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**"Dedoublement":  
The Negotiation of Gender in Transvestism**

**Caroline de Kerchove d'Exaerde**

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**Department of Anthropology  
University of Durham**

**Ph.D. Thesis**



**2001**

**"Dedoublement":  
The Negotiation of Gender in Transvestism**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment for the  
requirements of the degree of Ph.D.**

**2001**

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# **Abstract**

## **"Dedoublement":**

### **The Negotiation of Gender in Transvestism**

This thesis is intended to contribute to anthropological and sociological debates on the sources of gender identity and the strategies that are entailed in its management.

Cross-dressing among men in western societies has been studied from two major perspectives. One comes from behavioural psychologists and psychiatrists who regard transvestism as deviant behaviour that requires counselling and treatment. This medical model has limited use and is not acceptable to transvestites. Cross-dressing has also been studied from a social scientific perspective that views transvestism in relation to the performance of gender. It is within this perspective that the results of my research are primarily located.

The example of male transvestism is particularly instructive because it demonstrates a creative play within shifting sexual boundaries. Male transvestites challenge assumptions about gender practices in the context of every day life when expressing their 'dedoublement' that juxtapose masculinity and femininity. Transvestism is thus an attack on the very notion of gender deviance, which is being mounted by small groups of otherwise very 'ordinary' men.

These men also have a developed masculine image reflecting a specifically regional discourse of masculinity that has its origin in socio-economic backgrounds based on heavy industry and its collapse in the 1960s. A similar masculine ideology is present in both areas of my research: the North East of England and Liège in Belgium. Transvestites, by asserting 'feminine within the masculine', seriously transgress this ideology.

Transvestites are often rejected on the basis of their non-normative behaviour. The boundaries between 'normal' and 'deviant' are reinforced on a daily basis through, among others factors, the media. To avoid being labelled 'deviant', transvestites tend to keep their behaviour secret or meet with others in groups that have recently began to flourish.

## Acknowledgement

I am grateful to many people who contributed to the creation of this thesis. First I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Sandra Bell and co-supervisor Dr. Peter Collins. Due to their infinite patience, advises and criticism, they have helped me to get this finished and polished work out of my raw data.

I particularly thank all my informants without whose friendship and trust would not have made the redaction of this work possible. Not only did they open the door to a complete new world for me, but also their own private life and feelings.

I am also indebted to the several funding bodies who trusted and supported my research by providing me some financial support: The Rotary Club Antwerpen, Graduation Society Accommodation Award, L'Association de la Noblesse du Royaume de Belgique, The Sidney Perry Foundation and the BFWG Charitable Foundation.

Finally, and on a more personal level, I would like to thanks all my friends and colleagues in the Department of Anthropology, University of Durham, who have provided advice, encouragement and above all friendship that has supported me trough the best and more stressful time of the redaction of this thesis. I would like to give a particular thanks to Alison Todd who gave me some of time in her busy schedule to read and criticise the content of my thesis and gave me some precious advises. And Mariella Marzano who proof read part of my thesis. My final thanks go to my family who have encouraged me over the phone and provided me with the warm stable roots that was needed during the time of doubt and crisis.

There are many other people who have helped intentionally or unintentionally and who are not mentioned, to all of them a sincere thanks.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

There has been, during the second half of the twentieth century, in Britain and other European countries, a major shift in the expression, orientation and representation of gender as a cultural category (Garber 1992; King 1993). Inspired by the influence of feminism and gay liberation, new sexual categories including those of transvestite and transsexual have become visible. However, there is a great deal of variation within these categories, creating sub-groups with specific and contrasting projects for the rearrangement and re-presentation of the gendered self. To understand these movements I focus my research on distinct groups of male cross-dressers situated in the North East of England and in Liège in Belgium.

The North East of England is somewhat isolated from the rest of England due to its geographical position. Its long coastline and other natural barriers (Pennines, Cheviot Hills and Cleveland Hills) set it apart. It is also distinguished by its industrial past that was founded on coal and iron deposits and depended on the presence of a large male workforce. The Province of Liège, if not delimited by natural barriers, has a strong sense of being an entity by itself within Belgium. This sensibility has its origin in the Province's history as an independent entity under the rule of the Prince Bishops of Liège since the eighth century. It too developed heavy industries based on coal mining.

Until recently, the two areas, as locations for coal mining and heavy industry, shared a specifically regional discourse of masculinity that reflects the values and attitudes of a once largely male and manual workforce. This discourse of a tough and uncompromising masculinity, described by Townsend and Taylor (1974), survives to the present among many sectors of the population, though it is nowadays challenged by altered



socio-economic circumstances and competing new ideologies of gender and gender relations, especially within the workplace. The challenge presented by traditional masculine ideologies will be explored more thoroughly.

Both areas of my fieldwork, in spite of economic and social changes, still have a specifically regional discourse of masculinity, which transvestites seriously transgress by their 'dedoublement' and the latter's assertion of the feminine within the masculine. However, in their everyday life, transvestites express a masculine gender identity that is linked with their male anatomy, so fulfilling the particular masculine ideology related to the two areas of my fieldwork. This apparently paradoxical assertion attracted my interest in transvestism because, I have a particular interest in body language and 'intermediary sex/gender'. I had previously carried out research (1997) on male castration in Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth century and I wanted to continue my investigation of non-normative gender expressions in western societies.

The distinct groups approached during this research consist of male 'transvestites' who consider themselves to be heterosexual, except for one individual who is homosexual. They want to live as men, but display a recreational need to dress and behave in accordance with what they describe as a 'feminine alter ego'. To shed light on behaviours and characteristics particular to transvestites, I also approached another group whose members designate themselves as 'Drag Queens'. Drag Queens earn part of their living by cross-dressing and, work in bars and cabaret night-spots. These two distinct groups of cross-dressers have different approaches to female clothing. I will demonstrate that male transvestites have internalised a feminine self and Drag Queens use female attire largely for entertaining others to earn money. This research is related to theories and questions about gender and sex and the relation between them. It is intended to contribute to anthropological and sociological debates on the sources of gender identity and the strategies that are entailed in its management (Barnes and Eicher 1992; Brod 1987; Erchak 1992; Garfinkel 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978; Moore 1994; Ramet 1996; Siann 1994; Synnott 1993).

This research will provide insight into a little known area of social life. I expect to demonstrate that there is not only one transvestism, but many varieties of transvestisms. I also hope to contribute to a better understanding of an increasingly visible minority. Moreover, focusing on behaviours that are generally deemed to be transgressive can be of considerable use to shed light on normative social phenomena. Indeed, transvestism is an interesting behaviour that sheds light on defined gender norms, as transvestites are both part of the mainstream and display deviant behaviour. The very nature and presence of deviant behaviours illuminates cultural values and the sanctions that occur when the boundaries of the social norms are crossed (Freilich et al. 1991).

### **1. Western perspectives on 'transvestism'**

The current literature on transvestism in western Europe and USA suggests that most transvestites are heterosexual, though they are commonly perceived as homosexual. While many transvestites often feel more comfortable and accepted within the gay community (Brake 1976), there is currently a move to establish their own position within society. Despite recent shifts towards gender equality, gender in European society remains dichotomised so that people are expected to be readily categorised by themselves and others as either men or women. This is especially true from a legal perspective (O'Donovan 1985). However, contemporary transvestism may be a new way for a person to express different forms of identity and sensibility (Evans 1993) even though it is susceptible to judicial impediments. People are assigned at birth to either male or female gender according to the appearance of their external genital. This biological determination of gender also affects a person's position with regard to the regulation of sexuality by the criminal law, employment law, social security law, family law, welfare law, sex discrimination and even the capacity to marry (Edwards 1996).

Hence, laws encode the widely held assumption that gender is dichotomous and resides within the individual. A person will be classified as either 'masculine' or 'feminine', but not both. Moreover, the masculine pole of this dichotomy has a history of being the more valued. The social construction of gender identity is used to maintain the structural patterns of male dominance and female subordination. This categorisation is not only a way of *seeing* differences, but also a way of *creating* differences (Crawford 1995:14). In every day life, each of us behaves in gendered ways according to social contexts. Even in similar situations, men and women are treated differently and so behave differently. If a man refuses to conform and breaks the limited boundaries of gender by dressing as a woman, as transvestites do, he will often confront negative social consequences for violating social norms and expectations. Gender is thus a self-fulfilling social creation, which creates cultural differences between the sexes (Whitehead 1981; Crawford 1995).

Cross-dressing among men in western societies has been studied from two major perspectives throughout the twentieth century: medical and social scientific. The medical view has mainly focused on the origin of transvestite behaviour and how it could be 'cured'. Such a perspective has limited use and is not acceptable to transvestites who do not want to stop cross-dressing. Sociologists take another position. They approach transvestism as the expression of a 'personal identity'. This approach is more in line with transvestites' self-understanding. Sociologists propose that we ask not why people are transvestites, but why they are categorised as transvestites. The labelling of their behaviour has pushed them to identify themselves with a certain pathology. This identification has also generated sub-cultures of people sharing the same behaviour. Cross-dressing has also been studied from the perspective of cultural and media studies, but the focus here has been on sexual ambiguity in the theatre and entertainment industries (Garber 1992; Newton 1972<sup>1</sup>). Very little research has treated cross-dressing within everyday life. Such a perspective requires the techniques and insights of social anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup>Newton's research on "female impersonators" was exclusively focused on gay communities.

## 2. Terminology

At this point, it is important to make some careful distinctions of terminology. I will use the generic term 'cross-dresser' for any male using feminine attire. Male cross-dressers will be distinguished by four ideal categories throughout my thesis. The definitions of these different categories are based on the cross-dressers self categorisation:

- *the fetishist*, the first step towards cross-dressing, is the use of one or a few items of female attire for erotic or sexual pleasure. The fetishist may be hetero- homo- or bisexual.

- *the Drag Queen* uses female clothing as professional costume to appear cross-dressed in public and to perform on stage. He plays with his appearance in an ironic and mocking way and behaves in a flamboyant and camp manner. He does not try to pass as a woman. He is usually part of the gay community and uses his cross-dressing to earn money.

- *the transvestite* is often married (or divorced) with children and most commonly heterosexual. He cross-dresses occasionally to fulfil his need to express what he calls his 'femininity'. He sometimes may experience erotic pleasure from cross-dressing. Transvestites are 'coming out of the closet' and are joining associations such as *The Beaumont Society*. As I will show in the ethnography to follow, transvestites' behaviour is not merely a question of men putting on frocks and wigs, but rather one of men enacting the full 'female role'.

- *the transsexual* feels trapped in the wrong body and wants to be cured of his gender dysphoria by surgery because his genitals are more a source of repulsion than joy. He lives and passes as a woman and wishes to wear female clothes as his normal attire. He may be hetero- homo or bisexual.

Stoller (1968:177) maintains that distinguishing transvestism from transsexualism is not simply a matter of splitting hairs. It would be so much easier to categorise all under the same title because members often share a common behaviour (wearing women's clothes), a common psychodynamic feature (e.g. cross-gender identification) or fantasy (e.g., conscious or unconscious desires for sexual relations with a person of the same sex). Still there are differences in gender identity that cannot be ignored. Due to human complexity it is hard to classify a person. There are always some cases that could match two different definitions. Also a fetishist may become a transvestite who may later have a sex change operation to become a transsexual. People may migrate from one group to the other. To fulfil the purpose of my research, I will mainly focus on transvestites.

### **3. Development of the masculine ideology in both areas of my research**

During my research, I have focused on shifts in the expression, orientation and representation of masculine gender as a cultural category. I also examined the dynamics of the construction of masculine ideologies and focused on two local discourses of masculinity that are influenced by specific socio-economic factors. It might be argued that my choice to consider the North East of England and Liège as singular entities would not reflect reality and tends to ignore existing differences between towns in each region, such as Darlington and Newcastle in the North East of England. My decision was based on the knowledge that even if differences exist, these two areas are considered as similar entities from the point of view of their past economy that was based on coal mining and heavy industries. Darlington is a market town, with some nightlife and cultural social life due to its theatre and Arts Centre. Newcastle is a much more lively and open city as it has a port and an international university. Its nightlife is extensive and animated and also offers a wide variety of cultural activities. In comparison to these two towns, Liège is closer to Newcastle as both are university cities with a port (a river port for Liège) and the night life is varied and busy.

These three towns where I conducted my fieldwork have developed particular discourses about masculinity. Before the Second World War, coal mining and related heavy industries such as steel production and shipbuilding did not require highly trained workers, but a strong and reliable male workforce. This workforce developed a particular masculine ideology related to its industries (Williamson 1982). Nowadays, even with altered socio-economical circumstances, many of the attitudes and values associated with masculine ideology survive, not only among the male work force born and educated before the Second World War, but also within other social strata.

A strong masculine image that marked both areas is that of the miner. In the mine's industry, to become a pitman, men had to follow the "*pit hardening*" (Williamson 1982:29) which was a matter of acquiring particular technical skills and above all the assimilation of attitudes and disposition which moulded the miner's character and enabled them to work underground.

Atkinson (1977:93) recalls a miner's words: "*Now I was completely dependent on my safety lamp, and I was beginning to realise the vast difference. At the shaft, you had height, light and plenty of air. Now, for the first time in my life, I began to understand what pit work was all about ...*". A boy began work in the mine at around the age of fourteen as a trapper (boy responsible for opening and closing a trap giving access to the mine) and then, a driver. At around the age of twenty he would become a putter (man who pushes the coal tube) and finally a coal hewer. His working life would finish around the age of fifty depending on his health. In cases badly affected by silicosis a man might be lucky to find a job helping to sort out the lumps of shale from the coal (Atkinson 1977:95).

Lambrix (1992), a Belgian author, recalling his grandfather's and father's mining stories, wrote that miners could not survive underground without the help of work mates. For this reason, fellow workers were called "*frères*" (brothers). Each man could rely on the others to help him in case of an accident just as he would always be there for them in return. Underground, accidents were frequent. Atkinson collected these words from a miner:

I hadn't been at the shaft bottom many days before I saw something that has left its mark to this day. I had already seen one or two non-fatal accidents cases, and seen the difficulty of getting the injured men from the shaft bottom to the surface. (1977:96)

Men working underground were strongly attached to the idea that they were 'tough', they were not afraid of danger and had a very fatalistic attitudes towards accidents (Atkinson 1977,1980; Williamson 1982). Children learned from a very early age that nothing could be done against fate. A miner's daughter wrote about accidents that:

This was all part of our lives; we came to expect such happenings. Those who survived described it as 'blood for money'. Several of my classmates at that time have since lost their lives in the same way. Usually the phrase was simply 'a fall of stone'. (Wade 1984:37)

Coal companies could rely on these attitudes and give any kind of work to these men who would not grumble, just as they could rely on the miners' sense of duty and self-discipline. The miners accepted authority and the dangers of the pit without many questions.

In mining and the heavy industries that grew up around it, jobs were poorly paid and hazardous. Not only miners suffered from dangerous conditions. In the chemical industry, glass making and other industries, workers were breathing poisonous fumes, could suffer burns from acid or fire, or be killed by bursting boilers and structures collapsing. In these dangerous environments, men had a strong self-image as the only ones capable of doing such gruelling jobs. They were proud of their work because only 'real men' were able to do it. Mike Donaldson (cited in Connell 1995:36) observes that hard labour in factories and mines uses up the workers' bodies and that the body's destruction is proof of the toughness of the work. The person accomplishing this kind of work therefore demonstrates his masculinity, but at the same time he destroys it, as these kinds of jobs use up men's strength and health.

Jobs in mines and heavy industry were reserved for men, while married women were generally confined to the home. The separation of these activities was considered to be normal because jobs in industries entailed such heavy work that women were not supposed to be able to fulfil them. Consequently, social activities were highly polarised according to gender (Lambrix 1992). Men worked outside the home while women worked within it. Housework was time consuming and hard. Shift workers were returning from work at all times of the day and women were expected to have a meal prepared. Most people were clean and women were very proud of their family's clean clothes even if it took them all day to do the washing (Wade 1984). Women's tasks were organised around a weekly timetable of one day for washing, one for baking etc. It is one of the reasons that very few of them were working outside the home. Adolescent girls had very little choice of work before getting married. They could either pass an arithmetic test in the hope of finding a job in a shop or office, or go into domestic service. Those who chose domestic service started work at the age of fourteen away from home, living in their employers' house (Wade 1984:37). A last choice was working for a mine company sorting out lumps of shale from the coal.

Leisure time was also gendered. Women and girls stayed at home sewing or knitting while men spent most of their time gardening or in pubs socialising with their fellow workers (Segal 1988). The social camaraderie of drinking in the pub celebrated the desirable masculine qualities of toughness and endurance (Lambrix 1992). To be real men they had to be good at work and at drinking as well. This culture of drinking still exists in both areas of my research.

It is not surprising to find that many mining communities were notable centres of religious zeal. Indeed, working and living conditions were uncertain and particularly in the mining community. In Liège Catholicism was the major religion, the North East of England became a centre for the spread of Methodism (Moore 1974). Moore argues that

Methodism gave the oppressed an assurance that their life had some significance. It also taught them that they were not so helpless and that religion could make them independent of their condition by promising a better afterlife. From these notions, the author concludes:

... such notions might have been the basis for a radical political response to social conditions. But this radical potential was reduced by the Methodists accepting deprivations as a trial of faith rather than a political challenge. ... Methodism was a religion of despair and rebellion, producing submission and political leadership among working men who lived earnest and disciplined lives while engaging in spiritual orgies. (Moore 1974:8)

The author also argues that Methodism served both the interest of the manual workers by giving them hope, and the interest of the bourgeois as it taught the workers to be submissive and disciplined and assured the privileged of the right to enjoy their status.

In many communities there were marked disunities in life between the workers and the land or factory owners. Townsend and Taylor (1974) argue that religion was a unifying cultural element. In general, the spread of religion established standards of respectability and responsibility in personal behaviour. Its followers shared common beliefs and common attitudes to which they attached importance. Religious people were supposed to be more civil and have a higher standard of behaviour because they adhered to Church rules. Although mining communities could also contain a considerable number of ungodly folk, most people shared collective values based on altruism. Due to the characteristic of the men's work individualists could not survive. These attitudes of looking after each other still survive in old industrial communities (Lambrix 1992).

The nineteenth century saw, in both England and Belgium, the creation of miners' unions and so increased contact and negotiation between workers and management. Miners exercised their influence among their fellow workers through trade unions and co-operative societies. From an early date, some of the more coherent groups of worker showed a capacity for defending their own interest by organising strikes. Not only coal miners, but also a large section of the working class developed a shared consciousness, especially in

times of economic recession, to protect and consolidate its interests. And as Connell (1995) notes, relations between these various expressions of masculinity, developed in relation to the different jobs, responsibilities or ownership, there could be dominance, subordination or alliance. Thus, even if these men are sharing a common masculine ideology, some of them will have more or less access to political influence due to what are perceived as their particular masculine attributes, such as strength or courage.

In this context, it is not only class that is important, but also the difference between various masculinities produced in the same cultural or institutional setting (Hearn and Collinson 1994; Connell 1995). It also demonstrates that masculinity is not a fixed concept that depends on a particular masculine ideology, religious beliefs or political involvement. Its significance may vary from one culture to the other and from one discourse to the other. However, the most traditional masculine ideology in the North East of England and Liège has been constructed by its industrial history. For example, Atkinson (1977,1980) and Brittan (1989) noticed that coal miners have typified a particular kind of working class consciousness.

One can hardly wonder, after such experiences, that the pitmen of North-East have not only hated the coal-owners, but the pits themselves. Though a curious kind of love-hate relationship has often bound the men to their work and such a tough life drew together the whole population of each pit village. This community spirit, which in the nineteenth century had stood firm despite evictions and 'blacklegs', held through the first half of the present century. It was a spirit the equal of which would be difficult to find in any other industry. (Atkinson 1977:96)

These two industrial areas, Liège and the North East of England, are linked to a once prosperous economy based on coal mining and steel industries. In the period after the Second World War, the capitalist search for profit has changed the technologies and labour process in both these regions. These changes strongly challenged old divisions of labour and the male power in the domestic and paid work. The restructuring and dismantling of old industries increased male unemployment creating crisis in traditional patterns of male

authority, as well as altering patterns of sex-role socialisation. However, people in the North East of England and in Liège in Belgium still have distinctive cultures. This is made apparent for the North East of England in a study by Townsend and Taylor (1974) when 80% of the interviewees agreed that distinctive qualities of Northerners are that they are "*hard working and rough* (1974:37)".

It seems that these qualities, among others, continue to be valued by many men in the region to this day. It is particularly clearly enacted on Friday and Saturday nights when groups of young men are going out on the town. They walk in large groups, wearing tight T-shirts which mould their muscular chests, their arms slightly detached from their trunk, their hands closed in a firm grip and their jaws closed and in a tight 'masculine' grin. These attitudes and body language translate the still living masculine ideology of workforce labour that depended on strength. In contrast women look extremely feminine. Most of the women, when going out, wear make-up and clothes that accentuate their feminine body features.

The people of Liège, the so called 'la Cité Ardente' (Arden City), have the reputation for being hot tempered and it is not uncommon to witness a fight and some blood in the streets. Here too, strong masculine images are prescribed for men, while women are expected to follow feminine dress codes. Muscular arms and chest are features that are required to be considered a real man, alongside the ability to drink beer without appearing to be drunk. Drinking traditions are present in both areas, but the most striking difference is that in England men have to drink as much as possible before closing time and drunkenness is valorised. The law in Belgium being different about closing time, men do not have to drink as much as possible before a deadline, but continue late into the night. It is not only the quantity of beer that is valued, but also the endurance.

#### **4. Description of the Chapters**

The aim of this thesis is to cover several theoretical perspectives of transvestism such as sex and gender; masculinity; deviance; labelling theory and sub-culture. Chapter 2 will cover the literature review concerning transvestism and sex/gender. In the following chapter, Chapter 3, I will give an account of my research methods; how I located the field and my initial questions; how I entered fieldwork and made the first contacts with my informants, and an introduction to the places I frequented on a regular basis. We shall see that the methodological approach of my fieldwork, influenced by the frequency and time of the days of my informants' cross-dressing as well as their secrecy, imposed on me certain ethical restrictions. The relationship I developed with my informants was based on trust. To be able to gather rich data, I used different approaches such as conversation, interviews and observations that complemented each other.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will be mainly based on the data I collected during my fieldwork. Since the mid-twentieth century, it appears in the literature that transvestites' groups have developed in western societies. Young transvestites who have not joined a group often feel themselves to be freaks and it is only when they discover that there are other men sharing the same behaviour that they feel more comfortable about cross-dressing. With the development of regional and national meeting groups as well as the new communication technologies such as the Internet, transvestites have started to develop their own network of friends. They often develop friendship with people sharing the same interest as well as a similar attitude towards transvestism. As we shall see there are several types of transvestism, which are related to the personal representation of what a woman should look like.

From early cross-dressing, which is often an erotic act for the young transvestite, to the creation of the woman they are acting, there is a long process. After some time, it seems the erotic pleasure the transvestites get from handling and wearing female clothes disappears to be replaced by the need to create the 'perfect woman'. This evolving process

starts from wearing only a few feminine items to the full cross-dressing with make-up and wig that will enable them to look like a woman. They will even try to adapt their voice and body language to their creation. Sometimes they want the proof that their creation could fool other people and thus go out in public and try to 'pass'. They want to perfect their image as much as possible to create a convincing image of a woman knowing that beneath it there is a man. To better understand their 'dedoublement', I will present several cases studies. These will also demonstrate and explore the link between openness about transvestism and the knowledge that the partner or the family has of the transvestite about his cross-dressing.

The study of transvestites in our culture would be incomplete if I did not approach the transvestites' partner and family. The partners seem to have a great influence on the transvestites' cross-dressing. When transvestites are secret they have to hide, but when their behaviour is revealed, their partner may influence the frequency and style of the transvestites' feminine image. Some transvestites also may slightly change their character, as they can openly express their 'dedoublement'.

In **Chapter 7**, I will analyse the process of the acquisition of gender identity within a cultural context, which in western societies is based on a dichotomy. Transvestites challenge our cultural norm by crossing gender boundaries while expressing their 'dedoublement'. This non-normative behaviour leads the transvestites being labelled as deviant. Wearing this label, the only places where they do not suffer rejection are in gay areas or transvestites' groups where they can indulge in their cross-dressing. This social organisation could be considered as a 'sub-culture' or 'minority'. These concepts, as well as 'labelling', will be covered in this last chapter.

## Chapter 2

# Literature Review

### 1. Two approaches of Transvestism

Since the nineteenth century, there has been a tendency in western societies to medicalise sexuality and categorise its different aspects (Weeks 1986, 1991). Literature concerning transvestism first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and described it as a sexual phenomenon. Psychiatrists and physicians diagnosed transvestism as a 'perversion' and a 'psychosis' and confused it with homosexuality. This categorisation identified a group of people with certain behavioural characteristics and distinguished its members from others. These first identifications 'labelled' individuals or groups of people and will be further explored in **Chapter 7**. Hirschfeld, a sexologist who started his work on transvestism at the beginning of the twentieth century, suggested that transvestism was not a clinical condition, but the expression of an inner drive that is part of the individual personality (Hirschfeld 1910;1952). This is also a view that is consonant with transvestites' own idea about themselves. But, it was only with the social scientists' interpretation of the origin of transvestism that Hirschfeld's theory became more generally acceptable.

#### **1.1 The medical view of transvestism**

When reading the existing literature, we soon notice that 'transvestism' and 'transsexualism', two terms nowadays clearly differentiated, were not separate categories at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the first authors, and first sexologist, to discuss male to female cross-dressing was Havelock Ellis. In *Man and Woman* published in 1894, he proposed the practice be known as "*Eonism*", in reference to the Chevalier

d'Eon.<sup>2</sup> Ellis made parallels between eonism, sadism and masochism, but distinguished it from homosexuality. He understood transvestism to be a modification of bisexuality and maintained that a boy's over-identification with the feminine image of the mother was an important factor in its development. He also suggested that transvestism might be hereditary, further provoked by an unbalanced endocrine system. Ellis' view is very much in the trend of the period, as he categorises eonism as a sexual disturbance. His interpretation influenced the medical interpretation of transvestism for several decades. Even today, transvestism is sometimes still seen as a form of sexual disturbance.

A few years after Ellis, Krafft-Ebing (1906) explained the origin of transvestism as stemming from an inherited condition affecting the central nervous system. He also linked it to "*frequent abuse of the sexual organs*". He borrowed the term *transvestism* coined by Hirschfeld and classified it, along with fetishism, as cerebral neurosis which "*invests imaginary presentations of separate parts of the body or portions of raiment of the opposite sex, or even simply pieces of clothing-material, with voluptuous sensations* (1906:21)." The neurosis was accentuated by the fact that the fetishist did not find gratification in coitus, but rather in the manipulation of his sexual organ or objects he fantasised on. In a case study of fetishism/transvestism<sup>3</sup>, Krafft-Ebing noticed that the patient, a young butcher, presented no traces of masochism or homosexuality, as he was expecting, and that the patient was thoroughly 'masculine'. Krafft-Ebing also postulated that this kind of cerebral neurosis could lead to "*perverse*" and "*criminal acts*".

These two early interpretations of transvestism are thoroughly essentialist and rooted in biological determinism. Ellis believed that transvestism was an inherited condition attributed to an unbalanced endocrine system while for Krafft-Ebing, it was a diseased condition of the central nervous system. Ellis categorised transvestism along with sadism and masochism while Krafft-Ebing also associated it with fetishism. Thus, they

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<sup>2</sup>The chevalier d'Eon was a famous image in the seventeenth century. He was a very fine swordsman and dragoon in the French army. Sent by the French king as a diplomat to Russia he accomplished his duty cross-dressed. Later he was commanded by the French king to stay cross-dressed for the rest of his life. (Gaillardet 1970)

<sup>3</sup> This implies that Krafft-Ebing did not distinguish these two phenomenon.

both perceived transvestism as a form of sexual gratification. Ellis (1894) and Hirschfeld (1910) distinguished transvestism from homosexuality and sought to normalise both forms of behaviour. Hirschfeld criticised Kraftt-Ebing for regarding transvestism as nothing but a variant of homosexuality. For Hirschfeld transvestism was "*a condition that occurs independently and must be considered separately from any other sexual anomaly* (1910:189)". This is the first attempt to separate transvestism from so called 'sexual anomalies', but it did not succeed in erasing the influence of Ellis and his categorisation of transvestism as a sexual pathology.

Hirschfeld coined the term *transvestite* from the Latin terms *trans* (cross) and *vestitus* (clothed) (Bullough and Bullough 1993). The term was soon adopted by writers and sexologists together with its translation *cross-dressing*. This later term covering any person using clothes attributed to the opposite gender. Hirschfeld described transvestism as:

... the impulse to appear in the outward trappings of the sex to which a person, according to the visible sexual organs, does not belong ... and readily admit that this name indicates only the most obvious aspect of this phenomenon, less so its inner, purely psychological kernel. (Hirschfeld 1910:187)

This definition readily acknowledges the existence and expression of an internal self. For Hirschfeld, a man's impulse to wear female garments must be considered "*as the living home of our existence, as part of our most intimate being, in short, as a form of expression of our innermost personality*" (Hirschfeld 1910:187). So, for Hirschfeld, cross-dressing is the expression of a person's personality. This interpretation is very similar to one used later by social scientists. It is out of this social scientific view that in later chapters I interpret my ethnographic data.

Hirschfeld uses the term transvestism to refer to any man or woman who likes to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex. He also distinguishes the "*name transvestite*" who is a man who chooses a feminine name to express his "*inner feeling of femininity*" and has thus reached a further level in his transvestism, as it has become internalised (1910:218). The feminine denomination of this inner feeling of femininity could be compared to the

creation and recognition of another self, an idea I shall develop in **Chapter 5**. Hirschfeld was the first sexologist to suggest that the transvestic impulse is a part of a person's personality and that the individual cannot simply be rid of it. He was also an early advocate of the view that the concepts of gender identity and cross-dressing identity should be regarded as sub-systems of the self. This early understanding of transvestism is reflected in the later psychological interpretations of transvestism and is based on Freud's theories.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Freud's theories had a widespread influence over the psychological and psychiatric world. During this period, transvestism seems to have been established as a "*perversion*" and a "*psychosis*" by psychiatrists (Tennenbaum 1930; Balint 1935; Liebman 1944). The most widely accepted explanations of its origin were based on Freud's (1924) ideas that psychological disorders are rooted in early sexual experiences. Since Freud (1953) did not write a case study of transvestism, many authors used Freud's psychopathology of fetishism to approach and treat transvestism. Thus, there was often confusion between fetishism and transvestism, while both continued to be seen as related to sexual perversion or sexual inversion. Transvestism was generally explained either by the fact that the patient's parents, wishing for a girl, had dressed their son in female clothes (e.g. Lukianowicz 1959) or as the result of "*castration anxiety*" (e.g. Fenichel 1945). The castration anxiety is explained by the fact that as an infant the patient had seen his mother's genitals and concluded that her penis had been cut off by the father. He came to fear that the same might happen to him. Again these last two explanations have their roots in Freud's theories. King (1981) notes, that at this time, even if transvestism was a known condition, there was no general agreement on its nature and its separateness from homosexuality, which represents a step backward when compared to the ideas propounded earlier by Ellis and Hirschfeld.

After the Second World War, Freud's theories continued to influence the medical profession. Theories concerning the origins of transvestism were based on the 'transvestite-mother', or 'other women', relationship. Psychoanalysts, such as Benjamin (1967) or Ovesey and Person (1976), trace the origin of transvestism to the pre-Oedipal period. They

regard it as a disorder of the self, originating in an early identification with the mother as defence against anxiety during the Freudian separation-individualisation phase of the male infant. Ovesey and Person suggest that this leads to "*a split in the ego into incompatible male and female gender identities* (1976:234)." In the "*full blown*" syndrome of transvestism, there is an elaboration of two identities: male and female. The authors suggest that the female personality might be viewed as "*fighting*" the male personality and crowding it out. For Ovesey and Person, the use of female clothes in transvestism is a representation of the mother. They believe that clothing symbolises the mother as a transitional and incestual object. Female clothes are a substitute for the mother that the child uses in periods of fear and darkness. They represent the warm and affectionate mother.

Stoller (1971), who theorises about the aetiology of transvestism in the United States, believes that in the case of many transvestites the emerging masculine identification that a boy is encouraged to adopt from early age, is compromised by a girl or a woman who forces the boy to wear female clothes. He illustrates this by a case study of a white heterosexual male in his thirties, father of three children, who was forced into girls' clothes by an aunt. This first and single act of cross-dressing at an early age seems unlikely to be the only element that will produce a life-long need. Stoller, however, suggests that early childhood experience prepares the ground. The results of Prince's (1962) study of 166 cases of transvestism do not support such assertions. He reports that very few of his transvestite informants were forced into girl's clothes or had a history of being dressed as a girl in childhood and that such experiences do not automatically lead to cross-dressing. Prince, who is a transvestite himself, led several research projects and rejects the association of transvestism with fetishism or homosexuality. He maintains, as do social scientists, that transvestism is related to gender and not sex<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The distinction between sex and gender will be discussed later in the chapter.

Other hypotheses, which draw on Freudian theories to explain the origin of transvestism, have focused on an absent father during the mother-infant symbiosis (Bullough 1976; Stoller and Herdt 1982). A boy may suffer disruption in his relationship with an absent father or a father who is a distant or passive man in contrast to a dominant mother who is a model for the boy (Stoller 1971). This weak image of the male role leads to its rejection. An over protective mother and a positive reinforcement of anti-male messages from the mother who has rejected the husband may influence the child in his cross-dressing. Fathers who are violent and abusive towards the mother and other members of the family have also been cited as contributing to their son's transvestism (Ovesey and Person 1976). However, in Prince's (1962) study, fewer than twenty percent had an absent father, and fewer than ten percent admitted to have a drunken father. Only fourteen percent were raised in broken homes, all of which challenges the idea that an unstable family environment provokes transvestism.

Prince (1962:523) revealed that for forty four percent of his subjects, cross-dressing began before ten years of age, another forty-four percent began to cross-dress between the age of ten and eighteen and the remaining twelve percent began after the age of eighteen. Psychiatrists Buhrich and Beaumont (1981) report that almost all the subjects they studied started cross-dressing during pre-puberty and, in the majority, cross-dressing was well established by late adolescence. Cross-dressing was usually initiated by the child himself and not by another person. These two studies contradict the different hypotheses that try to explain the origin of transvestism. As we shall see in **Chapter 6**, very few of my informants would fit into the interpretations put forward by Benjamin (1967), Ovesey and Person (1976), Stoller (1970; 1971; 1985), Stoller and Herdt (1982), which are based on Freudian theories.

Another hypothesis supported by Buckner (1971), claims that the origin of transvestism is to be found in the personality of the person, and is not founded on early childhood experiences that are open to interpretation via Freudian theory. For Buckner,

transvestism is most likely to occur in passive men with reduced libido and follows five developmental stages:

- Step 1. Between the age of five and fourteen the boy tries on women's clothes and experiences sexual gratification usually through masturbation.
- Step 2. As a young man, the subject experiences difficulties in perceiving himself as masculine. His failure might be in sport, marriage or employment and he interprets it as a failure of masculinity. His performance might actually not be poor, but he may be a perfectionist and feel unable to reach his own goals.
- Step 3. He may deny his homosexuality by having an aversion to gay men. Thus a transvestite would be a 'refused' homosexual.
- Step 4. Feeling unable to chose between heterosexuality and homosexuality, he might returns to his first pleasure of wearing female garments and masturbation. He elaborates fantasies around the act. Learning about transvestism through literature he will adopt the sexual script that goes with the label.
- Step 5. With the development of the other persona, his gratification pattern becomes fixed in the transvestite identity. He will give a name to his alter ego and elaborate a fantasy life. Later, this fantasy may evolve into the apparent presence of a female companion who will become part of his 'self'. Having two different persons within himself, he will play out the prescribed heterosexual dyadic pattern, but he might find that his marital sex is less satisfying for releasing tension than relations with his alter ego (Buckner 1971:332).

For Buckner, transvestism is an internalised social relationship of a man with his own female fantasy. Its development is a reaction against not being able to fulfil the social expectations of the masculine, heterosexual male. In my research, I did not come to such conclusion, as my informants manage to fulfil both their feminine and masculine character. On the other hand, it is true that several of my informants did experience sexual gratification through wearing or handling female clothes, at least during the early stage of their cross-dressing career. Also, they create an alter ego with a name and a certain image that they present to other people. Through the literature, it appears that closet transvestites,

who cannot socialise as their alter ego, feel that their feminine image is not fulfilled. Part of the transvestites' pleasure derives from being able to socialise as their alter ego and thus have it recognised as a social entity. This process will be discussed in **Chapter 5**.

Stoller (1966; 1970) describes transvestism as a completely pleasurable experience. He defines two kinds of transvestites (and a number of infrequent variants). According to Stoller, the most frequent transvestism is that of a man who does not question his masculinity and has learned to move and act as a woman so that he can pass as a woman undetected in society whenever he wishes to. His transvestism may have started in childhood or adolescence and be associated with feelings of sexual excitement, sometimes provoked by a single female garment. Over the years there emerges a non-erotic desire to act as and pass as a woman (with a penis). During my fieldwork, I met transvestites who fitted this description. The second type is the intermittent cross-dresser who considers himself as a transvestite, but continues to emphasise and enjoy his masculinity. Stoller describes this type as a man who does not want to look or pass as a woman, but who finds pleasure in cross-dressing. Stoller thinks the transvestite is an exhibitionist, in the sense that he is aware of the penis under his women's clothes, and sometimes gets great pleasure in revealing his disguise. So, the transvestite's pleasure sometimes comes from tricking people by letting them believe that he is a woman and subsequently revealing his true gender (Stoller 1968). This behaviour will be covered in **Chapter 5** where we shall see that only transvestites who are confident about their feminine image dare to venture out and have their image evaluated by the others.

Following Stoller (1968), cross-dressing can begin as a way of achieving a sense of well being or, as a sexual fetishism that can wane in later years or even cease, leaving a desire to cross-dress as an antidote to anxiety. In adolescence, the young transvestite will feel like a freak and pervert, but the pleasure is too intense to stop (Stoller 1968). Indeed, transvestites are aware that their behaviour is not acceptable, but they are compelled to

cross-dress and it is at a later stage that the guilt will disappear, if at all. An examination of transvestites' feeling of guilt at cross-dressing and the slow creation of their feminine alter ego will be further developed in **Chapter 5**.

With the development of medical and surgical techniques, it became possible to alter the bodies of the people who had an 'inner feeling' of belonging to the opposite gender (Hausman 1995). Till then, 'transvestism' and 'transsexualism' were both considered to be a different degree of expression of the same pathology. From early 1950s when the first successful sex change operations began to be performed, a new 'scientific' category and 'condition' was created (Billings and Urban 1982; Bolin 1994; Hausman 1995; Ekins and King 1997). With the newly 'created' condition of transsexualism, some people started to identify themselves as transsexuals instead of transvestites. These new medical categorisations led to the emergence of new identities and the need for new terms to distinguish them. Thus, behaviours involving non-normative gender expression were appropriated by clinical medicine and affirmed as new scientific categories. The labelling of these new scientific categories, which were re-appropriated as identities by those so categorised to find respectability under a recognised and medicalised 'illness', will be further developed in **Chapter 7**.

Hamburger, Stürup and Dahl-Iversen (1953), who practised one of the first successful sex change operations on Christine Jorgensen in Denmark in 1952, suggested that there were different kinds of 'transvestism'. They decided to distinguish the different types by applying the terms "*genuine transvestism*" or "*Eonism*" (inherited from Ellis) to the category where "*the feeling of 'being a woman' is rooted and irresistible*" (Hamburger et al. 1953:848) and "*transvestism*" to cross-dressers who did not experience such feelings. Their definition of the 'genuine transvestite' corresponds to what a year later, Benjamin (1954) defined as "*transsexualism*". Benjamin suggested that 'transsexualism' be applied to those whose foremost desire is to change sex, while the term 'transvestism' be used for

people with the desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex. Benjamin's distinctions and definitions come very close to those used in current scientific and sociological literature concerning transvestism and transsexualism.

Even though the term transsexualism was first used by Benjamin in 1954, it is only in the early 1960s that it became clearly differentiated from transvestism as a separate category so, the different terms became standard (King 1981, Ekins and King 1997). For authors such as Hamburger et al. (1953), in the case of transsexualism, people should be allowed to follow hormone treatment or undertaking surgical demasculinisation if they wish. Hormonal treatment with oestrogen in sufficient doses reduces the libido, and in too high dose it may feminise the body and decreases sexual potency. The mentioned side effects are used to alter the body appearance in relation to the feminine gender identity of the patient (Hamburger et al. 1953). In this case, the treatment will not be used towards the aim of 'curing', but to match the patient's body to his 'illness'. King (1981) mentions that in the 1960s, there is a general agreement that sex reassignment for transsexualism can be used as a therapy.

If transsexualism was clearly categorised, the phenomenon of transvestism was not yet clearly defined and was linked to forms of sexual disorders. Transvestism continued to be compared to fetishism (Randell 1959; Allen 1962, Baker 1968, Stoller 1968), and the 'fetishistic transvestite' is mentioned by certain authors as a type (Benjamin 1967; Stoller 1968). Other authors continued to relate transvestism to homosexuality (Randell 1959; Segal 1962; Allen 1962). This continuing confusion between homosexuality, fetishism and transvestism demonstrates the strong influence of the early authors who categorised transvestism as a sexual category. Also this understanding of transvestism made it well suited to the application of forms of aversion therapy that were often used by psychiatrists to treat what were perceived as sexual disorders. The literature reveals that different methods were used with more or less satisfactory results in the short term. With the social scientists' interpretation of transvestism as the expression of a feminine gender identity, transvestism began to be considered as something different from a sexual disorder.

Erchak (1992) notes that in United States, a disorder is believed to be located in the individual and not in the society where the individual lives. Thus, the individual is generally treated in isolation from the community by a single therapist. Throughout the twentieth century, various methods have been used to 'cure' transvestism. The application of aversion therapy to transvestism began in the 1940s. The application of the chemical and electric shock aversion therapy is based on Pavlovian conditioning (Liebman 1944; Eyres 1960; Blackmore et al. 1963; McGuire and Vallance 1964; Thorpe et al. 1964; Rachman 1965; Marks et al. 1967-1970). The procedure aims to establish an aversive response to a particular behaviour, in this case cross-dressing. Another form of aversion therapy was a drug derived from curare that paralyses the patient and terrifies him for a few seconds (Rachman 1965).

