

# Counselling the partners of heterosexual male cross-dressers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, I have begun to see a small number of wives of cross-dressing heterosexual men in the context of my private practice in sexual and marital therapy. Initially, I felt reasonably comfortable that I had a good working knowledge of the characteristics of these couples and the problems they face. However, I soon realized that I knew much more about the experiences and problems of the cross-dressing husbands than I did about their wives' struggles. A review of the academic research, practice literature and of various internet sites proved to be of limited utility to me for reasons described below.

In this paper, I will summarize the kinds of literature available to counsellors working with this client population and to the clients themselves. The problems and concerns of women married to heterosexual cross-dressers, as these are reflected in the literature, are summarized and a critique of these materials is provided. Some counselling processes and content that seem to me to be of particular importance to these women, and some suggestions for resources that need to be developed to assist them, are also described.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**RESEARCH LITERATURE** This review is limited to material appearing since 1975 and originally published in English. It is divided into two main categories: research reports and community materials. The research studies tend to fall into six general content categories, each of which is summarized briefly below.

**Personality research reports** This category, which contains the largest number of research reports, consists primarily of survey studies focused on the personality dynamics, childhood experiences, and sexual practices of cross-dressers (e.g., Blanchard, 1993a; Chivers & Blanchard, 1996; Wise, Fagan, Schmidt & Ponticas, 1991; Wysocki, 1993). These studies tend to use clinical samples, although, more recently, some have surveyed large, non-clinical groups of cross-dressers, located principally through access to cross-dressers' social organizations or specialized publication mailing lists (e.g., Bullough & Bullough 1997; Brown, Wise, Costa, Herbst, Fagan & Schmidt, 1996; Schott, 1995). In either case, the samples studied tend to be biased in favour of the extremes of the continuum of acceptance of cross-dressing. Clinical samples tend to include more women who find their partners' cross-dressing unacceptable, while samples obtained through cross-dressers' organizations tend to include women who are more likely to be accepting of this behaviour.

**Theory development articles** The second category of academic work includes studies that attempt either to clarify gender identity development theory by studying cross-dressers, to establish diagnostic categories for use in understanding the differences among cross-dressers (e.g., Blanchard, 1993b; Devor, 1993; Levine, 1993; Tewksbury, 1994) or to clarify distinctions between cross-dressers and other clinical groups such as transsexuals or paraphilics (Docter & Fleming, 1993; Doom, 1994).

**Political position statements** A third group of academic reports are essentially political pieces which either argue against the common social, psychological and psychiatric practice of identifying cross-dressers as a pathological population (e.g., Bullough, 1991) or raise objections to "therapeutic" practices such as using various drug treatments as interventions for controlling cross-dressing behaviour (e.g., Tsang, 1995).

**Case studies of cross-dressing** The fourth category is made up of treatment reports which seem to be

exclusively single case studies. These reports describe the use of particular therapeutic approaches to "cure" cross-dressing, such as paradoxical communication (Cliffe, 1987), strategic therapy (Shaffer, Barclay & Redman, 1989), psychoanalysis (Warnes, 1984), or even hypnotic "depossession" (Rogo, 1989). Alternatively, a few reports describe the need to limit treatment to assisting the cross-dresser and family members with the "[ ... ] acute crisis occasioned by the discovery" (Frances & Wise, 1987, p. 233).

**Texts and pamphlets** A number of these are available from researchers (e.g., Gabbard & Atkinson, 1996; Green & Schiavi, 1995; Hirschfeld & Lombardi-Nash, 1991) and from educators (e.g., the Beaumont Trust, the Gender Trust, Tri-Ess).

**Studies of female partners** The final category is made up of reports on the female partners of heterosexual cross-dressers. This small group of papers considers issues such as the female partner's personality characteristics (e.g., Brown, 1989; Brown, 1994; Calogeras, 1987; Peo, 1988; Weinberg cross-dressing (e.g., Woodhouse, 1985), her coping styles (e.g., Wise, 1985), and marital adjustment (e.g., Bullough & Weinberg, 1988). More detail concerning some representative examples of these studies is included elsewhere in this paper.

