school" that day, folks!

October 9th... transcribing the above for this publication, I am reminded how LIBERATING the act of sharing this "secret" was... even empowering. "Honesty is the best policy, because that way you don't have to remember what you said... to whom, whenever." ❄

A sad note from Banning CA recently received at the Connection:

"Betty [#9310] died on September 4, 1997. A lovely, tolerant companion, who said 'It's not what you are wearing, or how you dress, it's the PERSON within that counts.'"

Shirley Louise
CA-4249-F

Dog Day Musings

by Frances Fairfax

Every one of us has felt the bite of arbitrary social "rules" laid down by some unimpeachable "them". While we may laugh at such fashion dictates as "Don't wear white after Labor Day", most aspects of our lives are ruled by our fear of what "they" will say. This is not all bad. If we didn't have this healthy concern for consequences backing up the still, small voice of conscience, we would get ourselves in a lot more trouble in this world. "Your freedom to swing your arm ends where the other person's nose begins."

The healthy fear of consequences that keeps us from defying the law of gravity by stepping off a cliff also prompts us to do whatever is necessary to conceal the "CD thing" from "them". Fearing all those consequences that would befall him and us, should "they" find out, we assume the burden of logistics, of cover stories, of locked closets and dresser drawers. The terrible burden of secret keeping often gets shifted from his shoulders to ours. He feels a great sense of relief and freedom, even a "gender euphoria", that may blind him to consequences of which we are suddenly and all too acutely aware.

Does this ring any bells out there in the doldrums? Is your new title "Acting Chief of Security" because he is AWOL from that post? A very hot topic at a previous SPICE was "Why can't men OWN their own crossdressing?" "Why can't they take responsibility for their own actions? Consider the consequences before they do something?" "When they can't or won't behave responsibly, and we try to set some boundaries, we get resentment and envelope-pushing." Ain't it the truth? Only mad dogs, Englishmen and cross-dressers go out in the noonday sun. Right now -- there's a sale on at the mall! ❄