Among the literature relating to treatment of transvestism by aversion therapy, few of it considers follow-ups. Rosen and Rehm (1977) were among the few doctors who undertook a long-term follow-up of two patients. The patients were respectively a thirty-eight year old heterosexual actor who started cross-dressing at age four or five and, forty-three year old patient who started cross-dressing at age fourteen and had homosexual intercourse when cross-dressed. Rosen and Rehm studied the effects of aversion conditioning on their transvestism. It appeared that the treatment was unsuccessful and that the patients were back to cross-dressing after a few months.

Psychotherapists who tried to 'cure' transvestites by chemical or electric shock treatment resulted in a fear of cross-dressing, but not a 'cure' (Buckner 1971). In his study of 166 cases of transvestism, Prince (1967) found that only sixteen percent of the analysed cases followed any form of treatment and from this group, two thirds reported that they did not get any benefit from it. It appears that the medical profession has the opportunity to be in contact with a very small fraction of transvestites and, even if transvestites seek treatment, it is unable to offer appropriate assistance to the majority of them. In 1981, Croughan et al. carried out a comparative research of seventy male cross-dressers. Some of

them had been treated and other not. It appears there were no significant differences and more similarities than dissimilarities between the two groups (Croughan et al. 1981). This study certainly reinforces the view, held by my own informants that the medical profession cannot help transvestites to stop cross-dressing, even if they actually want to. Generally, transvestites do not wish to stop cross-dressing, preferring a change in social attitudes towards them. However, because of the intolerance that they experience, some transvestites do seek psychiatric help to be able to deal with their feelings of fear, shame and guilt.

Benjamin's (1967) approach to transvestism completely separates it from any other perceived sexual perversion such as homosexuality, fetishism or sadomasochism. He maintains that the transvestites' problem "*is almost exclusively that of men dressing as women*". If the attitude of society and law were more permissive, there would be no such problem. He asserts that transsexuals are disgusted by their sexual organs, but that this is not the case for transvestites for whom the genitals are a source of pleasure. He also states that most transvestites are heterosexual and that cross-dressing can be associated with autoerotic excitement. Due to the contemporary tendency to separate transvestism from fetishism and homosexuality, psychologists and psychiatrists generally agree that transvestites are unlikely to differ from non-transvestites, apart from their cross-dressing (Bentler and Prince 1970). Bentler and Prince (1970) conducted a study on neurotic and psychotic scales that compared 176 transvestites to 74 control subjects. Bentler and Prince recognised that the two groups can be differentiated only on a marginal level of statistical significance. Usually, the minority of transvestites who seek medical help are afraid to make a further step and become transsexuals (Prince 1962,1967; Wise and al. 1981). The majority of them do not present introverted, neurotic or obsessive compulsion (Prince 1962, 1967).

Authors such as Peabody and Rowe (1953); Lukianowicz (1959); Bartholomew (1960); and Benjamin (1967) even argued that there are no apparent pathological manifestations of transvestism and transsexualism and therefore no available means of

curing either. If there is no pathology there is nothing to cure. They believe that efforts must be concentrated on making cross-dressers' lives easier by allowing them to wear female clothing and that attitudes towards them should change. This more tolerant attitude towards transvestites maintains that these people cannot be blamed for their behaviour.

## 1.2 The social scientific approach to transvestism

With the arrival of social studies of transvestism, it finally becomes clearly differentiated from sexual disorders and related to gender. Different terms such as "*gender reversal*", "*gender mobility*" and "*gender migration*" (Ekins and King 1997:3) began to be used to categorise people who wear the clothing of the opposite sex. The term "*transgender*" was used by the sociologist Ekins in early 1980s (Ekins and King 1997:3). It does not relate specifically to a medical condition and has a large number of connotations. Transgender can refer to any behaviour considered to be 'transgressing' societal norms pertaining to clothing or behaviour that crosses gender boundaries. Raymond (1996:215) places "*pre-operative and post-operative transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, cross-dressers, gays and lesbians, bisexuals and straights who exhibit any kind of dress and/or behaviour interpreted as 'transgressing' gender-roles*" under this generic term. Raymond also points out that currently it is mainly men who are dismantling gender roles and trying to combine aspects of femininity with their masculinity. The term 'transgenderism' may also be used more narrowly "*to refer to those who live full-time in the 'opposite' gender but without surgery*" (Rudd 1993:134 in Ekins and King 1997:3).

Pfaefflin and Colemann (1997) use the term 'transgenderism' as an umbrella to cover various aspects and expressions of gender identity. They use this term in preference to transvestism, transsexualism or cross-dressing, all of which they consider to limit our understanding of the expression of gender identity. In addition they consider that the history of these terms have connotations suggesting pathological conditions.

Transgenderism is a more neutral and demedicalised term that extends the categories of gender identity and their manifestations. This term challenges gender dichotomisation because it is inclusive and neutral (Ekins and King 1997).

The anthropologist Holly Devor (1989) first used the term "*gender blending*" in her ethnography about women who were mistaken for men in their everyday life. These women's general appearance was masculine, but their personal gender identity was feminine. They did not dress in androgynous or masculine clothes and keep their hair short out of an attempt to pass as men, but to fulfil their own personal clothing style. Devor coined the term "*gender blender*" to categorise people who "*indisputably belong to one sex and identify themselves as belonging to the corresponding gender while exhibiting a complex mixture of characteristics from each of the two standard gender roles* (1989:vii)".

This concept of blending gender is very interesting in relation to Devor's research, as the women she approached were mixing male and female characteristics. In the context of my research, I do not use this term because, as we shall see, transvestites do not 'blend' characteristics of both gender, but clearly separate each gender they are enacting. According to Ekins and King the concept of 'gender blending' can be understood in two ways. In the first sense it means that a person expresses a mixture of feminine and masculine characteristics, which I did not observe with my informants. The second sense, refers to harmonisation of "*a psychological and cultural imperative*" (Ekins and King 1997:4). In general, people try to harmonise cultural elements and social expectation such as clothing and gendered behaviour with their anatomy. Some people who have a gender identity that mirrors their biological sex may also sometimes present gender characteristics of the opposite gender, but it does not mean that they also have the gender identity of the opposite sex. In the case of transvestites, they present a masculine image that matches social expectations and it is only when they enact their feminine alter ego that feminine characteristics are present.

For the last two decades, the social scientific view of transvestism has increasingly influenced the medical profession to recognise transvestism as a "behavioural variation" rather than a "psychotic illness". Nowadays, transvestism in men is often understood by psychiatrists (Money and Ehrhardt 1996) as a desire, or compulsion, to wear female clothes and as a gender "identity disorder" instead of a "sexual disorder". The Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1998, proposed that gender identity disorders in children and adolescents are rare and complex conditions. They are more frequent in boys than girls and involve psychological, biological, family and social issues. So, instead of analysing a patient in a medical context, outside of his/her surroundings, psychiatrists are now more ready to accept that their patient is a social individual influenced by a social context.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) (1998) observes that the outcome of gender identity disorders cannot be easily predicted and, requires careful attention to emotional and developmental needs. They are often associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Young boys can experience incongruity between sex and gender identity. According to the report this is characterised by:

- A desire to be of the other sex (transsexualism)
- Cross-dressing
- Play with games, toys and objects usually associated with the other sex and avoidance of play normally associated with their sex
- Preference for playmates or friends of the sex which the child identifies.
- Dislike of bodily sexual characteristics and functions (RCPsych 1998:2-5).

These five states involve a development process (physical, psychological and sexual) and there is a great variability in the outcome. Only a minority of children with alleged "*gender identity disorders*" are predicted to become transsexual, transvestite or homosexual in adult life (RCPsych1998). This psychiatric analysis of the origins of "gender identity disorders" is interesting as it accept variability. Still, as I could observe during my research, many transvestites never met any of the above criteria that could have contributed to their transvestism.

Bullough and Bullough (1993) note that, in western societies, there is no evidence of what might be called "*a transvestites consciousness*" before the creation of the transvestites' group Phi Pi Epsilon (FPE) in the early 1950s in USA. The only known organised group in western societies prior to the mid-twentieth century are the Mollies, which existed in eighteenth century England (Bullough 1976; King 1981). They were a group of homosexual cross-dressers who met in the suburbs of London. Around the world, a few organised groups of transgendered people appear in ethnographic accounts such as the *Hijras* in India or the North American Indian *berdache* (Herdt 1994; Nanda 1986,1994; Roscoe 1994).

Nanda (1986:35) describes the Hijras as "*an institutionalised third gender role in India. Hijras are neither male nor females, but contain elements of both.*" Hijras are born hermaphrodites or emasculated men who adopt female dress and female behaviours. They earn their living by collecting alms and performing at weddings, births and festivals. In Nanda's view, the essential cultural aspect of the Hijras is that they are perceived as asexual, even if there is empirical evidence of Hijras engaging in homosexual activity. Hijras acknowledge that they are born men, but as they cannot reproduce children, they do not fulfil the masculine role expected of Indian men. On the other hand, they are not female. Despite their feminine clothes, long hair, feminine names and feminine mannerisms, their behaviour would be considered inappropriate for an ordinary woman. Hijras make little attempt to 'pass' as women as their behaviour is a deliberate caricature of femininity.

Hijras in India are recognised as members of a third gender with particular social duties, while in Western cultures transvestites are still considered as transgressing the norms of gendered behaviour. Both transvestites and Hijras adopt feminine clothing and mannerisms, but if Hijras do not attempt to pass as women, transvestites do, as they are not recognised as a third gender. Consequently they are under pressure to pass as women if they do not want to be labelled as deviant. Still, as Nanda mention, "*Hijras express in their bodies the confrontation of femaleness and maleness as polar opposites* (1986:53)". So, the

Hijras, even if accepted as a third gender, are understood in the context of the duality of sex and gender. They are not male as they cannot reproduce and they are not female either, as they cannot bear children.

In the context of this research, I will consider transvestites not as a third gender, but as the expression of a 'dedoublement'. The literal translation of the French word 'dedoublement' is 'split of personality'. I decided not to use its English translation, as it has a psychiatric connotation that I want to avoid when analysing the behaviour of my informants. 'Split of personality' also relates to Ovesey and Person (1976) who trace the origin of transvestism in a split of the self that elaborates two incompatible gender identities. Evans (1993:182), a social scientist, already made the mistake of defining transvestites as men with "*two gender identities*" who need to enact both. As we shall see, transvestites have a masculine gender and not two separate gender identities. When expressing their 'dedoublement', transvestites are perfectly aware of the role they are enacting and thus need not to be confused with those who are said to display unconscious multiple personality disorder (MPD), as described by Hacking (1995).

Moreover, the word 'dedoublement' is composed of the word 'double', which implies a linked duality. As we shall see, transvestites create a 'double' or 'feminine alter ego', which does not alter their masculine gender, but covers it. Transvestites are born male and enjoy their socially learned masculine identity and, along with this well-established identity, they claim the need to express what they call their 'femininity' or 'feminine side'. So, when transvestites express their 'femininity' or 'feminine side', there is a duality of gender, within one person they create a 'double individual'. The expression of transvestites' 'femininity' and the creation of their feminine alter ego will be developed in **Chapter 5**. So, behind the 'dedoublement', there is a coherent masculine gender identity that crosses the socially created gender boundaries in the guise of a woman.

The concept of gender is crucial to understanding the phenomenon of 'dedoublement' that occurs in the case of transvestism. 'Dedoublement' arises within the parameters set by a particular culture of gender. These parameters inform the members of a culture of expected norms and behaviours. They also measure the negotiations between people towards what is considered proper, perverse or possible in gender behaviour. The number and kinds of 'gender' categories present within a society depend on the general understanding of gender. In western societies, there is a general acceptance of two polarised genders, with one pole feminine and the other masculine. 'Dedoublement', which brings a person from one gender category close to another, can be partial or total. This 'dedoublement' can be expressed through behaviour, clothing, self-identity, speech, or anything that might be considered appropriate to a different gender. Our cultural expectations attached to the polarised genders may vary over space and time as well, as do the meanings attached to a gender 'dedoublement'.

## **2. Sex/Gender**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, ideologies of gender and relations between sex and gender have changed (Laqueur 1990). Laqueur claims that until recently sex, and thus the body, has been the basis of culture. Every individual is supposed to have a gender identity in accord with their biological sexual organs. Lott and Maluso give a general definition of the terms sex and gender:

Whereas sex denotes a limited set of innate structural and physiological characteristics related to reproduction, and divides animal species into female and male, gender is specific to humans and connotes all the complex attributes ascribed by culture(s) to human females and males, respectively. Only among humans are there girls and boys, women and men (i.e., gendered social categories). Gender is constructed, or learned, from the particular conditions, experiences, and contingencies that a culture systematically, and differentially, pairs with human femaleness and maleness, and is a major social category used by most societies as a basis for socialisation and for the ascription of social status. Members of human groups are socialised to perform behaviours appropriate to the social categories deemed important; in our society in addition to gender, these categories include age, ethnicity, skin colour, social class, and sexual orientation. We also learn to respond to members of social categories with particular expectations, evaluations, and actions. (1993:99)

To summarise this definition, *sex* is a biological component of any individual and refers to genetic and morphological characteristics. *Gender* is the socially constructed and learned element of sexual differences and refers to behavioural and psychological qualities in accordance with cultural understandings about sex. As Jacobs and Roberts (1989:439) point out, "*notions of gender are culturally specific and depend on the ways in which cultures define and differentiate human (and other) potentials and possibilities.*" It is common usage in western societies to privilege the existence of two and only two sexes: male and female. Linked to this assumption are two fundamental gender categories: feminine and masculine. In its strongest forms this dichotomisation opposes any cultural or biological variance in sex and gender and treats variances, as for example transgendered persons, transvestites and transsexuals, as problematic. However, many authors, such as Garfinkel (1967), Kessler and McKenna (1978) and Butler (1990; 1993; 1995), will see 'sex' as well as 'gender' as socially constructed. Kessler and McKenna go even further in arguing that there is only 'gender'.

For Crawford (1995:14) this dichotomous categorisation of gender "*is not simply a way of seeing differences, but a way of creating differences*". Following her theory, the creation of differences between gender constrains everyone to behave according to norms created by a particular social context. Non-conformity can result in negative consequences. Thus, gender is a self-fulfilling concept that is socially created (Crawford 1995). Crawford and other authors, such as Whitehead (1981), believe that western societies use the biological difference in sex to create differences in gender identity.

Following the western dichotomisation of sex and gender, Garfinkel (1967:122-126) depicts what is common sense way of thinking of "*normally sexed persons*".

1. A normal sexed person belongs to the female or male sex.
2. The population is dichotomised and it is a legitimate order.
3. An adult member considers himself or herself as part of one or the other sex as a condition of his or her self-respect and ability to live without risk and interference from others.

4. People will be and always are 'male' or 'female'.
5. To be normal a person will always have certain sexed attribute such as a vagina or a penis.
6. Recognition of a normal person is not only made by first appearance, but also by the individual's entire ancestry and posterity.
7. Normal persons need to have a 'natural' sexed appearance, which looks right and correct. For the *bona fide* person, normal means "*in accordance with the mores*". Therefore, sexuality means sexuality as a natural and moral fact of life.
8. Our society prohibits free movement from one to the other sex. These transfers are only possible in known controlled forms such as masquerading, play acting and the like.
9. People who are difficult to classify e.g. the hermaphrodites must nevertheless be classified as member of one or the other sex.
10. In case of damage or loss of external genitals, a person still remains a member of their original biological sex, and will never be considered as a member of the other sex even if the person claim to be so.

Garfinkel (1967) points out that western societies acknowledge the existence of two and only two sexes and in the case of hermaphroditism, there is a gender assignation to one or the other gender and no 'hermaphrodite' category, as they refuse to acknowledge hermaphroditism as a 'natural' sex. This confirm Garfinkel, Kessler and McKenna and Butler's view that 'sex' is culturally constructed as 'gender'. The above definitions refuse a gender identity that is not in relation to the related sex. However, as we have already seen, transvestites challenge this categorical assumption when expressing their feminine alter ego. The definitions of 'a normally sexed person' also refuse any other sexual preference than heterosexuality. Garfinkel states that the only movement allowed from one gender pole to the other are under conditions of controlled masquerading or acting, but this is challenged by transsexuals who have a sex change operation and are reassigned a new sex. So, following Garfinkel's analysis of normality within our society, sex and gender are

assumed to be 'naturally' given and linked together. But we shall see that he is challenged by several authors, who argue that this approach is too rigid and refuses any deviance from the norm (Ekins and King 1997).

Ethnographic evidence suggests that at least three phenotypic sexes are acknowledged in human culture: males, females and androgynous persons such as hermaphrodites or transgendered individuals (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Nanda 1986, 1994; Herdt 1994; Roscoe 1994; Trumbach 1994). Some communities accept a third gender within the social structure. Particularly where the gender system is not focused on the polarity of a binary construction where at one pole there is female sex/gender and at the other male sex/gender, but stress instead the continuum between male and female.

A good example is the North American berdaches. They are born hermaphrodite or have voluntarily chose the role of the opposite gender. These persons, both hermaphrodites and normally sexed person, have a particular status in their society that is reflected in their gender role (Whitehead 1981). Their roles, described by Roscoe (1994), are "*productive specialisation*" such as domestic work and handicraft for male and, hunting, warfare and leadership for female; "*supernatural sanction*" as they possess and confer powers; and "*gender variation*" in relation to the normative cultural social structures and expectations. The berdache, who takes the role of the opposite gender, in some cases, dresses in particular clothes that are distinct from those designated as male or female. In opposition to hermaphrodites, transvestites and transsexuals in western societies, the berdaches are integrated members of their communities. They have a particular status that is recognised and they enjoy respect and honours (Whitehead 1981). They are also sometimes feared due to their supernatural power.

Thus even in societies that recognise a third gender or intermediary sexual category such as "*the Cheyenne berdache, the Omani xanith and the Tahitian mahu*" (Gilmore 1990:9; Caplan 1987), the hermaphrodite or transgendered individual must occupy a gender role and follow its socially ascribed rules. All societies provide a socially institutionalised

"sex appropriated role" for men, women or third gender persons (Gilmore 1990:9). As Pringle argues that "gender is understood as a set of social practices and a system of cultural meaning (1993:96)" and "theorising about sex has been shaped by the culture which generated it and this has served to structure, indeed 'construct', sexualities (1993:85)". So the association of sex and gender is socially created and, in most societies, used as the corner stone of a dichotomous culture. Gender is based on cultural interpretation with emphasis on biological differences and is learned through process of socialisation that takes place throughout the life cycle.

Authors, such as Gilmore (1990) and Lopes (1982), note that the differentiation between sex and gender is a "*transhistorical-universal phenomena*". This is proved by that fact that most societies attach importance to whether a child is born male or female, except in a few cases where children have a more or less neutral sex. It is only when they reach a certain age that they will be assigned one sex or the other, as in the Truk Island. However, cultural interpretations are historically determined and open to change. The relationship between sex and gender is not static. And as we shall see the relation between sex and gender may vary at the different levels of gender assignation, identity, role, and attribution.

## **2.1. Gender assignation**

When a child is born he or she is assigned a gender based on the characteristics of the external genitalia (Astuti 1998). In western societies, the presence of a penis leads parents, doctors and midwives to assign the gender label 'boy' to the neonate, as the presence of a vagina will assign the gender label 'girl'. Kate Bornstein (1994:22), a well known male to female transsexual actor, defines gender assignation from her own personal experience as, "*this is what you are.*" She argues that gender assignation is all about "*penis*" or "*no penis*", with "*penis*" as the "*ideal*". Her view describes a phallogentric rigid structure. In western societies, as soon as the gender assignation has been made, it is expected that one's personal behaviour will follow the social expectations associated with masculinity or femininity.

Thus, the assigned gender is intended to conform to the child's biological sex. This matching is an attempt to bring two categories into line (the biological and the cultural). However because these gendered categories are culturally constructed, they cannot always be made to 'fit' so that there is always a degree of indeterminacy. It is sometimes only later in life, usually during adolescence, that these indeterminate details will appear. To definitely categorise an adult, O'Donovan (1985:10) notes that seven variables affect the determination of sex:

- internal organs morphology (ovary for female and testes for male)
- external genitals morphology
- chromosomal sex (XX chromosomes for normal female and XY chromosomes for normal male)
- internal accessory organs (uterus in the female and prostate gland in the male)
- gonadal sex (the structure of the ovary or testis)
- hormonal sex
- assigned sex at birth
- gender role.

O'Donovan considers that within these criteria there may be considerable variations. For example the external genitals morphology might suggest one category that after puberty and development of secondary sexual characteristics, such as body hair, voice, development of breast or pelvic shape, will prove to be the other. As in the case of hermaphrodites, there may be confusion in the assigned sex (Kessler and McKenna 1978). It is only with the maturation of the external genitals and the secondary sexual characteristics that it will be noticed that they belong to one or the other sex. In case of transvestism, the gender role may not always fit the social expectation as they are sometimes presenting an image in opposition of their gender assignation.

## 2.2 Gender identity

Garfinkel pointed out that gender attribution is about more than a simple inspection of the genitals at birth. He stressed other factors such as gender role or gender identity. Kessler and McKenna (1978) define gender identity as referring to a person's own feeling about being a man or a woman. It is the personal choice of a subject and responds to the question asked by Bornstein (1994:22) "*Who am I?, a man or a woman?*". Following Bolin (1996), gender identity includes both personal identity and social identity. Transvestites' personal gender identity is male only, but their social gender identity could be mistaken as both male and female.

Gender identity is often assumed to be 'natural'. Every person with a penis feels like a man and every person with a vagina feel like a woman, but it is not the case for everyone. For example Kessler and McKenna (1978) point out that transsexuals suffer from a gender assignment which they feel does not match their gender identity. Gender identity may be universal in the sense that everyone knows the category he or she is assigned, but an individual's own feelings and perceptions may not fit closely to the assigned gender, such as transvestites who want to enact both masculinity and femininity. Some people are looking for their "own" identity and as Bornstein wrote "*I've no idea what 'a woman' feels like. I never did feel like a girl or a woman; rather, it was my unshakeable conviction that I was not a boy or a man* (1994:24)". Bornstein does not feel like a woman because he does not know how a woman feels like. For her, gender identity became a question about "*which gender (class) do I want to belong?* (1994:24)." In western society, we can only be a 'man' or a 'woman'. So an individual seeking to escape the assignment to one gender can only choose the other.

### **2.3. Gender role**

Gender roles are a set of expected behaviours appropriate to people belonging to one gender or the other and relates to Bornstein's question "*How do I need to function so that society perceives me as belonging or not to a specific gender?* (1994:26)." Stereotypical behaviours attached to each gender are due to the fact that gender is a culturally ascribed role and certain expectations are attached to the expression of the biological foundation of gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978). It is often assumed that sex and gender are related directly and femininity and masculinity are simply the result of one's sex, but people such as transvestites or transsexuals do not always want to express a gender role in relation to their biological sex.

### **2.4. Gender attribution**

People attribute gender to one another by assessing the body, clothes, posture, movement, and voice. After attributing gender to an individual most people find it difficult to change that attribution, even if they discover that someone does not have the appropriate genitals, as in the case of transsexuals or transvestites. Assignment, identity and role are different from attribution, but can only be interpreted in the context of 'gender attribution'. Indeed, a person assigned to a particular gender will almost always develop a gender identity as well as a gender role in concordance with the gender assignment. Thus, a person who behaves according to the social expectations attached to a particular gender will be attributed that gender following the image projected. Knowing this, transvestites who want to pass as a woman will adopt a feminine demeanour.

## **2.5. Discussion about the duality of sex and gender**

The words 'sex' and 'gender' are frequently assumed to be synonymous or interchangeable (Vance 1995), but their meanings cannot be equated. Most of the time, gender assignation will match gender identity and thus the distinction between a person's biological characteristics and his/her social sexual identification become synonymous. But this is not the case for everyone. Garfinkel's study (1967) of what he thought to be a hermaphrodite patient, Agnes, demonstrates her confrontation with the problem of passing as a normal sexed person in every day life and reveals the socially constructed nature of sexual meanings. Agnes, as a person with dubious gender, is often confronted with this well-established structure where her socially constructed gender becomes problematic.

Agnes is a naturally born male, assigned to the male gender and brought up as a male. Before puberty he started stealing hormones tablets from his mother. These feminine hormones, taken on a regular basis at a period of great change in human body (puberty) feminised his body. At age seventeen, after hiding his feminised body under large men's clothes, he transformed himself into Agnes. He found a job as Agnes and lived with a girl roommate without ever being discovered. It is only when he met his boyfriend that he decided to have a sex change. At age nineteen, he was first observed by Stoller in UCLA. His feminine gender identity and role as well as his feminine body features convinced the doctor that he was a hermaphrodite, even if there was no presence of vagina and ovaries. An amputation of the male genitals was performed a year later and his birth certificate changed. It is only later that Agnes told the truth about his intake of female hormones that feminised his body matching his gender identity. So Agnes was not a born hermaphrodite, but assigned to the right sex. Till age seventeen he played the male role and was attributed the masculine gender, but his gender identity was feminine. Only after he disclosed his feminine gender identity, did he play the feminine role and was attributed the female gender.

The concepts of sex and gender are separated though closely related. Vance (1995) develops the idea following two opposing lines. First, 'sex' causes 'gender' which means that the male-female reproductive organ and the process of reproduction are biologically given differences that lead to the social distinction between genders. Secondly, 'gender' causes 'sex' because women, as a gender group, constitute the locus of sexuality, sexual desire and motivation. The process of reproduction becomes the source of all other male-female differentiation and structures the organisation of the gender system. Thus, following Vance (1995), sex and gender are knit together seamlessly.

The concepts of sex and gender have been distinguished from each other since the 1950s. John Money and his colleagues, who were clinicians in the Johns Hopkins University and pioneers in research on transgenderism, introduced the term 'gender' to shed light on the social aspect of gender identity while they were working with hermaphrodites and transgender subjects. In the 1970s feminist theorists used the distinction between sex (biological) and gender (social) to examine the cultural construction of male power over female. They wanted to separate the biological characteristics that distinguish male and female from the cultural constructs based on these biological characteristics. Pringle (1993) argues that the feminist and gay movement needed to distinguish sex and gender to be able to establish the way these concepts had been historically constructed in relation to each other. Despite their efforts to distinguish both concepts, contemporary writing about sexuality is often "*gender-blind*", as with Foucault (1980) who wrote about the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, or fails seriously to take into account the question of male power, as with Lacan (1966) (Pringle 1993:84).

Butler (1990) argues that the relation between sex and gender is a fiction. Indeed, she says that, in everyday life, gender is only performed and that it is its performance that reinforces gender stereotypes attached to each sex. She maintains that men's drag performances imitate femininity, but the "*femininity' that is imitated is not understood as being an imitation at all*" (Butler 1995:32). This means that femininity enacted by women is only an imitation of the social expectations of femininity. Transvestites by imitating

women, only imitate the social representation of what is 'femininity'. "*Thus, drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself as an imitation*" (Butler 1995:32). Butler implies that acting reveals the performative status of gender. She also argues that performance "*consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer's 'will' or 'choice'*" (1993:234)". So, performances expose the very binarism of sex and gender and its fundamental unnaturalness.

In relation to Butler's arguments, gender performance is neither true (because imitating an ideal) nor false (because expressing an individual's identity). Goffman (1963) tells us that we act out who we would like to be, that we are all great actors and that, indeed, "*all the world is a stage*". Indeed, as Butler (1993) argues, what is performed conceals the unperformable and unconscious. In everyday life, we perform the person who fulfils the social expectations attached to a particular gender even if deep inside, we would like to present a completely different person. This 'dedoublement' is expressed by transvestites who, in their everyday interaction, present a masculine image. They 'act' their masculinity to fit social norms and allow their full personality to be expressed only in private.

Transvestites transgress, moving across the boundaries making gendered difference. In doing so, they pose a challenge to the taken-for-granted association of 'men' with 'male' and 'masculinity', and 'women' with 'female' and 'femininity'. Dislocating the markers of femininity and masculinity from the bodies of females and males, transvestites represent 'gender' as not only archived, but actively fashioned. (Cornwall 1994:112)

Rule breakers are viewed, by Butler (1990) and by Garber (1992), as the very proof that gender boundaries are a variable and not a constant, that one can change one's gender, construct one's sex, or maintain a status not directly identifiable as one or the other gender categories.

### **3. Learning of gender**

Siann (1994:116) suggests that there are three major approaches to sex and gender: essentialist, socialisation and structuralist. She believes that the essentialist approach includes medical biological determinism and early childhood psychoanalytical influences of the parents based on Freud's theories. I agree that biological determinism is essentialist, but I consider that parents' psychological influence is part of the socialisation.

#### **3.1. The essentialist approach**

Biological determinism is essentialist in the way it regards gender differences in psychological functioning as arising from biological differences. This determinism is found in every society in a more or less clear and distinct social structure organised around genders. In western societies, any individual with chromosomal or sex hormone abnormalities will be assigned to one or the other gender with the help of medicine and psychological treatment.

##### **3.1.1. Biological development of male and female**

Since the 1920s, embryologists have understood that during foetal development a single and undifferentiated gonad develops into either a penis or an ovary. The ovum contains an X chromosome and the sperm contains an X or an Y chromosome that will determine the child's sex. The XX pattern will develop into a female and the XY pattern into a male. So, if there is at least one Y chromosome, the individual is considered to be male, and if there are no Y chromosomes, the individual is considered to be female. This is the most basic criterion for assigning sex and also the most clearly dichotomous.

The sexual chromosomes start to effect the development of the embryo around six weeks after conception (Money and Ehrhardt 1996). If there is an Y chromosome, it will cause the development of the medulla (centre) of the primitive gonad into testes that will produce sperm at puberty. If there is a second X chromosome, the cortex (outer layer) of the primitive gonad will develop into ovaries, which contains all the egg cells that will be released after puberty. Once developed the testes soon begin to produce androgens that will causes the development of ducts. In the absence of androgens, a uterus and upper vagina develop and oestrogen is produced. At birth the infant produces low levels of both androgens and oestrogen's until puberty. At puberty, the hypothalamus stimulates the glands to produce greater levels of hormones than are produce in childhood. Androgens facilitate the development and growth of the bones and muscles, while oestrogen causes breasts to develop, facilitates fatty deposits, slows down growth of the bones and stimulates the process of ovulation and menstruation.

Kate Bornstein (1994) concludes that what should make a man is testosterone and what should make a woman is oestrogen. But it is demonstrable that hormones are not the universal key to gender because some women may have more testosterone than men at certain times in their monthly or life cycle and vice visa (Kessler and McKenna 1978). Research has also shown that sex hormones have no direct effect on human sexual direction or erotic inclination (Money 1961) and thus cannot explain sex or gender deviance.

### *3.1.1.1.Chromosomal abnormalities*

Most individuals possess 46 chromosomes. In some cases, Money and Ehrhardt (1996:32-33) observed that instead of having two sex chromosomes, some individuals develop an extra chromosome or one is deleted. In the case of the deleted chromosome (XO), the individual is identified by doctors as female, but in adulthood she will remain sterile even if given female hormones. In cases of those born with additional chromosomes, studies about abnormalities such as XXX, XYY, XXY or XXYY indicate that they have little direct effect on gender identity or sexual orientation (Forssman 1970;

Money and Ehrhardt 1996). Gender identity in such cases appears to be closely related to the child's upbringing in conformity with the gender assignation indicated to the parent at birth (Money 1961; Money and Ehrhardt 1996).

### 3.1.1.2. Sex hormone abnormalities

John Money (1961) studied certain abnormalities that may occur during the development of the embryo. The Y sex chromosome starts the process of modifying the XY embryo in a male direction. However, some embryos with an Y chromosome may develop genitals that are indeterminate. Individuals with this sort of condition are referred to as 'intersexed'. What fashions these intersexed bodies is the presence or absence of testosterone at a critical period. The embryo may develop partly male and partly female characteristics if the testosterone is present in the wrong amount or at the wrong period of development. Usually these people are "*fixed*", as Bornstein (1994) says, by doctors to fit into the gender dichotomisation that dominates our society.

Money and Ehrhardt (1996) studied some hormonal abnormalities in XX individuals after their mothers received a high dose of male hormones in order to prevent miscarriage (a practice no longer used). According to Money, these female children seem to be perfectly 'normal', but their social behaviour and interests are considered as more 'tomboy' than the other females. They also show a delay in the development of sexual activity. In the case of XY individuals, they may develop conditions that affect their response to hormonal secretions. In these cases the embryonic tissues are not able to respond to male hormones and the result is a baby with internal male organs and the appearance of female genitals. They are therefore assumed to be female and are only discovered to be chromosomal males at puberty when they fail to menstruate. Another abnormality is caused by a lack of enzymes for the conversion of testosterone and again, at birth, the internal reproductive organs are male and the external organs appear female. At

puberty these individuals undergo an increase of testosterone. Their voice deepens, their already enlarged clitoris enlarges further into a small penis capable of erection and their body and genitals' appearance becomes unambiguously male.

Bornstein (1994) wonders if all these abnormalities imply more than two sexes. However, in every day life, it is assumed that individuals belong to one of two genders: masculine or feminine. As already stated, even biologically 'mixed' people, who are recognised by scientists as a combination of both sexes, are often assigned into one or the other category by medical surgery instead of being considered as a third gender. None of the researchers on physiological abnormality (such as Buhrich and McConaghy 1977, or Money and Ehrhardt 1996) report that they are associated with transvestism. Medical explanations for transvestism generally tend instead to rely on psychological and developmental models.

### 3.1.2. A cross-cultural view of biological determinism

As shown, sex hormones have to develop and under their influence, it will feminise or masculinise the body. XY individuals who can appear partially female at birth because the external genitals are not fully developed, under the influence of masculine hormones at puberty will fully develop as men. Several non-western societies, such as the Sambia (Herdt 1987), also believe that boys do not develop 'naturally' and that their masculinity is socially developed through ritualised homosexuality. To achieve maleness, boys between seven and ten years old are separated from their mother and join the men's group. They believe that semen is not naturally produced, but acquired by drinking the semen of the initiated. When initiated, it will be their turn to give semen to the younger boys and be allowed to get married. After their initiation, they will drink certain white tree saps to replace their lost semen.

As the Sambia believe that masculinity is acquired, hermaphrodites are assigned to the male gender believing they will become men during the initiation. This is rarely the case in western culture where hermaphrodites are surgically assigned to the male or female sex. Even, if chromosomes are the basic indicators of sex, surgeons will often transform a hermaphrodite body into a female body. The reason is that it is easier to 'create' a girl than a boy with a penis that matures (Money and Ehrhardt 1996). This invites one to think that the female sex is more 'basic' than the male one, not only medically, but also biologically and culturally. The Sambia as well as other societies believe that girls become women the day they start menstruating. This is a clear and natural sign. For men, there is no such a transformation and they need initiation to enter the men's circle. This cultural change of status based on biological determinism is often used to demonstrate that woman are more basic and 'natural' and men are more 'cultural', as they need to go through a social initiation.

The Sambia example of acquisition of masculinity through initiation proves that biological determinism can not be taken for granted as the basis of gender development in relation to sex. In western societies, transvestites and transsexuals, whose gender identity, role and attribution do not match their gender assignation, challenge the dichotomous relation between sex and gender. So, maybe there are other factors involved.

### **3.2.The Socialisation approach**

#### 3.2.1. Social interpretation

*"Gender identity is both constructed and lived"* (Moore 1994:49).

From the perspective of many social theorists, men and women are perceived as being different because our society moulds and shapes behaviour, attitudes and values around gender. From a very early age, boys and girls are treated differently, touched differently, given gender specific names and expected to have different developmental and

social reactions. Different kinds of toys are used to foster the development of gender-typed skills and attitudes in order to integrate children into socially defined roles and behaviour patterns (Lopes 1982, Crawford 1995).

From their earliest years children are given approval and/or reward when they behave in the ways that boys or girls are supposed to. Social theorists (such as Tarde or Bandura.) explained the learning process of children, who imitate the actions of their parents first and then of their peers, thus adapting their behaviour to the gendered behaviour expected by their society. Even if children learn a wide range of behaviours from direct learning and observation, they will select the positively rewarded ones that are in accordance with their gender, in order to avoid negative sanctions. For example girls will be sanctioned as not being feminine if they are noisy and play rough games. Conversely, boys will be rewarded as they are displaying what is considered to be a masculine behaviour. According to Bandura (1986 in Lott and Maluso 1993) this is one of the ways that children learn how to behave in our society.

Positive consequences and opportunities for practice are considered in social learning analysis to be the primary mediators of both response performance and maintenance. The importance of consequences is highlighted in all social learning positions, including those stressing cognitive mediators and observational learning. (Bandura 1986 in Lott and Maluso 1993:102)

However learning by imitation and rewards are not the only or even primary means by which children are socialised. Another very important medium for learning about social settings and ideologies is language. While learning to communicate through language, children also unconsciously integrate social norms and specific codes. As Bernstein suggests,

... every time the child speaks or listens the social structure of which he is part is reinforced in him and his social identity is constrained. The social structure becomes the developing child's psychological reality by the shaping of his acts of speech. (1971:124)

Children, as well as adults, learn their social role and status through communication: "*A role from this point of view is a constellation of shared, learned meanings through which an individual is able to enter into persistent, consistent and recognised forms of interaction*"

*with others*" (Bernstein 1971:124). This exchange of information during conversations enables the protagonists to share their own point of views and get social approval or disapproval from the others.

Gender is also a product of social technologies such as cinema, television, advertisements, magazines, as well as institutionalised ideologies and everyday interactions (Pringle 1993). For Bornstein, "*gender is a method of partitioning our identities, our families, our economics, or our society* (1994:139)". In this sense gender is the enactment of our internalisation of social structures. It is learned from a very early age because of its significance as a major social category. Gender identity is reinforced and maintained through life by various cultural mechanisms that produce and reinforce the differences between genders (Beall 1993). Thus, gender role and gender identity is constructed in everyday social interactions.

Nicholson (1984) states that it is the differences between men and women that we notice, but there are very few biological differences between the two sexes when compared with the biological similarities. Following this theory, it would not be surprising to find out that men and women would behave in much the same way in most circumstances had they not been conditioned to behave otherwise. But this is too superficial, which is made clear if we compare humans with apes who both share very similar genes. However, Simone de Beauvoir (1953:681) supports Nicholson's theory and wrote: "*Woman is determined not by her hormones or mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself*". Following her interpretation, a woman 'becomes' a woman. She is not born but socially constructed, as is a man.

Still, there are several problems with socialisation theory. First, it is almost impossible to explain any exception to the rules (Brittan 1989), as the 'dedoublement' that is in action in the case of transvestism. The theory does not allow for processes of change on the individual or social level. To this, Brittan (1989:22) adds "*Moreover, this image of*

*complete social absorption suggests a society in which there is a perfect fit between the individual and role demands, and this, to say the least, is a dream of social theory, not reality."* Also socialisation theory cannot explain why some individuals do not conform to the 'norm' and why others do not feel comfortable when following the rules of a dichotomised and completely gendered system.

### 3.2.2. Psychological interpretation

#### *3.2.2.1. Freud's interpretation of gender differences*

Freud was convinced that motivation for human behaviour, including sexuality and gender identity lay deeply submerged in suppressed memories of early emotional relationships that are so intense and painful they are consigned to a kind of mental repository called the 'unconscious'. He also maintained that adult sexuality was not naturally given, but the result of a long and constructed process (1924). Freud placed an enormous emphasis on sexuality in his theories about formation of gender identity. He maintained that gender difference is forged during the phallic stage when children between three and four years old discover their genitals (1924).

Following Freud, Pringle suggests that socialisation is not an easy, gentle process. It is associated with pain, and fear, desire for one parent and rejection of the other. The child experiences a threat to bodily integrity as implied in the Oedipal complex (separation from the mother) and castration anxiety (fear that the father will cut his penis, as the child thinks the father did to his mother).

Gender and sexuality are here intimately connected, for gender is actually constructed through the whole Oedipal process. It certainly cannot be said that psychoanalytic theories ignore the body. Far from treating the human body as a mere biological specimen, they recognise that it is always lived in culture; that understandings of its workings are themselves cultural productions. (Pringle 1993:93)

Freud (1924) explained sexual deviation and psychological disorders by an unsuccessful completion of the Oedipal complex whereby the necessary transformation of identity has become somehow side-tracked. According to Connell, Freud argues that homosexuality is *"not only a gender switch because he offers the hypothesis that humans are constitutionally bisexuals, that masculine and feminine coexist in everyone. This implies that human sexuality is complex and in some ways a precarious construction"* (Connell 1995:10).

### *3.2.2.2. More recent psychoanalytical interpretation*

Nancy Chodorow's (1978, 1994) ideas about child development are influenced by Freud's theories of sexual differentiation during early childhood. Because the children are totally reliant on the mother, they do not differentiate themselves from her and as their physical and cognitive development progresses they begin to define themselves in relation to the mother. Later on, the ideal circumstance would be that boys have to learn to differentiate themselves from their mother, while girls can continue to identify with their mother. The mother contributes to her son's masculinisation by encouraging him to differentiate himself from her, but encourages her daughter to identify with her. Because boys have a more precarious sense of gender identity, they compensate by being more concerned than girls with knowing what is 'masculine' and what is 'feminine'.

For Chodorow, these early processes of gender differentiation have important consequences for personality differences in later life. Girls grow in their desire of being connected with those who commit them to a destiny of nurturing others including their own children. Boys, who have developed their identity in opposition to femininity, grow into men who are likely to devalue women and to believe in the superiority of whatever qualities are culturally defined as masculine. Chodorow's theory is the equivalent of the Sambia's initiation for boys. Boys have to be separated from their mother in a very drastic

and painful way. During their initiation they will learn the social taboo surrounding women and will have to completely separate themselves from their mother to become member of the community of men.

According to Chodorow, each generation reproduces gender differences not because of biology, but because masculine/feminine differences are continually reproduced in early experiences of family life. She rejects Freud's emphasis on the importance of the phallic stage and penis envy, but accepts that the adult personality is a consequence of gender differentiation during the early years of life and its influence on unconscious processes.