**Summary** Most of the research reports focus on cross-dressing as a problem. The extent to which it is also presented as a "pathology" varies with the theoretical orientation of the authors. The content includes research data and discussions about various questions about cross-dressing including: a) whether cross-dressing is a mid-point on a continuum of gender identity running from masculine to feminine or, alternatively, a continuum of gender identity problems running from transvestitism to transsexual positions; b) whether cross-dressers move progressively further along such a continuum toward transsexualism; c) whether there are measurable personality differences between sub-populations of "cross-gendered" individuals (e.g., transvestites, transsexuals); d) whether cross-dressers or their female partners demonstrate personality problems (e.g., masochism) at a rate significantly greater than that found in the general population; e) whether cross-dressing is caused by biological factors (e.g., genetic predispositions, prenatal hormonal influences), by socialization factors (e.g., relationships) or by some mixture of the two; f) whether pharmacologic intervention is appropriate and/or useful in treating cross-dressers; and g) what are the typical attitudes and coping strategies of women married to cross-dressers?

**COMMUNITY PUBLICATIONS** The cross-dressing community also provides publications which are of interest to researchers, practitioners and cross-dressers and their partners. These publications tend to be practically oriented and include books, articles and internet sites. The internet resources, in particular, provide a wealth of materials and services, including articles about understanding gender identity, definitions of terms, suggestions for alternative classification systems for cross-dressing behaviour, listings of counselling resources for cross-dressers and their partners, notices about coming events (e.g., conferences, meetings, social activities, specially organized holidays), safe shopping location & Bullough, 1988), her attitudes toward her partner's advertisements, product advertisements, advice about solving cross-dressing problems (such as using make-up effectively), chat lines, and personal advice and opinion columns that support "coming out" or suggest solutions to relationship difficulties.

In contrast to the academic literature, these materials are almost always written from the explicit position that cross-dressing is a normal variant of personal and sexual expression which does not imply pathology. Here, cross-dressing is discussed as controllable, but not changeable, and often as reflecting a feminine part of a man's identity. The idea of a "cure" is generally derided on the basis that it implies illness, and therapists are generally portrayed as ill-informed, blundering and often malicious agents of social control.

**LITERATURE SPECIFIC TO WIVES AND PARTNERS OF CROSS-DRESSING MEN** Again, there are significant differences between the materials found in the academic research literature and community materials. It is also important to distinguish between research studies that are based on clinical samples and those based on samples obtained through community organizations and events. These three types of material are briefly reviewed below.

### Research Literature on Female Partner

Clinical Samples These reports are infrequent in the academic Journals, though clinically based studies of cross-dressing men are numerous. As indicated above, research on partners tends to be primarily case reports (e.g., Calogeras, 1987) or small-scale studies done in psychiatric outpatient facilities (e.g., Wise, 1985). Their focus is on identifying the wife's "complimentary pathology", and findings are usually couched in psychodynamic terms (e.g., transvestitism as the recapitulation of infantile core conflicts, fixations). Wise (1985), for example, evaluated 20 wives of men being seen at Johns Hopkins Sexual Behaviors Consultation Unit for cross-dressing. Thirteen of the 20 women were aware of their partners' cross-dressing prior to the marriage. He described six coping styles as characterizing these women's attempts to deal with their husbands' behaviour, including rage and rejection, dysthymia and passivity, an eye for an eye, alcoholism, hopes of cure, and acceptance and enjoyment. The "rage and rejection" group usually divorced the cross-dressing partner, while the dysthymic group demonstrated passive resignation, apathy and various psychological and somatic symptoms. These women remained in their unhappy marriages due to religious beliefs or to the conviction that their children needed their father. The "eye for an eye" group retaliated against the husband by "extracting punishment", such as forcing the man to do housework while cross-dressed, or refusing to get a job to help with finances, behaviours which Wise (1985) diagnosed as "conscious sadism" (p. 295). One woman became alcoholic and three focused on trying to "[...] cure their husbands for whom they felt sorry and clearly utilized projective identification" (p. 295). Two wives "[...] enjoyed taking part in the husband's transvestitic perversions" (p. 295) and were diagnosed as having sadomasochistic characteristics. The women were also characterized, as a group, as having low self-esteem and as being excessively dependent.

Woodhouse (1985), in her discussion of such studies, suggests that they reflect a "heads I win, tails you lose" approach, since even women who could not be assigned a psychiatric diagnosis by the researcher are described using terms such as "moral masochists, people who derive psychological gain from suffering" (p. 584).