Even though this psychological explanation acknowledge the role of social relationships within the family as crucial in determining gender (Pringle 1993), it exhibits a tendency towards essentialism because it does not take into account social and historical changes. It regards gender identity as fixed in the unconscious during early childhood, while continuing to exert an influence throughout adulthood. This psychological interpretation can only be applied to transvestism if we are convinced that its origin is linked to early childhood influence, but as we have seen earlier in the chapter, there is no real proof that this is the case.

### **3.3.The structuralist approach**

The structuralist approach, following Claude Levi-Strauss, is concerned with the deep structure of social behaviour and also the manner by which we conceptualise our social world through cognitive categories. It appears that western society is dichotomised around a gender system with on one side masculinity and on the other femininity. This binary system based on the mimetic relationship between sex and gender where gender mirrors sex, is called into question by Butler (1990). Thus, people are becoming gendered. At birth babies are dichotomised and allocated one or the other gender and, gradually transform into men or women. They slowly learn how to think in terms of masculine or feminine and to behave properly with respect to the other gendered sphere. This gender

structure, as Cucchiari (1981) asserts, could be understood as a symbolic system constituting two complementary and mutually exclusive categories in which all humans have to fit.

This dichotomisation of genders is also identified by Bem (1993:80) who wrote:

Even many feminists commonly assume that if androcentrism and biological essentialism were both eliminated, only sexual difference would remain. In fact, what would remain is gender polarisation, the ubiquitous organisation of social life around the distinction between male and female. Social life is so linked to this distinction that the all-encompassing division between masculine and feminine would still pervade virtually every aspect of human experience, including not just modes of dress and social roles but ways of expressing emotion and experiencing sexual desire.

Indeed, all societies are divided into more or less gendered places, domains, space tasks and tools or items. Of course the use of these gendered places, domains, tasks, tools and items are subject to variation. And as Moore suggests:

... this makes it easy to fall into the trap of suggesting that gender specific tasks and domains, with their associated material items, simply reflect the obvious division of the world into women and men. (1994:72)

Gender polarisation also superimposes a male-female dichotomy on the biological determinism of genes, chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive physiology that constitutes sex itself, which means that gender polarisation, and not biology, is the reason that people perceive the existence of two, and only two, sexes (Kessler and McKenna 1978). As mentioned earlier, while western cultures seem to polarise gender along strictly anatomical lines, ethnographic material suggests that not all cultures categorise humans into two and only two sexes. It means that sexual differentiation does not only produce a fixed and binary categorisation and that anatomical sex does not always dictate gender identification.

... the differences between women and men which people in other cultures naturalise and locate in the human body and in features of the physical and cosmological environment are not necessarily those which correspond to the constellation of features on which western discourse bases its categorisation. (Moore 1994:13)

Thus, ethnographic research on cultures that appear to have a 'third gender' have forced anthropologists to review the simplistic dichotomous gender model to account for more complex systems (Moore 1994). As already mentioned, the Hijras described by Nanda (1994) are considered as neither male nor female. These born hermaphrodites or male live their daily life within their own social community that is "*both a caste within society and renouncers outside it*" (Nanda 1994:373).

So, the structuralist approach does not allow any change or deviation from this rigid gender structure. Douglas (1966) notes the importance of meeting the criteria of a certain category and its consequences:

... an anomaly is an element which does not fit a given set or series; ambiguity is a character of statements capable of two interpretations. But reflection on examples shows that there is very little advantage in distinguishing between these two terms in their practical application. (1966:37)

Indeed, in the absence of third gender categories, ambiguous sex, or gender categories, such as transvestism, hermaphroditism, or transsexualism, are moulded into 'appropriate' gender behaviour or related to sick, dangerous or pathological categories (Brake 1976:178). In western societies the common attitudes toward transvestites has been to convince them that they have a 'problem' that needs to be treated by psychiatrists or psychologists instead of accepting that they want to express their femininity and still present a masculine image when not cross-dressed.

So, I agree with Moore (1994), that the dichotomous gender norm is simplistic and does not represent reality. Eking and King (1997) take the same view by arguing that in theory, social life is dichotomised, but in practice, a lot of "*incorrect*" elements are allowed, particularly on certain trivial occasions. Thus, as Brittan (1989:37) states, "*gender is not static - it is always subject to redefinition and renegotiation.*" To a degree, that may sometimes be hidden, the gender of an individual may be subject to a greater variety of expressions and experience than the dichotomous model suggests, as in the case of

transvestites who express a 'dedoublement'. Gender is a mixture of femininity and masculinity in each individual rather than a strict separation between the feminine and the masculine pole.

#### **4. Male anatomy and 'masculinity'**

It is hard to define the concept of 'masculinity' because it is not a coherent subject about which a general theory can be propounded. As we shall see there is not only one type of 'masculinity' around the world, but many 'masculinities'. Still, within western societies, there are general trends that exist and are discussed throughout this chapter. These trends could be found in both areas of my research that developed regional masculine discourses around these general trends. Also, we have to be aware that masculine discourses can depend on the expectations of a social class, again these are influenced by the general trends (Hearn and Collinson 1994). Instead of attempting to define 'masculinity' as a universal concept shared by everyone, we will consider the processes through which men pass in order to achieve this culturally defined status.

In most western societies, as we have seen, medical determination influences the future of the child who henceforth carries the gender along the masculine or feminine developmental pathway. This strong bifurcation of the sexes between the polarities of male and female is common in western societies. To each pole of the structure are attached a series of stereotypes that reflect the prevailing beliefs and interests of a culture and even a particular area. The biological distinction between male and female could be equated with sexual destiny as sexual distinction is translated into social organisation.

As we have seen structuralists, such as Cucchiari (1981), argue that it is the external influence of the society's stereotypes that mould the difference between a man and a woman. Indeed, gendered structures follow a dichotomous path leading to the expectation that men will be the breadwinner and protector of the family and women should care about the housework and children rearing. This attribution of tasks survived within the institution

of marriage in most pre-industrial western societies until relatively recently. As Brittan explains, an ideology can evolve: "*Masculinity refers to those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time. In some cases these fluctuations may last for decades - in others it may be a matter of weeks or months* (1989:3)". Since the beginning of this century, the ideology of masculinity seems to have been challenged and changed in western societies under the influence of not only one element, but a complex of changes (Chapman and Rutherford 1988; Rutherford 1988).

Authors such as Willott and Griffin:

... understand gender categories to be social and historical constructs, constantly renegotiated within and in relation to other systems of inequality such as 'race', sexuality, class and age. As such, masculinity cannot be presented uncritically as a monolithic and unitary entity. Rather, there are multiplicities of masculinities in any sociohistorical context. (1996:79)

With the influence of capitalism and industrialisation a large proportion of the manual workforce was replaced by machines causing a loss of jobs. This consequently challenged men who, along with their lost jobs, were also losing their role as the family breadwinner.

Also, since the end of the Second World War and mainly with the feminist revolution, western societies have seen a major change in attitudes towards men and women (Mansfield 1998). Pleck (1987) argues that wars produced important progress in gender relations and in women's employment. Later, in the 1960s, the feminist wave asked for equal opportunities for men and women and for the equality of sex. This challenged men's masculinity even more and social normative gender dichotomisation. Feminists based their query on S. de Beauvoir's statement "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman* (1953:273)". As already stated, for de Beauvoir it is society that constructs a woman. From this theory, feminists claimed that their feminine gender is socially constructed and that they have the right to have access to the same facilities as men.

Men often have the impression that manliness is superior and speaks for itself, but this slow adoption of same job opportunities and social equality between sexes in our societies has challenged male identity (Segal 1988). Thus, the 'respectable' traditional pre-industrial masculinity, which is culturally questioned, needs to be reaffirmed in other ways. Masculinity, which was traditionally rooted in technical expertise and economic advantage of men over women, as well as in family power, had to be reaffirmed around new traits. Nowadays, the division is made around the distinction of homosexual/heterosexual, normal/deviant. This slow revolution of equality of sex also challenges my earlier comments about the feminine sex often being considered as more basic and natural than the masculine one. Nowadays, women are theoretically considered as equal to men even if it is not effectively the case.

All these social changes challenged the dichotomous attributions of tasks and thus the presumption of traditional political and social theories. Nowadays, more and more women are also breadwinners and do not have as much time to care about their children and the housework. Still, results of studies about the repartition of work outside the household and in the household between men and women showed that most of the women working out still have most of the burden and responsibility of the household (Reskin and Padavic 1994). Thus, even with these social changes, traditional sexual labour division survives as well as the stereotypes attached to each gender. The rare men who will care for the household or exhibit traits traditionally reserved to the other sex will be considered as behaving inappropriately for their gender. An 'unmasculine' man does not behave as a 'masculine' man does and because of the binary character of sex and gender an 'unmasculine' man is likely to be perceived as 'feminine'.

The influence of parents' behaviour towards their children and the development of the child's gender role and identity have been scrutinised by socialisation theorists, as explained earlier. However, the general idea behind socialisation theory is that the development of a baby into a man or a woman is influenced not only by biology, but involves social influence as well. This social construction of masculine and feminine

ideologies is created in everyday life through social discourse, the media and other forms of representation. So, as Fausto-Sterling puts it (1992:127), "*men are made, not born*". This quote goes along with Simone de Beauvoir who said that women are socially created.

Gender is acted out in social interactions and signified by socially expected behaviour. For example, men are attempting to be strong, hard, aggressive, stoic, ambitious, dominant, in control and non emotional and, women are attempting to be sensitive, emotional and dependent. All these attributes are supposed to be linked to anatomical features. Connell writes that masculinity is thought:

... to be inherent in a male or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority (1995:45).

This way of thinking, in a sense, is considering the body as a machine detached from the sensibility of the person (Synnott 1993).

Moynihan (1998:1074) argues that "*it highlights the way that a Cartesian dualism between mind and body is recreated, leaving men feeling separated and estranged from their somatic experiences*". Thus, due to this Cartesian split in western cultures, men are not supposed to express their feelings, which leads to men feeling separated from their sensitivity (Rutherford 1988; Seidler 1989). Also, to be a man requires abandoning the feminine. This repudiation of the feminine exacerbates, as Butler argues (1995), the desire for femininity. This influences men to be attracted to women and thus to heterosexuality that is a required quality to fulfil the masculine stereotype. Authors, such as Brittan (1989), Horrocks (1994) and Connell (1995), assert that the concept of 'masculinity' does not exist as an isolated phenomena, but only in contrast with 'femininity', and that masculinity expresses a man's self image in relation to women.

In western societies, masculinity is often perceived as being measurable inasmuch as some men are more masculine than others and those who lack culturally acceptable external features of masculinity are considered by other men as 'inadequate' or 'deviant'. It is also suggested that masculinity is timeless, general, and universal (Moynihan 1998). However Gilmore's work (1990:XI) challenges these views asserting that there are a number of ways of 'being a man'. The same kind of approach is adopted by Herdt (1994). Herdt and Gilmore's view is cross-cultural and draws on studies from western and non western cultures such as India, Andalusia, the Truk Island, North America and Central Brazil. They demonstrate that variation in the expression of masculinity varies from cultures to culture as well as being influenced by social or economical class, place, religion, occupation, age, ethnicity and historical era.

Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that throughout the world different types of masculinity are expressed and that they appear ambivalent and contradictory when compared to each other. The influence of economy and institutional structures is demonstrated by Gilmore (1990). He relates masculine gender and patriarchy to the material conditions that exists within cultures. It appears that in an environment with scarce resources, the male is inclined to take the dominant role and the ideal of masculinity will be characterised by aggression more than in places where material condition are easier and there is less strenuous work. Friedl (1990), goes along with the same theory, but specifies that the male's power has its sources in the acquisition of animal protein that is not easy to get.

Gilmore (1990) gives the example of the ideal masculine image in Tahiti that is of a very pacific man with a dimly defined gender role. Here men and women share the skills and tasks and, they are less inclined towards attributed roles. Men do not need to hunt, as there is an abundance of arable land, domesticated animals, fish that is easy to catch in the lagoon and, there is no warfare or feuding. As Gilmore write, "*there are no dangerous or strenuous occupations that are considered masculine. ... The economy, rather than promoting competitiveness among men, fosters an unusual degree of co-operation ...* "

(Gilmore 1990:205). This ideal of masculinity is not shared in the Truk Island, where to be masculine a man has to be a fierce warrior to defend his land from external enemies. Truk Island men also have to be able to deep-sea fish and climb up tall breadfruit trees to gather the fruits. So they are supposed *"to engage in strenuous economic activities involving 'strength and potential risk'"* while women are constrained to housework such as cooking and sewing (Gilmore 1990:61).

Friedl's (1990) assumption that the power of men over women comes from the animal meat that men bring to the village is shown in these two examples. In Tahiti, animals are domesticated and fish are easy to catch. This leads to a very egalitarian social structure that is not found in the Turk Island where men have difficulties in finding fish and meat. Each culture assumes that their gender attributes are 'given' and 'fixed', but as the two examples demonstrate, attributes vary across cultures and can even vary among groups and sub-cultures. In cases where the digressions vary greatly from the norm, individuals may be considered as 'deviant', as in the case of transvestites who challenge the masculine ideal of the two areas of my fieldwork when expressing their feminine alter ego. Through their 'dedoublement', they bring the two gender categories close to each other.

In western societies, with their polarised perception of gender, the masculine pole is the more valued (Caplan 1987; Synnott 1993; Seidler 1997). The ideology of 'masculinity' justifies and naturalises male domination over women and thus the ideology of patriarchy. This concept takes for granted the gender dichotomisation and the differences between men and women as well as the sexual division in labour. This social construction is deployed to maintain male dominance and female subordination. Masculinity is not an essence or a born characteristic of a male person, but a response to cultural requirements. Masculinity is *"the approved way of being an adult male in any given society"* (Gilmore 1990:1). Thus a man's masculinity is the creation of his culture. Kimmel summarised this in the following way:

... ; in each culture the researcher can identify a static sex-role container into which all biological males or females are forced to fit. As such, the paradigm ignores the extent to which our conceptions of masculinity and femininity - the content of the male or female sex

role - is relational, that is, the product of gender relations that are historically and socially conditioned. Masculinity and femininity are relational constructs; the definition of either depends on the definition of the other ... Almost all sex-roles researcher focuses on attributes, indicating behavioural or attitudinal traits associated with the role. Changes in sex roles thus appear as changes in the list of traits or attitudes associated with masculinity or femininity. But masculinity and femininity are more the products of role *enactments*; instead of specifying traits, one might detail the ways in which people negotiate their roles, the historically fluid and variable enactments of specific role prescriptions. (1987:122)

The above extract acknowledges cultural variability between and within societies in the meanings attached to masculinity, men and the relationship between men and masculinities. These are not two fixed concepts. Their significance may vary from culture to culture and from one discourse to the other. Usually the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'men' are related to each other by the notion of gender roles because biological men are expected to display a range of behaviour fulfilling the masculine stereotype. Again, this stereotype varies due to historical changes within a culture. In the view of Gilmore (1990) and Herdt (1994) we also have to recognise that there is no masculinity (singular) but masculinities (plural).

## **5. Conclusion**

In western societies, the medical profession tried to understand unusual behaviour patterns as mental or sexual pathologies. Anthropologists and social scientists have tried to understand the same behaviours in the cultural contexts, as they are interested in a person's perception of the attitudes of others towards him and the influence of others on an individual. They focus on society as a whole and not on the isolated individual. As culture shapes the norms surrounding social behaviour, any person who presents signs of non-normative behaviour will be categorised as abnormal. Normality and abnormality *"are based on shared beliefs within a group of people as to what constitutes the ideal, 'proper' way for individuals to conduct their lives in relation to others"* (Helman 1994:247). So social behaviours are, to some extent, controlled by societal norms. Still these norms are not static (Helman 1994) as can be seen in the changes in perceptions of transvestism through the twentieth century.

As we shall see in **Chapter 4**, due to the availability of groups, help-lines or Internet resources, transvestites nowadays have less need of medical help. At the same time, medical models of transvestism as sexual perversion are losing their influence to be replaced by social scientific views of transvestism as "*gender reversal*" or "*gender mobility*" (Ekins and King 1997:3). Thus, nowadays, the medical profession suggests that transvestism is more a matter of adjusting to being a transvestite than of being cured. There are different levels of expression of 'dedoublement' in transvestism ranging from the simple act of wearing an item of female clothing to the desire to pass as a woman. Some transvestites struggle with the wish to dress in female attire and have to do it in private while other are confident enough to go out cross-dress.

The two genders, masculine and feminine, are continuous subjects of reinterpretation because they do not exist outside of history and culture (Brittan 1989). These changes, within the wider western trend based on the dichotomisation of feminine and masculine, can be studied in two areas of my fieldwork. The concept of masculinity could be defined as a gendered place in a culture that affects a person's bodily experience and personality (Connell 1995). Thus, economic circumstances and institutional structures influence the making of masculinity. The traditional masculine ideology of the North East of England and its counterpart in Liège has been constructed by a history of industrial activity. As seen, the development of a specific regional masculine ideology has its roots in the geographical situation, along with the mineral resources of these areas and, social and industrial history.

The presence of transvestites in both areas challenges not only the highly polarised gendered structure of western culture, but also well defined masculine ideologies existing in both areas of my research. In these areas, physical strength and masculine attitudes are valorised and no feminine demeanours are allowed to be expressed. However, transvestites, even if displaying a strong masculine role in their every day life have the need to express their feminine alter ego. The expression of their feminine side is in total

opposition to the ideal of masculinity related to their male sex. So, by indulging in their 'dedoublement', transvestites are challenging actual social structures and actively opening up the discussion on existing gender theories.

## Chapter 3

# Methodology

*Warnings and advice, in the last analysis, are pale echoes of field work realities, general principles abstracted from the thick context of research done at other times in others places, by other men and women. Entering the field, developing a place within the social order, talking, feeling, and living in the setting, are the terrain of understanding the intersection of gender, self, and others in fieldwork. Writing field notes, writing essays, seeking and incorporating reviews and editing, are the terrains of understanding the web of data, self, and discourse. The final warning and advice, I think, must be: Go into the field, and live, and think, and write. Listen to what we others have said, but do not let our voice become too much the shapers of yours. It is not 'any researcher' who produces a particular ethnography, it is you (Warren 1988:65).*

### **1. Preparing for field work**

Prior to my decision to undertake this research, my knowledge about transvestism was restricted to the flamboyant Drag Queen, or other familiar images projected by the media in films such as *The Adventure of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* or *Tootsie*. While studying at Liège University my student room was in a gay area of the city. This area covers three parallel streets and one perpendicular street in the middle. It is also adjacent to what is referred to as "le Carré" (the Square), which is the kernel of the nightlife of Liège. In the street where I lived, there was one gay bar (*The M.*) with Drag Queens' shows twice a week, a restaurant where the waiters cross-dressed, and a homosexual private club. So it was rare, but not surprising, to meet cross-dressers in the streets or night-clubs of the area. I suppose that my interest came from the few interactions I had with these people. The feelings I had toward them at that time were of interest and curiosity. Although I was aware of the local community of cross-dressers while living in the gay area of Liège, I had

very little contact with it. My few brief contacts with my neighbours happened during the day and I never attended any of the Drag Queens' performances. This was not through a lack of curiosity, but because I felt that, as a straight woman, I had no right to be in a gay bar or night-club.

Having already made contact in Liège with the owner of *The M.*, as he was my neighbour, I decided to compare the social life of transvestites in a similar area. The North East of England has a very similar socio-economical character to Liège and a particular identity related to a history of extractive and heavy industries. These two areas continue to maintain a distinctive blend of industrial towns, mining settlements, market towns and country villages. Both fields gave me the opportunity to compare different contexts with social codification which appear similar due to common characteristics based on their past economies.

After spending several months in England, when I returned to Belgium for fieldwork, I soon realised that I could not compare both areas on an equal basis. While in the North East and all over England, transvestite groups flourish, I could not find similar well organised sub-cultures with help-lines and meeting groups in Belgium. So, most of the information in this thesis concerning transvestism comes from the North East of England. Nevertheless, my fieldwork in Belgium helped me to understand how transvestites who have not joined the transvestite sub-culture manage their non-normative gender identity.

## **2. Locating the field and initial questions**

The choice of the fieldwork areas was first of all a question of easy access and feasibility of the research. The university I conducted this research from is in the North East of England, while as an undergraduate student I studied in Liège in Belgium and was familiar with its social fabric. Because of their shared industrial past these areas provided a readily identifiable discourse on masculinity which stood in powerful contrast to

transvestism. Against these industrial values, transvestism appears as a deviant form of behaviour to the existing social structure of both areas. This seemed like a good vantage point for studying masculinity, because deviance sets the limits of cultural values and reveals the social and cultural dynamics of any society (Freilich et al. 1991).

So, having decided on my geographical locations, I faced questions about why and where male transvestites meet in these areas? How do they make contact with each other? How do they find their clothes and make-up supply? How do they manage both their masculine and feminine personalities? How do other people react to transvestite behaviour? To answer these questions, I believed I had to be in close contact with transvestites. Interviewing them and observing their interactions with one another and the other people around them while cross-dressed would be the appropriate way to gather rich data about these secretive people. I also planned to analyse transvestite gender identity management and, to clearly distinguish transvestites from other cross-dressers I made comparisons with Drag Queens and transsexuals. To this end I spent time with Drag Queens, but for the most part I depended on other people's research for my information on transsexuals (Hamburger et al. 1953; Benjamin 1954, 1967; Billings and Urban 1982; King 1981, 1993, 1996)

### **3. Entering fieldwork and making contacts**

After choosing my subject the next step was to check if the research was feasible and to establish trusting relationships with some reliable informants. I began my research in North East England, before returning to Liège in Belgium between academic terms. Before trying to enter the transvestite community in England, I read a great deal about transvestism, transsexualism, homosexuality and female impersonation. This reading gave me a clearer idea of the various perceived differences between these categories. It also allowed me to become, in Goffman's terminology (1959), "*wise*", by learning the jargon used by and about these distinct groups. After reading literature about transvestism, I also studied the theoretical literature on gender and gender systems. An issue analysed by Carol

Warren (1988) particularly appealed to me. Warren believes that ethnographic fieldwork cannot be understood without taking account of the researcher's gender and its relevance to the fieldwork. Since, gender is a key organisational feature in all societies, male and female researchers will always be treated differently by the people they study and so will come to discover different aspects of the same society they investigate. "*Living within a society, or visiting one as a fieldworker, presupposes a gendered interaction, a gendered conversation, and gendered interpretation*" (Warren 1988:10).

I believe that for this fieldwork, it was an advantage to be a young woman. For example when I telephoned *The Beaumont Society*, which is the most well known national transvestite organisation in Britain, I explained the purpose of my research to a person on the phone who was a transvestite and he gave me my first contact number in the North East of England. I was very surprised how easily I got this telephone number. First of all, I thought that the Society was extremely open, but later I assumed that it was my feminine voice and probably also my 'French' accent that elicited a positive reply. This assumption was positively confirmed when I contacted other transvestites.

To reach my informants I used what is known as the "*snowball process*" (Talamini 1982; Polsky 1997). It is based on the process of being introduced by a person to another whom, in turn, will introduce you to someone else. Thus, this process allowed me to reach people who were linked together by friendship and who knew each other's telephone numbers. After a few phone calls, starting with *The Beaumont Society*, I contacted 'Karen' in Newcastle and asked if I could meet him<sup>5</sup>. I was surprised that he accepted straight away and proposed that I joined his group of friends on a Friday meeting at his apartment. He did not ask his friends beforehand if they agreed that I joined them. Later, Karen told me that his group usually meets people that they do not know in a pub before deciding whether to invite them to a meeting at the apartment. They usually protect their little group as much as possible from outsiders, who are often perceived as threatening, because they may disclose their secret behaviour to close family and friends. Because I was a foreign woman,

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<sup>5</sup> When referring to a male transvestite, I will use the masculine pronoun even if using a female name.

having been in the area for a short time and was unknown to people in the city, Karen felt safe to invite me to his apartment without either telling his friends or meeting me in a public place beforehand.

Some of the group members turned out to be very secretive about their transvestism. They avoid revealing it to anyone outside the group. Still, by agreeing to be interviewed, my informants already revealed and opened themselves up, as they knew I would use our interviews to write this ethnography. This is indicative of the mutual trust on which my research with this group, as well as with my other informants, came to be based. The literature about transvestites describes them as generally harmless people, but even so, I too was taking a risk by attending the group's meeting without an introduction in a public place.

Often during my fieldwork, I reflected on my behaviour towards my informants and the group that I studied. I had to step back to analyse the data as a researcher and not let my personal feelings take over. Karp and Kendall suggest that:

... reflexivity means that good field work does not just enlarge the field worker's conceptual field, but reorganises it. It poses challenges to the field worker's most fundamental beliefs about truth and objectivity. It generates understandings and at the same time casts doubts on the validity of those understandings as it makes clear that self-awareness is a continuing process. (1982:250)

At the outset my own reactions and beliefs were fairly representative of western normative cultural expectations. I was expecting transvestites to be sexually deviant people existing at the margins of society. These internalised beliefs, shared by other people, soon proved to be false.

When I entered the field, I was conscious (as Karp and Kendall 1982 would reflect) that I was taking with me my own knowledge, influenced by the cultural background of the places I visited or lived in. However, I have been educated in Belgium and spent several years in England and thus, have integrated these two countries' norms. I can move around both countries without committing social faux pas or using inappropriate behaviours.

Reflecting about my own behaviour in the field was prompted by writings about fieldwork (Karp and Kendall 1982; Golde 1986; Cant and Sharma 1988; Warren 1988; Edwards 1993) which are themselves examples of reflexivity in modern research. Researchers and informants are likely to be complex persons, who act and react following their moods and feelings of the moment. Spontaneous, irrational and unexpected reactions can appear from both sides and overtake the intellectual and academic approach of the research (Hunt 1989). It is then that reflexivity is essential to understand the interactions that are at work. Moreover, for Giddens (1990), the particularity of modernity, is reflexivity about the nature of reflection itself. So, reflexivity links thought and action in the sense that an action can influence reflection and reflection can influence action.

Around the same time I contacted Karen in Newcastle, I also made contact with a transvestite in Darlington through a fellow student who was carrying out research on sexual identities among a group of lesbians. She told me that a transvestite, Jo, sometimes joined their meeting and she invited me to meet him. During the meeting, after talking to Jo for more than an hour, he began to tell me about his involvement in a transvestite self-help group. This gave me the opportunity to introduce myself as a 'research student' and to ask him for a meeting. It appeared that Jo, and his wife Lily, organise a telephone help-line for transvestites and their close family members. Along with the help-line, they also organise a group that meets every first Saturday evening of the month to eat, chat or play dominoes in their house in Darlington. This group also meets every third Friday of the month in a restaurant where a separate room is booked for them. The first contacts in England being made with two transvestite groups, the next step was to enter these groups.

Entering the field in Liège (Belgium) was far different from my experience in England. For several weeks, I tried in vain to discover transvestites' organisations such as *The Beaumont Society*<sup>6</sup> in England. I called family help-lines, psychologists working with transsexuals, gay help-lines and transsexuals help-lines, but none of them could give me

any information about transvestite groups. A representative of the transsexual help-line told me that transvestites call in search of help, but the help-line cannot do anything for them because there is already enough work dealing with transsexuals. I was also in contact with the Department of Psychology at the University of Liège, where I was told that a student tried to do research about transvestism, but had to stop because she could not find any informants. Eventually, I called *The Beaumont Society* in England to get a contact in Belgium. The only address they could give me was a gay bar with Drag Queen shows, *The M.*, which I already knew of. I had visited the place several weeks previously and met the landlord while a student in Liège. This place became the starting point for my research in Liège.

The first transvestite I met in Belgium was Manöelle. I met him in *The M.*, where Drag Queens perform twice a week. Manöelle, the only transvestite I met in the bar, is very lonely and has few contacts with other transvestites. The landlord of the bar, gave me the name and telephone number of someone he knew and after a few phone calls, I ended up with an appointment with another transvestite. This transvestite did not give me much information about himself, as he refused to speak openly and to be interviewed, but he gave me a list of shops where transvestites go shopping as well as a transsexual and two transvestites' telephone numbers. It appeared that in Belgium, transvestites may know the telephone number of other transvestites, but they never go out together or meet on a regular basis. As a result they tend to feel lonely and isolated. Thanks to the snowball process, begun in Liège, I met Ghislaine. He had started a group that met at his apartment. He told me that the group folded because some members were jealous of Ghislaine's relationship with his wife, who has supported him as a transvestite since they first met.

After much research, I discovered that a branch of *The Beaumont Society* in Belgium had existed in the past. I met a transsexual who, after living in the US for a few years where she met Charles 'Virginia' Prince<sup>7</sup>, said that she was one of the founders of The

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<sup>6</sup> *The Beaumont Society* was established in the 1960s and was named following the name of a well know transvestite in the 18th century: le Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont.

<sup>7</sup> Charles "Virginia" Prince is a very well know American transvestites who wrote several books about transvestism and created the transvestites' Club "Full Personality expression" (FPS) in the early 1950s.

*Beaumont Society* in England and then in Belgium. This person was teaching sexology at a University in Belgium and told me that I would no longer find any organised groups such as *The Beaumont Society* in Belgium. She said that the society failed to thrive due to linguistic problems between the French speaking and Dutch speaking transvestites, non-effective organisation of the group and jealousy among the organisers.

The contrast between England and Belgium concerning the concealment of transvestites became even more apparent at this stage. I wondered and tried to understand where such a difference came from. Liège is considered to be a particularly liberal city where the gay community is apparent and active. Belgian law, concerning cross-dressing, does not seem to be more repressive than neighbouring countries. I thought that maybe Belgium being a predominantly Catholic country, as England is predominantly Protestant, that religion would influence the concealment of transvestites. But Hellman et al. (1994) did not find any link between religion and transvestism. The only other reason I could think of, but could not verify, relates to the size of Belgium, which is a small country separated into two linguistic regions. This fragmentation of a minority into even smaller groups would make it difficult for transvestites' groups to have enough members to create a viable organisation. Belgian transvestites who want to join a branch of *The Beaumont Society* have to go to France or Holland for meetings. However, I remain unconvinced that this is the only reason for the difference found between the situation in Belgium and England. My general feeling is that England seems to be more tolerant of transvestites and this makes it easier for them to get together.

During my research, the main difference I noticed between the two areas of fieldwork is the lack of a transvestites' network, which leads to the isolation of transvestites in Belgium. In England there are several transvestites' groups, but in Belgium all the transvestites I met were solitary. Thus, in Belgium, all meetings, conversations and the only taped interview were on an individual basis.

### **3.1. Meeting places I frequented on a regular basis**

Fieldwork was conducted among different transvestites' groups and individuals, as well as other cross-dressers. This provided opportunities to meet a broad spectrum of transvestites. Unlike the individuals described and studied in literature produced by clinicians or practitioners, the people I met were not looking for a 'cure' for their behaviour. On the contrary, they enjoy cross-dressing and those in England meet with other transvestites. The few individuals I met in Belgium were going out in certain public places where they were tolerated, such as *The M.* in Liège. Thus, my observations were based on studying transvestites interacting socially on an everyday basis with other people, and not as 'patients' attending a clinic.

#### 3.1.1. *Transvestites' group in Darlington (UK)*

The first meeting I attended with the Darlington group was in an especially reserved room in a restaurant. Only the most confident transvestites meet in this place because they have to take a few minutes walk from the organiser's house to the restaurant. While walking in the street they have a good chance of encountering other people. Some transvestites are not confident enough for public interaction, even if they are going out as part of a group. The room on the first floor is separated from the rest of the restaurant, but transvestites enter by the main entrance and corridor. Again, there is a chance that they will encounter other people and be spotted as cross-dressers. The patron and waiters at the restaurant seem to be used to the transvestites and pleased to see them. They have been meeting here every third Friday of the month for the past few years.

As the Darlington group also meets every first Saturday of the month in Jo and Lily's house, I decided to focus on these monthly venues instead of the restaurant venues where it was difficult to circulate among my informants. Also, more transvestites attend these meetings because they are held in a private house. They do not have to travel to the house while cross-dressed, but can change in a room that is set aside for the purpose. So,

even non-confident transvestites can attend and feel comfortable. Lily leaves the curtains of the house open because she does not want the neighbours to think that there is something strange going on in the house. The atmosphere is really relaxed during the meeting and I was able to observe small groups of transvestites or women (transvestites' wives and a mother) chatting freely together.

For the monthly meeting, Lily and Jo prepare a buffet meal with coffee and tea (no alcoholic drinks). During the meetings, Lily prefers to keep the guests on the ground floor where there are two living rooms separated by a large glass sliding door. The smoking room, secondary kitchen (where the tea is prepared and food warmed up in an oven) and a small bathroom are separated from the living room by a narrow corridor with two steps. These last rooms are the access to the back door out to the garden and are never used in Jo and Lily's everyday life, as they have a main kitchen and bathroom on the first floor. In the smoking room, there is the opportunity to play dominoes. For the meetings, Lily and Jo do not change the usual decoration and arrangement of the rooms. Framed pictures of Lily, Jo and their children, vases and plants stay on the mantelpiece of both fireplaces of the living rooms, as well as the collection of porcelain statues that is stored in a glass-cupboard. The most unusual piece of furniture, that lots of people seem to enjoy, is a swinging-sofa that used to be outside, but as Lily said, it rains so much in England that she keeps it inside. Otherwise the general organisation of the rooms looks very much like any conventional house reflecting the taste of its owners.

Because the organisers of this group are also running a self-help line for transvestites and transvestites' wives, there are always some new faces at the meetings, as well as the small group of regulars. These regulars were my major informants because I could approach them most often. The transvestites who are more confident than others might go the pub after a buffet meal is served, so those who dare can take the opportunity to go out cross-dressed in a small group.

### 3.1.2. Newcastle transvestites' group (UK)

This group is composed of four friends who have known each other for several years. They met one another through *The Beaumont Society*. They decided to create their own group and meet at least every Friday in Karen's apartment. They also go out to gay pubs or clubs such as *The C.* on Monday and *The P.* if they want to go clubbing. They also meet for special occasions such as weekends away or outings to the theatre. They tend to meet more often during the winter than in the summer, because the days are shorter during the winter. This allows the transvestites to leave their houses after dark and walk the street without being recognised by their neighbours when cross-dressed.

### 3.1.3. Newcastle gay bar: *The C.* (UK)

*The C.* is a pub in the centre of Newcastle, in the gay area of town. Gays, lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites and Drag Queens mix in this place, especially on Mondays when there is a Drag Queen show. The show attracts a lot of people, but I never met another 'straight' person in *The C.*

### 3.1.4. Newcastle night-club: *The P.* (UK).

*The P.* is also situated in the heart of the gay area of Newcastle. It is a large club with the dance floor on a lower level than the bar and a sitting area that runs along the left side of the room. On the right of the room is a stage. At one end of the room, next to the toilet, is a separate room for homosexual couples. As in *The C.*, gays, lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites and Drag Queens coexist happily. Every now and then, there is a Drag Queen show. I had the chance to go back stage with two informants while they were getting ready for the show.

### 3.1.5. Liège gay bar: The M. (Belgium)

*The M.*, is owned by a gay drag artist. It was the first gay bar in Liège that was open to both gays and straight people (with the majority being gays). Here, there is a mixture of gays, transsexuals, Drag Queens and once in a while a transvestite. Sometimes straight people also assist in the show. *The M.* is a very long room with a stage at one end and a bar running along one side. Every Friday and Saturday, there are two shows of one hour each. The owner told me that this is the only time transvestites come to the bar. Consequently, I visited the place only when shows were being performed.

### 3.1.6. Meeting individual transvestites in Liège and Brussels (Belgium)

Because I could not find any transvestite clubs or societies in Belgium, I met transvestites on an individual basis. I usually met them in bars in the afternoon or in night-clubs. On one occasion I met a transvestite in his workplace. He owns his shop and it was easier for him to meet me there.

## **3.2. Fieldwork**

The fieldwork conducted for this research was traditional anthropological fieldwork, but there were certain restrictions imposed by the specificity of the field and through limitations on my own resources. In England, it was possible to meet transvestites by attending their meetings organised in the evening and following them in their different activities while cross-dressed. Transvestites' groups meet on a regular basis, such as once or twice a week or once a month depending on the group. Some individuals who are more open about their transvestism do go to pubs or night-clubs to which I accompanied them. Attending meetings and going to pubs and night-clubs was the only way to have regular contacts with my informants on a long-term basis and allowed me to gather data about the social behaviours.

While hanging around with my informants in England, I also met transvestites with whom I did not develop long term contact. Even though I was not able to carry out taped interviews with them, as they did not want to be recorded, sometimes these individuals provided me with rich data that was used as general information. In Belgium, the four transvestites I met were solitary and usually they were not cross-dressed when we met in public places during the daytime. Some of them were more talkative than others, but I could tape only one interview because the rest refused to have our interview taped or refused to be interviewed. This taped interview did not have any value as it was recorded the first time I met this person and he eluded most of the questions.

This research was also typically urban research in the sense that I did not meet my informants on an everyday basis as a researcher working in a particular village or neighbourhood might do. To be able to meet my informants, I had to call them to make an appointment. I also needed to be introduced to new contacts by one of my key informants. Also, most transvestite group meetings are located in urban areas. Moreover, transvestites who are 'out' (who are going out in public) only dare to go out in urban areas where they are less likely to be recognised by any of their friends, family or work colleagues. It is easier for them to 'blend' (mix and be perceived to be a woman by others) in a city than in a country village or small town.

Transvestites who dare to go out cross-dressed, tell me that it is much easier to move around in a large town because people do not pay attention to one another while walking in the street. People usually attribute gender by following codes surrounding clothing and body language. One of the pleasures for transvestites, who are confident enough to go out, is 'passing', which means being able to fool people while cross-dressed. This aspect of transvestism will be examined more thoroughly in **Chapter 5**. Even transvestites who are very confident take care not to meet their friends, family and colleagues when cross-dressed. This is one of the reasons they tend to travel to shop in a distant city or town where they are unlikely to meet anyone they know.

After a certain time studying the different groups and individuals in England and Belgium, I learned the rules among the different groups according to the places where they meet or visit. As Freilich et al. write "*As a result (of research) we experience a personal and rich introduction to another system of rules, behaviours, sentiments, and belief* (1991:3)." This consideration is very true in my case, as I entered into contact with what was for me, as for most people, an unknown aspect of culture. This research has introduced me to different behaviours and beliefs that led me to challenge some well established norms such as the dichotomisation of gender. So, during this research, I looked at how transvestites perceive themselves in relation to the society within which they live and how they understand their own behaviour in relation to the expectations of their cultural backgrounds.

While hanging around in pubs, bars or during the meetings in private locations I observed cross-dressers and their interaction with others (members of the public, friends, gay men and lesbians, wives and any other person who entered into contact with them). Usually I observed the interactions of my informants in delimited spaces such as a pub, night-club, or house/apartment. I also focused on the interactions of the different people that share these delimited spaces. While analysing my data, I had to be careful not to take for granted transvestites' own explanation of their behaviour, but to look at how and why they wanted to present a certain image, to look at their body language and interaction with others. All this is summarised by Polsky: "*Successful field research depends on the investigator's trained abilities to look at people, listen to them, think and feel with them, talk with them rather than at them* (1997:219)."

The attention I paid to the perceptions that transvestites have of themselves, and the way they are perceived by other people, allowed me to clarify the general reaction to deviance and how stigmatised people deal with the implications of being deviant. These points will be developed in **Chapter 7** of the thesis. The most important thing in this

research was not only being able to tape an interview with my informants, but to understand what they really meant in between the words, and what they expressed through their behaviour.

#### **4. Conversations, interview and ethnographic exchange**

I entered the field in January 1998 and concluded the fieldwork at the end of August 1999. During this time, I met about five pre- and post-operative transsexuals, eight Drag Queens and fifty transvestites. I was looking for information that would lead me to a better understanding of male transvestites' life experiences. I sought to understand the reasons for their behaviour, the predicaments they endure and how they deal with them.

Lee and Renzetti (1993) note that some sensitive topics might evoke particular responses such as guilt, shame or embarrassment from the researcher. Also, some unwelcome consequences may arise. Indeed, if the researcher is not careful enough about how s/he handles the research, it might result in mistrust, concealment and dissimulation from the informant. Informants might feel that information they provide might not be used properly, or might even be used to threaten them or their community. As Lee and Renzetti state:

... a sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data. (1993:5)

To avoid making mistakes that might lead to my informants concealing information and causing distress to them, I was careful to gain their trust. Before I began to ask direct questions or request interviews, I spent a long time in the company of transvestites learning about their ways and enabling them to get to know me. This first step was part of my participant observation. I also spent a lot of time getting to know personal information about each of my future informants before I began the in-depth interviews.

#### 4.1. Participant observation

Participant observation ensured me a familiarity with the field before going further with my research. The understanding, thus gained, allowed me to formulate appropriate sets of questions. It also ensured trust and co-operation from my informants. At the beginning of my participant observation, my informants observed me as much as I observed them and then slowly people approached me and began asking questions about my research and myself. After a while hanging around the different groups, I came to be regarded as a regular and was treated with hospitality and kindness. For example, I had 'my room' at Jo and Lily's house and Lily asked me to help prepare the sandwiches and tea for the meeting. This was very convenient for me, as I usually arrived before the meetings. During this preparatory work we had the chance to chat together and again in the morning, while having breakfast. Jo also gave me information concerning other transvestites' groups, as well as books and magazines.

As also noticed by Woodhouse (1989), transvestites tend to idealise women and my informants seemed genuinely pleased that a female outsider paid attention to them and was interested and willing to listen to them. When they became more confident with my presence and trusted me, they became really talkative. Also, as a woman I was not a threat for them as some men are towards transvestites. It was also easier for me to talk to the transvestites' wives or mothers who, I assume, could express more readily their feelings and emotions about their husband's or son's cross-dressing to another woman. Laura Nader (1986:44) asserts that "*Women make a success of field work because women are more person-oriented; it is also said that participant observation is more consonant with the traditional role of women*". Even though I am not married, I could imagine the women's questions and fears that the children might discover their husband or son's transvestism. My relationship with the transvestites and other informants was one of a 'research student'. This way of introducing myself did not have the same connotation of power that 'researcher' evokes.