In short, the wife who stays with a deviant husband, whether for the sake of the children, lack of alternatives, or even her love for him, is, almost by definition, psychologically deficient; whilst the wife who leaves her husband is also lacking because it was her own inadequacies which impelled her to marry him in the first place. Far from the transvestite causing psychological stress for his wife, the situation has been reversed and the wives are depicted as acting out

their own problems and as needing treatment and therapy so that they can adjust to their husbands' needs.

If, however, they have already adjusted, this too can be seen as the outcome of some personal, psychosexual malfunction

(Woodhouse, 1985, p. 585).

COMMUNITY SAMPLES Brown (1994) reports on a study of 106 women with transvestite (TV) partners who were contacted through TV support groups and conferences. He describes his average participant as a 40 year old Protestant Caucasian in her first marriage. Women in this sample were indistinguishable from the general population on demographic patterns, measures of personality characteristics, and frequency of lesbian experiences. They had been married for an average of 13 years and had known of their husbands' TV activities for 9 years. Brown (1994) found that "[l]ow acceptance of cross-dressing was associated with discovery of the partner's cross-dressing after marriage and lack of arousal to cross-dressing stimuli" (p. 515). four percent of the women (n=47) believed that they should be more accepting of the cross-dressing than they were, while 8% (n=9) believed they were too accepting. The remainder believed that they were sufficiently accepting (n=44) or were undecided on this issue (n=6). Some of the respondents who returned the questionnaire had received it from husbands who had attended a conference or group at which the wife had not been present; however, several men returned their copies saying that their partners were too hostile toward their cross-dressing to complete it. The actual return rate is unclear, but it seems likely that the overall sample is biased in favour of women who are more accepting of cross-dressing. In contrast to the clinical studies, the data from this study and from others like it do not support the view that these women have low self-esteem, are unusually dependent, or have diagnosable psychiatric problems.

Bullough and Weinberg (1988) also studied a nonclinical sample of 70 women married to TVs. Their subjects also generally learned about the TV in the early years of the marriage. Most tried to be supportive initially, but had "[...] negative feelings of hostility and resentment" (p. 83). Their common fears were discovery of the cross-dressing by people outside the family, and concerns for their children. Most did not support the husband's TV, but felt that their marriages were very happy. Bullough and Weinberg (1988) describe them as "[...] developing a rationale that emphasizes positive aspects of their husbands' behavior" (p. 83). These authors suggest that the plight of the wife of a cross-dresser is best understood as a process of stigma management that requires two intrapsychic processes: "(1) adjustment to the new status of the couple [...] and (2) adjustment to a new view of oneself (married to a transvestite)" (p. 86). Like Brown (1994), these authors did not find any differences between their sample and the general female population on demographic variables. About one third of the Bullough and Weinberg (1988) sample knew about the partner's cross-dressing prior to marriage, while half learned about it shortly after marriage. The earlier in the marriage a woman learned about the cross-dressing, the more accepting she was likely to be of it. Later discovery produced a strong sense of betrayal.

The wives' initial response to the discovery was "[...] confusion, surprise, and shock" (p. 93) followed by curiosity, and hostility and resentment. Common fears included that others would find out, that the husband's TV would affect the children, that she was somehow deficient as a woman, and that the partner might be mentally ill. Most distinguished between their reactions to the TV and their love for their husbands, and few women in the sample actually separated from them. They reported protecting the partner by not talking to anyone, and by negotiating secure conditions for the cross-dressing (e.g., doors locked, children not at home). Often, they agreed to tolerate the behaviour provided they did not

have to see it. There were still many problems in most of the marriages, however, often due to the husband's refusal to accept limitations to cross-dressing, and most of the wives did not support the behaviour. Women who "[...] initially attempted to understand and cope with their husbands' transvestitism [found that] their sympathetic attitude did not necessarily hold over time. The longer a woman [had] been married, the more negative her feelings about her husband's cross-dressing" (Bullough & Weinberg, 1988, p.96). Some women reported that the husband's behaviour while cross-dressed was particularly gentle, kind and helpful which, for some, made it easier to bear.

Woodhouse (1985) is apparently one of the few female researchers in this literature. Her studies tend to point out the "blame the victim" nature of many research reports and the "hard sell" nature of much of the popular literature made available to these women by male transvestite authors such as Prince (1967) or Sinclair (1984) and by associations for transvestites and transsexuals. She works from the perspective of trying to understand the politics of gender, and provides critiques of the academic and the popular literature and small-sample interview-based studies of the "forgotten" wives of cross-dressers. Her 1985 report is based on three women's reactions to the knowledge that their husbands wear female clothing. The reactions are described as being initial anxiety, then support in the hope that he would "get over it". This hope diminishes over time and is replaced by resentment, anger, and a sense that every inch given in the battle to control or limit the partner's cross-dressing will result in a mile taken. These women make a decision to try to put up with cross-dressing as long as it does not come to public attention or hurt the children, in order to maintain the marriage.

#### Community Literature for Female Partners

Virtually all of this material is produced by individual cross-dressers or societies of cross-dressers' (e.g., the Beaumont Trust in England or Tri-Ess and the Transgender Forum in the United States) taking an active role in informing and supporting these men and their female partners. By far the largest part of this information is intended for the cross-dresser, and seeks to provide him with reassurance, advice, information, and opportunities to meet and talk with other cross-dressers. However, partners are frequently mentioned, and the information, whether explicitly directed to them or not, is certainly informative for them. One internet site points out that there are now more than thirty organizations in the United States whose membership is restricted to heterosexual male cross-dressers and their partners (*italics in the original*).

Again, the flavour of the information about cross-dressing is overwhelmingly positive and clearly intended to "normalize" this phenomenon. Cross-dressing is described as a normal, and perhaps even a superior, means of self-expression for men needing to escape the confines of the male sex role stereotype.

Positively framed, affectionate vocabulary is used (e.g., trannies, gender-gifted, gennys) and cross-dressers' partners are encouraged to see social acceptance and freer expression of their "feminine side" as their partners' right. Almost all conversation is carried out using the "en femme" pseudonym of the cross-dresser, and photographs of the authors fully cross-dressed are common.

In some instances, the material is written by a supportive wife of a cross-dresser who describes the struggles she had in learning to accommodate her partner's needs, and offers supportive responses to letters from women who are still struggling with understanding their cross-dressing partners. These materials take a sympathetic approach to the wife's predicament, especially if she was not informed of the cross-dressing prior to marriage. They remind cross-dressing men, for example, that, "A transvestite who indulges in cross-dressing at the expense of time spent with his wife and family, and at the cost of purchasing a double wardrobe, risks alienating both wife and family" (Beaumont Trust). They provide advice to men who want to know how to get their wives to be more supportive of their cross-dressing. Ultimately, however, the wife's situation is usually considered to be one of "grow or go". Persistent negative feelings are seen as a failure to meet the challenge to grow, and as imposing unreasonable restrictions on cross-dressing husbands.

The specifically sexual aspects of cross-dressing are infrequently mentioned, though much of the advertising and art work on these sites reflects men's efforts to present a stereotypically "sexy" female appearance. When men's sexual arousal is addressed as a component of cross-dressing, it is described

as a whole body, sensual experience (e.g., the feel of the night air on nylon-clad legs) and contrasted to the limited, genitally focused arousal commonly attributed to men. Cross-dressing is differentiated from fetishism in that it is described as not being dependent on particular items of clothing, and not consistently required for sexual arousal. Sexual arousal is seen as only one of many motivations for cross-dressing, and as a relatively unimportant one at that. Men are also cautioned that pairing cross-dressing with marital sex may risk the partner's developing a sense that it is the clothing and not she who her husband finds arousing.

These sites also take more care than the academic literature does to assert the individual nature of cross-dressing and of partners' responses to it. Cross-dressing is portrayed as including a very wide range of behaviours and motivations, and partners' reactions as ranging from complete rejection to delighted acceptance. They suggest that, because of this extreme variability in both the cross-dresser and his wife, no single definition is appropriate and no generalizable solutions can be offered to marital problems. The marital advice is generally about the need to learn effective ways to communicate needs and to understand the partner's needs as well, advice that again reflects the belief that cross-dressing, and the marital problems associated with it, are part of a normal range of problems experienced by married people in general.