Hunt writes about researchers:

... they enter into the world of subjects but remain faithful to their primary goal of research. It is within this context that self-reflection becomes necessary. Thus researchers must observe the activity of others even while engaging in it. (1989:14)

In my case, being able to gain open access to different informants within their usual place of meeting or action (for the Drag Queens) was very important to my understanding of the sub-cultures of which they were a part. Thornton (1997) comments that distant observation does not permit the researcher to have insight into a sub-culture. He points out that in participant observation, there is a danger of "*going native*" by internalising the norms and habits of the community or group studied. Participant observation gave me an insight into a not very well known sub-culture, but it is true that after a while the interaction between the members of the groups became 'normal' to me. I often had to take a step backward to be able to be reflexive and analytical.

Laura Nader (1986) discusses what she refers to as the "*deep structure of human experience*" such as the body, body language, self-identity, and sexuality. She argues that gender is not only determined by social norms, but is also based on people's own life experiences and is expressed through body language. So, due to their past experiences, researchers embody characteristics that influence their position in a societal structure. These characteristics also draw a response from the informants who have their own feelings about attractiveness, body functions and display. Certain ways that the self is presented, such as hair-styles and clothing, can be altered and adapted to circumstances in the field, but some characteristics cannot, for example body-size, skin colour or language and education. The development of relationships in the field involves the monitoring and perhaps the modification of behaviour and presentation of self.

The body is an issue in fieldwork (Callaway 1992). This applied especially to my case, working on gender identity and body language. To satisfy the expectation of my informants I changed my usual casual student dress composed of trousers and jumpers, to a more feminine one composed of skirts and dresses. Transvestites have strong ideas about

how and by what means women should express their femininity. For transvestites, femininity is expressed through clothing, make-up and body language. As Eicher notes:

Dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time. The code of dress includes visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, sound, and feel) and supplements (garments, jewellery, and accessories) to the body which set off either or both cognitive and affective processes that result in recognition or lack of recognition by the viewer. As a system, dressing the body by modifications and supplements often does facilitate or hinder consequent verbal or other communication. (1995:1)

So, while doing my fieldwork, I had to assume different images depending on the place where I was and the dress code of the group, or individuals, I was with. Each image was carefully planned in advance. Here, I was playing with the complexity of clothing and changing sets of clothes to adapt to the 'enclave' or sub-culture I was visiting. Barnes and Eicher (1992) write that there is a "*gender-specific shape*", a gender specific pattern, as well as gender specific materials for clothing. During fieldwork I used these shapes, patterns and materials to blend in with the different groups. For example, if I was visiting a transvestites' group meeting in a house, or apartment, I would wear a dress or a skirt and make-up. To go out with transvestites to a gay pub or night-club, I would wear a feminine shaped pair of trousers with a 'masculine cut' jacket and some make-up to please the transvestites in one aspect, and to blend in with the gay community in the other. Only when transvestites asked me to wear a dress to go to a particular venue organised in a gay surrounding, would I do it to please them. If I were visiting Drag Queens in any areas, I would wear either very masculine or androgynous clothes and no make-up. This was a way of blending my clothes with the masculine clothing that predominated in these places. Hunt (1989) notes that researchers plan their role strategically to engage in a variety of group activities. Researchers take into account their knowledge of the complexity of the culture they study. In case of unanticipated situations, they have to use their creativity to respond to the event.

In the company of transvestites, I soon realised that I adopted different attitudes depending on whether they were cross-dressed. With transvestites who were cross-dressed, I think my attitudes were more as if I had another women in front of me, while in some

respects I remained aware that under the dress there was a man. I also noticed that the sociologist, Annie Woodhouse (1989) had a similar experience while researching among transvestites' groups. She too felt unable to classify the cross-dressed transvestites as men or women and chose to classify them under the rubric "*third gender*". I will not follow this classification, as for me transvestites are not a third gender, but a 'dedoublement'.

#### 4.2. Conversations

In the early period of meeting transvestites and talking to them, I realised that I could not use the same set of questions for all because each had different experiences, backgrounds and interpretations of their transvestism. So, with one exception, before interviewing anyone I spent several evenings hanging around and chatting with those who had expressed their willingness to share their experience with me. This time spent conversing with my informants allowed me to get to know them better and to design a specific interview adapted to each of them. Some were very friendly and talkative from our first meeting, others took more time to get used to my presence among them. I have to say that I too needed some time to get used to them and their different personalities. The data I gathered during these conversations was used as general information on which this thesis is based. The interesting stories, as they were not recorded, will be explained and a few striking sentences that I took note of in my notebook will be quoted.

Spradley (1979:58) writes that "*they [researchers] may interview people without their awareness, merely carrying on a friendly conversation while introducing a few ethnographic questions.*" This method is widely used by Rapport (1982,1999) whose ethnographies are based on data gathered while conversing with people. Cant and Sharma (1998), doing research in a medical surrounding, also reflect that their interviews were based on dialogues.

Entering a group of people who keep their transvestism more or less secret to research their behaviour, social structure and interaction with the wider society involves complex social relations and exchange. So, to penetrate beyond the frontstage of the subjects' world I used the 'reciprocity' technique (Edwards 1993). This technique was based on immediate return and reciprocity of information. While talking to my informants, I would also freely answer their questions and share my personal views and feelings. It could be argued that sharing personal points of view might weaken the researcher's position, but I think that this reciprocity creates a more balanced relationship between the researcher and informant. Exchanging personal information is essential for establishing a trusting relationship and a mutual interaction. I believe that the trusting quality of these relations removed barriers and helped to reveal hidden aspects on both sides. These relations were also determinant to allow me to interview my informants about sensitive subjects such as gender identity, relationship with partner or childhood experiences. Sometimes, I had the feeling that I received more information than I gave. This was mainly due to the divergence of interests. I was interested in their behaviour and personal experiences, transvestites liked to talk to me about hairstyle, fashion and cosmetics. They often asked me for advice on these topics.

During the initial meetings or activities I shared with transvestites, I gathered a great deal of information about people's life stories and attitudes towards their cross-dressing. They also shared some anecdotes about their cross-dressing and nights/days out cross-dressed. All these conversations were of great help for the preparation of my interview questions. Indeed, knowing part of a person's history I could always go back and ask for some further details. It meant that each story or piece of information that an informant offered provided a stimulus for more questions allowing me to probe more deeply.

Transvestites who are members of a group have already taken the first step towards being partly, or completely, 'out'. It is therefore easier for some of them to talk about their transvestism because they are more self-accepting. Disclosure was also facilitated by being introduced to the groups by the organisers (Jo and Karen) because this indicated that I was

safe to talk to. This was also experienced by Newton (1972) and Woodhouse (1989) who were introduced by major informants. Only once, did I receive an aggressive reaction from a transvestite. Later the same person told me that a few months previously a male sociology student had conducted some research among the group. He came once with his questionnaire, asked his set of questions, recorded the answers and left. The members of the group felt they were being studied "*as if they were guinea pigs*". This led me to assure my informants that I wanted to spend a lot of time with them in order to gain a deeper understanding of their transvestism.

In certain situations with the Darlington group, some transvestites adopted a paternalistic position towards me, watching over me when we visited gay pubs or night-clubs. They would buy me drinks and help me avoid any lesbians that would come too close to me. Being a regular in their group and a friend, they would jokingly introduce me to new people as "*This is Caroline. Look what a good transvestite she makes*" and then explain the reason for my presence in the group.

I believe that all this careful preparatory work made my informants feel confident enough with me to allow themselves to speak confidentially. As Giddens (1990:121) underlines, "*relationships are ties based upon trust, where trust is not pre-given but worked upon, and where the work involved means a mutual process of self-disclosure* [author's emphasis]". Indeed, after some time, some informants would tell me, in intimate conversation, something that had to be kept secret from their partner. For me, it was a sign of trust. Once I was asked to take a position in an argument between a transvestite and his wife. In this case, I preferred to stay quiet and carefully listen, as these kinds of arguments were very helpful in trying to understand transvestites' wives. This trusting relationship with each of my informants led to rich and constructive interviews.

### 4.3. Interviews

Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that flexibility is needed in interviews. I designed the interviews to allow my informants to talk freely about their personal experiences and comment about their transvestic behaviour. To permit personal expression I opted for a semi-structured set of questions. As researcher I already had in mind a plan for the research and certain topics I wanted to cover however, I remained fairly flexible. Also, we have to take into account that the researcher's self is a variable in the interview process. At best interviews are an interaction between people who understand each other from their own point of view. I opted for lengthy and repeated conversations with fewer informants instead of a large number of more superficial interviews. The disadvantage of open-ended sets of questions was that they did not allow a great quantity of interviews because all of them were specifically adapted to each of my informants, but it permitted me to collect data of good quality.

Interviewing people about private and often secretive behaviour, such as transvestism, is very sensitive. I opted for semi-structured interviews and participant observations because I thought that they were the most appropriate methods of enquiry for this kind of research. Indeed, semi-structured interviews instead of structured interviews seemed closer to everyday conversation than a research study. Whenever possible, I also interviewed the mothers and wives of the transvestites. This provided an important perspective from the point of view of people who live with transvestism, but do not always feel comfortable with it. My intention was to collect data about the different regular members of the groups, which, along with my observations, would help me to understand the groups' dynamics and the processes that are at work in the establishment and management of gender sub-cultures. My main informants (transvestites, transvestites' wives or mothers, Drag Queens, transsexuals), were interviewed for between half an hour and three hours. I interviewed seventeen people only once, except my most significant informants whom I interviewed several times. All these interviews were tape recorded with

their consent. Also, it was important to meet my informants on a regular basis so that I could refine or complete my taped interviews by asking them some further questions in the context of our informal conversation.

The fact that few of my informants knew anything about anthropology or anthropologists avoided negative preconceptions such as a psychologist or psychotherapist might have encountered (Newton 1972), as some of my informants had undergone psychological treatment in the past and have some bad memories of therapy. Also, I would not have been able to interview any of my informants without the help of a few key members of the transvestites groups who were recognised as leaders. One of these was Jo who I met via a contact at the lesbian gathering. He was the main facilitator for my entry into transvestite life in Darlington. He introduced me to his group of about seven to fifteen transvestites, after having spent an afternoon chatting with me at his house. The other important figure was Karen. He introduced me not only to his group, but also to the gay and Drag Queen community in Newcastle.

Taped interviews are very useful because after transcription they provide an exact record (Newton 1972; Spradley 1979), but I could not use a tape recorder in public places and crowded gatherings. Taking notes in public places was also to be avoided because I felt that it prevented me from blending in, which is an important issue observed by Polsky (1997). I was moving among circles that have been marginalised by mainstream society and was not welcome by everyone. In the night-clubs and bars I was aware that the management might disapprove of my presence as a researcher. In one pub the manager knew I was a researcher and he appreciated my discretion. I usually waited for someone to come to talk to me or to be introduced. After a few months of visiting the bars and night-clubs, regulars knew about my research and were asking me questions about it, but I never questioned anyone who was not known to me as a transvestite or Drag Queen. The atmosphere was usually very relaxed and informal. I kept a low profile and took some rapid notes in a pocket size notebook while visiting the ladies toilet or on the train home.

After a few nights I developed an ability to remember the most important conversations or events from the evening. I trained myself to remember the main topic of a conversation, which would act as a trigger for the details to flow back into my mind.

While out in pubs and night-clubs with some of my informants, I tried to approach transvestites whom I had not been introduced to. However, I soon discovered that I would not be able to talk to people if I was not first introduced by someone else. I came to accept that a trusting relationship must be built before a person can be invited to act as an informant. Transvestites agreed to talk only because I had taken the time to build a trusting relationship by talking and spending some time with them. Among the individual transvestites I met, most of them were happy to talk to me on an 'every day conversational' basis, but did not want to be interviewed and recorded.

When deciding on a meeting point for interviews, I always asked my informants where was the most convenient place for them to meet me, as did Polsky (1997) when leading his research. Some of them chose to be interviewed in public places such as in a pub in the afternoon, or backstage in the case of two Drag Queens. Other informants invited me to meet them in their homes. Home interviews permitted the informant to feel more at ease and to verify certain stories or details of their behaviour by showing me pictures or their wardrobe of female attire. I had the occasion to visit one transvestite's wardrobe and those of two Drag Queens. Sometimes, in order to illustrate a story or adventure my informants might put on a wig or show me the attire they were wearing on a particular occasion. Drag Queens explained the different and varied characters that were behind the items in their wardrobe. This contrasted with transvestites who expressed their 'dedoublement' through their talking about their carefully cultivated female alter ego.

For the transvestites I interviewed while attending meetings, I arranged a separate room to have some privacy. Usually, the interviews conducted during the group meetings were shorter than the ones conducted at the informants home, because most of the transvestites wanted to spend the evening chatting with their friends instead of answering

my questions in a separate room. During these short interviews, transvestites were very keen to share their experience and were very talkative as long as the interview did not go on too long. I only conducted one interview in a transvestite's workplace. Ghislaine asked me to meet him at his work place because he is the owner of a shop and he felt at ease to talk to me sitting at his office desk. Sometimes we were disturbed by telephones calls or clients. This interrupted the flow of the conversation, but allowed me to come back to certain points and to ask for some further details.

The interviews covered a number of defined areas such as family background, education background, transvestic history and its influence on self perception and everyday life, description of their feminine self, occupation, hobby, and (if married) relationship with wife and children. Some incidents might have occurred thirty or forty years ago and transvestites when telling me their life experiences, might have added or changed some details or mixed stories together to make them more striking, as all memory is reflexively constructed and reconstructed.

Bruce Jackson (1987:88) suggests that some informants have a "*sense of audience beyond that microphone*" and that they chatter less idly with the tape recorder on. It is true that while the recorder was on my informants would structure their answers and try to make them as clear as possible as well as their speech. They also allowed me to go deeper and into greater detail than during our conversation. Some of them would even analyse their own answers, which is a good example of the nature of reflexivity that Giddens (1990) describes. For example, Jerry said that his behaviour was unacceptable for society and then, analysed his answer by reflecting that he was reproducing social expectations in what he was saying. Later he tried to normalise his transvestism by comparing it to a hobby. Sometimes I also gathered useful data just after I turned off the tape recorder. My informant might have had the feeling that because the tape recorder was off, they could speak more freely. Moreover, because they were already revealing some details about their life there was no reason not to keep on going on the same track.

## 5. Ethics

Transvestism is a sensitive subject for research. Most transvestites are hiding their behaviour from their wives, family and friends. They are afraid to be discovered and tend to feel misunderstood by people who are close to them. This is one of the reasons some transvestites did not want to be interviewed. Their main fear is to be discovered and so cause disruption to their family relationships. Other transvestites have a more public life. They share their cross-dressing with a wife or mother and sometimes other members of their family. A few are very happy to share their experiences with a wider public. Even though transvestites use an alternative female name when cross-dressed I changed my informants' male and female names to keep their identities secret. All names and details that might identify informants are treated confidentially throughout this thesis and were treated in this way throughout the research process. Those who are unafraid of identification may be recognised from my descriptions, but I have ensured that those who cross-dress secretly cannot be identified. Throughout the thesis, I have used neutral names for transvestites I have met both 'en femme' and in their male role (Jo and Jerry). All the others I have met only 'en femme' will be assigned feminine names (Clare, Deborah, Priscilla, Karen, Ghislaine, Angela, Lindsay, Alison, Christine, Justine, Dorothy, Manöelle). To distinguish them from wives (Lily, Anna and Gemma) and mother (Rose) I have used masculine pronouns when referring to the transvestites' feminine names.

To further ensure confidentiality, I never used my own camera to take pictures of my informants. Some transvestites took photographs of themselves and their friends during meetings and would often give me copies. Even though these photographs were freely given, I will not use them in this ethnography. I will only use pictures of cross-dressed films actors or people who are already 'out' and who regularly go on television programmes or do newspaper interviews. I did not take pictures of the Drag Queens because I realised that everyone in my surroundings was expecting me to be as discrete as possible and to respect the sub-cultures in which I was moving. A request to take photographs would have seemed overly intrusive.

Researching and writing about individuals, or a group of people, may help or harm them by the conduct, publicity and publication of the research results (Sieber 1993). Informants generally trust the professional responsibility of the researcher. They trust the guarantee of non-disclosure of some particular pieces of the research. But, some information given confidentially might be essential for the research and ethical problems of disclosure arise. Misunderstanding between the researcher and his/her informants may also arise and inaccurate interpretations of the data may follow. So, I had to reflect on my own interpretation to be certain I would not distort the meaning of my informants' speech and behaviour.

Sometimes during their interviews people asked me to turn off the tape recorder so that they might speak more freely. This gave me some very private and sensitive information. An ethical question is how to treat such useful information, revealed when the tape recorder was switched off. My decision is to respect the informants' wishes for secrecy. But I have concluded that it is possible to deduce some general points from these revelations and to refer to specific points providing they do not compromise the informant's wish for anonymity.

## **6. Conclusion**

Taped interviews can provide much information and insight, but participant observation was a very precious method that complemented and assisted my interviews. Participant observation involved regular and close contact with my informants to allow me to observe and learn about the dynamics of the groups and individuals studied. It can even add some extra very useful impressions such as interactions with each other, friendship, use of space, conversations and so on. The different tactics I used to gather data during this research allowed me to have a more complete view of a complex behaviour that is not only men putting on women clothes, but a 'dedoublement'.

Based on what my informants said, their actions and attitude when cross-dressed, I will give my own interpretations of their behaviour. These might be similar in certain respects to the existing literature on transvestism and different in others. As Karp and Kendall said:

... there are convincing reasons for arguing that every anthropologist's field experiences are unique. After all, each field worker does take a singular mixture of presuppositions, personal penchants, and past histories into the field, and these factors cannot help but colour interpretations made there. (1982:252)

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## Chapter 4

# Meeting Groups

In this chapter I will analyse the different groups I visited and discuss their aims. Within each group, a certain image of femininity is represented. I will also take a look at the Drag Queens' scene that is very different from that of the transvestites' groups. Creating a feminine image for transvestites does not only depend on the expression of their individual feminine personae, but also on the reactions of a wife or partner, who may influence styles of dress.

### 1. Transvestites' groups

Early organisations of transvestites started with the work of Charles "Virginia" Prince who formed a transvestites' group, the Phi Pi Epsilon (FPE), in America during the early 1950s. From there other groups started such as the Sea Horse in Australia, the Elisabeth Club in Japan, the Phoenix Group in South Africa and *The Beaumont Society* in England. *The Beaumont Society*, in association with the FPE, developed in the 1960s in England and since then has spread across the world. When *The Beaumont Society*, the most well known transvestites' group in England, started in 1967, there were only 12 members. Three years later there were already 360 members and by 1990 more than 4000 members were registered. Transvestites' associations also publish magazines reserved exclusively for their members such as *TV Repartee*, *Beaumag*, *Cross-Talk*. Generally transvestites' groups are aimed at transvestites only. Often, these groups are approached by transsexuals or some transvestite members eventually declared themselves transsexuals and began hormone treatment. For these reasons *The Beaumont Society* set up a parallel branch for transsexuals. Alongside these national and international groups, smaller local groups developed such as the two groups I visited for my fieldwork in England.

In both groups, transvestites I encountered were between twenty-five years of age and their late seventies. The older ones told me that when they started cross-dressing, there were not so many possibilities for them to meet other people sharing the same interest. They had felt painfully isolated and thought of themselves as freaks because each felt himself to be the odd one out. Jerry told me that when transvestites are solitary, "*they don't feel right*". For the solitary transvestite the social pressure is most keenly felt. For Jerry, "*The reason is simply because of guilt*". The young transvestites I met told me that before they met other transvestites they were feeling very lonely and it was only when they met others that there was a big change in their transvestism, about which they came to feel more confident. Similar feelings of shame, disgust and guilt when cross-dressing, and relief on discovering that they are not 'the only ones' also appear in Talamini's study (1982).

The way the transvestites that I met learned about the existence and addresses of transvestites' group was usually through specialised literature available in gay shops for the past few years, through a local doctor, or an advert for "*TV enthusiast*" (which needs to be read as transvestite and not television enthusiast) in a local newspaper. Usually, transvestites who joined a transvestites' group already had been in possession of the contact number for a long time, but did not dare telephone or make contact (King 1976). They told me that they were afraid that the group would not be what they expected and that the members might be gathering in order to find sexual partners.

The younger generation of transvestites I met had fewer problems contacting transvestites' groups as addresses are published in a book available in gay shops. I had the chance to see this book once and it contains all the information needed by transvestites. The book was divided into chapters each of them covering a certain city and giving the places where transvestites can go shopping, where they can go out clubbing or drinking as well as the local meeting groups of the area. What strikes me is that the useful information needed

by transvestites is always available in the gay area of a city or in gay shops. While most of the transvestites I met do not want and/or are afraid of being confused with homosexuals, they continue to go out in places known to be gay.

Buckner's (1971) theory, tracing the origin of transvestism in repressed homosexuality and the consequential development of an aversion to gay men, does not seem to fit in this context. Most transvestites do not want to be confused with gays, but I did not notice that they held a negative attitude towards them. The explanation for straight transvestites going out in gay areas is not that they are attracted by gay men when cross-dressed as Woodhouse (1989) suggests. None of the heterosexual transvestites I met ever wanted to have a sexual relationship with a man while en femme. Their reason for going to gay areas is because of their non-normative behaviour. Transvestites are hiding from the mainstream and, when cross-dressed, they do not dare to go into straight bars where they might be rejected.

Whittle (1996) observed that lesbian and gay pubs often provide safe and welcoming space to transvestites. The gay community usually tolerates transvestites and other sexual or gender minorities because they too have suffered rejection even though they are nowadays enjoying a degree of acceptance. Transvestites and transsexuals are still waiting to gain this acceptance. If gay people tolerate transvestites, it does not mean that they fully accept them. For gays, transvestites are just "*heterosexual men in frocks*" (Drag Queen's words). So transvestites can be found in gay bars/night-clubs, but at the same time they are excluded from membership of the gay community.

Even if it is common to come across transvestites and transsexuals in gay bars and night-clubs, I noticed that the different communities may overlap and interact, but do not mix as they are not the same (Whittle 1996). For example *The C.* seems to be used by different categories of people in a very uncoordinated way. I soon realised that it is only in the area around the bar where all customers mix. Each sub-culture that is represented has a specific space in the pub. For example, transvestites usually share the same table, as do the

Drag Queens. The transsexuals tend to occupy the middle of the room, while lesbians sit around a table next to the door. There are some movements between the groups, but their separation is very noticeable. This became more apparent to me as I got familiar with the pub. In *The P.*, gays, transvestites, transsexuals and Drag Queens also coexist happily following certain demarcations. Representatives of the different sub-cultures enjoy themselves on a certain area on the dance floor. This demarcation between the different sub-cultures was not that clear in *The M.* in Liège. Maybe this was due to its long narrow design, with the bar running along one side, that did not allow the people to demarcate, as they had to walk from one end to the other to meet their friends or get a drink. Another explanation of no clear demarcations between the different groups would be that in Belgium, Drag Queens are considered as part of the gay community as well as transsexuals. There is only a minority of straight people attending the Drag Queens shows and they usually leave immediately after the end and the only transvestite I met there was Manoëlle who was always sitting next to the bar and did not seem to mix with the people around.

### **1.1. The Darlington group**

The group in Darlington was initially attached to *The Beaumont Society*. This early association was due to the fact that *The Beaumont Society* did not have a local branch in the North East of England. The founders, Lily and Jo, needed to be part of the wider transvestite network to start their group for it be recognised within the transvestite community in England. A few years ago, the group decided to separate from *The Beaumont Society* because they did not agree with its new president, or his choice of persons in charge of organisational posts and organisational policies.

When Jo and Lily started their group, they decided that its aim should be to provide an opportunity for transvestites to cross-dress in a quiet and relaxed atmosphere. Members who are still secret, or do not dare to travel fully dressed, have the opportunity to cross-dress at the meeting place. They classify their group as "*family oriented*" as they welcome transvestites together with their partners and other family members. The organisers want to

help couples and families who are confronted with transvestism. To avoid any likelihood of sexual propositioning from gay transvestites toward married and heterosexual transvestites, the organisers prefer to avoid the presence of transvestites who identify themselves as homosexual. The organisers also prefer not to have sadomasochists or fetishists attending their meetings. They say that such people have a 'sexual interest' in transvestism and not a 'recreational need', as do the other members. During my fieldwork, I met homosexual as well as heterosexual transvestites, although the majority was heterosexual.

I did not encounter any sadomasochists, but I read several stories in transvestites' magazines that were clearly sadomasochist and/or exhibitionist. For example *The World of Transvestism* displays pictures of transvestites in underwear, or even half naked, posing in seductive positions to the camera. There are also pictures of transvestites wearing tight PVC corsets, leather underwear and wielding a whip. The *TV Friend* aims to establish contact between, hetero- homo- or bisexual transvestites and transsexuals as well as fetishists and sado-masochists. Sometimes pictures are published with the advert. A few examples of these adverts illustrate the connection to sadomasochism and fetishism.

Obedient 32 year old submissive wishes to meet a mistress or she-male for domestic and slave duties. Humiliate and degrade me, chain me up, force me into leather restraints, whip me, abuse my whole body. Your place only. (TV Friend, issue 9, p.4)

Gymslip clad TV schoolgirl, into navy blue knickers, white ankle socks, and sport skirts. Would love to get you behind the school shed for some naughty sex games. Fancy a look up my skirt, you'll get a big "stiff" surprise if I pull my knickers down. I am looking for headmaster to correct my naughty ways. Strong slipper and cane preferred. Write with detention duties. Photo by return. (TV Friend, issue 9, p.21)

Norwegian medical doctor, internationally working - 44 years and good looking is dreaming of a marriage - like relationship to a gay, very feminine TV. I want you to be my wife, mistress and also whore, dress in ultra feminine clothes, corset, laces, very high-heels and heavy make-up. Is this our opportunity? (TV Friend, issue 9, p.27)

Not all transvestites' magazines are aimed at fetishists, sado-masochists or sexual contacts. Magazines such as *Cross-Talk* and *Beaumont Magazine* issued by *The Beaumont Society*, do not have any sexual connotations. They concentrate on sharing transvestites'

stories about going out or taking holidays cross-dressed. They also give advice on how to dress and where to find the accessories needed to present a feminine image. In the *Beaumont Magazine*, there are even a few pages reserved for women. The *International TV Repartee*, is a magazine that falls between the two stools. There are some adverts for meeting people, but it is not as sexually explicit as the *TV Friend*. These various examples of different types of magazines covering different needs reflect the variety of forms of transvestism.

The Darlington group also offers the opportunity to go out to a restaurant on a monthly basis, but this activity is safe and transvestites know they will not be bothered by people. In the restaurant there is a separate room booked for them. Alongside these activities, Jo and Lily also run a self-help line for transvestites and their relatives. The telephone number, which is the same number as Jo and Lily's private phone number, is advertised in local newspapers and in transvestites' web sites. People can call them at any time, but they are more often home in the evening. As I said earlier, due to this constant contact with new transvestites, new faces sometimes join the group for a meeting or two or longer if they feel at ease within the group.

### 1.1.1. *Etiquette and dress code*

When Lily started the group with Jo, they did not establish any rules about dress codes, but it appears that within the membership there is an unwritten shared ideology of how a transvestite should be dressed. During the monthly meeting and when going out to a restaurant, the unwritten etiquette of the group is to dress 'appropriately' and 'decently'. This is very close to the Seahorse Club's etiquette described by Buhrich (1976) where the members are asked to "*dress with taste*". I believe that in Lily's thought, transvestites have to dress the way that she thinks a woman should be dressed, which corresponds with what I call a 'respectable matron look'. Lily's approach to femininity deeply influences the group. I noticed that all members that attend on a regular basis also share an ideology centred on a certain image of transvestism. Thus, the character of the group has developed around this

collective identity of the 'respectable woman'. As Woodhouse (1989:9) writes, "*appearance makes statements about what a person is (or would like to be) and about the groups that person identifies with*". Thus, the kernel of the group stick together because they all adhere to the same ideology and image of what transvestism is, how transvestites should look and the type of woman transvestites have to impersonate. So, even if transvestites express a very personal 'dedoublement', they identify with a certain ideology of transvestism. This coincides with Cohen (1994:65) who acknowledges individualism even though it can be masked by a "*category or collectively imposed identity*".

Typical attire in the Darlington group consists of skirts that are long, or fall beneath the knee, dresses, white blouses, buttoned cardigans or jackets, classical suits, mid-high heeled shoes, light make-up that is intended to appear 'natural', with curly, short or to the shoulder wigs of a natural colour. Jewellery, such as earrings, necklaces, rings, brooches and bracelets are often worn, but are not too obvious and bright. Styles such as mini skirts or shiny materials are avoided. If a member wears such items, they receive critical looks rather than words. Transvestites who adopt a more glamorous style may join the group for several meetings, but are unlikely to become regulars, as they do not share the group ideal of matronly respectability.

### 1.1.2. Socialisation

During the meetings, in the sitting rooms, I noticed that most women gather together, while the transvestites tend not to mix with the women. They tend to form groups of three or four people sitting on the sofa and chairs spread around the two sitting rooms and smoking room. As I described the spatial layout of Jo and Lily's house in the previous chapter, we can imagine that it separates the different groups of people who like to gather together. The separation is real between the people sitting in the smoking room and in the sitting rooms, as these two areas are completely separated from each other by a corridor. The two sitting rooms are very much linked together, as there is a wide glass sliding door between the two. However, before the buffet is served, everyone gathers together in the

sitting rooms. It is only after everyone has eaten that one group retires to the smoking room to play dominoes. At this juncture, Jo sometimes leaves with a few transvestites to go out for a drink in the bar of the local Art Centre, which is a liberal place, that also hosts lesbian meetings on a regular basis.

Among the group, I achieved a particular status and transvestites who knew me from seeing me month after month, or those who were just curious about my research, would come and talk to me. Our major topic of conversation was first of all about my research and what I was looking at. They also asked me questions about my family and my activities outside my student life and of course, they also asked me advice about make-up, which colour might suit them as well as their hairstyle and general look. As a female researcher, and not the partner of any member of the group, I was a kind of curiosity. Maybe, I was also conferring upon them a certain respectability, or status, as my research was acknowledging their behaviour as interesting enough to spend time observing them and interviewing them. Also, several times, I had the feeling that some women of the group or transvestites were looking for my opinion to support their views.

Lily invited me at least twice to take her side in an argument. Once she was arguing with her husband because a television team was coming to interview them both. She said that she was fed up because her husband had agreed to be filmed without asking her consent. She then turned towards me and asked what I thought about it. I managed to elude the question, as I did not want to take sides. The second time we were together in the kitchen and she was complaining about a newspaper article giving the wrong impression that she is the one dressing her husband and that Jo did not make any comment to clarify the mistake. She said that she had had enough of Jo wanting to go out and be seen. She said that she had no private life anymore because of newspapers and television programmes calling them for interviews. Behind all these complaints, the real reason was not that she was interviewed too often, but that Jo is cross-dressing too often and that she does not see her husband in his masculine role often enough. All these interviews do not help their

relationship, as Jo has to be cross-dressed in front of the cameras. As we shall see in **Chapter 6**, Lily tolerates her husband cross-dressing because she loves him, but feels his alter ego is too often coming between them.

During the meetings, I tried as much as possible to mix with everybody. I tried to move from one little group to the other, but often did not manage to talk to everyone the same evening. Usually, what I would do is to have general discussions with as many people as possible before the buffet was served and then would focus on one particular group, such as the wives, joining the group of transvestites who was going out for a drink or those playing dominoes.

### 1.1.3. Dominoes

The origin of the dominoes game was that organisers did not want people to smoke in their house except in the room next to the secondary kitchen. To keep people busy while smoking they left dominoes, cards and puzzles. While some people prefer to stand and chat with each other, others play dominoes at every meeting. As Rapport (1999:100) writes, *"dominoes, indeed, provides something of a foundation for sociality of a particular kin, neighbours or even local acquaintances. Playing dominoes may be seen to give on to relations of friendship which negate and transcend the latter certain categories."* Since Jerry convinced his mother Rose to join the group, she has developed a friendship with Lily. As Lily explained, Rose being a heavy smoker spends most of her time in the smoking room. Lily accompanied her and they started playing dominoes around a small square table. They were soon joined by Christine who seems to have a particular relationship with Lily and Jo. Christine and Jo have lots in common as both had a military career and have lost a wife. But most of all I sensed a certain authority from Christine over Jo. Christine is older than Jo, who told me that he considers Christine as 'his mother'. Several times I heard Christine moderating Jo who started arguing with Lily about his cross-dressing. A strong friendship also exists between Lily and Christine and Christine sometimes takes Lily's part in arguments with Jo.

After attending several meetings, I was invited by Christine, with whom I quickly built a friendly relationship, to join their group to play dominoes. At first I thought that I would be separated from the others and would not gather as much data as I could if I stayed in the living rooms chatting with everyone. Still my curiosity and desire to play won over my apprehension and I joined their group. The first time we played together, they explained the rules of the game and gave me advice about 'knocking' the others. As every beginner, I won the first game and they all combined to make me lose the next one. As I became a regular player (I used to play at least three games each time I was attending a meeting) I received various support from Christine or Lily, but not from Rose who seemed never to take me fully into her confidence.

Often, while chatting and playing we talked about very serious matters and at the same time diverting attention to the game. Rapport (1999:114), in his discussion of domino playing in a village pub, also notes that "*transferring intimacies between persons or intimate knowledge of oneself to the outward complexities of a football match, a car engine, a committee meeting, ... provides a language for friendly and intimate expression ...*". So, this way of approaching a family's problems, questions about a husband or son's transvestism and other matters, was made possible by the 'leisure' context of the game. While concentrating on the game and enjoying it, the players would make some serious comments and reflections.

One of the favourite topics covered was gossiping about transvestites who once came to meetings, but ceased because they did not fit with the group. This connects to Gluckman's (1963:308) idea that gossips can "*maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups*". Rose and Lily once described a transvestite who suddenly decided to have a sex change operation. They discussed the problem of married transsexuals with children who decided that they had had enough of their responsibility and 'escaped' by having operations. They argued that these people were living with the illusion that, as soon as they are operated on, all their problems will be solved. They criticised these men who thought



that it is much easier to be a woman. They also described the clothes, make-up and habits of transvestites who joined the group for several meetings, but left. For the most part these people seemed to have failed to fit in with the 'family oriented' ideology of the group.

While playing dominoes I was also struck by the fact that even though the table was separated from the central gathering in the sitting rooms, there were always people bringing us food or proposing a cup of tea. It is true that to go to the secondary kitchen they had to pass the table, but still, there was always someone coming to have a chat with us, checking how the game was going on and sharing gossip. Still it was very rare for another person to join in for a game. Maybe the others had the feeling that they were disturbing special friendship?

#### 1.1.4. Friendship

Friendship that develops among the members of the group is not only based on the similar non-normative behaviour that brought them together in the first place, but develops also around shared interests. As Blieszner and Adams 1992:65) state: "*friendship is based on attraction of partners for one another, and attraction is based in part on perceived similarity of personality, values, attitudes, beliefs, needs, or social skills between partners*". So, "*what brings people together in friendship may not be what keeps them together*" (Rawlins 1992:2 in Bell and Coleman 1999:6).

As Allan (1989) notes, the ability to develop friendship between two people is "*wanting and being able to engage in the same sorts of activity as each other*. (1989:69)." For example, both Jo and Christine sometimes enjoy recalling their time in the army. Lily and Rose share a friendship that was first based on the shock of discovering the transvestism of a close member of their family. Lily, who had discovered her husband's transvestism years earlier, provided Rose with the support, advice and comfort that are among the roles of a friend (Allan 1989:53). Nowadays, they enjoy the company of each other and chat about any subjects that two women can enjoy discussing. As we shall see a

bit later, the Newcastle group developed around four friends sharing similar interests, who decided to gather together to cross-dress and, sometimes, to enjoy other activities when not cross-dressed. Another interesting friendship relation is Angela and Anna (husband and wife) who, on top of their marital life, have developed a friendship that was evident when Anna was kindly teasing her husband. This relates to Allan who notes that "*a good proportion of some couples' closer friendships are couple oriented* (1989:80)."

#### 1.1.5. Topics of conversations at the meetings

The usual talk is about topics that reflect members' interests and hobbies, such as cars, football and computers. They also exchange advice and tricks concerning make-up and clothes, as well as valuable information, such as the names of shoemakers who have feminine shoes in large sizes, or where to go to be pampered by a beautician who is willing to provide services for transvestites. What sometimes surprised me was how easily transvestites would switch from a 'feminine' conversation to a conversation more typical of men. This mixture of feminine and masculine elements could be compared to their personality that has integrated femininity and masculinity. So, their conversations reflect their 'dedoublement', as they do not reinvent a history specific to their female alter ego.

Members also relish sharing good and bad experiences that after the actual stressful event are very funny, such as the story of being stopped by a policeman or of a neighbour asking who is the nice looking lady visitor. In the first case, Alison, even if extremely scared about being arrested, kept his mind calm and told the policeman he was going to a fancy dress party. He does not know if the policeman truly believed him but who, in any case, let him go. Alison, when telling this story was laughing at the scene that happened, remembering the face of the policeman who discovered that this 'lady' was in fact a man. The other story happened to Jo when he was still a young bachelor. He had his apartment and was used to sneaking out cross-dressed to enjoy a night out. Once he was nearly

caught by a neighbour who saw him pass on the staircase, but did not realise it was him. The day after, when his neighbour asked him who that nice looking lady was, he nearly gave himself away, but had the presence of mind to tell him it was a friend.

Angela told me that his wife Anna sometimes teasingly addresses him, when he is cross-dressed, as "*your ladyship*". So he pretends to be a countess and parades around the house. Anna, by gently teasing her husband about his transvestism and feminine attitudes, receives a humouring response from her husband who in return pretends to be a type of woman to whom even more stereotypes are attached. Angela's 'double' looks like an old schoolmistress and by parading as a countess, he emphasises even more the paradoxical image he gives as a man dressed as a woman. Such a case implies that transvestites are aware that their 'dedoublement' is a paradox in western societies. In their everyday life they are displaying a masculine image and sometimes in the evening, often hiding from the rest of the world, they are walking around their home in women's dresses.

Conversations during the meeting, at the restaurant and out in the bar were very similar to those in the house. On our way to and from the restaurant, to which I accompanied the group once, we did not meet anyone so I could not observe any interaction. In the restaurant, the waitress seemed to know the transvestites already and joked with them. Still, I could read some curiosity in her eyes. Maybe she thought that the scene was funny, or maybe she was wondering why they were doing such a thing? At the bar at the Arts Centre, there were often a few men drinking. I could see surprise and even astonishment, but none of them ever made audible comments or tried to make any contact with the transvestites. On the other hand, transvestites were observing the reactions of the people around them. They were commenting on the looks these men gave them when they ordered their drinks and some of them, who were not used to go out to this bar, thought it was surprising that these men did not make any comments. They concluded that the men were afraid to say anything, as a lot of people in the area know that Jo often goes there and

that he was a paratrooper and thus knows how to fight. So, even when Jo is displaying his 'dedoublement', people who know him, still consider him as a man with his masculine capacities.

Through the stories in transvestites' magazines, it appears that transvestites who go out very rarely get into trouble or get much notice, but they do observe people's reactions and often write about it in the magazines. They seem to appreciate being mistaken for women, but also enjoy telling stories about being recognised as transvestites. This wish of being able to 'pass' as a woman and simultaneously to be recognised as a transvestite was also present among my informants as we shall see later in **Chapter 5**.

## **1.2. The Newcastle group**

These transvestites usually meet at least once a week in Karen's apartment where, unlike Darlington, food is not served. Rather, they spend the evening sipping wine and chatting about similar topics to those discussed in the Darlington group. Sometimes, one member of the group comes with his girlfriend (two of the four members are divorced, one is a secret transvestite and the fourth is allowed to cross-dress but his wife does not want anything to do with it). During these evenings, they also sometimes invite transvestites who are not members. As I said in the methodology, this group also regularly goes out and it was mainly on those occasions that I accompanied them.

The group attends events at the theatre (*The Rocky Horror Show* is a favourite) or transvestites' weekends to which I did not find the opportunity to attend. Transvestites' weekends are usually organised in February-March and October-November outside the peak holiday season. They told me that about a hundred transvestites together with the wives who accept their husband's transvestism gather in a hotel for these events. There is usually a cocktail party on the Friday night and other social activities on Saturday and Sunday. I was told that sometimes the organisers persuade certain female clothes shops or stores, which sell feminine skin products, to stay open all weekend so transvestites can

shop for their make-up and other accessories. The highlight of the week-end is the dinner party on Saturday evening when everyone wears his/her best evening dress. So, even if the Newcastle group tends to organise their own activities, they are part of a larger network of transvestites. Because they often go out and sometimes attend specially organised transvestites' week-ends, they get to meet other transvestites with whom they are in contact on a more or less regular basis by phone, mail or e-mail.

In Newcastle, there is no etiquette surrounding appearance and everyone dresses the way they like. Most wear feminine classical suits or skirts below the knee with a white blouse, medium high-heeled shoes, light make-up and a curly short hair wig. Only Clare who is the oldest of the group likes to wear miniskirts and low cut tops. Clare's style is even more extravagant when the group is going out. Once I saw him with a long pair of golden trousers and a silver mini-top. Even if wearing clothes appropriate for a night-club, I never saw the other members wearing miniskirts and low cut tops. Still, as in the Darlington group, they try to behave in what they consider a feminine fashion and to improve their 'dedoublement', they think about details such as how women apply make-up, dress and move. In both groups, transvestites tend to sit with their knees together and their legs tucked under their seat in a very ladylike position. Sometimes a few of them forget and keep their legs open in what is considered among them to be a very inelegant and non-feminine manner.

Compared to the Darlington group, it seems that the Newcastle group is more open as they do not hesitate to go out to gay venues and walk in the street from one place to the other. This major difference could be that the Newcastle group is composed of only four transvestites, three of whom do not depend on anyone. The fourth member does have to take account of his wife and try to maintain secrecy. Most secret transvestites usually cross-dress when their wife is out shopping or visiting friends and, to be able to attend their transvestites' group they pretend they are going out to the pub with friends. Clare, for example, tells his wife that he is going hill walking for the weekend, but before going to his

walking area, he joins his friends on Friday evening and goes out with them cross-dressed. The group meetings are not fixed and can change and be adapted in relation to the members' needs.