One site, Yvonne's Place, describes a talk given at a recent conference called SPICE '96 for spouses and partners of cross-dressers which focused on the wife's experience as one of loss of a "life dream". A negative communication spiral can be set up when the husband tells his wife about his cross-dressing. She reacts to her sense of loss with intense anger and crying, which he interprets as rejection rather than an expression of grief. He becomes defensive and withdraws, thus failing to offer her the support she needs. The cross-dressing, rather than the wife's unresolved grief, is then assumed to be the problem preventing the resolution of the problem. An alternative pattern of initial support from the wife, followed by increasing hostility, is also seen as the result of repressed grief. Yvonne's Place also includes a bill of rights for wives, which includes the following points:

1. We have the right to know about our husbands' crossdressing, preferably before marriage, but certainly when our husbands start to make crossdressing a significant factor in their lives and wish to contact support groups.
2. We have the right to honest open communication with our husbands, with negotiation and compromise on both sides, particularly in regard to allocation of family resources and in matters pertaining to telling our children. Old patterns of selfishness and deception must cease.
3. We have the right not to be pushed to "accept" things before we have had time to learn enough about them and to begin to get used to them.
4. We have the right to our husbands as men, the men we married, men who maintain a positive, healthy masculinity while "exploring their femininity" and seek neither to evade responsibilities nor to appropriate our own feminine roles.
5. We have the right to our husbands' masculine bodies. Neither partner in a marriage has the right to alter body features without the full knowledge and consent of the other.
6. We have the right to support groups for ourselves that promote our own growth and well-being, help us understand our husbands' needs, and provide tools for relationship building.
7. We have the right to support groups for our husbands that encourage their feminine development without denigrating healthy masculinity, that welcome us as full members on an equal basis with our husbands, and that fully support relationship commitments.
8. We have the right not to be mocked and demeaned by sexually explicit or otherwise offensive conversation, dress and behavior at group meetings.
9. We have the right not to be pressured to attend group gatherings at public locations, night clubs, or

other places that pose security risks.

10. We have the right to be asked permission before our clothes, make-up, jewellery or other personal items are borrowed.

11. We have the right to personal time in which to get in touch with our own femininity, pursue our personal growth and work on creative projects.

12. We have the right to expect local, regional and national gender organizations and conventions to fully support and promote these rights in their programs and policies.

Summary Reading the academic literature may leave women feeling inadequate, frightened, and further stigmatized. Reading the internet materials is not always much better, though for different reasons. The internet materials' focus on reassurance and information can be interpreted by some women as a demand that they "grow or go" and that they learn to "live in a box" rather than requiring their partners to do so. The only ways out of their own box may seem to be acceptance, which they cannot imagine, particularly in the early crisis stage of discovery, or divorce. Looking at the internet materials can also be traumatic because it brings the women face to face with images that they would rather not see: photos of cross-dressed males. Getting past these materials to read the articles may be difficult or impossible.

#### Counselling Process and Content

The following discussion should be understood as reflecting the concerns of women who come to counselling because of unhappiness associated with their partners' cross-dressing. As is pointed out in the literature, the range of adjustment in such situations is very wide, and these women are no doubt a select group. Information is still lacking on this topic, since only a few studies have been done and these have tended to represent opposite ends of the spectrum of adjustment. Docter (1988) and Woodhouse (1985) are probably two of the most useful publications available to practitioners. Some literature suggests that cross-dressing has benefits, as well as disadvantages, for marriages; however, few couples coming to counselling seem to report such benefits.

One of the first problems the counsellor encounters in working with these women and their partners is the choice of a working vocabulary. As usual, the best practice guideline is probably to inquire about their preferences or to observe and use their own vocabulary. I have adopted the term cross-dresser for use in my practice and in this paper, since the individuals and couples I have seen prefer it to the term transvestite. Their preference is based on the belief that "cross-dresser" is a straightforward description of a behaviour, while "transvestite" is associated with a DSM diagnostic category with all of the value implications of a system used to designate some behaviours as pathologic. Its use by a practitioner may be taken by the couple as meaning that s/he adheres to a particular set of beliefs about cross-dressing that may be difficult for them to accept or work with.