Another difference between the groups is that the Newcastle group does not follow the matronly look. Even if two of them wear very classical clothes such as a black suit with curly brown wig for Priscilla, or a white blouse with a black skirt and a blond, curly, short wig for Karen. Clare sometimes wears short 'strappy' dresses. Clare told me once that he likes the "*tarty look*". This is very surprising knowing that he is over seventy years old. This difference of ideology concerning the feminine image is clear between the two groups, but I never found out why the Newcastle group who went several times to visit the Darlington group stopped doing so. Their answer was that they all live close to each other and like to go out together. The real reason might be that, they do not share the same ideology as the Darlington group. These different ideologies about the feminine image existing between these two groups again demonstrate that there is not only one transvestism, but several transvestisms.

While out with Jo's group after the buffet, as well as with any other transvestites in England and Belgium, I noticed that most transvestites, when cross-dressed do not drink pints of beer instead they drink smaller glasses of fruit juice or bottled alcoholic drinks. This reflects the 'dedoublement' that is at work. Transvestites, when creating and expressing their feminine alter ego, tend to do it not only through clothes, but also through a whole range of behaviours and attitudes. So, when it comes to food and drinking habits when cross-dressed, transvestites seem to try to adopt what they regard as feminine behaviour.

### **1.3. Transvestites in Belgium**

As already discussed in **Chapter 3**, during my fieldwork in Belgium I did not meet any transvestites who gathered in groups or discovered any local or national organisations. If Belgian transvestites want to join *The Beaumont Society*, they have to go to France or Holland. All the transvestites I met were on their own, going out in gay pubs or night-clubs where gays and a minority of straights share the space. They tend to go to mixed places where they feel their heterosexuality will not be threatened. They wish they could go to straight bars, but they are afraid of rejection. As Manoëlle told me, as soon as someone criticises him or comes too close, he goes home.

From the few solitary transvestites I met in Liège, they told me that it is not easy to deal with their transvestism. They are hiding from everyone and do not have anyone to share their experiences. The lack of a transvestites' network adds to the sense of isolation. Transvestites wish that there were groups where they could meet others, but until the very recent appearance of a Belgian transvestites' web site, there were none and the only place where they seem to be tolerated is in the gay community.

### **1.4. The Internet**

With the development of electronic media such as the Internet, new methods of making contacts are becoming available. Several members told me that they often use this new technology to contact members of other groups with whom they chat about a common interest and sometimes even meet and build a friendship. Certainly, since starting my research, I have witnessed the development of the use of the Internet. When I started in 1997 I could find only one or two sites of groups in England and none in Belgium. Nowadays, if you can find one site there is usually a link with other sites available in the

different parts of England, and only very recently I found a site mainly aimed at Dutch speaking Belgian transvestites: Belgo Gender. In England, transvestites' wives have their own site and chat-line alongside the transvestites' sites.

So now, it is easier for transvestites to contact one another, and particularly members of the younger generation who are more comfortable with electronic communications. However, the Internet is not reserved for the younger generation alone. For example, Angela, who is in his late sixties, told me that he met other transvestites through an Internet chat-line. He can send private messages to particular people or messages to everyone who is interested in a certain discussion. Through the Internet, he has developed his contacts and made a friendship. So this system allows transvestites to develop links between people previously unknown to one another. In the future, this may lead to the creation of small groups, such as the Newcastle group who met through *The Beaumont Society* and decided to create their own group because they live in a close proximity, share common interests and enjoy similar activities when cross-dressed. During the writing up of my thesis I could not avoid noticing the increase in Internet sites and chat rooms and, it is likely that the Internet will become one of the major forms of contact between transvestites.

## **2. Drag Queens shows**

Due to the very purpose of the Drag Queens' cross-dressing as part of their role as entertainers, meeting them was much easier than was the case with transvestites. Most transvestites are very careful about blending into society and often have a very secret and private life. By contrast Drag Queens only exist because of the presence of a public and though, want to attract attention. They wear exuberant and attention grabbing clothes and enjoy the gaze and reactions of other people. Drag Queens regularly perform in gay bars or night-cubs where transvestites and transsexuals are included in the clientele.

I attended several Drag shows. I went on a regular basis to *The C.* on Monday evenings, once to *The P.* where two informants were performing and in Belgium I attended shows on several occasions at *The M.* Newton (1972), who conducted research among female impersonators in America, distinguishes performances as "*recorded act*" or "*live*". All the shows I attended, Drag Queens were performing play-back or on their own recorded voice. Drag Queens change costumes at least every two songs. Sometimes, they have two costumes one on top of the other so they can transform their personae with the change of music. In England, artists perform either solo or in pairs. In Belgium, they often perform in a group of five or six. In the places I attended, Drag Queens being part of the gay community interact with everyone. In England, they even socialise with the transvestites, as both categories are 'cross-dressers'. Still, even in the friendly talks, there was a certain reserve because the transvestites are heterosexual.

When I use the word 'artist' to define Drag Queens, it is a term used by the landlord of *The M.* who told me that he is an artist by profession. In her research, Newton (1972:6) describes how it is very important for impersonators to refer to their performance as "*work*" or as a "*job*" and, at best, a "*profession*". This distinguishes them from "*freaks*" or "*hustlers*" as they want to be associated with "*glamorous forms of entertainment*" (Newton 1972:6). The landlord of *The M.* used the term 'artist' for all Drag Queens because he said that they are performing on stage and do not otherwise have any interest in female clothing. As he once commented ironically about his stage costumes, "*which women would like to wear such clothes?*" referring to the glitter, colour and extravagance of the clothes and the size and shape of the shoes. Drag Queens do not try to look like 'real' women. They perform to entertain people and earn money. For them clothes are for focusing the attention of the audience on the character they are creating, which can be a well known pop singer or their own imagined character.

Steve, a young Drag Queen, has a very strong personality that is expressed even more strongly when on stage. As Steve told me, when he cross-dresses, he is quite nasty because people allow Drag Queens to do what they want and also expect them to behave in

a caustic manner. It is true that Drag Queens are on stage to entertain the audience, but there are many different ways to make the public laugh. They can be comic, satirical or extravagant. This relates to their origins in tradition of the European jester whose privilege and power is to speak 'the truth'. The jester can break all conventions, including sacred and taboo matters, under the guise of playfulness he can have his own bite (Willeford 1969). Steve, when on stage, likes the attention of the audience and it seems that he is not the only one. When watching the shows, I often noticed that the other Drag Queens who were not working that night were still wearing glittery clothes in an attempt to be noticed. They also loudly criticised the person on stage for not being glamorous or for not changing costume often enough.

The Drag Queen's impersonation is separated from transvestites' 'dedoublement' in various aspects. The transvestite and the Drag Queen's clothing, body language and the speech while cross-dressed are very different. Drag Queens use female clothing for 'work' and have no special attraction or erotic feelings towards these clothes. Steve told me, "*I do it for the money and the attention I get from the public. If I could get the same attention from people in my everyday life when normally dressed, I would not do it*". Another informant told me that, "*I am an actor by profession and this is only one aspect of my profession*".

Most transvestites deny any homosexual impulse and avoid 'campy' behaviour and the glamour reserved for the Drag Queens. Drag Queens, on the contrary, avoid looking like ordinary women. That is reserved to transvestites. Drag Queens are outrageous on scene, using body language and language that are likely to contain vulgarity, to attract the attention of the audience. Newton (1972) observed that Drag Queens who adopt a drag style that makes them look like an ordinary woman will violate the aesthetic standard of the scene and be rejected by the other performers.

Another street-oriented boy, who was very much disliked by the other performers, and who had only been working for a few weeks, had outfitted himself largely with skirts and blouses. The emcee began to criticise this, saying his appearance was too transy. Soon the boy was in a state of some anxiety about it, and before he would go on stage he would nervously ask

anyone who was standing around 'Does this look too transy?' to which they would reply, 'Yes.' When I asked one of the older performers what this meant, he said it meant the boy's drag looked 'too much like a real woman. It's not showy enough. No woman would go on stage looking like that.' (Newton 1972: 51)

Steve started cross-dressing when he was sixteen. He saw a drag show and thought he could do better and started from there. He works solo as well as with a good friend, Alex. They both seem to be well known in the Drag Queens' circles of Newcastle and arouse jealousy as they both look very impressive and get the full attention of the audience. Usually, Drag Queens have to buy their outfits from older Drag Queens or order them. These specially created clothes are very expensive and young Drag Queens cannot afford many outfits from specialised suppliers, but Steve and Alex have their clothes created and made by Alex's mother. Also, Alex is very creative and they often present new shows, while others tend to repeat the same act over and over again. Once, in *The P.*, Steve invited me backstage to watch him getting dressed for the show. He first applied a thick foundation, powdered his face, designed some oversized eyebrows, used brown and white eyes-shadow, designed his eyes with a black pen, used brown blush for his cheeks, designed his lips with red lipstick on top of which he applied red glitter. After "*painting*" his face (Steve's words), he put on two pairs of very thick tights to cover the hair on his legs and tucked his penis between his legs. With this basic preparation, he was ready to put on any costumes that were hanging around the rooms with the appropriate wig next to it.

The term Steve used to describe his make-up, 'painting', is important as it demonstrates the different approach to cross-dressing between the transvestites and the Drag Queens. Drag Queens do not try to enact their femininity, but create a character that exists on stage only. Transvestites, as we shall see, try to create a woman in relation to what they feel to be their inner personality. This 'dedoublement' is not present in the case of Drag Queens who do not identify with their feminine creation, as transvestites do when cross-dressed.

### **3. Conclusion**

Transvestites' groups provide a place where their members can cross-dress without being afraid of being discovered by relatives, friends and colleagues. This also provides the opportunity for transvestites to realise that they are not the only people indulging in cross-dressing and to build their confidence about it. Within the groups, their feminine 'double' is recognised as well as the masculine alongside it. Transvestites develop relationships with other members of the group not based on their non-normative behaviour, but on shared friendship. Apart from cross-dressing, the Drag Queen scene has not much in common with transvestites' groups. Drag Queens cross-dress on stage for the purpose of entertaining people and not to express their 'dedoublement'. The competition being hard, very few impersonators develop friendships with one another, except between partners who are usually already friends before they decide to collaborate.

When joining a group, most transvestites build their confidence about expressing their 'dedoublement' and will tend to improve their feminine image under the encouragement and advice of the other members of the group. This evolution and refinement of their feminine alter ego may lead them to be able to pass as women and thus enable them to fool people about their gender if they have the confidence to go out. In the following chapter we will follow the slow creation of the transvestites feminine alter ego.

## Chapter 5

# Fashioning a 'double'

The purpose of this chapter is to present portraits of four transvestites who shared their stories with me. These four portraits, as well as extracts from other interviews, will illustrate how transvestism and the creation of a feminine 'double' may evolve over a life span and be influenced by the transvestite relationship with members of his family.

### 1. Case studies

#### 1.1 Jo

This case study is based on the life of the first transvestite I met, Jo. His feminine 'double' is also known as Jo. Jo invited me to meet his wife Lily at their home in Darlington where I made the first recording of our conversation. After chatting for about an hour I realised that it would be helpful to record the proceedings, as some very interesting subjects were being discussed. When I arrived at the house, I was not expecting to record our conversation, but I had, as usual, taken the precaution of carrying a tape recorder in my bag and was able to ask permission to record. The importance of the first interview for my later understanding was the presence of Lily and her willingness to explain her point of view. Also, interaction between Lily and Jo provided extra insight across a wide range of topics. This liberty of speech led to a general conversation about transvestism that covered Lily's feelings about her husband's cross-dressing and Jo's personal experiences as a transvestite. The information I gained from the first interview was expanded upon during later informal conversations I had with Jo and Lily. At a later stage, I also recorded focused interviews with Jo and Lily separately, in order to allow each to express a point of view without interacting with one another.

Jo and Lily, who were respectively 61 and 62 years old when I met them, were married in 1989. Both of them have children from previous marriages that in each case ended with the death of their partners. Six months after Jo and Lily's wedding, a journalist knocked on the door seeking information about Jo's transvestism about which she knew nothing. The journalist had noticed that a transvestite was buying clothes in a charity shop and traced him to Jo and Lily's address. Lily knew Jo loved cross-dressing for carnival, but she did not know what a transvestite was. Jo had not given her any indication that he cross-dressed regularly and she could not say anything "*to defend her husband*", as she puts it. Lily said that as Jo's wife she felt she ought to have known enough about her husband's behaviour to have told the journalist "*Yes I know and so what?*". Lily said this experience felt like the end of the world to her. However, from what I observed, she seems to be a generous and open-minded woman and, despite the shock, she decided to try to understand why her husband has the need to cross-dress.

Jo's first memories of cross-dressing reach back to when he was about four or five years old. His father was away fighting in the Second World War, so Jo was the only boy among women in his household. He lived with his mother, aunt, grandmother and the waitresses who worked in the family pub. "*The barmaids were in the courtyard dyeing their legs ... I was curious and was watching them. They looked at me and said I looked like Shirley Temple.*" The barmaids decided to dress him in girl's clothes because they said his long blond curly hair would make him a convincing Shirley Temple. Months later (he cannot say if it was six months or a year) he saw his mother putting on silk stockings and she agreed to let him try them on. "*I felt so nice.*" Later on he began to take silk stockings to bed with him. "*I felt so natural, so warm. I felt security. I don't know why.*" Jo says he was a shy boy, with a 'tomboy' girl as his best friend.

Jo's first experience of cross-dressing alone was when he was a teenager. He took clothes belonging to the pub waitresses and put a scarf on his head with some rolled socks tucked under it to give the impression that he had more hair. He then left the pub by the

back stairs, but as soon as he saw another person coming towards him he ran back home. That was Jo's first experience of 'going out' as a transvestite. On a second occasion, he rode his sister's bicycle to a wood and put on complete female attire. Again, he found himself afraid of discovery, so when he heard someone coming his reaction was to squat and pretend to pee, shouting to the person not to come too close.

At fifteen, Jo joined the military cadet school. "*I could not dress there.*" So he had to wait for his free weeks-ends. At eighteen he joined the army and became a paratrooper. It is at this period that he managed to obtain the wig and make-up he needed to complete his feminine image. At that time he could dress only every three or four weeks. "*It was awful.*" Still he said, "*I enjoyed the army*", but was often thinking, "*I wish I could put a dress on.*" It is also during one of his free weeks-ends that he managed to pass successfully for the first time. One evening, he decided to go cross-dressed to the late showing at the local cinema, so he would not meet too many people in the street and would only have to speak in order to buy his ticket. This evening out was a real thrill for him, as he did not get spotted.

It had never been a problem for Jo to buy his feminine clothes as his mother had difficulties walking and rarely ventured out. Moreover, she had to run the pub because his father, back from war, was often drunk. So, Jo did all the shopping for the family, which included buying all the feminine items that his mother needed. He could always pretend that the extra stockings he was buying were for his mother. It seems that Jo always had some attraction towards stockings, and believes they represent some kind of replacement for the lack of his mother's display of tenderness. For him the stockings were "*like a teddy bear*". His attraction to this particular item of women's clothes diminished as he took to cross-dressing on a more regular basis.

During his military service, it was hard for Jo to fulfil his transvestite urges because he thought that if someone discovered him he would be put before a Court Martial and dismissed from the army. Nevertheless he managed to find opportunities to cross-dress. At

the beginning of his career as a paratrooper, Jo married for the first time. However, his wife left him only a few months later; he did not give me the reason. He then married his second wife. His wife knew nothing about Jo's cross-dressing until one day she caught him folding his female clothes. She asked him to whom the clothes belonged. Jo admitted they were his, but she did not believe him. He then told her "*look, I'm transy, hiding a girl behind the system ... I like to dress up*". His wife broke down and could not cope with his admission. He said it took her a long time to get over it. He then promised her not to cross-dress again. Soon after he went with the army to Hong-Kong for six months, during which time he used to wear a sarong when off duty, as an alternative to transvestism. Still, the urge was there and he asked his wife if he could cross-dress. She agreed if he kept it very secret from the family and other people. When he came back to England, he joined the civil police and continued to cross-dress once in a while in the privacy of the bathroom.

After his second wife's death, Jo met Lily and they married. Once Lily came to know about Jo's habit, he cross-dressed more often, because he no longer lived in fear of discovery and rejection. I have noticed that 'discovered' transvestites are more confident than those who cross-dress in secret. Jo likes to go for a walk or go shopping while cross-dressed to observe people's reactions. Being a transvestite for more than thirty years, he has acquired the confidence and looks that permit him to pass convincingly as a woman. While many transvestites long to go undetected while cross-dressed, Jo sometimes likes to draw attention to his transvestite state. He says he likes to watch the expressions on people's faces when he uses his loud male voice or moves his hair (wig) a little. Jo likes to be noticed by other people, but at the same time he wants to 'pass' as a woman. "*I try to look all right. I have to!*"

For Jo it seems important to 'go out' and be seen by people. "*I have a big ego as a transvestite. I like to be seen.*" He likes to fool people because it proves that his creation is convincing. He also said that when he goes out, "*it is not Jo dressed as his alter ego, but it is Jo.*" This example of 'dedoublement' makes clear that Jo wants his feminine alter ego to come alive and wishes 'her' to be recognised as such. Also, not only does Jo want to give

the opportunity to his 'double' to 'go out', but he also wants transvestites to be known and recognised by others as human beings and not as psychologically disturbed people or freaks. As the feminine Jo, he goes out shopping and even to a dancing class. He also appears on television programmes and in local and national newspapers talking about transvestism. Jo says that transvestites need to be known and to be accepted by society, because people are afraid of what they do not know and that this is one of the major reason transvestites are rejected. Appearing so openly in this way is only possible because his wife knows about his transvestism. Also his children are grown up and will not suffer discrimination as a result of their father's behaviour to the same extent as they might have done when of school age.

## 1.2 Christine

Christine is in his early seventies and a widow who cross-dresses fully most of the time, which is unusual, as most transvestites cross-dress only at certain times. His cross-dressing history is linked with his military career and his marriage. It seems that his wife discovered his transvestism at some point and whenever she found his clothes she threw them away or tore them up. He tried to talk about his transvestism, but she did not want to discuss it. Because of his transvestism, they drifted away from one another and lived apart, although they did not get divorced. It was only when his wife died in 1994 that Christine started cross-dressing all the time.

Christine's transvestism was discovered when he was a teenager and he was taken by a relative to a psychiatrist, but found no help there. He said that the psychiatrist did not ask him "*why*" he likes cross-dressing, but was trying to discover the origin of Christine's transvestism. Christine thought that therapy was a waste of time and abandoned it. In the early years of his cross-dressing Christine tried to stop his urges, but he always gave in to them. He said that if he was younger he might think about having a sex change, but thinks it is now too late. "*At my age there is no difference*". His thought about a sex change and the fact that he cross-dresses all the time means that Christine blurs the boundaries between

transvestism and transsexualism. However, unlike most transsexuals Christine has never said that he felt like a woman when he was younger and has never been disgusted by his male body. From my understanding, he considers himself to be at the edge of transsexualism because he cross-dresses full time. When he says that he is too old to have a sex change, it is as if old people are asexual and do not need to have the anatomy matching the gender identity to feel like a man or a woman. Thus for him, his male body dressed in female clothes seems to fulfil his gender identity. He said, "*as long as Christine is all right, all the rest is all right*". So, he feels fine if his feminine alter ego is accepted.

While cross-dressed, Christine likes to 'feel' feminine so he tries to dress in clothes that he perceives to be as feminine as possible. "*I don't feel like a man. I rather feel the other way. Tenderness and stuff like that. If anybody knew me before and after, I think that the way I am now is more like what people expect a woman to be.*" His reference to his stereotype of a woman's personality is very clear here. Every transvestite I met thinks that women are more tender and caring than men, and while expressing their 'dedoublement' they try to fulfil this notion. On the other hand, cross-dressing often relaxes transvestites and may thus give rise to warm feelings that they associate with the feminine. As Christine said "*I feel more relaxed being dressed like this [in female clothes] than as a man*".

Christine's mother died when he was two years old. His father tried to bring him up, but could not provide a stable home. As a result Christine often lived with relatives. He remembers that once as a child he was looking through some draws and found a pair of stockings. He put them on and after that he felt the urge to cross-dress. He masturbated while wearing the stockings and then felt guilty. "*Oh god, why am I doing this, I shouldn't be doing this*". As an adult he tried to stop cross-dressing "*The number of times I have parcelled my clothes off and put them in a carrier-bag and thrown them away ... you have that guilt about what you are doing*".

Christine left the army in 1971. It was a turning point in the history of his transvestism. While a full time soldier he had to be extremely discrete and secretive about his behaviour, but wore female underwear under his uniform. The only time he could cross-dress fully was at a fancy dress party or at home, hidden from his wife. When he rose to a senior rank, it was easier for him to cross-dress because he had his own room and could wear night-dresses in bed, but still he had to be extremely careful. Until he left the army in 1971, he never dressed completely as a woman, only using a few female items such as underwear and night-dresses. When he left the army, he found the telephone number of a woman providing services to transvestites. He visited her for a week-end and she dressed him up completely with make-up and a wig. For the first time in his life he went out cross-dressed. It was then that he bought his first wig and make-up. It was also in this period that he met other transvestites who he found through a contact magazine. "*It is only in 1971 when I met other people who had exactly the same feeling as I have that the guilty feeling went away*". These people put him in touch with *The Beaumont Society* who gave him the telephone number of the group in Darlington.

For Christine it was a great relief to meet fellow transvestites. He told me that until they make contact "*all transvestites think they are the only ones in the world*". From 1971, he grew more confident about his cross-dressing. When he left the army he became a lorry driver, hiding his female clothes in his truck to avoid discovery by his wife. Sometimes, he would tell his wife that he had to go away for the week-end for training, as he remained a part-time soldier in the Territorial Army. In fact he went to meet other transvestites and cross-dress. During the week, if the need was there, he would also cross-dress while driving his truck. Sometimes, after leaving home, he would call his work place to tell them that he could not come that day because he was sick. He would then go to *Transformation*, a transvestites' shop in Newcastle, and spend the day there. But such specialised shops are extremely expensive and nowadays, he goes shopping in ordinary clothes shops.

Another crucial period during Christine's career as a transvestite came when his wife fell ill and was confined to a wheelchair. This meant that Chris could no longer disappear at the week-ends. However, it also meant that because his wife was restricted to the ground floor of the house he had the whole of the upstairs to himself and was able to avail himself of this opportunity to cross-dress without fear of detection. When Christine's wife died in 1994, he started cross-dressing whenever he was at home. Once a female neighbour caught him, but they were able to talk and his neighbour became used to finding him cross-dressed. Since becoming a widower, Christine has built his confidence and created a very convincing feminine image.

Because of financial difficulties, Christine had to sell his house and move to another neighbourhood. He now lives in a street where he is the only man among seven widows. When he moved in, he decided to tell all his neighbours about his transvestism. He told them that when they see a woman at his house, it is likely to be him. His female neighbours accept Christine's explanation that he feels more relaxed when cross-dressed and they are happy to visit him. In return, he gives them help, such as doing their shopping and repairing small things in their house. He asked his neighbours if they wanted to call him Chris or Christine and they opted for his masculine name. He says that he is appreciated by his neighbours who are pleased to have a man among them. He says that they probably feel safer with a man as he can help them when needed and maybe protect them, because even if he is cross-dressed, he is still a man under his female clothes.

He goes shopping both as Christine or Chris, but when he goes out as Christine he is careful not to do so at certain times, as his relatives are likely to be shopping in the same area and he does not want to be recognised. Nowadays, among his relatives, only his daughter and son know about his transvestism. *"My daughter and my son know I'm dressed, but I never dress in front of them. My two grandchildren don't know I dress and I want to keep it that way"*. When Christine goes shopping, he always wears women's

underwear and as soon as he returns home he changes into female clothes. Wearing feminine underwear under his masculine clothes indicates that Christine needs to feel that even under the masculine appearance, he continues to express his 'dedoublement'.

It is important for Christine to pass and be accepted as a woman. He says that even if people notice that he is a man he does not mind, as they usually do not say anything and at the end of the day he always gets what he needs. He does not try to change his voice. He is however concerned to have the right shape and the appropriate clothing to pass as a woman. He pointed out that, "*You have to think about the little things women do and what they look like*". He notices that a lot of transvestites forget to remove the hairs on their hands, "*you have to get rid off all the male hair.*" Nowadays, he is very confident about his female image and does not need to spend lots of time in front of the mirror. "*When I'm dressed I don't look in the mirror anymore. I'm confident for the rest of the day.*" He does not try to achieve the image of a certain type of woman, as he is aware that the 'woman' he is presenting depends on his body features and not his clothes. So, he just dresses as 'Christine'. This means that after experimenting with different types of clothing he has found a style and an image that suits him and his personality. The female 'double' he creates corresponds to his perceptions of his 'dedoublement'.

### 1.3 Jerry

Jerry is 43 and single. He started wearing female clothes in his teens, but cannot recall exactly when. During his early twenties he started cross-dressing fully with make-up and a wig to fulfil the complete feminine image. When he started wearing female clothes he was using any garments available in the house. He says that he did not associate cross-dressing with sexual excitement. "*I don't know why I had this fascination. Just like, I suppose, teenage girls who want to try their mother's clothes. There is nothing sexual or funny about it. You just do it.*" He said that he was trying feminine clothes out of curiosity and because they looked nice. He knew he was transgressing "*it's hard at an early age ... You feel you are doing something you shouldn't do.*" At this point he was not trying to

produce a particular effect. *"No particular look. You don't have a sense of fashion"*. However, as the years passed he began to create his personal feminine image, buying a wig and make-up. *"Now I have a sense of fashion. I have tried different wigs and different looks"*.

Nowadays, Jerry has achieved a very convincing feminine image, but he says that he does not cross-dress too often *"because of the inhibition of society. It's not an acceptable thing. If it was acceptable I would dress more often."* He said that years ago people were shocked by women wearing trousers and he is wondering why it should be different with men dressing in female clothes. Even though he goes out cross-dressed and has told his mother and sister about his transvestism, he is still aware that not everybody will accept his behaviour and so keeps it as secret as possible. He told his mother about his transvestism a few years ago *"because I wanted her to know"*. He said he wanted to cross-dress without it being a secret from everyone. As we shall see in the following chapter, it was a shock for his mother, Rose, to discover the transvestism of her son. But both now feel they have benefited from Jerry's openness.

As a factory worker, raised in the North East of England, Jerry feels he is supposed to present a masculine image in his everyday life. So when cross-dressing he is careful not to shave his legs as he plays football and does not want any of his team mates or friends to think that he is effeminate. When dressed in his men's clothes, Jerry presents a masculine image. He works in a factory as a driver of a forklift truck and has hobbies such as football and body training, so no one questions his masculine image. Only his mother and sister know about his 'dedoublement'. Even if Jerry does body training and does not shave his legs, he presents one of the most feminine images among the Darlington group. He is one of those who pass without any problem as he is slender and not too tall. However, he indulges in cross-dressing only once in a while, as he knows that his behaviour is considered as unmasculine. He wants to preserve his masculine image, which he sees reflected in his job and sporting hobbies.

Jerry considers his transvestism as a hobby and a "*work of art*". "*You have to have interests*". He wants to express his feminine side, not to become a woman. When he achieves a feminine image of himself with which he is satisfied, he takes photographs. Photography is another of his hobbies. He says that with practice he has learnt how to look more convincing when cross-dressed. Nowadays, while he is putting his make-up on, he does aim at perfection, because he says that no woman would spend two hours in front of a mirror to get ready. The female image he tries to achieve is a "*gorgeous look, elegant and classic*". He likes "*smart style*". He sometimes goes shopping cross-dressed in order to have feedback from the reaction of people in the street. He said that if he has done a good job with his feminine figure, he feels he can go out. He told me that once he went to a restaurant with a fellow transvestite and they were spotted by people who came to talk to them and ask them question about their transvestism. Commenting on this incident he said "*people do notice and they will say if you look like a horror or very nice*".

When I asked him about his childhood, he replied that he had a relatively happy childhood. His parents divorced when he was very young and he had a good relationship with his stepfather. He feels that his family circumstances did not have any sort of influence on his transvestism. While explaining this to me I understood that Jerry had done some readings in order to understand his behaviour. As seen in **Chapter 2**, one hypothesis is that transvestism has its origins in an unstable family environment. Jerry was also very critical about the behaviour of other transvestites who, as he puts it, are "*on the fetishist side*". By this he means transvestites who take soft porn pictures of themselves in feminine underwear or PVC corsets and send them for publication in transvestites' magazines. He also criticises transvestites who look like "*sluts*" and do not care about their feminine image. He said that it somehow degrades the image of the transvestite community. For him, transvestism should be "*the emulation of feminine beauty*" and not the degradation of women as sexual objects. He wishes that transvestism would not be confused with sexual disorders.

#### 1.4 Ghislaine

Ghislaine is a Belgian transvestite in his early fifties. He is a mechanic and owns the motorbike shop where I met him. I did not get the chance to tape an interview with him, but spent an afternoon chatting with him in the back of his shop.

Ghislaine has always been very open about his transvestism and has gone out cross-dressed since his early twenties. He was cross-dressed when he met his wife who was the waitress. Her boss had been very rude to her and Ghislaine comforted her. They chatted all evening and started dating each other. Since she knew about her husband's transvestism from the very first day they met, there is a great understanding between the two of them. After the birth of their daughter, they decided to be open about Ghislaine's transvestism, so the child would grow up in an environment where clothing is not gendered. Nowadays, their daughter is in her mid-twenties and accepts her father's transvestism and he says she does not seem to feel uncomfortable about it.

Ghislaine and his wife often go out together to pubs or night-club while he is cross-dressed. Sometimes people spot him and comment on his behaviour. Instead of running away, he usually approaches them and talks to them to explain why he is cross-dressed and what a transvestite is. He told me that usually, after he has talked to them, people are more accepting and positive towards transvestites. In his opinion, a lot of people reject transvestism mainly because they are ignorant about it.

Ghislaine told me that he is very different when cross-dressed. To support this he telephoned his wife and gave me the receiver to have a chat with her. She told me that her husband is indeed another person when cross-dressed. When not cross-dressed she described him as a very strong character that can be aggressive and get into fights, but while cross-dressed he becomes "*kind and gentle*". She speaks about Ghislaine as if he is two persons in one. This differentiation underlines the importance of the 'dedoublement' which is at work. As I did not meet him cross-dressed, or other people who know him, I

could not verify the existence of these two very different personas expressed when cross-dressed or not. Ghislaine has a very good relationship with his wife, but he nearly jeopardised it a few years ago. He stopped cross-dressing for a while, as he did not feel the need. He could not explain why he stopped, as there was no obvious reason for it. His wife as well as his daughter knew about it and never asked him to stop as they were accepting him the way he is. This lasted for about a year and then he went back to cross-dressing, but did not tell his wife about it. He was afraid that she would not accept it anymore even if she had previously done so. He thought that he could hide the fact by cross-dressing while at work after closing the shop at night. Unfortunately she found out and got very upset, as she was expecting him to be open and straightforward with her.

Since Ghislaine has mostly been open about his transvestism and has an accepting wife, he is generally very confident and sure about himself. A few years ago he attempted to start a group for transvestites in an apartment he had redecorated for the occasion, but he had to stop because other transvestites were so envious of his relationship with his wife that they nearly jeopardised his marriage. He said that a few members of the group were so jealous that they tried to break up the marriage by telephoning his wife to warn her that Ghislaine was out chatting up other women. His wife would then rush to check on him. Ghislaine got so fed up with these situations and the arguments they caused that he abandoned the group. Since then, he goes out only with his wife while cross-dressed and does not want to meet other transvestites.

## **2. Shaping a 'woman'**

Transvestites cross-dress in female outfits that reflect their personal choice and image of the women they want to personify. They know that under the woman they want to present in public is their own male body. As Jo told me, "*You try to create the perfect woman with your own physical character.*" So, when expressing his 'dedoublement', he does not try to model himself on a real woman, but creates a female version of himself with a wig, make-up and clothes' style that he believes suits him. Jo says that after years of

practice and self-criticism about his own female image: "*You really get into it. When you look in the mirror you try to perfect 'her'. You are looking for the perfection!*". He said that transvestites are looking for perfection. They try to get as close as possible to a feminine image made out of their masculine features and will feminise their body as much as possible. Transvestites will not take feminine hormones, but they do usually add some padding around their hips, on the buttock and a pair of false breasts. They are very careful about their feminine shape and transvestites who do not make an effort to feminise their body risk being criticised by others. As Christine said aloud to me during a meeting that a new transvestite was attending, "*look at him he doesn't look right*". He said that to pass, a transvestite needs the right body shape.

To feminise their body features, not only will transvestites add some padding, but they will also shave, depilate or hide their body's hair such as beard, chest, arms, legs and even hands. Shaving and depilating will depend on the secrecy of the transvestites. In cases where the wife is not aware of her husband's transvestism, he will avoid altering any of his masculine characteristics such as body hair. Others, such as Jerry, do not shave or depilate their arms, chest and legs due to their sporting hobby, as they do not want people to suspect. Instead, they wear long skirts and feminine boots or wear two pair of tights, like the Drag Queens. Usually men's leg muscles are more developed than women's and the double pair gives a smoother shape to their legs. A few secret transvestites attending the meetings have not reached a refined level of their 'dedoublement'. So, they do not pay so much attention to these little details, thus revealing their masculine features and destroying the feminine image they were trying to achieve.

Jo has his legs and arms professionally waxed and his eyebrows plucked and nails varnished by a beautician. Not all transvestites have their nails varnished and eyebrows plucked, but they try as much as possible to keep their nails clean and a certain length. Much depends on the kind of work they do. To transform into his feminine alter ego, after the preparation done by the beautician, Jo only needs to shave his beard and apply his foundation, eye shadow and blusher. After adding padding to obtain female curves, he puts

his dress on. He says "*I don't see Jo in the mirror until I put on my wig*". After completing his transformation he hopes to achieve a certain image. "*When I look in the mirror after transformation, I hope to see a woman. If I don't, then it isn't right. If I just look like a bloke in a frock, I start all over again. With the experience I have now it doesn't happen. Every time I see my image it's about right*". In the process of refining and developing the expression of their 'dedoublement', transvestites will also give their feminine 'double' a name. The choice often comes from the feminisation of their own masculine name. It can also be the name of their wife or daughter or a name they like. Thus, the choice of the feminine name of their alter ego is often in close relation to themselves or family.

To finish the feminine image, and with some practice and experience, transvestites will complete their creation with adapted body movement, facial expression and speech. To achieve this, transvestites observe women and try to reproduce their body movements. A wife complained to me that her husband observes her when she is putting her make-up on or when walking. Once, I felt observed by a transvestite while dancing. I could see him trying to reproduce my movements and it was a very strange feeling. For transvestites, women are the models for what they want to achieve. Transvestites know they will never be women, but they believe they can be feminine and to achieve this femininity they have to learn from women. Femininity for women is largely unconscious, learned from a very early age, but men need to practice what they consider to be feminine. As Jo said, "*I try to emulate a woman as much as I can*". So he softens his voice and adopts more feminine movements. The final touch to the feminine image is smell. A lot of transvestites give the final touch to their image with feminine perfume. Not only do they like the scent, but also realise that it is an important element to complete their feminine image. Not all transvestites are able to achieve a convincing image, as it needs training and experience. Among the older transvestites, several had become adroit at mastering the process, as in the example of Christine.

The 'dedoublement' from a man to a woman is sometimes pretty astonishing. The most experienced transvestites manage to transform bodies that no one would doubt as masculine into a feminine version. Even if they have their hair removed and their eyebrows plucked, their image is still masculine in their everyday life. Someone who does not know that Jo is a transvestite would never notice that his nails are polished and eyebrows nicely shaped. Jerry who plays football is more careful about nail varnish, eyebrows plucking and shaved legs. He does not pluck his eyebrows, but wears varnish that he is careful to remove afterward. To manage both identities of their 'dedoublement', transvestites have to be careful to retain certain features particular to men such as hairy legs, but when they are cross-dressed, they have to hide those features that are considered as non-feminine.

Transvestites have different ways and means of obtaining all the items they need to feminise their body. What they told me in conversations and interviews is very similar to what is found in the literature (Buhrich 1969; Talamini 1982). The very first clothing they collected in their teens usually came from their mothers or sisters. They borrowed or stole panties and other items. Some of them also stole clothing from clotheslines. Others had a sympathetic sister or friend who guessed their need and gave them female clothes. Later on, the secret transvestites often go shopping in specialised shops such as *Transformation*, which exist in major British cities and are specialised to serve transvestites. These shops also offer other services such as dressing, posture and photo sessions. From what the transvestites told me, these shops are very expensive and thus, transvestites take their chance in non specialised shops if they are confident enough.

In England, the transvestites' favourite shop is *Marks & Spencer* because they can buy their clothes, try them on back home and return or exchange them if they do not suit. Also the staff do not ask any questions. The other favourite shops are Charity Shops because they are really cheap, but in all cases transvestites need to know their female size. The easiest period for them to go shopping is around Christmas and New Year, because lots of men buy lingerie or perfume for their wives or girlfriends at this time. During the year they can always pretend that their purchases are for a birthday present. As my informants

told me, it seems that they never have trouble buying women's garments. Sometimes they notice a strange look from the shop assistants, but none of them has ever been asked to leave the shop. They said that they are customers and the only thing a shop wants is their money. In general, shopping habits depend on the transvestite's self-confidence and opportunities. Mail order might be the perfect solution for transvestites, but they are often afraid that using this system will lead a wife or partner to discover their transvestism.

### **2.1. Transvestites and the approach to female clothes**

Transvestism can be expressed in different ways and be internalised at different levels. Docter (1988) notes that the frequency of cross-dressing increases over time and more items of clothing are added. At the beginning, transvestism is often intermittent, but likely to increase in frequency and may become continuous. Stoller (1966) notes that it is known that many transvestites experience periods of disgust and fear of cross-dressing or even lose the urge to cross-dress. During these periods, transvestites often get rid of their wardrobe and swear they will never cross-dress again, but the desire is likely to return. This happened with several of my informants, such as Jo, Christine and Ghislaine, who felt disgusted by their behaviour or lost the urge to cross-dress for a while and destroyed their female accessories. Transvestites often perceive their cross-dressing as a need that they have to fulfil. They see cross-dressing as a part of their personality that cannot be eradicated. Jo said that if you try to stop it "*It's like trying to pull off you leg ... you don't exist anymore.*" This demonstrates the importance of the 'dedoublement' that is at work. Jo says the only thing you can do is to promise to 'try' to stop cross-dressing. Stoller states that under sufficient motivation the transvestites may refrain from cross-dressing for months or years and that this is as effective as any psychiatric or aversion therapy or jail sentence.

Transvestism seems to be an evolving process, as also noted by Talamini (1982). It appears from the interviews that several of my informants experienced erotic feelings and masturbated at early stage of their cross-dressing, but most transvestites told me that

nowadays it is only "*relaxation*". So, after years of practice, it seems there is no more eroticism for transvestites, but just the expression of their 'dedoublement'. As Jo said, "*I just want to be me*". Jerry and other transvestites say cross-dressing is like putting on their male clothes except that they feel more relaxed in their female clothes. Angela expressed his feeling when cross-dressed, "*It's difficult to describe ... Feeling a bit passive, feeling contentment.*" The way I understood Angela's feelings were that when cross-dressed, he does not fight anymore against his inner femininity that he wants to express and feels content to be able to express his 'dedoublement'. At the same time he feels that there is some ostentation and vulgarity in his behaviour. Hirschfeld wrote about transvestites' feeling when cross-dressed. He describes how transvestites, when using women's clothes feel confined, imprisoned, oppressed using something that does not suit or belong to them, but at the same time they have a feeling of security, restfulness and exaltation (Hirschfeld 1952:188).

Transvestites' assigned male gender and identity are in contradiction to their cross-dressing. Transvestites like to dress in women's clothes, but they do not want to *be* women. This has also been noted by Kessler and McKenna (1978). A very good example is that when I was interviewing Jo cross-dressed, he was using a softened voice to talk to me. Then the phone rang and he answered with a very deep masculine voice as if he wanted to make sure that the person on the phone would not question his masculinity. Jo says, "*I feel I'm a woman when I'm cross-dressed. I know I'm not. I'm pretending. It's an illusion.*" Deep inside, Jo knows he is male and wants to keep his male gender identity. Only sometimes he wants to dress as a woman. He believes that everyone has both feminine and masculine elements in their personality, but for transvestites the feminine elements are stronger. He says it is "*exciting*" to be able to control ones own creation.

Some transvestites try to stop their cross-dressing because, as described by Hirschfeld (1952), they know that this behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable, but the urge comes back. Others never try to stop as they enjoy cross-dressing only once in a while and consider it as a hobby, as in the case of Jerry. Angela told me that he never tried to

stop, as it was very much under control when his children were young, but nowadays, "*I gradually enjoy it more and more frequently as the years go by.*" Nowadays, he cross-dresses most evenings. This follows Talamini (1982) and Docter's (1988) argument that transvestism is not a static condition. Indeed, it seems that the more transvestites cross-dress, the more they enjoy it and the more often they want to do it and thus, it might become a 'habit'. As we shall see in the following chapter, it is the frequency of the appearance of the feminine alter ego that bothers mostly the wives who have accepted their husband transvestism.

Jerry enjoys male activities and would not like to cross-dress every day. He said he would go out more often if our society was more open and accepted transvestism, but because of social pressure he just does it once in a while like any "*casual hobby*". By comparing his transvestism to a hobby, Jerry wants to normalise his behaviour and it also gives his 'dedoublement' a leisure aspect that implies time and relaxation and in his case, creation. "*To me, it's almost like a work of art ... It's painting myself up. It's painting this image and behind this image it's still me as a man*". If he did not feel pleased with the "*finished product*" (Jerry's words), he would not do it as it is a hard work to achieve a satisfactory image. For Jerry, there is no sexual feeling towards his cross-dressing, instead he likens it to the satisfaction of creating a work of art.

Jerry also compares transvestism to smoking and the quantity of cigarettes each smoker smokes a day. He said the some people smoke more than others and it is the same with transvestism. Some men cross-dress everyday, whereas others do so once in a while. Jerry cross-dresses once every fortnight, Jo cross-dresses at least twice a week, but both of them still enjoys their male role. As Jo said "*try high heels for a day and you will feel what I mean*". By telling me this, Jo underlines the discomfort of high heeled shoes that are attached to the stereotypes of women. So, he enjoys wearing female clothes, but he would feel 'uncomfortable' to be a woman as he feels he is a man.

When I asked Jerry, who has cross-dressed for about seventeen years, what he feels when he puts his female clothes on he replied, "*it's like asking a woman. It's easier for a woman because she does it on a daily basis, but it's not such a big thing*". For Jerry, and other transvestites, transforming themselves into a woman is "*no special feeling. It's like dressing as a man. You try to act differently, more womanly. ... You go through a role and you act it.*" In these cases, their transvestism might have become a habit as they say they do not feel anything particular about it. Jerry is aware that some people experience transvestism as a need, but for him it is equivalent to watching football or movies. He says "*it is just something that you do*". Except that what he does transgresses social expectations, but Jerry has become so used to crossing the gendered boundaries that cross-dressing has become a habit. He never tried to end his transvestism because it is only occasional. Jerry says that it is the mentality of the people who reject transvestism that create a negative reaction, but that there is nothing egregious about it. For example, no one would question a woman who is dressing in men's clothes. So, he wonders why should it be such a problem about men cross-dressing, "*it's just an everyday thing*".

## **2.2. Clothing the body**

In Liège, Darlington and Newcastle most transvestites I met usually wanted to impersonate 'any women' who could blend within the crowd. To achieve this image, transvestites select what they consider to be feminine ordinary items. Still differences are noticeable depending on personality, taste and age and, this also gives an indication of the female image that transvestites try to present when expressing their 'dedoublement'.

Clothing does indeed communicate, but not in the manner of speech or writing; what it communicates has mostly to do with the self, chiefly our social identity as this is framed by cultural values bearing on gender, sexuality, social status, age, etc. (Davis 1992:191)

Like women, transvestites are careful to choose colour and make-up that match with their colour of skin and eyes. Before adopting a style and colours of clothes, they try different types. For the make-up, they experiment with different colours of foundation, lipstick, and eye shadow as well as follow advice from friends before finding what suits them. They also adapt their clothing and make-up in accordance to their activities.

Even more so, perhaps, than the utterances produced in everyday face-to-face interaction, the clothing-fashion code is highly context-dependent. That is, what some combination of clothes or a certain style emphasis "means" will vary tremendously depending upon the identity of the wearer, the occasion, the place, the company, and even something as vague and transient as the wearer's and the viewers' moods. (Davis 1992:8)

Jo's wardrobe, which I was invited to visit, contained attire such as classical two piece suits, and knee length dresses. There were also several evening dresses, long and short, a nurse, a schoolgirl and an army uniform. This made me wonder if Jo was also a fetishist, as these uniforms are often mentioned in the transvestites' magazines as fetish clothes. He said that these uniforms were used mainly for fancy dress parties and not to fulfil a fantasy. Jo also had different attires for line dancing as he joins a dancing class once a week as 'she'. As Jo has cross-dressed for a long time, he has accumulated a large amount of clothes, wigs and accessories. With all of them he can create a different woman every day. 'She' can be blond, brown or red with curly, straight, long or short hair. Usually, Jo creates his 'double' in relation to the place he is going to and his mood.

When going to the restaurant, transvestites usually wear cocktail dresses such as a blue Chinese style silk dress with a short brown bob-wig for Jo; a long sleeved red lace top with an ankle length black dress and curly blond shoulder length wig for Alison. The exception was a young transvestite of my age who was wearing a low cut long sleeved pink top, a sequinned purple mini skirt and a red bob-wig. It was the only time I saw him in the group. At the meeting in the house, dresses are of a more everyday style such as a white blouse, black knee length skirt and red jacket and brown bob-wig for Jo; a flowery knee length dress and a short curly brown wig for Christine. The choice of clothes of the married transvestites reflects not only the personal taste of the transvestite, but also what

the wife, who is aware of her husband's transvestism, finds acceptable. While visiting Lily and Jo, I often heard her complaining about the length of her husband's skirts. They always seemed too short for her taste. When members of the Newcastle group go out to night-clubs, they wear brighter colours or less classical clothes than when meeting for a glass of wine at Karen's apartment. Even so, they do not wear leather, sequins and bright make-up like Drag Queens.

The different types of clothing that transvestites wear depending on their mood and the occasion reflect that their 'dedoublement' is not only the creation of the image of *one* woman but *a* woman, as they will place this woman in different situations. It is not rare to read in transvestites' magazines transvestites telling their stories about going hill walking or sailing cross-dressed. So, as every woman, transvestites often own several types of dresses that they wear depending on the place they are going to. Some transvestites, such as Jo, not only create one image, but several images of the same woman. Jo owns several wigs, which he says are the final touch of his feminine look. As any woman who may enjoy going to the hairdresser to change her hair look, Jo enjoys wearing different wigs that give him a different look too. From my observation, most of the transvestites I met were usually wearing one style of wig that they felt comfortable with and they just adapted their clothing depending on the situation.

Another interesting detail is the underwear. Jo explained to me that he usually wears two items of feminine underwear on top of each other to have the right pelvic shape. The first one very tight to keep the penis between his legs and the second more feminine to look like nice feminine underwear. From what I could understand from several of my informants, feminine underwear is also an important detail of their creation. When creating their 'double', everything has to be feminine including the underwear. Also, the underwear is often padded and thus gives a feminine shape to their male body. So, not only do they give a feminine image, but also the feminine body contour. Some transvestites, such as Christine, even wear feminine underwear when dressed as a man. This implies that even when presenting a masculine image there is still some 'dedoublement' at work.

### **3. Development of self and identity**

Alongside the elaboration of their gender, people also develop their own sense of self and personal identity. The social recognition of an individual's personal identity is connected with the rise of a new and decisive form of individualism in the recent history of western societies. Modernity freed the individual from earlier prevailing beliefs in the divinely ordained and thus unchanging nature of social life. The expansion of the idea of the individuality of the subject began with humanistic perspectives of the Italian Renaissance. The Reformation set the individual conscience free from dogmatic institutions and exposed it directly to God. Along with these changes, scientific developments gave individuals the capacity to enquire, investigate and discover the mysteries of the world around. These ideas were associated with the notion of an indivisible subject, a unity that cannot be divided, and is thus a singular and unique individual (Hall 1994).

Every culture constructs its own concept of the 'body' and of the 'self' (Strathern and Lambek 1998), thus, it is impossible to develop a simple theory of *the* body and *the* self (Synnott 1993). Any such theories would need to change constantly following social changes, because the body and the self are at the heart of social interactions and self-identity. So, the relations between the body, society and the self are closely integrated (Synnott 1993). In western thought, the body and the self are isolated from each other, while necessarily in relation with each other. This embodied self is learned from early childhood through exploration when the child discovers the features of objects, others and his own body and thus becomes aware that s/he is a discrete entity distinct from everything and everybody around her/him (Giddens 1991).

The self is not only embodied, but also gendered (Moore 1994). At an early age, children learn and constitute their self-representation in regard to their gender. This social learning pushes them to act in their everyday life according to their gendered self, and thus follow the general practice of what is to be a man or a woman (Moore 1994). Mead studied the development of the self in early childhood:

... as the child does take the attitude of the other and allows that attitude of the other to determine the thing he is going to do with reference to a common end, he is becoming an organic member of society. He is taking over the morale of that society and is becoming an essential member of it. He belongs to it in so far as he does allow the attitude of the other that he takes to control his own immediate expression. (1934:159)

The development of the self seems to go along with the social learning of gender identity discussed earlier. Thus, the formation of self-identity is also culturally defined and constructed in relation to interactions with other people (Woodward 1997). In this way gender identity includes both personal and social experiences, individual and cultural factors (Strauss 1969).

... a person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct. He takes its language as a medium by which he gets his personality, and then through a process of taking the different roles that all the others furnish he comes to get the attitude of the members of the community. (Mead 1934:162)

Erchak has the same point of view that it is through social interaction that a person develops, "*learns cultural rules, and becomes a member of a society* (1992:34)." The self develops within each person as a result of social experiences. Thus, it is not a solitary self because it cannot arise outside of social experience (G. Mead 1934, M. Mead 1952). But selves are not replicated, rather each is created by a different person having had different experiences.

The self can be viewed as a process rather than an entity. The same man, at different ages, might have the same stereotype of what a man 'should' or 'ought' to be, but he might express it in different way. A young boy may enact his masculinity by playing rough games or starting a fight, as a mature man will feel masculine if he is married with children and able to be the breadwinner and protector of his family. Also stereotypes

change with time, following social changes. So rather than speaking of self-identity as something finished, we should express it as self-identification, as an ongoing process (Hall 1994). Thus, the self is not a given, but a variable and complex concept that evolves over a person's lifetime (Cohen 1994).

Erchak (1992) mentions that, in western societies, few people think of the 'self' as something shared by others around us, but as something set apart from others, unique to each individual. The 'self' internalises the attitudes of other people in society towards himself or herself, but at the same time, an individual's sense of self may serve to separate him, or her, from others (Erchak 1992). In fact, as Erchak argues, the 'self' both sets each of us off as a unique individual, but also ties us to the other people. The self being linked with the individual as well as with the collective creates contradictions, as people must affirm their individuality as well as their membership of collectives. This double identification and reconciliation between a single person and others is necessary to human society (Cohen 1994). Social structures force individuals to belong to well-defined categories and therefore compromise our individuality. Thus, the self cannot be completely autonomous but still, it is unique to each individual on the basis of personal experiences. The concept of the self presented by Erchak being shared with others as well as becoming a unique personal experience has also been discussed by Baumeister and Tice (1986:64-67). They distinguish different kinds of self: the *public self*, which is how one is known by others, his/her reputation and public role and the *private self* which is the reality of an individual in the sense of behaviours, traits and characteristics.

The construction of 'self-identity' is closely linked to the construction of the self as a reflexive project (Docter 1988). Every individual interacts with his surroundings and internalises his/her own experiences through a lifetime. So an individual is not what we are (when born), but what we make of ourselves (Giddens 1991), as we have both personal and social experiences that will influence the construction of self-identity. The dominant model in western Europe is that the self is unitary with the individual having his or her own particular experience and knowledge of the world. But, there is something imaginary about

this unity. The self remains incomplete, it is always in the process of formation. Hall (1994:122) argues that the identity of an individual is not complete and gets its wholeness "*by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others*". The search for identity is the search for the different parts of our 'self' to reconstruct it into a unity and the fantasised pleasure of fullness. Transvestites, by expressing what they call their 'feminine side' of their personality are responding to a cultural imperative to reconstruct their 'wholeness'. The reconstruction of this wholeness could be compared to what I have called the transvestites' 'dedoublement'.

### 3.1. Transvestite's identities

Money (1974) and Docter (1988) support the assumption that transvestism is a disorder of the self by stating that transvestites acquire a "*second self*" or "*alternate identity*" when cross-dressed, as some transvestites may change not only appearance, but also attitudes and personality. During my research, I also noticed these changes, as in the case of Angela who adapts his food taste and Ghislaine who changes his personality, but I argue that transvestites express a 'dedoublement'. I believe that the transvestites' expression of their 'dedoublement' is conscious and under their own control and not unconscious as Money and Docter seem to assume. It appears to me that it is a conscious acting out of a fantasy instead of an unconscious expression of an 'alternate identity'. The transvestites that I studied claimed a masculine gender identity, but regarded their personality as both masculine and feminine.

From what I have observed, transvestites can perfectly distinguish which identity they are enacting and when. They develop and refine their feminine alter ego after years and years of practice. The only time transvestites allow their feminine identity to be expressed is when they are cross-dressing. The endorsement of this female identity is managed in a ritual that begins with the basic preparations, as described by Jo, for feminising the body such as shaving the body hair and padding their body to get a feminine shape. Indeed, even when performing their feminine creation, transvestites never forget

that they are men attempting to pass as women. Some transvestites may perform their feminine identity sufficiently well to dupe others and pass as women, but even when cross-dressed, they never abandon their masculine identity, but conceal it.

The observations made during my fieldwork lead me to suggest that transvestites are simply performing a representation of their internalised feminine identity that cannot be expressed in their everyday life and which complements their masculine identity, in the way that Hall (1994) describes. Hall proposes that identity is formed through unconscious development, but that this evolution is always 'in process' and incomplete. He implies that identity is never finished and individuals looking for wholeness will fill it from outside by imagining how they are seen by others. In the case of transvestites, they complete their identity by creating a 'double' that counterbalances their masculine image. By creating and expressing a feminine alter ego, transvestites are trying to "*recapture this fantasised pleasure of fullness*" (Hall 1994:122). As seen, transvestites have the feeling that their personality is completed by their feminine alter ego. Thus, their performance is a conscious elaboration of a feminine image fulfilling the transvestite's feminine ideal.

This 'femininity' or 'feminine side' that transvestites claim to have, might not be comparable to what women consider to be femininity, but is what transvestites as men refer to as their 'own' femininity. Indeed, transvestites who want to be regarded as men and generally enact masculine stereotypes in their everyday life by performing in ways that are expected of men. Transvestites usually have strong ideas about what femininity is and how a feminine woman should look like. When they are cross-dressing, they are trying to fulfil their own idealised images of femininity. They try, as much as possible to 'enact' this femininity so after years of practice, what they consider to be feminine becomes 'their' femininity and then the expression of 'their' alter ego. This 'femininity' involves the enactment and reproduction in a performance of various female stereotypes existing in our society. So, by performing through their created 'double' what they consider to be 'their'

femininity, they enact their 'own' feminine stereotypes, some of which might not be shared by other transvestites. This clearly appears when looking at the transvestites magazines and the different groups I visited in England that share a particular feminine ideology.

As seen earlier, the creation of their 'double' is also developing. Transvestites do not express a well defined image of their alter ego when they start cross-dressing. They usually use any items they can find before being able to fulfil the feminine image they want. This search for the perfection of their 'double' was made clear to me by Justine. Justine is a transvestite in his late thirties who has created his feminine image since he got divorced a few years ago. Before, he was hiding from his wife and was dressing secretly in his bathroom. Since he joined a transvestite group, he has developed and refined the image of his alter ego. He showed me a succession of pictures of his alter ego taken eighteen months ago, twelve months ago, nine months ago and so on. On each picture, there was a change in the style of clothes, the colour of the wig, the make-up and even different body shapes. He said that now he has finally achieved the feminine image he wants to, and feels comfortable with it.

Justine did not only develop a feminine image that he believed corresponded to his personality, but has also developed a particular 'personality' that goes along with his 'double'. Justine, when not cross-dressed, seems rather bland and does not stand out in the crowd, but in contrast his feminine alter ego is lively and out going. It seems that Justine is also more adventurous about food when he is cross-dressed, other wise he is strictly vegetarian. Once, in a meeting, he asked me if the eggs in the sandwiches were 'dairy' and straight away said that anyway he did not care. Justine told me that during the period he had to hide his cross-dressing from his wife, his only way to express his femininity was through practising ballet dancing. Both women and men dancers have to be elegant and gracious and, bodies of both genders are emphasised by tight clothes. Justine said he loves ballet dancing because it uses both strength and elegance, two qualities that he feels represent his masculine (strength) and feminine (elegance) sides.

Thus, the male transvestite possesses and wants to retain a male gender identity, but yearns to express what he commonly refers to as 'the feminine part of himself'. For example, Jerry plays football and goes to the gym and does not want to alter his masculine features such as his hairy legs, but he presents a very feminine image by concealing his masculine features. So his 'dedoublement' is expressed through two clearly polarised behaviours. Transvestites want to be very feminine when they perform as women, but they do not want to be women, as they do not feel themselves to be truly and fully women. By cross-dressing they are only acting out their feminine self-identity. Transvestites sometimes want to pass as women, but they also want to be recognised as men, as in the case of Jo, Jerry and Ghislaine who have masculine jobs that does not permit anyone to question their masculinity. They experience their self as performed in their everyday life as masculine.

Thus, transvestites' identity is related to conventional gender identities because even if male transvestites talk about expressing their feminine self, this makes sense only in relation to gender dichotomization (Bolin 1996; Devor 1989; Ekins and King 1997). Brittan (1989) states that:

... the implication to this is that even though we take our own gender identities for granted, even though we naturalise sexual differences by giving them the status of facts, we are nevertheless always in the business of putting together our sense of gender (1989:38).

This action of putting together our sense of gender always follows a particular society's norms. This is apparent in the attitudes of British and Belgian transvestites who want to be recognised as men, but also want to pass as women when cross-dressed. Some transvestites who go out and are very confident about their feminine image sometimes also like to be recognised as men when cross-dressed. An example of this is the case of Jo who passes so well that he likes to surprise people by using a very low masculine voice in order to be recognised as a cross-dressed man.

Butler (1995:32) suggests, "*what is exteriorised or performed can be understood only through reference to what is barred from the performance, what cannot or will not be performed*". Following her arguments, transvestism would not be the denial of a sense of identity, but the embracing of two identities, thus creating "*gender trouble*". Transvestites by asserting a masculine and a feminine identity when cross-dressed create gender confusion for the people who encounter them, as their 'dedoublement' permits simultaneous existence of the masculine gender and the performance of their feminine personality. Transvestites who do not want to be considered as effeminate men or to have any homosexual tendency, have constructed their feminine 'double' that express their feminine identity, but that is performed in parallel to their masculine identity.

Sociologists such as Becker (1964) and Goffman (1959) show that the public and self image of people depend on the way other people perceive them and how the actors themselves manipulate and feel about these perceptions. Human interactions centre on the way individuals negotiate meanings and identities in various public places. So, people are acting in their everyday life. As Turner argues:

Acting, like all 'simple' Anglo-Saxon words, is ambiguous - it can mean doing things in everyday life, or performing on the stage ... It may be the essence of sincerity - the commitment of the self to a line of action for ethical motives perhaps to achieve 'personal truth', or it may be the essence of pretence - when one 'plays a part' in order to conceal or dissimulate. (1982:102)

For transvestites, acting out their 'dedoublement' is achieving what Turner calls their "*personal truth*" or "*essence of sincerity*", as they have both a masculine and feminine personality. On the other hand, they also express the "*essence of pretence*" while concealing their gender and acting their feminine alter ego. So by revealing their feminine 'double' transvestites also conceal their masculine gender.

Goffman (1959) analyses interactions as dramaturgical performances. People prepare themselves 'backstage' for a public play. This preparation allows them to control the impression they make on the public while performing. In the morning when dressing, combing our hair and preparing ourselves we are fashioning our body to fit into variations

of the expected gender category structured by our society. Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967) both assert that the individual has to be in control of his body in social interactions. He must avoid gestures, signals or lack of bodily control that would be perceived as 'wrong' by others. However, Ekins and King believe that in the case of transvestites or transsexuals:

...the transgender identity breaks down the gender dichotomy by mixing and matching its characteristics in any combination. It is also a more open identity in that transgenderists are perceived as neither male nor female. (1997:6)

Transsexuals and transvestites, who know about how much the image they project in public will influence the impressions they make, really care about the way they might be perceived and a good performance will allow them to 'pass' in public. They will work on every detail they can think of: not only the clothes, wig and make-up, but also the body language, voice and masculine and feminine features.

As already seen, in Garfinkel's (1967) case study of Agnes, the author noticed that he was a highly accomplished liar, as he was able to fool other people including scientists about his gender attribution that was in fact male. Lying about his gender was a way to conserve the stable features of his socially constructed interactions. His masculine genitalia did not prevent him from being perceived as a woman because his hormonally shaped body, hairstyle and clothing matched a socially acceptable female image. Goffman (1959:25) called "*the complex of clothing, make-up, hairdo and other surface decorations*" the "*personal front*" which is consonant with other peoples' expectations. The personal front is an important component of self-identity as it is also a link between the social and the personal.

Thus, the identification of a person as male or female, in everyday life, has less to do with anatomical features than with the 'personal front'. This goes along Garfinkel's (1967) concept of the "cultural genitals". Indeed, for the author, 'genitals' are cultural as it is a social act that categorises males and females. Being aware of the social categorisation, transvestites who want to be able to fool people, adapt their 'personal front' to a socially

expected image of a woman. Ekins and King (1997:3) note that "*gender is attributed to social actors by self and others (Kessler and McKenna 1978) and is a fundamental element in the everyday presentation of self (Cahill 1989; Goffman 1979).*" Indeed the body is most of the time on display and under the appraisal of others. Feelings of bodily integrity depend on regular appraisal and responses by others (Giddens 1991). If the 'personal front' presented by transvestites matches an acceptable image of a woman, they are able to pass. As Christine told me, "*If you have got to dress, you have to do it right.*"

Goffman (1963) notes that individuals, by maintaining a certain physical distance between themselves and others, can influence the others to believe that they are members of the gender they are enacting. As a Belgian transvestite told me, when going out and meeting people, he makes sure that the person he will talk to looks at him first. This enables the other person to notice his feminine appearance and thus think that he is a woman. When it comes to start a conversation, his masculine voice will not give him away, as the other person already thinks he is a woman. This transvestite also told me that it is very hard for him and other transvestites to pass as a woman on the phone, as the other person does not have a feminine image in front of her/him.

This distance between the actor and others can also be provided by performing in a place with a mobile population, such as big cities where people look first at the general look and shape of the others and not the face and body language. Thus, any curvy shape wearing a dress or skirt would be considered as a woman. Transvestites who are sufficiently confident to go out cross-dressed, know about this process and take their chances by going out in city streets and shops away from their own locality, where they will encounter different people and thus limit their chance of being identified.

Warwick and Cavallaro's (1998) study regards clothing, which is one aspect of Goffman's 'personal front', as a symbolic system that safeguards, reinforces and strengthens gender boundaries. Sometimes clothing may also render these boundaries unclear or

ambiguous. Clothes 'frame' the body and connect the individual to others as well as expressing the self-identity and personal fantasy of the individual. Warwick and Cavallaro argue that:

Dress as a boundary is meant to trace a neat line between self and other: the limitation of physical visibility via clothing ... As margin, on the other hand, dress connects the individual to other bodies, it links the biological entity to the social ensemble and the private to the public. (1998:xvii)

Thus clothing does not only conceal the body's visual appearance, as in the case of transvestites who hide their masculine features under female clothes, but also communicates and connects the individual to a social group (Davis 1992; Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992; Warwick and Cavallaro 1998). So, transvestites who are able to hide their masculine body and give the impression of being feminine will be associated with the female gender because of their external image. Thus, the result of wearing clothing is the transformation of an incomplete and raw body into something culturally significant (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992; Warwick and Cavallaro 1998).

Barnes and Eicher (1992) venture in the same direction by arguing that humans have always worn clothing, decorated themselves with jewels or painting and even shaped the body. These additions or transformations are not only protective, but constitute social markers indicating an individual's status within a society. *"A cultural identity is thus expressed, and visual communication is established before verbal interaction even transmits whether such a verbal exchange is possible or desirable"* (Barnes and Eicher 1992:1). The identity expressed through clothing is defined geographically and historically and marks the belonging of an individual to a certain social group. This could be compared to Erchak's 'self' that is both unique to an individual and shared with others. Indeed, every person expresses his/her individuality through clothing. At the same time particular clothing reflects the individual's belonging to a certain group or strata of society. As seen earlier, this was noticeable in the different transvestites' groups I visited. So, *"The body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture [author emphasis]"* (Csordas in Epstein and Straub 1991:1).

Gender is thus recognised to be achieved through and by people in a certain context. Moynihan (1998:1073) states that "*gender is not something we are, but something we do in social interactions.* [author emphasis]." This follows Garfinkel's (1967) concept of the "cultural genitals". So, gender membership is communicated in social interaction through an individual's physical appearance, body language and clothing that are usually related to the individual's gender identity (Hirschauer 1997). We always assume, following the image we get from another individual, that the person has anatomical features under his or her clothes and a gendered identity matching the gendered image that he or she produces. Transvestites' capacity to pass in public depends on their clothes appearance and 'personal front' and thus, when they wear female clothing over male bodies they try to fashion a new public self. In their case, clothes protect as well as reveal identity.

Due to the prevailing gender dichotomization between men and women in western societies, men and women have to fulfil a certain image. This image does not only depend on their behaviour and features, but also on their appearance. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, fashion evolved to allow women to wear and adapt items of clothing that were once exclusive to men. Nowadays, women are allowed to wear clothes very similar to men's and may even behave in, a manner that is considered to be 'masculine' without encountering much social pressure (Davis 1992). Thus, women can dress depending on their mood and inspiration of the day. Men on the contrary have not had such an evolution in their clothing. They are still expected to dress and behave following a very strict code that does not allow any feminine characteristics. This may lead to the hypothesis that male to female transvestites are more common than female to male.

### **3.2. Going out and 'Passing'**

Transvestites do not only want to wear female clothes and perfect their feminine image, they also want to fool people while cross-dressed into thinking that they are real women (Beigle 1969; Kessler and McKenna 1978). The more confident transvestites, who

are assured of their feminine image and transvestite status, take great pleasure in going out in public without being spotted, and as they say, 'pass' as a woman. 'Passing' for some transvestites is sometimes not only being able to walk in the street without being spotted, but also being treated as a woman in various ways, such as men opening doors for them and so, enact their 'dedoublement' to the full woman's role. Still, transvestites who go out together do not expect their cross-dressed friends to open the door for them, as they know they are all men. Transvestites like to be treated as women emotionally, but not sexually, as they are men and do not want to be women, but 'pass' as women. After going shopping 'en femme' or out for dinner in restaurants, they often recount the story of their experience at group meetings or write them up for transvestites' magazines.

To be able to dupe others, many transvestites use a very common style of clothing adopted by many women in everyday life that will allow them to blend in the crowd. If transvestites' external presentation and body language does not correlate to the feminine image they want to project, they will be 'read' by others. This will lead to disappointment instead of the satisfaction and enjoyment that transvestites have while fooling people when passing. As Bornstein (1994) notes, the very concept of 'passing' demands the concepts of reading and being 'read'. If it was so easy for a cross-dresser to pass as a member of the opposite gender, there would be no reason for them to try to pass. As it is, cross-dressers have the challenge to create a convincing image, to be able to fool people about their real gender, in order not to be read.

Transvestites know their creation is an illusion and like to play with it. Fooling people about their true gender is one of the games transvestites like to play and when they are very confident and able to pass, they sometimes also want to be 'read' (discovered as attempting to pass as someone from the opposite gender). Thus, these two concepts of 'passing' and 'reading' exist in relation with each other. Transvestites like observing the different kind of reactions that people express when realising that the person they are encountering is a man dressed as a woman. There is a kind of thrill in being recognised as a transvestite and being accepted or tolerated as such. For many transvestites, it is a way of

expressing their personal identity and thus, their own individuality. The expression of individuality is experienced as a form of freedom, but sooner or later the transvestite returns to the recognised standards of gender intelligibility and follows the stereotypes attached to his masculine gender attribution (Seidler 1997).

The fact that the transvestite wants to perform as a woman, but to be simultaneously acknowledged as a man means that cross-dressing alone is forever disappointing. It is only within a social context that the transvestite becomes fully realised, because it is only through seeing himself in the eyes of others that he can satisfactorily pass as a woman while continuing to be acknowledged as a man in his everyday existence. Closet transvestites always feel disappointed that their feminine alter ego is not recognised and it is only by joining a group or going out, that their creation has a life that involves other people. At the same time transvestites acknowledge that they are male and that their feminine alter ego only exists for the time they indulge in cross-dressing. When joining groups such as the one created by Jo and Lily, they have the opportunity to express their 'dedoublement' by cross-dressing and talking about dresses and make-up, but the other members of the group also acknowledge one another as male. This is reflected in conversations between transvestites at meetings where they often talk about football, computers, cars and other interests that they see themselves sharing as men.

Some transvestites told me that some of them succeed in passing while others look like "*men in frocks*" because they are wearing cheap and inappropriate wig colour and style, or clothing that does not fit their age and features. It is not always possible for transvestites to buy the best clothes because of lack of money, secrecy or lack of confidence. Some of them have to hide their clothes from their wives and keep them in a bag in the boot of their car so the clothes look crumpled. Some transvestites may also be spotted because wearing too heavy or bright make-up. Large hands and feet, or prominent Adam's apples may also give them away.

Jo finds going out cross-dressed exhilarating and exiting. "*I generally do this fairly successfully and when people do occasionally spot me it is quite amusing to see the look on their faces ... It doesn't worry me*". He has the experience and confidence to go out. When going out he never gets into trouble. Most of the time people do not even realise or if they do, he does not care. Some cases of transvestites getting into difficulties emerged in the interviews. For example Clare had her wig stolen by a group of young men when he was walking in the street with some friends on the way to a meeting. At the time, it was a very stressful event for him, as he did not have a spare wig. As Clare told me, a transvestite without a wig really looks like a man in a frock and this feels ridiculous. Later, the gang was arrested by the police and Clare got his wig back. Clare found this event frightening. He was relieved that he and his friends were not attacked by the gang of young people, but losing his wig and thus his feminine image was very distressing. Since then, he always carries an extra wig in his handbag. While telling his story, Clare took his spare wig out of his handbag and started playing with it pretending it was some kind of little hairy animal walking on the table. This wig finally landed on my head and, as he said, "*it makes you look like a transvestite*".

When playing with his wig and putting it on my head 'to make me look like a transvestite' there was a real paradox. For transvestites, the wig, when on their head becomes 'their hair'. As underlined by Jo, the wig is the final touch to the transvestites' feminine image and without it they would never be able to pass as women. So the wig is the final element that creates the woman. When teasingly putting the wig on my hair, he was creating the image of another woman on top of a woman. This humouring gesture of creating a woman with a woman for me was a sign of acceptance within the group.

Going out cross-dressed is not without danger for transvestites. If they are spotted, they may encounter legal sanction if others complain about their behaviour. Lukianowicz (1959) uses the official interpretation of the law on the subject of transvestites in Britain. Even if "*the mere wearing of clothes appropriate to the opposite sex ... cannot ... be made the ground of any criminal charge*" a person may be convicted under Section 1 of the

Vagrancy Act of 1898 which says that "*cross-dressing may, prima facie, be evidence of an intention to commit some crime*" and "*a man, masquerading as a woman in a public place, may incur suspicion*" (Lukianowicz 1959:56). This very old Vagrancy Act also appears in a booklet published by *The Gender Trust* in 1990 and thus still in operation nowadays and interpreted in some cases. They may also face charges of "*insulting behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace*" under Section 5 of the public Order Act (1936). Originally, this act was introduced to deal with street fighting, but nowadays this statute has served as a generalised legal weapon against any behaviour interpreted by law officers as 'insulting' and thus is sometimes used against transvestites who are 'read' in the street. This application of laws to certain behaviours considered as deviant reflects the public opinion about them. However, it is not illegal to dress in the clothes of the 'other gender', but under common law a charge of breach of the peace can be made.

In Belgium, there is no law about the illegality of wearing clothes of the opposite gender in the street. If a transvestite gets stopped for an identity card control, policemen can require that he removes his wig and make-up to check that his face correspond to the picture on the identity card that everyone has to carry in Belgium. Still, a policeman is only allowed to ask a transvestite to remove his wig and make-up in a police station or it could be considered as an attempt to invade privacy. This law was explained to me by a transvestite and lawyer, who got stopped once. He claimed he could not remove his wig and make-up in public and they drove him to the nearer police station to check his identity. As soon as they matched his face with the picture on the identity card, they released him.

Other transvestites who are not as confident as Jo, but who still want to taste the experience of going out cross-dressed, do so at night. The main problem associated with passing at night, as described by a transvestite, is people do not look at the whole person, but at the shape of the person. So even if the transvestite is fully dressed, wearing make-up and looking very convincing, his shadow may reveal masculine bone features or his walk might initiate suspicion. In Britain, under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 (sect. 32) it is an offence for a man to "*persistently solicit or importune in a public place for immoral*

*purposes*". This might be applied to a transvestite who is out in a place known for prostitution or seen waiting around dressed provocatively (Beigle 1969). Also, to avoid crowds, insecure transvestites walk in dark streets where they may be mistaken for prostitutes and actually prosecuted (Woodhouse 1989).

While out, a cross-dressed transvestite cannot legally use public lavatories for either men or women or they could be charged with "*breach of peace*" if they use lavatories designated for woman. They may be charged with "*soliciting*" in the case of use of men's lavatories (Evans 1993:183). Moreover, transvestites in any public places can be open to prosecution just for being there. In public areas, interaction with others is inevitable and any person who feels threatened by the presence of transvestites can prosecute them for "*offensive*" or "*immoral behaviour*", or for "*suspicious behaviour*" under the Vagrancy Act (Evans 1993:183). In these cases interaction does not imply any contact. In general, as Edwards states:

The law has its particular response to these categories. The human body in law is, for the most part, biologically given. The law is a body of authority of consuetude which regulates and organises social conduct, social relationships and the institution of the family through the application of rules and sanctions, conferring meaning, not merely on conduct or relationships *in abstracto*, but regulating action in relation to the sex of a specific actor. (1996:8)

Transvestites are suffering from a law that is based on the distinction of the sexes. And, as any deviance is often perceived as being private, hidden because non-normative and socially disruptive, any appearance of it would be culturally disapproved and maybe penalised (Freilich et al. 1991:20). To avoid social pressure and criticism, most transvestites cross-dress in the secret of their home and only a minority of them will dare going out in public. Transvestites who dare doing this are usually very confident about their feminine image. The confidence of transvestites is usually linked with their wives or partners' knowledge of their transvestism. Transvestites, who have wives or partners who have accepted or tolerate their transvestism, are usually more confident than the secret transvestites.

For transvestites, being able to share their full personality with a close person such as a partner, wives or parents helps them to fully express their 'dedoublement'. When keeping their transvestism secret, they are afraid that they will give a hint of this non-normative behaviour and thus tend to have discreet and reserved personality. It is only with the ability to open up to someone that they will be able to manage their 'dedoublement' and enjoy it fully.

As it appeared in the case studies, the four transvestites have revealed their transvestism to their partner and/or close family with more or less acceptance and are enjoying their 'dedoublement'. Among the four case studies, Jerry is an exception as he is the only one who is not married. Still, since he revealed his transvestism to his mother and sister, he has developed his 'double' more fully. And as we shall see in the following chapter, it has also influenced his general personality. Ghislaine and Jo, who have received a positive acceptance from their wives (in the case of Ghislaine support from the beginning), have grown confident about their 'dedoublement'. They are open about their transvestism and easily go out cross-dressed. Christine in comparison had to wait for the death of his wife, to feel confident enough to cross-dress full time, go out in public and to tell his neighbours. Christine's story suggests that transvestism can be a real strain on a marriage especially if it is not accepted by the wife or partner of the transvestite. Also, even if the partner is aware of the transvestism it does not mean that the transvestite becomes confident. He needs the approval of the other. This was not the case with Christine's wife who tore or threw away his clothes whenever she found them. Only when his wife died did Christine start cross-dressing fully on a daily basis.

Jo and Ghislaine's wives reached such an understanding that they created a self-help group with their husband. So from an isolated practice of transvestism, they have moved to the ability to share their cross-dressing with their wives, to the formation of a self-help group. Ghislaine's group did not work out as members of the group tried to make his marriage collapse because they were jealous of his relationship. They maybe were also jealous of his confidence to go out cross-dressed and his ability to interact with other

people. Ghislaine is managing his life with people knowing about his transvestism and it seems that most people accept him the way he is. A lot of secret transvestites wish they could be able to reveal their 'dedoublement' and find acceptance to finally be able to freely express themselves.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Erchak (1992) mentions, the self both ties us to the others and separates us from the others. Transvestites develop their own sense of self and self identity that is masculine and that they present to the public. To fulfil their 'fullness' (Hall 1994), they consciously create a feminine 'double' that they will tend to keep secret. This 'dedoublement' makes sense in relation to the conventional genders, as they are male, and want to be recognised as such, and their 'double' is feminine. When creating their 'double', transvestites will fashion their body and hide their masculine body under feminine clothes. Clothing thus transforms a raw body into something culturally significant. Transvestites, aware that people first look at the shape of the body and clothes, will fashion a feminine image by padding and covering their masculine features when going out in public. They know that any masculine features can give them away and thus, they are very careful of their 'personal front' (Goffman 1959).

Transvestites, when expressing their 'dedoublement', tend to fulfil their stereotypes of femininity through their feminine 'double'. For this reason, there are many kinds of transvestisms that are reflected in the specialised literature available to transvestites. Transvestites who join a group tend to share a similar image of 'femininity' as we have seen in the two groups I visited. Still, when going out 'en femme', they tend to enact the kind of woman that blends with the crowd if they do not want to be read. If transvestites cannot be prosecuted because wearing clothes of the opposite gender in the street, there are others laws that have been interpreted and applied to their behaviour. This reflects the social rejection of their behaviour. Under this social pressure, many transvestites tend to keep it secret not only from the public, but also from their close family and friends, as they fear

rejection.. As we shall see, rejection is not always an outcome when they reveal their behaviour to their close family and friends. Still, the revelation of their transvestism to their close family can influence the confidence and intensity of their transvestism.



Major informant  
(Evening Chronicle January 26, 1998)



Dustin Hoffman as Tootsie

## Chapter 6

# Transvestites and family life

To fully understand transvestism and its expression, it is indispensable to consider the transvestite in relation to his immediate family and, especially in the case of the married transvestite, to his wife. I have noticed that transvestites who share knowledge of their transvestism with their wives and other members of their family are more confident about appearing cross-dressed in public. Secretive transvestites are usually hiding their cross-dressing from their spouse and other members of the family. Among the transvestites I met, several of them had faced a divorce after their wives discovered their cross-dressing.

### 1. Theoretical approach to transvestites' close family

Before the 1980s, psychological and psychiatric literatures about transvestism rarely mention transvestites' wives. If they appeared at all, their experience was usually presented in a negative light. For example, in 1968 Stoller argued that, in general women who are married to transvestites encourage and even force their husbands to cross-dress because of their need to humiliate men. He believes transvestites' wives are "*malicious male haters*" who cross-dress men in order to emasculate them. Wise et al. (1981) also identified transvestites' wives as "*masochistic*" women who tolerate the "*self-centred*" behaviour of their partners. To stay engaged in a relationship with a transvestite, the wife has to sacrifice her own sense of self-esteem and desires. Wise et al. thus consider a wife's acceptance of her husband's cross-dressing as a form of "*narcissistic indulgence*" and as "*moral masochists*" (Wise et al. 1981:1223-4). Other literature, such as Talamini (1982), Docter (1988), Woodhouse (1989) and Brown (1998), is more positive about transvestites' wives.

Brown's study did not suggest characteristics such as "*inadequate self-esteem*" in these women and the other authors tend to describe them as women trying to cope with an unusual and unexpected behaviour. This is more in keeping with my own experience.

As cross-dressing is an aspect of the transvestites' 'dedoublement' that they cannot get rid of, I think it would be useful for research to focus on transvestites' wives and other members of the family, as it is a major issue in couple and family relationships. To shed light on this issue, I interviewed three wives and the mother of a transvestite. I will draw on my own field notes and taped interviews in England with these four women who were aged between fifty and seventy, as well as on literature produced by transvestites (Prince 1962, 1967; Prince and Bentler 1972). Other more recent sources will be Talamini (1982), Docter (1988) and Woodhouse (1989). These authors did not meet, interview or contact transvestites' wives in a clinical environment, but mainly through a snowball process or via the mailing lists of transvestite organisations.

Of these last three researchers, each interviewed fewer than sixty women. More recently Brown (1998), a psychiatrist, approached 106 women using an open-ended questionnaire given out at meetings. Brown covered various aspects of the lives of women whose partners are heterosexual male cross-dressers. Among her informants were women who go out with their husband when he is cross-dressed and others who do not appear publicly with their husband when cross-dressed. Some of these women who could not be personally interviewed, received a questionnaire through the mail and had to return it to the researcher. It is important to take into account that mailed questionnaires, as deployed by Prince (1962), Prince and Bentler (1972), Talamini (1982), Docter (1988) and Brown (1998), can be inaccurate. There is always the chance that respondents may reply in a way that they think is expected of them. Another bias would be that the more tolerant wives are of their husband's transvestism, the more likely they are to agree to take part in a study. Still, I will make use of these studies, because they did not take place in a clinical environment and, like the wives I interviewed, also accepted or tolerated their husband's behaviour.

## **2. Telling or not telling their wives about their transvestism**

When men are cross-dressed, they confront a dilemma. They know that they are breaching the social gender norm by wearing female clothes. They know that their behaviour is rejected and criticised, but nevertheless they cannot stop doing it. They often feel very lonely having to dress secretly in a locked room. Some will cross-dress in secrecy for their entire life and others may cross-dress within the confines of an organised group. However, some transvestites want to be fully accepted by close family and friends.

Buhrich (1976) notes that most transvestites think that their compulsion to cross-dress will disappear after marriage and so do not inform their future wife about it. In Talamini's (1982) study of a group of 50 wives, sixty percent were not told about their husband's transvestism prior to marriage. The transvestites' argument was that their future wives might reject them, or that marriage would end their transvestism. After a few years of marriage, when the transvestite realises that his need to cross-dress persists, he is confronted with the dilemma of telling or not telling his wife. For a man to disclose his transvestism to his wife is positive in the sense that it brings openness and honesty into the relationship, but many men are afraid that disclosure will destroy the marriage. Indeed, transvestites in England could be sued for divorce by their wives on the grounds of "*unreasonable behaviour*" (Evans 1993:183).

Transvestites who decide to disclose to their wives face a variety of reactions. Some are confronted by coldness or complete rejection, while others might find themselves pleasantly surprised by positive acceptance. On the other hand, if the transvestite decides to keep his behaviour secret, he might be discovered one day, leaving his wife to wonder why he hid it from her and what else he might be concealing. Prince and Bentler (1972) found, from an analysis of questionnaires completed by 504 transvestites, that twenty percent of wives were reported as being unaware of their husband's transvestism even after many years of marriage (or so the transvestites thought).

The previous studies of transvestites' wives together with my own research suggest that there is a range of reactions by wives who discover their husbands' transvestism. Some wives tolerate their husbands' cross-dressing by lending them their own clothes, shopping with them, encouraging them to attend transvestites' meetings and even accompanying them. As Anna said about her relationship with her husband, "*We try to share a bit [clothes] ... We go around the Charity Shops having fun, that's great!*". Others cannot accept so readily and do not accept their husbands' 'dedoublement' even if the husband does not cross-dress at home or in their presence. In these cases, it appears that because transvestites cannot stop cross-dressing, the marriage becomes strained and often ends in divorce, with the children being taken away from the father. This was reported to me by transvestites and not by the wives themselves as they usually sever contact with their husbands after divorce. This scenario happened to two of my informants Dorothy and Karen.