The second issue usually has to do with the provision of accurate information to help women overcome their fears that their partner may be gay, or that his "condition" may be inherited by their children. Some questions, such as these two, can be met with reassurance bolstered by references to data. However, other questions are not so easily dealt with. It is, for example, unwise to take the position that a cure is possible; hopes are raised that are unlikely to be met, and the resulting disappointments may add to the cross-dresser's sense of inadequacy and to the wife's conviction that he is not trying hard enough. Similarly, reassurances that the problem will remain stable are probably not helpful. Although there is a general belief that cross-dressing can be controlled, if not "cured", it is also the case that the long-term pattern in much of the literature (both academic and popular) is for a gradual escalation of the behaviour. For many women, it will be the case that the more they accept, the more their partner will pressure them to expand their range of tolerance. As one man writing on the internet put it, "The more you experience, the more you will want to do in order to have the same feelings of transformation." He added, somewhat optimistically, that, "If you go at a pace your partner is comfortable with, there will be fun instead of stress...Don't exceed your partner's comfort zone without asking."

Fears about discovery and concerns about children are also questions for which no easy answers are available. Some authors suggest that children should never be told, others that they should either be told before puberty or not until adulthood. Docter (1988), for example, suggests that, "The risk of giving young children information about the cross-dressing of the father seems to us to be far greater than any good which could be served by being 'open and honest', or by teaching children to be accepting of diversity" (p. 175). Wives generally seem to be more concerned than their partners are about the potential impact of discovery on children, though this is not always the case, and generally prefer that the behaviour be kept from the children entirely.

The women I have seen certainly feel that they are in a difficult and contradictory situation which severely tests their ability to be the "accepting" and "selfless" wives their partners and the health professionals they have consulted seem to expect them to be. The explanation of their continued unhappiness as partly due to repressed grief is probably an excellent fit for most, though there is often also repressed disgust. The messages the wife receives from the community literature and from her partner imply that her negative feelings are understandable but should be overcome. Unfortunately, this "overcoming" seems to be expected to occur without full expression of her emotions. As a result, she may try repeatedly to "put on a happy face" to appear accepting, forgiving, and appropriately feminine. When her negative feelings and her grief break through this facade, she may be seen as refusing to "get over it", and experience herself as a failure as a person and as a woman. This situation is worsened if she is a conventionally religious person, torn between the dictates to "hate the sin and love the sinner". In any case, several individual sessions may be required to assist her to express the breadth and depth of her emotional response to her husband's cross-dressing. It is unlikely that any lasting resolution of the marital problems can be reached without this respectful process, first by the therapist, and second, in a facilitated conversation between the spouses.

Once the wife's fears and grief have begun to be heard, issues such as the fact that her husband's cross-dressing often limits her own freedom and forces her into a socially isolated position must also be addressed. She may also feel a deep sense of betrayal, compounded by the common marital pattern of the husband's promises of restraint, followed by new discoveries, further confrontations and new grief and despair. In situations where husbands did not disclose the cross-dressing or allow it to be "discovered" until after their first child was born it will be particularly difficult for the wife to trust him again. Even in couples where the wife knew about the cross-dressing before marriage, the pattern in the research, and in my own practice, is for the wife's dissatisfaction to gradually increase over the years. She will tend to shift ground from the original fear and grief to patterns of resentment about the amount of time and money his crossdressing takes away from the family, and contempt for what she sees as his very limited understanding of what being a woman means.

A final suggestion based on my own practice is that these women should probably not be advised to visit support groups to meet other women who are married to cross-dressers until they are nearing the end of treatment. Attendance at these groups is often biased in favour of women who are relatively accepting of the behaviour. A woman who is early in the process of adjustment may find that this kind of exposure only makes matters worse by emphasizing the long distance she has to go, and setting an outcome standard that may be very different from what she desires or sees as possible for herself or for her marriage.

**RESOURCES REQUIRED** First, a great deal more research needs to be done to try to understand the range of experience of these couples. Participants should to be recruited through advertisement if possible, rather than being drawn exclusively from clinical populations or from support groups or cross-dressers' organizations. More research is also needed to help us develop a better understanding of the course of cross-dressing over time, and of the ways men and women find to make their marriages work under this stress. Currently, we do not have reliable estimates of the number of couples who are living with this pattern or of the number of these marriages that succeed.

Second, some "middle ground" literature needs to be developed for these women. As matters stand, they must either resort to the research literature, which is cold comfort, or to the popular materials which may be too large a leap for most women first venturing into it.

Mental health professionals also need to be better educated to deal with this population. Of particular importance is a willingness to combine acceptance for the cross-dresser's needs with an understanding

of the enormous strain his behaviour is likely to impose on his partner, and willingness to allow her fears and her grief full expression.

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