Karen did not tell his wife about his cross-dressing before his marriage thinking that it would disappear once married. He soon realised that the urge to cross-dress remained and so began cross-dressing in secret using his wife's clothes when she was out. After a few years, when their children were approaching school age, he told his wife about his need to cross-dress. She was very upset, but they agreed that he could dress every Wednesday night in the bathroom after the children were in bed. However Karen's wife could not rid herself of the perception of her husband as "*a pervert*" and she requested a divorce. She received full custody of the children and Karen was not even able to visit them on the grounds of his 'unreasonable behaviour'.

Some of the transvestites I met told their wives about their cross-dressing before getting married and these couples were able to make compromises, such as in the case of Anna who did not care "*as long as it was under control, I pushed it to the back of my mind.*" Still some transvestites who disclose to their future wives do not make things sufficiently clear by implying that they are interested in cross-dressing only for fun, and not

as an expression of what I call their 'dedoublement'. This is what happened to Lily. She knew Jo liked cross-dressing, but she thought he liked it for carnival and fancy dress parties. So the day she was told that her husband was a transvestite she was very shocked. Others among my informants were unexpectedly discovered by their wife while dressed 'en femme' and others are still preserving their cross-dressing secret.

## **2.1. The institution of marriage and divorce**

The main fear for closet transvestites focuses on the reactions of wife and family should they discover his cross-dressing. They also fear being spotted by their neighbours who may ridicule them and spread the word that there is a transvestite living next door. Most transvestites fear the likelihood of divorce following discovery. So some transvestites tend to stay secret or even single, as they know that their behaviour is not easily accepted from a partner. Even if they are very attracted to women, they want to avoid being rejected because of their transvestism. Younger transvestites who are still single wonder if they should tell a future wife.

Other transvestites avoid disclosing their cross-dressing to their wives because of the fear that they will be considered homosexual. Ovesey and Person (1976) point out that many marriages break up because of wives' doubts about their husband's sexual orientation. Misunderstanding about cross-dressing and confusion with homosexuality is frequent, and a transvestite's wife is likely to need reassurance that her husband is not homosexual. The other common fear among wives is that their husband may want to 'become' a woman and go through the process of sexual surgery reassignment. This reflects the common confusion between transsexualism and transvestism. They might also worry that their husband is a 'sexual pervert'.

Several transvestites I met were divorced and most of them were aware that it is hard for a wife to accept her husband's transvestism. I had discussions only and no taped interviews with four transvestites and, conversations and recorded interviews with

seventeen covering a range of different topics including marriage. Out of the eleven who were married, or had been married, one has been divorced once, then widowed and remarried to a third wife. A second was a widower, a third keeps his transvestism secret from his wife. Three were divorced (one currently has a partner) and, another has a strained relationship with his wife because of his transvestism. Ten were either single by choice or because they had not yet met a suitable partner. Among the eleven, one was gay. With the other transvestites I met in pubs and night-club, I was not always able to establish if my informants were single, married or had been married and as a consequence, they are not included in these figures.

However, even though divorce afflicts several transvestites in the group whose meetings I attended, the issue was never openly discussed and was referred to only in private conversations. The group members may have been aware of each other's marital status, but it was never talked about. The silence around the issue of divorce may be because divorce is perceived as a failure and one of the most painful experiences for an adult (Simpson 1998:126). In the case of my informants, it was even harder as the cause of their divorce was their transvestism. In cases of discovery or disclosure of the husband's transvestism, there is a high percentage of wives of my informants who have accepted, or at least tolerated, their husband's behaviour. Among the eight still married, or unmarried with a partner, seven wives and partners accept, or at least tolerate, their partner's transvestism while one transvestite remains secret. Nowadays, single young transvestites tend to consider that they should tell a future wife about their transvestism before getting married because the 'dedoublement' is part of their personality and their partner should accept them the way they are.

## **2.2. Management of the couple**

Transvestites, who want to be able to move freely around the home and live part-time as a woman, disclose their behaviour to their wives. If the outcome of cross-dressing is positive for transvestites, it is not always as satisfactory for the wife. It is the reason that

wives have to manage the 'dedoublement' of their husband in private as well as in public. Lily tolerates her husband transvestism, but it is not easy. As Lily has frequently told me, Jo is like a third person within the couple. She said, "*transvestism doesn't help a relationship because I'm fighting 'her'*", and 'her' is created, the expression of her husband's 'dedoublement'. She once told me that she would like to kill 'her' but if she kills 'her' she will also kill him. So she tolerates his 'double' as a part of her husband's personality that she cannot get rid of and, also she knows she has to accept 'her' to keep her husband happy. This was made clear when Lily told me "*I can't stop 'her' and I don't think my husband can stop 'her'. But it is just one of those things living with a transvestite you have to put up or shut up.*" By saying this she reveals an interesting point. She considers Jo's 'double' as "*another person*" and, when she talks about Jo's 'double', she uses the feminine third person instead of the masculine.

This impression of living with a third person within the couple relationship varies from one couple to the other. In some cases, the husband becomes so different when cross-dressed that the wife cannot avoid perceiving the change. Some husbands do not only change their voice, appearance and mannerisms, but also their attitudes and food habits as does Angela, Anna's husband. Anna told me that her husband appreciates hamburgers and other ready-made food, but his alter ego would never eat such food. This change of food habit implies the endorsement of a completely different personality when cross-dressed. But in opposition to multiple personality disorder that is unconscious (Hacking 1995), transvestites are aware of these changes. As seen in the previous chapter, Ghislaine's wife also acknowledges a striking difference between Ghislaine when he is dressed as a man and Ghislaine when cross-dressed. As Ghislaine told me, it is better to meet 'him' first and then 'her' as 'she' is much nicer and more caring than 'him'. Ghislaine has a very strong personality and at home he is the one who rules the house, but when cross-dressed it is his wife who takes over. Again, in this case there is a complete endorsement of the feminine role and the stereotypes attached to it when expressing his 'dedoublement'.

Also when Lily says that she has to "*put up or shut up*", she means that even if she does not like her husband cross-dressing, she has to tolerate it. As she told me, "*it is very difficult to live with Jo's alter ego. I love Jo very much but 'she' comes between us. If she was a real woman, obviously, he would get rid of her, but because it is your husband who is the other woman, it is very strange and very confusing.*" When she says that Jo would get rid of 'her', it seems that it is Lily's wish that is emerging here. Even though Lily tolerates Jo's cross-dressing I could feel that she would rather prefer him not to. She says of Jo when he is cross-dressed: "*Where is my husband? I want my husband back!*" When Jo is cross-dressed, Lily feels that she loses her husband and sees another person in front of her. To avoid this other person appearing too often, Lily has to impose some limits on Jo's cross-dressing. Lily's main concern is that when he retires from his work as a security guard Jo might cross-dress every day.

Lily's restrictions on Jo's cross-dressing mainly concern the frequency of his transformation and his style of dress. If he follows Lily's stereotypes of how a woman should be dressed, she seems to better tolerate her husband's cross-dressing. She does not allow him to go out wearing certain kinds of female attire and complains if the length of his skirts show 'too much' of his legs. The limits imposed upon Jo show how much control Lily has over him, but still she cannot completely control his 'dedoublement' as he sometimes goes on expressing his alter ego following his own standards that do not always follow the ideology of the group. The way she describes her husband when cross-dressed then is, "*very provocative, a person women like to hate*". Here Lily makes very clear that she does not like Jo's 'double' on these occasions. She tolerates that he cross-dresses, but she certainly does not like the image he presents and the kind of woman he is impersonating.

Lily said that she would advise anyone who discovered that their partner is a transvestite to "*try and stick to ground rules because if not, their marriage is done, the relationship is done. Because like children they [transvestites] try to move [forward] until tolerance and your frustration become too much to bear.*" Here, Lily compares Jo's

transvestism to a child who tries to push the limit as far as possible to extend the boundaries of tolerance. So, she has to play the role of the mother who has constantly to set the limits. This comparison of Jo with a child should be understood to mean that when Jo is cross-dressed, he is not responsible anymore and thus, is not a man anymore. It is as if for Lily he loses all his masculine characteristics and power when he is cross-dressed. This was also made clear in Lily's attitude towards her husband when he is not cross-dressed. She was not complaining anymore about his dresses and feminine look and, her body language was more controlled or under the control of her husband, as if she was returning to her 'wife role', as opposed to the 'mother role'.

Within marriage, it is often the wife who establishes rules to keep her husband's transvestism under control, in private as well as in public. In the private sphere, rules have to be negotiated between the two partners. Some women will accept more than others. Some will accept a husband's shaved legs, arms and chest. Others will categorically refuse this kind of body feminisation, but tolerate varnished nails or plucked eyebrows. Wives may also advise their husbands about clothes that suit them and how to apply make-up, thereby influencing the style of their husband's cross-dressing. The transvestite's appearance in public or in private also has to be negotiated and the husband has to follow these rules because he is the one who is expressing a non-normative behaviour that puts him in a weak position in relation to others. Among my informants, transvestites try to follow the rules as much as possible to avoid upsetting their wives.

By setting ground rules, transvestites' wives are also trying to return to an ideal of what marriage should be. After discovery of their husband's transvestism, wives have to negotiate their husband's 'dedoublement' and they tend to create new rules about the use of intimate space and public space in order to adjust and construct an image that approximates to their notions of normality. If within the private space, which involves the partner and family, transvestism is acceptable if kept under certain rules, within public arena, this non-normative behaviour needs to be completely kept under control, as reputation is still very important. So, to keep a facade of normality, a wife will often ask her husband to keep his

transvestism as secret as possible. One of my informants, Gemma, told me that she got used to her husband's transvestism, but she does not want anyone else to know about it except for members of the group. *"I got used to it, but I wouldn't like to be seen out with him"*. This concern to appear as normal as possible in public is due to fear of having their family members rejected by the neighbours or children being teased at school.

Apart from having to adapt their lives to their husband's transvestism, wives might also question their own sexual orientation or identity. Anna told me *"I had a very innocent youth and upbringing. ...It never occurred to me that's part of life. ... I felt a bit of ... , a bit of a freak you know. ... You feel you are losing your own identity. You wonder who you are"*. In cases where the wife agrees to intercourse while her husband is cross-dressed, she might wonder if she is a latent lesbian. Docter (1988) maintains that most women are conventional heterosexual women who never think about including cross-dressing into their sexuality. Some women do have sex with their cross-dressed husbands. Other women refuse categorically to be involved in cross-dressed intercourse because, as Lily told me, *"I do not want to feel like a lesbian"*. So sexual relations might be satisfactory, but often wives do not want their husband to come to bed cross-dressed. They have to draw a line. This usually has to be negotiated between the partners and where it is placed exactly varies from one couple to another. Among my female informants, none would accept their husband cross-dressed in bed because what they have accepted as a hobby then becomes a sexual deviation.

Anxieties about sexual orientation can be an extra strain on a relationship. Lily's response to her husband wanting to cross-dress when they have sex is very representative. She said that *"if it is carried to the bedroom, it is a no go area with me ... it is very off putting when your husband goes to bed with a nighty or a slip. It makes you feel like a lesbian. Gone is the man that you married and in his place is this person: half man, half woman. Therefore, [with my husband cross-dressed] sex is taboo."* Usually, Lily completely separates her husband from his 'double' and refers to both with different pronouns. When it comes to sexual intercourse cross-dressed, Lily cannot keep the two

personae apart and Jo becomes half man, half woman. Half man with his penis as a masculine attribute and half woman because he wears female clothes and make-up. Still, his masculine side is taken over by the feminine side as she feels like a lesbian if he comes to bed cross-dressed. This deeply ambiguous state can be very disruptive for the wives who do not know 'who' they have in front of them. This refers to Douglas's (1966:167) theory that "*those whose behaviour is ambiguous are treated as anomalies of one kind of another*" and in the particular case of food, she mentions that ambiguous animals are rejected from consumption. The ambiguous state of transvestites due to female clothes that make them 'look' like women might be expected to affect wives. Also wives might expect their husbands to go back to a male identity when performing heterosexual intercourse and not to be some kind of hybrid between man and woman that blurs the boundaries between homo-heterosexual intercourse.

Other transvestites prefer to keep their behaviour secret from their wives and to hide their cross-dressing to avoid confrontation, but these transvestites have to live with the fear of being discovered. When a wife discovers her husband's cross-dressing she might accept it, but will invariably ask, "*What have I done wrong?*" or "*What's wrong with me?*". Woodhouse (1989) mentions that sometimes a wife transfers guilt about her husband's behaviour to herself. She discusses a case where a woman believed that her husband cross-dressed to compensate for a lack in their sexual relationship. She also mentions that a wife may wonder if her husband is tired of her and is thus creating a woman to replace her, as he does not want to break up his marriage by having an affair with a real woman.

Sometimes women search for information about transvestism and particularly about married transvestites in the psychological or psychiatric literature. Here we have to remember that women I interviewed were between the ages of fifty and seventy. This meant that at the time they discovered their husband's cross-dressing they had access to the literature from the 1960s and 1970s when transvestism was fully under medical scrutiny. In some of this literature, as transvestites' wives, they were defined as "*malicious male haters*" with low self-esteem and suffering from a form of masochism that leads them to

marry transvestites (Stoller 1968). Wise et al. (1981) describe them as women with characters "*rich in dependency*" staying with their husbands instead for fear of suffering a lonely life. Since then (as described in a previous chapter) the interpretation of and attitudes towards cross-dressing have altered. More recent literature from Talamini (1982), Docter (1988), Woodhouse (1989) and Brown (1998) expresses a more positive view of transvestites' partners.

Brown reflects the general view among these authors when she describes transvestites' wives as possessing "*high levels of openness, a personality trait that fosters novel ideas and rejection of rigid stereotypes* (1998:366)." Brown also noted that poor research and analysis can have a detrimental effect on couples. "*One could also make a case that the existing literature was potentially damaging to these couples in its inappropriate generalisations and unsupported conclusions and did nothing to facilitate the process of communication and self-disclosure so vital to these relationship*" (Brown 1998:354). Among my informants, some wives mentioned that they were "*reading to find out*". They did not describe what literature they had access to, but Lily certainly had access to *The Beaumont Society* library.

The women I met certainly evinced healthier relationships with their husbands than those portrayed by Stoller. They did not display low self-esteem or over dependency on their husbands and nor did I detect any open hostility towards their husbands' masculinity. Only Lily seemed to look at her cross-dressed husband as an irresponsible child. All the women I met have been able to negotiate the transvestism of their husband. It seemed to me that all wives controlled it to a certain point. They were controlling the frequency of the alter ego enactment, make-up and style of clothes, the appearance in the outside world, as well as setting rules around sexual intercourse. Most of the wives discovered their husbands' transvestism years after the wedding. It is only due to their understanding and trust in their husbands that they have completely or partially tolerated their husband 'dedoublement'.

The wives I have met were for the most part very open-minded and rejected stereotypes of transvestites. Anna was clear about it *"I don't care about what other people think. I don't take much notice of what other people think to be perfectly honest"*. Anna's stance seems to be very liberal, but still, she prefers that her husband does not go out cross-dressed to avoid being seen by neighbours. Maybe she does not care about what people say, but she also clearly wants to maintain an image of normality. Another interesting story already mentioned in the previous chapter is Lily's. In 1989 a journalist knocked at the door and asked if he could talk about her story. She was surprised and said that she had nothing special to tell. He then asked about Jo's transvestism. *"I never heard about 'transvestism' before. I think it is that word that came out."* She then asked Jo *"What is this all about?... You gonna have to tell me. I can't cope with this."* Jo told me that his reaction was: *"I just wanted to die at that moment. I felt so awful. I felt as if I had betrayed her. I hadn't been truthful. I knew then that I should have told her before we got married."* Lily had known that Jo liked cross-dressing for fancy dress parties, but she did not know he was a transvestite. So he tried to explain what transvestism is and Lily started reading to understand more about it.

Through reading and discussions with her husband, Lily found out that it is very hard for a transvestite to reveal his transvestism to his wife, as well as for the wife to accept her husband's transvestism. As already explained in a previous chapter, Lily and Jo decided to start a self help-line and to organise meetings for transvestites and their wives as there was nothing organised in the Darlington area. On the other hand, organising a group in her house allows Lily to influence its aims and values. She can create the rules and keep her husband's cross-dressing under control, as well as monitoring the company he keeps.

The aim of the group is not only to permit transvestites to cross-dress, but it also gives the opportunity to transvestites' wives to meet other women who are confronted with transvestism. At the meetings they can seek and give support or advice about what attitudes to take towards their husbands and share experiences. Newcomers usually already accept, or at least tolerate, their husband's transvestism, but being able to talk and meet

other women sharing a similar experience gives them the feeling that they are not alone. This sharing helps wives to feel more comfortable with the situation. Women also tend to keep attending the meetings because they build a friendship network with other women. So both partners enjoy the evening, but for different reasons. This socialising by transvestites and their wives shows that divorce is not always an outcome of transvestism.

### **2.3. Acceptance by wives**

We might wonder how or why some transvestites' wives accept, or at least tolerate their husband's behaviour. Prince (1967:68-76) rates wives' acceptance along a graded scale from A to E. He rates the degree of acceptance of the transvestite's wife from the answers given by the transvestite and, the wife's own opinions about their husband's transvestism.

- Types A: the wife enjoys her husband's transvestism and helps him as much as possible. The husband's transvestism becomes part of her life too and she goes to transvestite group meetings with him.
- Type B: the wife takes a pragmatic attitude and does not bother about trying to find out why her husband is cross-dressing. She does not take any special interest in transvestism, but will not object to her husband's cross-dressing if he follows rules on which the couple agree, such as being certain there are no others around when he is cross-dressed. She might also go shopping with him and accompany him to meetings.
- Type C: the wife was shocked when she discovered her husband's transvestism, but now goes along with it. However, she does not actively encourage him and is terrified that their children or neighbours might find out. Still, she wonders why men waste their time cross-dressed.
- Type D: the wife knows about her husband's intense desire and seems to put up with it, but sometimes she will give him a disgusted look or make a remark that will hurt him. She refuses to share cross-dressing activities with him and resents the money and time spent on his transvestism.

- Type E: she does not want to divorce, but does not want to have anything to do with this "horrible thing". She refuses to be "contaminated" by this perversion.
- Type F: she equates his transvestism with homosexuality and will refuse any explanation about transvestism.

This scale is interesting as it recognises different levels of acceptance and tolerance by transvestites' partners. Still it has the unsuitability of many analytical scales, as some of my informants do not find their place in it. For example Lily tolerates her husband's transvestism and organises a transvestites' help-line. So it could be considered that her husband's transvestism has become part of her life as in the case of the type A; she also gives him some rules to follow and resents the amount of money he spends on his cross-dressing. On the other hand a woman such as Anna is easy to classify as a type B as she enjoys shopping with her husband, but wants him to keep his secret transvestism from neighbours, relatives and friends.

Prince encourages transvestites to tell their wives about their transvestism as he assures them, with the support of his research, that about sixty percent accept their husband's transvestism. However, Prince's work is not without its weakness. For example, he does not make clear if he is including wives who merely tolerate their husband's transvestism. In these cases the marriage is clearly strained and common sense suggests a high risk of separation. However, among my informants, those transvestites' wives who stay married describe their husbands as gentle, considerate and understanding. As Anna said to me, "*I won't say it doesn't bother me, but I have accepted it. I accept that he feels very much happier. Then, he is a much nicer person to be with*". Acceptance by the wife might also be understood as being due to the wife's understanding of her husband's transvestism as an integral part of his personality. She may conclude that his good qualities may be due to his 'dedoublement' that crosses the gender boundaries of masculinity and femininity. Women appreciate their husband's warmth, tenderness and understanding of feminine nature, which appears especially evident when they are cross-dressed.

It appears that some transvestites completely change their personality when cross-dressed. Anna told me, "*She is much more tolerant than he is. He can be bad tempered and twitchy, probably thinking 'I wish I could get changed'. Sometimes, 'she' is a much nicer person.*" Anna's remark reveals that her acceptance may be based on the fact that she enjoys her husband being nicer and thus accepts his cross-dressing. On the other hand, she recognises that he becomes bad tempered when he does not cross-dress for a while, and that his need to cross-dress might be linked with tensions or frustrations around work. After telling me this, Anna asked me not to tell her husband. She was afraid that he may want to cross-dress more often as she said that he is a "*nicer person*" when cross-dressed. This reveals that Anna is confronted by an ambiguous situation as she prefers her husband's personality when cross-dressed, but prefers him not to be cross-dressed. Because a wife accepts her husband's cross-dressing once in a while, does not mean she is prepared to accept seeing him cross-dressed every day. The wife often sets a limit to the frequency of the appearance of the husband's feminine 'double'.

The degree of a wife's acceptance might be linked to the frequency of her husband's cross-dressing. As Jerry and other transvestites told me, cross-dressing is a hobby, but if this hobby becomes a habit, then, it might become harder for a wife to tolerate. For example, Lily seems to dislike Jo's 'double', not only because he sometimes dresses in a style that she does not approve of, but also because he does so more than twice a week. For Lily, Jo's transvestism is not a hobby any more, but a habit. If Jo kept his cross-dressing a bit more under control and would not cross the boundaries set by Lily, she would be more tolerant. Moreover, each time he cross-dresses, Lily feels that she loses her husband. Anna on the other hand is tolerant, but until now her husband has kept his transvestism much under control and it is only recently that he started cross-dressing most evenings. Maybe she will not be as tolerant in a few months time. Jerry's mother, Rose, does not mind about her son's cross-dressing, but she once told me that she hopes he will never cross-dress as often as Jo does.

It is clear that most women have mixed feelings about their husband's alter ego. "*Selfish*", "*self centred*", "*vain*", "*narcissistic*" are adjectives often used by transvestites' wives. Some transvestites spend hours in front of the mirror trying on different clothes and make-up and this can deeply irritates wives who wonder why their husband should spend more time in front of the mirror than women do. In Brown's study (1998), forty five percent of the women said that their husband spent what they consider an excessive amount of time primping in front of the mirror while cross-dressed. I suppose it is the excess of time that bothers wives who have accepted their husband's transvestism rather than the fact that they put on make-up. Also, these activities are considered to be reserved for women, and men indulging in them are judged narcissistic. Also, some transvestites, when buying clothes for their 'double', forget about the needs of their wife and family. Priscilla found a solution to this problem. Each time he buys a dress for his feminine alter ego, he buys one for his wife. Priscilla told his wife about his transvestism a few years ago. He said that she accepts that he cross-dresses, but does not want to be involved with it.

Wise et al. (1981) suggest that these negative characteristics that wives attach to transvestism are important factors in the degree of marital stability. Men thinking about clothes, make-up and spending time in front of the mirror do not fit into the expected role of husband. Neither is their acting the role of the wife. Transvestites want to achieve a feminine image without the responsibility and consequences of being female. They only want to parade en femme, but they usually do not want to do any housework or if they do, do they treat it as a game and the wife has to finish the job after them (Brown 1998). Among my informants, Anna told me that her husband Angela, might be keener to do the washing up and other easy housework when cross-dressed. But when it comes to cleaning and dusting the house, she says she has to keep an eye on him to be sure the job is well done. However, most of the time he prefers sitting and chatting while en femme. This is an example that some transvestites' 'dedoublement' is consciously performed and that they choose which part of the feminine role they want to perform when enacting their alter ego.

Some wives may ask their partner to follow a psychological or psychiatric "cure" (Wise et al. 1981). The usual outcome of the 'cure' is that the transvestite might stop cross-dressing for a short period, but will go back to it later as we have seen in **Chapter 2**. However, therapy might make a transvestite feel less guilty about his behaviour and more confident about it. This might help the transvestite to better manage his transvestism and family life and so improve his relationship with his partner. Prince and Bentler (1972) note that transvestites who confess to their wives before marriage were more prepared to visit a psychologist or psychiatrist to please their partner. Dorothy tried to stop cross-dressing when his wife found out, but the urge came back. The couple tried to find compromises, such as cross-dressing at certain times on certain days or suggesting wearing androgynous or unisex clothing instead of feminine clothes, but these kind of clothes do not interest transvestites. To fulfil the urge, they need to dress in recognisably female clothes (Buhrich 1976). Compromises within the couple's relationship did not work and they got divorced.

Some transvestites may 'fall in love' with their feminine alter ego while living with their wife who can then feel jealous towards her 'rival'. As Lily told me, *"it doesn't help any relationship because there is this fighting. I'm fighting Jo's alter ego to get to my husband. And it is a continual fight that a woman has to get through. ... Does he love 'her' more than he loves me?"* Ovesey and Person (1976:230) suggest that the transvestite's attraction to his female alter ego may become confused between 'loving' to express his feminine alter ego, and 'becoming' his alter ego. The transvestites, instead of temporarily creating and enacting his feminine alter ego may start to allow his feminine personality to take over his masculine one. When there is such confusion between the two, it is extremely hard for the wife to understand her husband. She may also wonder who the husband really is and whom he loves: her or his alter ego.

Some wives might even become jealous of their husband's alter ego, because their husband makes a more attractive woman than they feel themselves to be. Prince (1967) argues that the husband's alter ego is not a rival, but if the wife is open minded and tolerant she might discover that transvestism can give a lot to both partners, leading to a rich

relationship and true friendship. To support his assumption, he gives different examples of wives who appreciate their husband's transvestism. And about the wives who refuse their husband's cross-dressing he writes "*You are causing your own pain ... your discomfort is self-inflicted*" (Prince 1967:42). Prince, being a transvestite himself, seems to forget about the wives' feelings. Each woman married a man and is suddenly confronted by a female "*creature*" (informant's word) who is part of her husband. The husband's attraction for women's clothes might become unbearable for the wife who might wonder with whom her husband is in love.

Lily said that one thing to be said in favour of transvestites as husbands is that they can be trusted to remain faithful. In her view transvestites are unlikely to be predatory towards women. "*It's like being with a gay in a way. He is not a sexual threat for women. The same way a transvestite is not a threat.*" She believes that because transvestites adore and emulate women they will never hurt a woman, on the other hand, to compare transvestites with gay men is to deny their heterosexuality and to make parallels with the stereotype of the effeminate gay. It is as if Lily considers transvestites as asexual men. Another wife, Julie, told me that it is better to have a husband who cross-dresses than an aggressive husband, because at least a transvestite husband respects women and does not threaten them. However, while transvestites appear not to be violent or aggressive towards their wives some can become so self-focused that they neglect the public (socialisation with friends and neighbours) and interactive aspects of their marital relationship. They will spend most of their spare time cross-dressing, admiring themselves or shopping for their 'double'. Lily says most transvestites prefer to buy a new pair of shoes for their alter ego than for their children. The large amount of time spent on these activities, as well as the extra expense, can make a partner feel badly neglected.

Lily explained that it is especially difficult for a wife to accept her husband's transvestism if she has young children. The main anxiety that wives shared during our conversation was the fear that their children might discover their father cross-dressed. They were afraid that the children would not be able to understand what their father was

doing. In the case of their sons, mothers were afraid that the child might be provoked to imitate the father. Also the children might talk to their friends at school and be criticised. We have seen how wives experience fear of social reprisal from their neighbours, close family, friends or work mates if the husband is discovered. So even if the wife truly loves her husband the social pressure on the family is intense.

A wife may also fear that her transvestite husband will lose his job if discovered. By disclosing their cross-dressing to close relatives and friends, transvestites face the danger of having these people tell others. In such an event a transvestite might lose his job. This threat seems particularly present for men in the armed forces or in the police. As Jo told me, he experienced an incident while he was in the army when a homosexual was discovered and sent to Court Martial. As a transvestite, he was sure that the same would happen to him if he was discovered. While attending the meetings, I met a transvestite who is in the police force. He asked me not to tell anyone that I had met him and not to say hello if I ever met him in a pub. He was very scared that his friends would ask him where he met me and that they would find out about his transvestism. Among the members of the Darlington group, there is genuine trust. Even if people know about each other's identity and life, they will never use this knowledge against each other. Members have the power of knowledge, but they do not use it. Each is in a weak position within society because all share the same non-normative behaviour.

Transvestites who are discovered may well lose their job because of this inappropriate dress code even though this may be considered a case of sexual discrimination. Wintemute (1997:335) asserts that there is "*sex discrimination*" when the chromosomal sex of a person is used directly, or expressly, to restrict persons in their choices or opportunities of life, and it is generally used to enforce the social dichotomization of men and women's social roles. Hopefully, this is not always an outcome. For example, Jo's employer knows that he is a transvestite, but expects him to wear his security guard's uniform to work.

### **3. Telling the close family members**

#### **3.1. Telling or not telling the children**

The question of whether or not to tell the children about their father's transvestism is always a very delicate matter for a woman. Brown (1998) suggests that the age of the child is a relevant issue. A young child educated in an environment where gender boundaries are not strictly defined will take the father's transvestism for granted. The only problem might be that the child fails to understand that the transvestism of the father is a private and secret behaviour not to be revealed to anyone. Brown's (1998) study suggests it is better not to reveal the father's transvestism to a teenager, who is likely to be still discovering his or her own gender and sexuality. Revealing their father's transvestism at this stage could be the onset of later sexual or gender identity 'disorder'. Telling adult children can also present some problems. The children might accuse their parents of having lied to them for years and completely reject the father.

Karen's children found out about their father's transvestism when their parents got divorced. At the time of the divorce, they were still teenagers. The mother received custody of the children and did not allow them to visit their father, as she considered him to be a 'sexual pervert'. Since then, his children have not wanted to see or talk to him. I came across another similar case, but with a different outcome. When Christine's daughter once found her father fully cross-dressed, she was in her early twenties. She was not angry, but embarrassed and left to give him time to get changed. She also then realised that the long-standing problems between her mother and father were due to his cross-dressing. Nowadays, they barely talk about it and it seems that their relationship has not changed for the worst. Christine's son also knows about his father's transvestism and he has not distanced himself. Christine still visits and receives visits from both of his children, but he is very careful that his grandchildren do not discover his transvestism.

As transvestism is less visible in Belgium, Ghislaine is a very particular case. His wife knew about her husband's cross-dressing from the day they met and the couple never hid it from their daughter. The child was raised in a house where a man wearing female clothes was something completely acceptable. She is now in her mid-twenties and still accepts her father's behaviour. She has even told her boyfriend who finds it curious and amusing, but has accepted it too. I think that a couple who inform their children about their father's cross-dressing will encounter different reactions depending on the existing father-children relationship. In the case of good and trusting relations, the usual reaction on the part of the children seems to be either indifference or open acceptance.

### **3.2 Telling or not telling the parents**

Telling parents about transvestism can also be very delicate. For a mother, finding out about her son's transvestism can be horrifying especially if they think that there is something wrong with his masculinity or, they can even blame themselves for his behaviour. It is often harder for a father than a mother to accept the transvestism of a son, as the father wants him to be a man and to fulfil a masculine role and, transvestism represents a failure from the masculine expectation. The father will often consider his transvestite son as effeminate and will often assume that he is homosexual and reject him on this ground, even if in public the son fulfils a masculine image and role. In Ghislaine's case, when he told his parents, they completely rejected him thinking that he was homosexual. Even after he got married the father still thought he was homosexual and the mother could not really understand his behaviour. More recently they have begun to accept it, although they do not want to see their son cross-dressed. In many cases, the mother accepts her son's transvestism even if it seems strange to her.

Alison was caught cross-dressed by his sister when he was a teenager. She kept Alison's secret for a long time. While on holidays with her parents, she inadvertently revealed Alison's transvestism. So, the family returned home early and caught him walking the dog while cross-dressed. Alison and his parents had a huge argument. His father was a

Marine and everything had to be "*right or out*" (Alison's words). Because his father rejected his transvestism, Alison left home. His mother was very shocked when she saw her son cross-dressed, but later accepted it. When Alison's mother fell ill and his father was away from home, Alison used to take care of his mother while cross-dressed. After his mother died, he did not have any further contact with his father.

Once, while playing dominoes, Rose told us how surprised she was when her son Jerry told her about his transvestism a few years ago. She knew what a transvestite was, but she had never been connected with one and would have never expected her son to be a transvestite. She still had some difficulties expressing herself as her son revealed his secret less than a year prior to our conversation. She said, "*It's just a shock to know. I don't really get involved with it.*" Rose has accepted her son's behaviour even if it seems "*strange*" to her. When Jerry is cross-dressed, Rose still says 'he' and not 'she', because she cannot distinguish both personae, as does Lily with Jo's 'double'. Rose calls her son Jerry when he is cross-dressed and uses masculine pronouns when addressing him. When I asked if she tried to stop him cross-dressing she replied "*Oh no, no, no, he is too old. It's his own life.*"

Jerry told his mother about his transvestism because he wanted her to know. "*I suppose you want everybody to know really*". For him it is a "*social open thing*". He wants to cross-dress without it needing to be a secret from his family. Rose said that since he told her she has seen a change in his behaviour. Jerry became more talkative while previously he was extremely reserved and taciturn. These changes in his personality may be because he can finally express his full personality: the masculine that is complemented by the feminine. Rose's son's revelation did not only change him, but also her social habits. Before he told her she was not going out much and since he convinced her to join his meeting group, she has developed a friendship with Lily and joins every meeting (in the house and in the restaurant if Jerry goes).

Rose being a widow, Jerry thought it would be nice if she also joined his transvestites' group to meet some new friends. Rose used not to go out much, but since she joined the group, she looks forwards to the monthly meeting where she meets her new friends and plays dominoes with Lily and Christine. By introducing his mother to the group, it seems that Jerry gained some proof that his mother had really accepted his transvestism and would understand more by talking to other women and transvestites. Not only does Rose talk to other women, but also to certain transvestites such as Jo or Christine. So, Rose finds herself able to talk to other women who are confronted with transvestism in their daily lives, in a friendly and relaxed surrounding.

Lola, a homosexual transvestite and sometimes drag artist, has a very good relationship with his mother, but not with his father who has rejected him. As already said earlier, the first time his mother found out about his cross-dressing, she dragged him to the doctor and asked for "*pills to cure him*". Many among the older generation of transvestites (in their fifties, sixties and older) hid their cross-dressing from their parents, whereas members of the younger generation (twenties and thirties) more easily disclosed their transvestism. This difference between generations may be due to the political changes that occurred in western societies during the twentieth century. It is now the turn of the transvestites and other cross-dressers to slowly come out and to openly display their 'dedoublement' (James et al. 1999). The political involvement of transvestites will be further explained in **Chapter 7**.

#### **4. Transvestites and wives' interpretation of the origin of 'dedoublement'**

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Prince's (1962) research indicates that about eighty percent of transvestites start cross-dressing before the age of eighteen. He argues that cross-dressing may have occurred earlier than the age recollected or that these tendencies existed earlier, but were latent or hidden. Among the transvestites I encountered, most of them recollected, or were told, that they started cross-dressing at very early age or at least before puberty. I only met one transvestite who told me he started in

his fifties, but he could not affirm that he did not cross-dress when he was a child. When I asked them why they cross-dressed, most of them did not have an answer. Jo expressed his feeling while cross-dressing in his teens "*I didn't know what I was doing but I liked it. I didn't like the fact I was doing it but I liked it.*" So, Jo was aware that what he was doing was not socially acceptable for a boy, but he enjoyed it and kept on cross-dressing. Christine told me that "*I don't know why I'm doing this, but I like it!*". So, again, he enjoys his transvestism, but does not know why he is doing it, as he knows that it is a non-normative behaviour. Through medical and sociological literature, as we have seen in **Chapters 2**, several explanations of the origin of transvestism exist.

Stoller (1971) traces the origin of transvestism in a mother wanting a girl and dressing him into female clothes at least once. This threatens the boy's masculinity, who will have a latent need to cross-dress again. This is challenged by Prince's (1962) research that found that less than twenty percent of transvestites were forced into female clothes. Another explanation (Stoller and Herdt 1982) traces its origin to the over-identification of the boy with the mother due to the lack of a strong father's figure. Again this is challenged by Prince's results that found fewer than thirty percent of the fathers represented a weak image. Still, these two psychiatric explanations could be applied to one of my informants (Jo) who was the only boy in a household of women (mother, grandmother, and female employees). Once the female employees dressed him when he was four years old. He said he did not like it because he wanted to be a soldier. His father was absent during his early childhood and when he came back from the war he seemed to be drunk most of the time and treated his wife badly. So his father represented a weak figure in contrast of the strong and omnipresent female figure of the women of the household. Among my other informants, many spoke of fathers who were absent or weak figures. However, I also met transvestites whose fathers did not fit into this picture.

Transvestites' wives often have their own ideas about its origins (with which ideas I do not agree). Anna is convinced that transvestism is inscribed in the genes and is hereditary. She supports her view with a rumour existing in the family that reports that her

husband's father was also a transvestite. This view is very much an essentialist approach related to theories explored in **Chapter 2** that explain the biological determinism of transvestism in or sex hormone abnormalities. Lily thinks the origin of transvestism comes from the way a boy is brought up. She says that most of the transvestites that she knows are shy and introverted men who had problems during their childhood. She believes that most lacked affection because parental attention was concentrated on another sibling. These boys were looking for the maternal attention that they were denied and took consolation in their mother's clothes. So, in Lily's view, transvestism is a cry for attention. Lily's interpretation is related to early childhood psychological influence, as well as social relationships within the family also examined in **Chapter 2**.

So, Anna and Lily's views reflect the dominant models about the origin of transvestism. Their views may come from the books they read when they discovered their husband's transvestism and made these theories their own. Both of them are in their early sixties, but Anna could have read the literature existing in 1950-60, such as Stoller, when her husband told her about his transvestism. This makes her theory very simplistic and 'old fashioned'. Jo is Lily's second husband so, she was confronted with transvestism in the 1980s and had access to a greater variety of literature. Still, her interpretation seems to be inspired by late 1970s models that located the origin of transvestism in an early identification with the mother.

Lily also thinks curiosity has an important role to play. Boys wonder why women wear certain kinds of clothes that are forbidden to them. They wonder why girls have lovely dresses while boys have to wear "*itchy fabrics*" (Jo's words) and trousers. As Jo expresses it: "*It was like the forbidden fruit. It's forbidden! Right I'm gonna do that!*". So cross-dressing becomes a habit, a way of relaxation. After a hard day at work, a man wants to leave his male identity and return to the mother through adopting female clothes. The transvestite wants to escape from himself. "*This is relaxation. Throwing away all the male responsibilities. The farthest you can get away from the male macho responsible image, is*

*to become the opposite: a female.*" Woodhouse (1989) also noticed that transvestites try to escape from their masculine role to endorse the feminine one that is supposed to be easier and thus more relaxing.

I found out that even if some transvestites do not have the need to cross-dress regularly, when cross-dressed they have the feeling that their personality is completed by their female alter ego. Many of my informants told me that when 'en femme' they feel more at ease and experience a feeling of relief from tension. The need to cross-dress is often felt when the man feels under pressure and needs to release tension. In this case, transvestism does not interfere with everyday life as he can control it for a certain period of time. But in cases of intense strain the temptation to enact the 'double' is so uncontrollable that a person might become irritable and aggressive if not allowed to do so. The wife of one of my informants explained to me that "*if transvestites cannot dress when they need to, then the aggression comes. ... It is like a volcano: if they don't cross-dress they will burst. They become nasty. If they are allowed to dress, they can keep it under control.*" This observation is reflected in the literature. Some psychologists and psychiatrists observe that transvestites tend to be "*aggressive and competitive*" and are inclined to suffer from depression (Marks and Gelder 1967; Ovesey and Person 1976; Bullough and Bullough 1993). Thus, as long as the transvestite is not under stress, he might not have the need to cross-dress, but merely enjoy the fantasy of being dressed in women's clothes.

Woodhouse (1989) mentioned that some transvestites cannot live with their transvestism and try to follow a cure, but as seen earlier the outcome is that the person does not stop cross-dressing, but might feel better about it. My informants told me that when they were young and had not met other transvestites, they felt guilty and ashamed about their behaviour, but could not stop it. As Woodhouse (1989) pointed, it is then that they are most likely to accept medical advice, but it is unlikely to help. It is only when they meet other transvestites that they feel more comfortable with their transvestism. Even transvestites who remain isolated do not stop. Woodhouse (1989) would compare them to "*drug addicts*" who do not want to be cured. Nowadays, it is much easier for young

transvestites to meet other men who share their interest due to the Internet where several transvestites groups have information sites as well as chat-rooms or correspondence sites. Also more and more transvestites' magazines are available in specialised shops. As we have seen earlier, this variety of magazines reflects the different tendencies of transvestism.

Among the older generation of transvestites I met, several were forced by their mothers to follow psychotherapy in their youth. One of them, Lola, was caught stealing female garments from a clothesline when he was sixteen years old. His mother took him to the doctor and asked him for some 'pills' to cure him. The doctor then sent him to a psychotherapist to follow a three weeks cure. The psychiatrist, noticing that nothing could be done for him pointed him in the direction of the gay scene. The others who also had to follow a cure did not stop cross-dressing. For all of them it was just a waste of time. They knew that their behaviour was socially unacceptable, but they did not feel that they were ill.

## **5. Conclusion**

Most studies of male transvestism have failed to take into account the influence and role of partners and other family members and the kinds of compromises they are called upon to make. Nowadays, transvestites have more access to help and support groups through magazines published by the growing number of transvestites' organisations as well as through the Internet. These organisations can advise and assist them with their internal conflicts. Most of all, these organisations give them the opportunity to cross-dress with or without the agreement of their wives. Transvestites' wives also need support to be able to understand and cope with their exceptional situation. However, their needs are usually different from those of their husband. Wives usually need to share their feelings and talk about their own experience with other women in the same situation. They need to express their fears about their children, family, neighbours and friends discovering the husband's transvestism, their concern about becoming objects of ridicule and criticism, as well as the anguish that is often felt over time, energy and money a husband might spend on his feminine alter ego. To fulfil these needs, several transvestites' organisations have

developed help-lines and support groups for the transvestites' wives and close family such as *The Beaumont Society* that developed the *Women of the Beaumont Society* (WOBS) who initiated a telephone help-line in 1990.

From the conversations I had with my informants, it was clear that transvestites understand the difficulty that their partners face. Some will try really hard to end their transvestism, but the urge always returns even after years of cessation. In cases of divorce, it is a great distress for them to see their family dislocated. They wish for their wives to at least bear their behaviour. The worst outcome for transvestites who are going through a divorce is that the wife gets the custody of the children and refuses him any contact with them, as she considers him as a pervert. Lily said that if people were more informed about what transvestism is, some of the strain experienced by some women would be relieved. It is one of the reasons why she agrees to be interviewed by newspapers, and to take part in television programmes, with her husband. She believes that the only way transvestism will be better understood is by transvestites going out and demonstrating that they are not 'perverts', but men with a need to express what they consider to be their femininity.

Women that I met who discovered their husband's transvestism had to overcome their distress and surprise. To accept their husband's transvestism, these women had to acknowledge the existence and expression of a feminine side of their husband's personality. They had to be sufficiently open-minded to accept a behaviour that crosses gender boundaries and challenges the stereotypes attached to gender. Those who were not informed by their husband before their marriage had to reassess their husband's masculinity. In their everyday private and public life they had to set new rules and boundaries in order to maintain the facade that hides transvestism or face censure. These women have confronted and challenged social norms in order to be able to accept their husband's 'dedoublement'.

## Chapter 7

# The "Others"

### 1. Challenging the gender dichotomisation

Following Garfinkel (1967:116), gender play is only permitted upon highly ceremonial occasions. These transfers are characterised by "*temporary*" and "*playful*" variations of what people "*after all and really*" are. For Garfinkel, in playful settings such as carnival, people may endorse female clothing as well as the matching personality for a time, but at the end of the day people will return to their original and expected gender that is related to their sex. This automatic return to the original gender is the demonstration that society exercises a close control over gender. Even legal change is regarded with reservation by societies that take the *bona fide* sex status for granted (Garfinkel 1967). After the gender assignation of the neonate in America and Europe, s/he will be legally registered as male or female. This registration will fix individuals into a gender group for the rest of their life. Thus, according to Garfinkel, socialisation is the most thorough way our culture has for maintaining the duality of sex and its one-to-one identification with gender and the most crucial component of the construction of gender identity.

The case of the transsexual Kate Bornstein is a good example of a person challenging this strict cultural dichotomisation. She was as she describes herself "*a straight, white, able-bodied, middle class male* (1994:61). Divorced three times, father of children, salesman and circumcised Jew. In her book *Gender Outlaw*, she takes us through her life story from early sex-role and gender confusion, to the acceptance she has since acquired as a respected artist. Her story demonstrates the fluidity of gender. Bornstein has crossed our dichotomous gender boundaries by transforming her male body into a female one. She argues that rules in relation to the genitals of belonging to one gender or the other

can be broken. This can be achieved not only by ceremonial behaviour or masquerade (as argued by Garfinkel), but also by personal self-perception of belonging to one gender or the other. Sex reassignment is a personal choice made to fulfil the social expectation surrounding the link between sex and gender. By contrast, transvestites happily mix both genders' characteristics while expressing their 'dedoublement'.

Ekins and King argue that some people:

... attempt to, or succeed in, blending various aspects of the culturally established components of gender, either in respect of themselves (e.g. transvestites, transsexuals) or in respect of others (e.g. medicine, the mass media). (1997:1)

From my observations, male transvestites are blending genders, as they are mixing characteristics of both genders by their practice of cross-dressing in feminine clothes and expressing what they call their femininity. Still, in their everyday life the transvestites I have encountered present a masculine image and it is only when cross-dressing that they express their femininity. So, they make a clear distinction between the enactment of their two genders; masculine in their everyday life and feminine when cross-dressed. This clear distinction between the performance of their two genders allow them to fit the social expectation attached to their masculine gender assignation with their 'dedoublement'.

However, it can be asked how do transvestites manage a strong masculine public image as well as their feminine 'double' in areas such as the North East of England and Liège in Belgium, which share a particular regional discourse of traditional masculinity? All transvestites I encountered were more or less conventional men with a masculine image (muscular body, masculine clothes and behaviour) and a job that does not question their masculinity, such as army officer, policeman, teacher, computer worker, lorry driver and so on. They are mostly heterosexual, married or divorced, with children. They socialise with their friends in pubs and have hobbies such as football, cars, body training and gliding. Five of my informants served in the army, thus fulfilling various male roles that are not linked with the image of an 'inadequate' or effeminate man. When talking about their time in the army, they underlined how masculine you had to be to live in such a surrounding. As

Jo told me about his time in the army, in an ironical way as he was cross-dressed, "*they made a man of me!*". When telling me this, he used a very loud voice to underline how masculine he had to be.

An individual's regional identity can be rooted in the local experience of a community. The kinship and friendship networks of the immediate social groups encompass a person's own life experience and provide the basis for "*his attachment to the region, its image and social attributes*" (Townsend 1977:390). We could say that local culture is embodied in each member of a community. For some people the embodiment of social stereotypes might present a real struggle and create psychological tension. Such a person might not feel comfortable with prevailing social expectations, but follow them in order to be accepted as a full member of the local community. In this sense the body is reduced to an instrument that is used to enact social stereotypes. As Connell (1995:295) puts it, "*The differentiation of masculinities cannot simply be understood in terms of individual choice. Rather, it is a collective project operating at the level of the institution and the organisation of peer group relation.*" This could also be applied to femininity that is enacted by women and that transvestites have internalised, but do not dare express except when cross-dressed.

While discussing with a woman who was born, brought up and still lives in the area of my fieldwork in England, she told me that men do not express their feelings. They do not say "*I feel*" but "*I think*". So their only way to express their feelings is *through* their female partners. This means that men usually go for feminine women wearing long hair, make-up and feminine clothes that will complement their masculine image. This could suggest that transvestites are more common in culture with very dichotomised and polarised gender identities, but I did not find any literature concerning this kind of research. In the case of transvestites, it is not through their partners that they will express what they call their femininity, but by creating their own feminine image with their own body. So, transvestites by expressing their 'dedoublement' challenge at least two ideologies of masculinity. Anatomically speaking they are male, but they sometimes use clothing

attributed to the other gender. They also enact a particular regional masculine ideal and in the same time they deal with their need to express their inner feminine self. This inner feminine self corresponds to the regional discourse that expects women to express their femininity through their appearance.

So, the expression of their feminine self seriously transgresses the masculine ideology of my places of fieldwork by asserting the existence of the feminine within the masculine. This is especially disturbing because in western societies transvestites have a particular status due to their masculine gender. They are challenging this male identity that affords them normative status in the culture by putting on female clothes that are attached to female stereotypes (Gutterman 1994). The expression of their 'dedoublement' also challenges the social dichotomous structure based on male/female and masculine/feminine. Any person crossing the dichotomous gender boundaries will straight away be considered as deviant or sick. To avoid being classified as such, transvestites tend to keep their behaviour more or less secret.

Another way that transvestites avoid being labelled as deviant or being considered as gay or effeminate is by strongly developing their masculine role, which contributes to maintaining their masculine image. Still, in cases where individuals keep secret what would otherwise be stigmatising, as some transvestites do, Goffman (1963) argues that these individuals will feel guilty and unable to disclose their secret. Even if the stigmatised behaviour is unapparent and unknown by anyone, it will cast a shadow on the individual's life. Transvestites I met who had not disclosed their transvestism to their close family, were afraid of being discovered because of social pressure and feared being rejected by their close family or partner and thus often had to live with this worry.

The existence of transvestites' feminine and masculine personalities supports Gilmore's (1990) suggestion that masculinity never exists in a pure state. Each personality is a complex structure of emotions that coexist and in contradiction to each other. This theory is supported by what Angela told me:

I'm inclined to believe that there is a gradual graduation between extreme male on one side and extreme female on the other side. And there are grey areas in between where people are predominantly one, but partially the other.

This argument proposes that transvestites are in what Angela calls 'grey areas', as they assert a masculine gender identity, but claim possession of a feminine 'double' that requires enactment through cross-dressing.

By accepting that transvestites have a 'dedoublement', it is recognising that transvestites make a blur of our gendered norms. This follows Gutterman's (1994) idea that the conflict between the individual personal non-normative gender and the norm creates interesting places of slippage. In these particular places, the standards of gender are undermined and contested. For example, transvestites who fulfil a strong masculine public image have, as they say, a 'feminine inner self' that needs to be enacted from time to time. This 'dedoublement' is not acceptable in the masculine ideology and transgresses the so called 'natural' boundaries of gender that have been created by our own culture. As King (1993) argues, male transvestites have to pass as ordinary men to hide their deviance. This is particularly true in the case of transvestites who pass as ordinary men in their everyday life and indulge in their cross-dressing in private. So, to be a man is not only to have male genitals, but also to display a range of behaviours evolving in parallel with this male body, such as displaying the ability of performing heavy duty work, wearing masculine clothes or going to the pub with friends.

Since the changes in fashion after the Second World War, women's gender identity is rarely questioned even if a woman displays masculine clothing and attitudes (Davis 1992). In general, men do not have the same option. Male attire is traditionally conservative. Flamboyant male attire, other than in a theatrical setting, is associated with homosexuality. A female in traditional male clothing will not experience the same labelling process, unless she takes the cross-dressing to wild extremes. In this respect, a female cross-dresser is less likely to experience social stigma for her cross-dressing because masculine women are more acceptable to society than 'feminine' men. This is different for

men who still have a strict masculine dress code as well as body language. Any men deviating from the masculine norms will have his gender challenged and feminine epithets may be used such as "*effete*", "*unmanly*", "*effeminate*", "*emasculate*", if the body language and clothes do not correspond to the expected cultural behaviour (Gilmore 1990:11).

So, because transvestites have this femininity they need to express, they are looked at by other men as being secondary men and effeminate. Transvestites are often judged from their external characteristics rather than on their personality. As Jo said to me about the reason transvestites are criticised and rejected. "*Transvestism is so visible. So if you look like a man in a frock, people have a problem accepting that.*" So to be able to 'pass' as a real woman, transvestites need to enact the image and movements of a woman who would blend into a crowd. If transvestites do not fulfil this image, they will be spotted by people and recognised as non-normative. Still not all transvestites suffer such rejection. As we have seen in the case of Christine, his neighbours have completely accepted him cross-dressed.

To avoid social repression, transvestites tend to present an unquestionable masculine image in their everyday life, but it does not always satisfy them. When they sometimes want to express sensitivity, emotions and other qualities that they associate with femininity, they cross-dress as their 'double' and free themselves from their everyday role as men. Talamini (1982:70) suggests that "*transvestism may, for many males, be an expression of an androgynous personality.*" For Talamini it indicates "*a conception of mental health which is free from culturally imposed definitions of masculinity* (1982:70)". Brake (1976) has a similar approach to gender and uses a very interesting quote:

My opinion is easily enough expressed; I believe that our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarisation, and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles, and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen. The ideal toward I believe we should move is best described by the term 'androgyny'. This ancient Greek word - from andro (male) and gyn (female) - defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes and human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate. (Heilbrun 1973: cx in Brake 1976:183)

Instead of accepting dichotomised genders, as imposed in western societies, Brake and Talamini, suggest that we should be able to freely choose a behaviour appropriate to our needs. The 'androgynous' gender would reflect and suit some people's gender expression. However, if our society accepted an 'androgynous gender', transvestites would still want to express an unmistakable feminine image, as for them already existing androgynous clothes do not have any interest, as in the case of Jo who was wearing a sarong while in post in Hong Kong, but still felt the need to cross-dress. What transvestites really want to express is their created feminine alter ego along with their undoubted masculine identity. So when Talamini writes that transvestites have an 'androgynous personality', I do not agree as I believe that 'dedoublement' is a more appropriate concept, as it brings close together their masculine gender with their need to express what they call their femininity.

## **2. Labelling non-normative behaviours**

Alongside the medicalisation of non-normative behaviours such as transvestism or homosexuality, a sociological explanation was developed, which came into prominence during the 1960s: labelling theory. Most of the significant literature concerning the theorisation of concepts of deviance has been written by sociologists, such as Lemert (1951), Becker (1964, 1974), Kitsuse (1964) and Matza (1969). The labelling of non-normative behaviours leads them to be classified as 'deviant'. A definition of deviance, suggested by Barfield (1997) in his Dictionary of Anthropology, describes it as: "*a general category of non-normative behaviour that includes crime, psychopathology, rebellion, or simple violation of social conventions.*" People who have been labelled as 'deviant' will react in different ways to protect themselves against this categorisation.

Few anthropological analyses of deviance exist and as Freilich et al. (1991:1) notes, our discipline is a "*latecomer to the study of deviance*". They attribute this late arrival to the nature of anthropology's traditional subject matter. Since the nineteenth century, anthropological researches have mainly focused on small-scale societies, that western

culture views as exotic, primitive and mysterious. They also argue that anthropologists have struggled to discern variations from the norm and, sometimes even impose patterns and structures where these irregularities were played down. Freilich et al. write:

...to counter such myths [of the anthropologist studying only primitive societies], anthropologists have tried to discover sense where others have imputed non sense, to perceive structure and meaning where others have found only noise. (1991:1)

If irregularities were mentioned, it was to shed light on the newly discovered "*patterns of culture*" (Benedict 1934 in Freilich et al. 1991:1). In summary, deviance in anthropology has been seen as "*a mole, a disruptive animal that messes up the neatness and symmetry of our carefully manicured cultural lawns*" (Freilich et al. 1991:1).

Erchak (1992) also notes that anthropologists have participated very little in the critique of medical models of deviant behaviours, such as homosexuality and transvestism. Anthropologists only presented accounts of various behaviours found in different societies and analysed them cross-culturally to shed light on the existing social interpretations of these behaviours, such as Herdt's book *Third Sex, Third Gender* which offers a cross cultural analysis of the third gender. Anthropologists also suggest less and less shyly, to physicians and psychiatrists that culture should be more seriously taken into account in diagnosis and treatment. Indeed, to be able to understand human behaviour, the scientist must explore both the individual and the group within which the individual lives. Some people are maintained in a lower social status by virtue of their race, religion or behaviour, but these individuals are part of the community. Even if someone's behaviour is considered abnormal or deviant, s/he is part of society and may function to mark its boundaries and enable others to feel a sense of belonging. Deviant behaviour may also force the revision of societal values. A society needs 'deviance' in order to develop to meet changing circumstances. For example, gays challenged the 'naturalism' of heterosexuality. Since the twentieth century, personal and non-heterosexual sexual choice has become more and more open and acceptable (Plummer 1981).

We may deviate from a number of ready-made criteria that are socially constructed and may vary from one society to the other depending on the respective importance attached to norms covering the deviations. For example, homosexuality is not considered as 'erotic' act but as a normal stage in the male development for the Sambia (Herdt 1987), as in our western societies, homosexuality was judged as a criminal offence. Even in the same society, following each personal interpretation of what behaviour is considered to be acceptable, we may deviate or not. Libertines and Puritans do not have the same degrees of tolerance across a range of behaviours. In the case of homosexuality for example, some Christians and elderly people may be less tolerant than the younger generation. "*What is deviant or not is entirely a matter of what participants in a social category judge to be deviant*" (Lofland 1969:23). Each society has its own definition of 'deviation' according to its social and moral organisation and within pluralistic societies such definitions are internally contested. Sometimes the boundaries are not really clear even if any divergence is readily observable. Erikson defines the social norm in these terms:

A social norm is rarely expressed as a firm rule or official code. It is an abstract synthesis of the many separate times a community has stated its sentiments on a given kind of issue. Thus the norm has a history much like that of an article of common law: it is an accumulation of decisions made by the community over a long period of time which gradually gathers enough moral eminence to serve as a precedent for future decisions. And like an article of common law, the norm retains its validity only if it is regularly used as a basis for judgement. Each time the group censures some act of deviation, then, it sharpens the authority of the violated norm and declares again where the boundaries of the group are located. (1964:14)

Thus, the social norms are not only unwritten and abstract, but they also evolve following the need of a community. This indicates that a society is not a unity and a fixed entity but plural, contested and always evolving.

## **2.1. Labelling theory**

During the 1960s, the concept of deviance became associated with a movement called labelling theory. The major proponents of the theory were Lemert (1951), Becker (1964, 1974), Kitsuse (1964) and Matza (1969). They emphasise both social process and

individual perception as being important to the construction of social life. These theorists assert that deviance is socially constructed. For example, Becker (1964) argues it is the social group that creates deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance. When those rules are applied to particular people they might be labelled 'outsiders' to minimise and limit their interaction and influences. According to this view, deviance is not the quality of an act committed by an individual, but the consequence of the application of the socially created rules to an offender by the members of a certain society. Thus, the members of a society decide which are the shared common norms and when an individual departs from these accepted norms. When an individual does depart from the norms, he or she is labelled 'deviant'. The labelled individuals find themselves rejected or marginalised from certain forms of social participation and sometimes encouraged to conceive of themselves as deviants. According to Kaplan, the concept of deviant behaviour is applied to individuals who fail "*to conform to the applicable normative expectations of the group*" (Kaplan 1980: 6). Kaplan notes that the failure may be due to either the individual's loss of motivation to conform to the social expectation or to the individual's active motivation to deviate from the norms.

Matza (1969) develops the idea that deviance may vary and be classified as different forms of divergence according to a number of criteria, such as the clarity of the deviation, the distance from the norm, the consequence of the deviation, whether it applies to an individual or a group and the motive behind the deviation. There are different kinds of deviation and they all vary to different degrees. So the designation 'deviant' for a person or a group of people is dubious because it depends on the nature of the society and a complexity of factors. In modern society, cultural definitions tend to be more and more ambiguous so 'deviance' may respond to any non-normative phenomena with ambiguity and elusory following the need. In the very idea of deviation shiftiness, ambiguity and pluralism are implicated. Where the definition of deviance is vague and ambiguous, it allows for a great variety of 'deviances'.

Lemert (1951) distinguishes different types of deviance. The person whose behaviour is a 'problem' to others, but not to themselves; the person whose behaviour is a 'problem' to themselves, but not to others and the person whose behaviour is a 'problem' both to others and themselves. The deviant may try to get rid of his discomfort and 'dis-ease' (Brierley 1979) to avoid social persecution. In the case that he cannot and is discovered, he may be rejected by others. Transvestites, following Lemert's distinctions of different deviance, would fit in the first and third classification depending on whether they already have met other transvestites and joined a club. As we have seen, transvestites often felt guilty and ashamed of their behaviour when they started cross-dressing and often tried to stop it. It is only when they have met other people like them that they will build their confidence and enjoy their cross-dressing without shame. If their behaviour is not a problem for them, it can be for their family and partner as well as the people they meet in the street.

Lemert (1951) points out that people are aware of 'norms' only when they are breached because deviations may be provocative and sometimes menace privileges and possessions that people have acquired and do not want to lose. Members of a society react in different ways to a visible deviation. Their attitudes depend on the nature of the deviations and the majority expectations. Lemert also notes that a range of reactions can be manifest and experienced such as admiration, awe, envy, sympathy, indifference, fear, repulsion, disgust, hate, or anger. To provoke a community reaction, the deviation must be visible and identified as deviant. Societal reaction will often reflect the nature, degree and visibility of the deviation and if the deviant behaviour persists for any length of time, the deviant is likely to be stigmatised and stereotyped.

Collective representation and stereotypes are attached to deviant behaviour and, any person who deviates from social norms may expect such collective representation. Indeed, as Goffman (1963) points out, an individual who knows, or is perceived, to have a stigma will suffer in social interactions because people will categorise him. Moreover, he will be categorised solely on the basis of his stigma. In the case of a transvestite trying to pass in

public, if he is read, he will immediately be categorised as a transvestite. During these interactions, the stigmatised individual and those around him might experience uneasiness. However, since the stigmatised person is more likely to face these situations than the non-stigmatised, he can become more adept at managing them and may devote considerable time and effort to it. For example, Jo says he does not care if he is 'read' while walking in the street cross-dressed. However, he always tries his best to pass as a woman and, as we have seen earlier, he sometimes also likes to be recognised as a transvestite by letting his voice drop when talking to people.

Some people may behave in ways that cross the boundaries of the social norm, but are never labelled 'deviant' because the behaviour is too secret to be noticed and punished. Some deviance from the norm might even generate envy and admiration, such as that which is directed towards people who undertake high risk and sensational activities. These people may take unusual physical risks in sport or adventure. They are breaking the norm of the possibility of sport or adventure and may be considered as 'mad', but there is some envy and admiration from the others that will never be able to do such things. King observes that:

... labelling theory rightly stresses the independence of label and behaviour (at least in the sense that a label is simply a name for behaviour or a 'type' of person), and focuses on the creation and changing nature of labels and their impact on the social world. (1981:158)

However, in many societies mild forms of deviance, such as using soft drugs in Holland, are tolerated (Raybeck 1991). Raybeck suggests that the distinction between tolerable and intolerable deviance is an important one. Tolerable deviance does not threaten the physical or social well being of the rest of the society and may sometimes privately profit those who publicly criticise these behaviours (Savishinsky 1991:73). Many deviations remain clandestine and escape public attention, but some members of deviant groups may have feelings of guilt and anxiety about breaching societal norms. They may imagine the reaction of others should they be discovered. If guilt is present, as in the case of a lot of transvestites, it may motivate discretion, thus avoiding public identification as an immoral person and the negative social reactions and penalties that follow such identification.

According to Lemert (1951), negative reaction will lead to defensive manoeuvres intended to neutralise personal shame and social malaise. The stigmatised persons may attempt to transform their negative stigma into a legitimised illness recognised by the scientific literature (Sagarin 1978), and adopt the characteristics attached to the illness. This identification with an illness might become a person identity. So, a deviant act may become part of one's identity in the sense that the persons think that what they do is important and indicative of them (Matza 1969). They engage in self-contemplation and slowly begin to conceive of the deviation as part of themselves, a part of their own identity, or even their full identity. Thus the deviant act and its characteristics may become a defence to the problems created by the social reaction towards a group of people's behaviour, as they will argue that it is not their fault if they are ill.

The behaviour may exclude people from the norm and their last chance to identify themselves to a social group, is by integrating the characteristics attached to their stigmatised behaviour and join people who share a similar experience (King 1976). By joining each other, they will create a group in society. They will expand the meaning of deviant identity and at the same time discover the conception of unity. They will conceive the difference between *doing* and *being* (Matza 1969:170). In the case of transvestism, the transvestites will not only *do* cross-dressing, but also *be* transvestites belonging to transvestites' group. Thus to protect themselves against rejection, transvestites tend to find 'respectability' under the cover of a recognised and medicalised stigma. Still, transvestites do not feel ill, but see themselves as being 'made differently' and as they have no choice in this matter, it frees them from the responsibility of their behaviour. In the two areas of my fieldwork, I could see that the transvestites' self confidence was related to their ability to join a group. In England transvestites are gathering in groups where they can express themselves without being rejected; in Belgium, transvestism is still a very lonely and secretive non-normative behaviour, as transvestites have not yet come together and thus still they feel the shame of their behaviour.

## 2.2. Use of the labelling theory

Labelling theory could be helpful for anthropology. In summary, following labelling theory, behavioural or sexual deviance is a form of conduct that attracts attention. It is not the behaviour itself that leads to it being labelled deviant, but the way it is perceived by those who do not share it. This label is not determined by an individual, but conferred by the social audience who witness and judge whether the behaviour is deviant. Because of collective prejudices, members of a stigmatised group will resent the discrimination and pejorative attitudes aimed against them and will develop a collective identity. For some stigmatised people, such as transvestites, the management of their stigma, even if shared with others, is not always easy as they recognise that their behaviour is not acceptable, though they say they cannot get rid of it. Negative labels can give such people a profound sense of inferiority, a diminished self-esteem and damaged self-image, as often the case with transvestites who have not joined a group yet.

Labelling theory confronts both social process and individual perception in the construction of social life. Labelling theorists, in their analyses of deviance, pay attention to how social actors define each other and their environment, particularly the way one group achieves and uses power over others. Their theory accounts for how power is created, enforced and used over other groups and how those groups are regarded and treated by the dominant group. The social control responses to deviance contribute to the development of the deviant actor's self-identity and social situation as outsider of the community. Thus, labelling theory focuses on the influence of deviance on self-conception and self-development of deviance, as someone labelled as deviant will lead to further development of identification through internalisation of the society's label and maybe will join a group of people sharing the same label. Thereby, the labelling theory stabilises the society deviant pattern, "*initial deviance influences change in self-concept, and self-concept change influences deviance*" (Kaplan 1980:220).

Plummer (1979) sheds light on the oversimplification of the theory. For example, he chose a sentence from Akers (1973:24 in Plummer 1979:89): "*People go about minding their own business, and then 'wham', bad society comes along and slaps them with a stigmatising label. Forced into the role of deviant, the individual has little choice but to be deviant*". This is oversimplifying labelling theory. It does not take into account a multiplicity of responses to the problems of being labelled and its consequences. Another line of criticism about labelling theory suggests that it is "*relativistic in the extreme*" (Plummer 1979:96). This means that nothing is intrinsically deviant and nothing has to be deviant, that no behaviours are deviant and it is naming them that make them so. This tendency does not take into account that labelling theory understands that deviance depends on many social factors, which can evolve over time and space. Thus, labelling theory is rather a way of looking at human behaviours to understand them and clarify them. Due to early vulgarisation and oversimplification of the theory, Becker decided to rename it in 1974 "*interactionist theory of deviance*".

### **3. Social consequences of gender assignation**

As seen in **Chapter 2** in the structuralist approach of sex and gender, the dichotomization due to sex assignation can confuse some people who have to belong to one or the other sex, hermaphrodites or transsexuals for example. Western societies see these behaviours as a threat to gender boundaries or as problems in the social organisation that should be remedied. To maintain clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders, these behaviours tend to be rejected and punished. Unlike some other cultures where the notion of a 'third gender' exists, western societies refuse this notion. This is due to the Judeo-Christian background that has a history of intolerance against sexual and gender anomalies. Any ambiguity is moulded into 'normal' gender behaviour or relegated to the category of the sick, dangerous, or deviant (Brake 1976:174-176). To avoid such categorisation, people crossing the gendered boundaries tend to keep their gender identity secret.

To minimise secrecy and guilt, Bolin (1996:38) notes that it has become apparent through recent research that there is a movement in which people from various gender perspectives have come to organise themselves as part of a larger community. These people are facing similar degrees of stigmatisation, rejection or acceptance. Growing public awareness of their existence facilitates the recognition of these larger groups. From the point of view of gender, Bolin perceives a continuum between transvestites and transsexuals that suffer from a similar stigma that regroups transvestites and transsexuals under a same label that is called 'transgenderist'.

The social construction of gender reflects the social structure and social status attached to each sex. It also perpetuates and evolves following cultural expectations. As seen in the literature review of transvestism, there have been several interpretations of this behaviour. With the labelling of this behaviour by the medical profession, it has helped people sharing a similar urge to dress in female clothes to recognise themselves as 'transvestites'. People displaying this stigma may reinforce their transvestite identity by joining groups or transvestites' clubs and thus, creating what is defined as a sub-culture or a minority within the wider culture.

### **3.1. Sub-culture**

Sub-culture is defined by Thörnton as "*groups of people that have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in significant ways from the members of other social groups (1997:1).*" A sub-culture is often studied without taking into account its place and relations with a society and is therefore sometimes regarded as standing in opposition to mainstream groups. Western cultures are composed of shared beliefs concerning religion, sex, age, social status, occupation, geographical situation and ethnicity that form a unity that integrates individuals. The members of a sub-culture have integrated these principles, however their differences make them choose to join a social group that is different to the mainstream, but still in relation to it. The sub-culture might also protect its members from

negative and hostile responses towards the deviant behaviour and moreover this social reaction to deviance might reinforce the members' identification to the sub-culture. So, for a member of a sub-culture, there is more a collective perception rather than a legal, physical or geographical division between the sub-cultural insider and the outsider (Thörnton 1997). In the case of transvestites, being a member of a group allows them to engage in their activity without being under the stress of being discovered by family members, friends or neighbours. And as members of a group they do not question their exceptional behaviour, but if lonely, they will often feel ashamed and tend to be more secretive, as in Belgium. Still Belgian transvestites have the opportunity to join *The Beaumont Society* in France or Holland. So, even if they are lonely, they are part of a larger existing network.

Douglas (1995) argues that smaller groups in the society have a high degree of visibility because their members have not yet established an identity supported and adopted by a large number of people. The few transvestites who dare to go out in public and who fail to pass, attract attention and their differences are noticeable as they wear clothes reserved for the opposite gender. If the society is looking for someone to blame for any social problem or crisis, any factors such as low status or deviant behaviour will be featured. Moreover, following Douglas, the prefix 'sub' of sub-culture often ascribes a lower or secondary rank. The member of a sub-culture may feel subordinate because they may be considered as deviant or debased by the others. This feeling of subordination may give them a low self-esteem and self-confidence, but not in every case. Sometimes the differences between the sub-culture and the society do not necessarily have to be something worse than what is considered to be the 'norm'. It could also be something better such as a high standard of work performance or wealth. There might also be a cultural conflict between the individual and the society, between the values and practices of the different groups.

Members of a sub-culture may develop a "*double consciousness*", which may be hard to combine and handle in their everyday life (Douglas 1995). This double consciousness is often lived by transvestites who are part of the mainstream when enacting

their masculine image and at the same time, they acknowledge that their femininity is a deviance from the norm. Thus, transvestites are part of the mainstream when expressing their masculine gender identity and at the same time, they are deviant from the mainstream. So, we could say that transvestites are doubly deviant as they deviate from the norm and also deviate from what is considered as deviant because transvestites are not effeminate when expressing their masculine identity and thus people cannot explain them away as lacking masculinity as in men.

This 'double consciousness' suggests that the gender boundaries are not fixed, but allow a lot of elements attributed to the other gender to mix, such as being soft and tender for men (Ekins and King 1997). Society wishes it could clearly categorise and define all behaviours, but it is impossible to make a clear cut between every group, even between 'normal' and 'deviant'. Transvestites are a good example of this as they, as King (1976) suggests, operate "*beneath*" the respectable masculine role, but not "*outside*" the mainstream of society. It is how transvestites challenge the concepts of deviance and normality at the same time because they present a facade of normality and beneath it, there is this femininity that needs to be expressed. To be able to live with their double consciousness most transvestites prefer to keep their behaviour secret, but often they still have the guilt and anxiety of breaching the societal norms.

It could also be suggested that transvestites' partners also live this double consciousness as they are at the interface of transvestism and the mainstream of society. This was made clear in the interviews when Anna told me that she does not mind that her husband cross-dresses, but that she does not want the neighbours to know about it because she then would feel ashamed of it. These women share their life with a transvestite and tolerate their 'dedoublement' and thus, challenge the dichotomisation of gender. However, they themselves do not show any deviant behaviour. Indeed, as we have seen in **Chapter 6**, wives impose rules to their husband's transvestism to keep a facade of normality to avoid also being labelled as deviant.

In western societies, the acceptable use of 'drag' tends to be restricted to forms of entertainment and not as the expression of someone's 'dedoublement'. So, as Goffman (1963) suggests, there is sometimes an inconsistency between an individual's "*virtual*" and "*actual*" identity. For example, Drag Queens' actual gender identity is masculine and there is no confusion with their visual stage appearance, as it is only the acting out of a female character. Transvestites on the other hand need to express their 'dedoublement', though it is only the virtual feminine image, which is viewed as deviant. When the discrepancy is discovered it might spoil the individual social identity and might have the effect of cutting him off from others who do not accept the female alter ego. Sometimes, this person might continue through life thinking he is the only one and that the whole world is against him, as observed with young transvestites' experiences. He might also meet someone who has the same incongruity and who will share his point of view of the world and "*share with him the feeling that he is human and 'essentially' normal in spite of appearances and in spite of his own self-doubts*" (Goffman 1963:31).

Transvestites share a common interest and stigma, which is cross-dressing in female clothes and they will be labelled on the basis of this behaviour. Labelling transvestites under a generic term lessens their individuality and does not reflect reality, as all transvestites express their own interpretation of femininity depending on how they perceive their feminine alter ego. The different feminine images enacted by transvestites are also reflected in the transvestites' magazines and thus distinguish different groups within the transvestites' sub-culture.

Through the conversations I had with the transvestites it appeared that they are aware of the paradox that their behaviour represents, as in the case of Angela who parades around the house pretending to be a countess after his wife teased him about his feminine image. If we were sharing tips about make-up and dresses, we also had conversation about the gendered social structure and where they stand within it. They said that social gender dichotomisation is too strict as they feel they have both masculine and feminine characteristics, but to pass as normal males, they have to hide their feminine side. So,

transvestites want to be seen as 'normal' men with a recreational need to cross dress. They even categorise their behaviour as a 'hobby'. As already said earlier, to classify their cross-dressing in such a way is to bring it to the same level as any other hobby such as football or collecting stamps and thus to normalise it. This way of presenting their non-normative activity proves that they do not want to be seen as deviant, but as men who enjoy an activity that involves wearing female dresses. The fact that they join groups and share a common identity attached to their non-normative behaviour categorises them as a sub-culture.

However, transvestites do not want to be considered as deviant or members of a sub-culture. They still spend most of their time in the larger community and have completely internalised its values and recognise that their behaviour is not acceptable and respectable. The sub-culture, as described by Talamini (1982) and Ekins and King (1997), is not delineated by geographical area and its members are not full time 'outsiders'. They only meet because they feel they share a common interest that can only be understood by the other members and is also often secret from their the social world. As Ekins and King (1997:8) wrote, "*this community is more centrally concerned with individual being or identity.*" So, the insiders of the transvestites' community consider that it is about people sharing a similar identity rather than a deviant behaviour (Ekins and King 1997). Also, its membership does not depend on face to face interactions as other sub-cultures, even if there are some events where the members can meet, because it does not depend "*on doing but on identity*" (Ekins and king 1997:8). In England, some members of the transvestites' sub-culture live in remote parts of the country and never meet any other members of the community, but they can be in touch with other members through writing, calling and through the Internet. These kinds of links between members can lead to a national and even international network of those who identify with the transvestites' community. As the transvestites network is barely existent and only starting to develop in Belgium, transvestites have to join international, rather than national organisations.

Douglas states that the development of sub-cultures has its origin in the size of a society. "*The major effect of such an increase in the size of a society has been a diminution of the individual's sense of belonging to it*" and that individuals may feel closer to sub-cultures than to the society as a whole (Douglas 1995:53). Also, in society, if an individual cannot keep a certain level of self-esteem due to criticism or rejection, he might be disposed to seek individual or collective deviant activity that might offer him more positive and intimate experiences, opportunities and resources. It is as though modern democratic societies are tolerant, but only on the surface (Douglas 1995). In the presence of sub-cultures with different attitudes, opinions, beliefs, culture, etc., the society may be influenced by the sub-culture and new cultural patterns may emerge (Freilich et al. 1991). But conflicts and confrontations can also sometimes erupt and disrupt the whole society. This can create the development of negative attitudes against the sub-culture, which then might be used as a scapegoat (Douglas 1995:54). Douglas analyses the process of scapegoating as such:

... it can be said that where scapegoating takes place the first element of choice of victim is the presence of difference. Second, where difference is compounded by other factors such as dislike, inadequate performance, unacceptable behaviour in regard of group norms, then the selection of such a member as a victim is almost assured. The third compounding element occurs when the appearance, behaviour and difference of a member bears some close resemblance to the basic dilemma of the group. (1995:147)

Following Douglas's process of scapegoating, transvestites are the perfect targets. Transvestites, by displaying their feminine 'double', are different from other men who do not have such a behaviour. Their inadequate feminine characteristics within their masculinity are often the characteristics that are selected as unacceptable behaviour. In areas where the masculine image is challenged by changing technologies and labour processes as well as the sex revolution, they may be the victims that raise suspicion and hostility.

Suspicion and hostility are often related to ignorance, prejudice and inevitably the perception of difference. These hostilities and suspicions can be the source of energy that can produce scapegoating. Also, "*a scapegoat has to be innocent of causing the events,*

*behaviour or situations for which he or she is being blamed'* (Douglas 1995:55). It could be argued that transvestites trying to 'pass' in public are far from 'innocent', especially some of my informants who consciously talk in a deep voice to be noticed. The consequences of these deliberate transgressions are often carefully weighted by confident transvestites who chose the situation and place where they can cross the boundaries of 'normality'. Douglas notes that the general dislikes of the scapegoat usually overlap with their personal characteristics. The personal characteristics displayed by the scapegoat will develop certain responses from the people observing them.

So, people who display behaviour or personal characteristics different from the norm will not necessarily become scapegoats until society needs some relief from frustration caused by its inability to cope with some major crisis. Then the people who were disliked, but tolerated, become blamed for the crisis. The chosen scapegoat has to be less powerful than the mass frustrated people and is usually close and well known. The chosen target must be reliable and accepted as such and moreover, has little chance to escape or resist becoming a victim. The 'deviant' is the victim to whom a label has been successfully applied. The choice of the victim is based upon visible characteristics and behaviour, which again are known only if there is a close contact between the society and the deviant.

### **3.2. Minority**

Talamini (1982) defines the transvestites' community as a minority as well as a sub-culture. As a sub-culture because of the creation of a culture within another culture and, as a minority because they are suffering the prejudice and discrimination that all sexual minorities face. If we have a closer look at Sagarin's definition of a minority we will notice that the transvestites do not match the definition.

Social scientists have for many years delved into the phenomenon by which some groups of people are hereditary assigned to a subordinate position in societies by virtue of their race, religion, caste, country of origin, ancestry, language community, and, perhaps, class. ... In a

pluralistic society, when an ethnic group, or several of them, is kept in a subordinate position and its members are judged collectively rather than individually, the subordinate ethnic collectively is called a minority group. (Sagarin 1971:1)

A minority, in Sagarin's understanding, implies unequal treatment for people belonging to a race, religion, country, language or ethnic group, but not a community of people sharing the same stigmatised behaviour. I suppose that Talamini defined them as minority because they are small in number.

Kameny (1971), in his study, considers that minorities meet four basic criteria which together are the definition of the minority condition.

1. The *minority characteristic* that is an aspect that all the members of a certain minority share. It can be, for example, skin colour, religion or stigmatised behaviour.
2. *Prejudice and discrimination*: Because of the minority characteristic, but not in logical consequence of it, the members of the groups are subject to prejudice and discrimination.
3. *Depersonalisation*: The members of the group are not considered as individuals with their own merits, but on an impersonal basis which characterises the group. Stereotypes are created which are supposed to represent the minority group, but they do not always correspond to reality.
4. *Internalisation*: In reaction to certain attitudes displayed towards him, the member of the minority will develop a sense of 'we' and 'they'. The minority group member will internalise the minority characteristic and will form a cohesive group or a sub-culture and alienate themselves from the larger society and may develop hostility towards it. Members of the minority develop a self-definition and self-identification from their shared characteristic. The extent of the members' internalisation will depend upon the amount and quality of support provided by the group. This support will play a determinant role in the way the members absorb and accept negative attitudes. Less support will often result in the members' reduced self-esteem, damaged self-image and loss of self-confidence and self-respect. All these may influence the features of the minority group, for example its amusements, humour, literature, of the minority as well as the behaviour of its members which reinforce the stereotypes or other aspects of the negative response of the society (Kameny 1971:52-53).

It might be worthwhile to explore briefly the manner in which the transvestite meets the four points of Kameny's description of a minority. Transvestites meet the first criterion. In fact, all of them share the same interest, which is a preference for wearing female attire some of the time as an alternative to the social convention of wearing men's clothes. Secondly, because of this behaviour they have to endure the prejudice of others and sometimes are liable under provisions of the criminal law. Kameny's third criteria is well established too. The stereotype of the effeminate or flamboyant transvestite is well known even if it does not perfectly match reality. Moreover, some people confuse transvestites, Drag Queen, homosexuals and transsexuals and take one for the other. These stereotypes do not take into account that male transvestites are individuals with their own merits and weaknesses and that, most of the time, they lead a normal family life and hold a conventional job. Transvestites, who found out about the existence of transvestites groups and joined, also meet the fourth criteria. For years, societies such as *The Beaumont Society* have existed.

Transvestites develop a strong sense of community in reaction to the negative attitudes they encounter in others. They wish that society would be more accepting of their behaviour. Even if transvestites fit into Kameny's definition of a minority, I prefer to classify them as members of a sub-culture following the definition offered by Talamini (1982) who considers a sub-culture to be a social act. It is important to recognise that transvestites see themselves as members of the mainstream and at the same time, members of a group that develop in parallel to it. This joins Ekins and King's (1997) definition of transvestites' groups, which they consider to be concerned with people gathering together because of sharing a similar gender identity.

#### **4. The image of the transvestite through the media**

Since the development of the mass media, such as the radio, newspaper, cinema, and television, people have had increasing access to a wider and wider range of information and interpretation of their environment as well as the rest of the world. The mass media often reflects society and its changes, but it can also induce changes in society (Shils 1995; Silverstone 1999). Social, political and religious organisations have often considered transvestism as a threat to their strictly gendered defined structures (Davies 1982). Sexual inversion is a widespread form of cultural play in literature, arts and festivity (Garber 1992; Ramet 1996). It involves dressing and masking as a member of the opposite sex. Sometimes, the reversal simply involves taking on certain roles or forms of behaviour characteristic of the opposite sex. Women playing men; men playing women; men playing women who were playing men. These inversions have been widespread over cultures and time, such as the Greeks, Japanese, Chinese and European Baroque theatre, or the famous carnival of Venice (Ramet 1996). Theatrical and festive inversion, in countries under catholic influence, were prohibited by biblical injunction: "*The woman shall not wear that which pertained unto man, either shall a man put on woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God*" (Deut. 22.5).

This biblical injunction was often used by puritans in the sixteenth-century against the theatre where cross-dressing was a very common practice. Indeed, the actors were the only ones who were allowed to transgress the laws that ruled dress and social stratification. They were transgressing the rules by dressing in clothes from another rank or the wrong gender. Female impersonation was mainly used because of religious and cultural restriction that did not allow women to perform on stage for different reasons such as 'perversion' and 'low morality' of the actors. However, cross-dressing and theatre are interrelated through the unconscious use of language. Cross-dressing represents a symbolic act on stage and audiences recognise that the figures on stage are impersonators. It is also

clear that such inversion in early Europe was not the expression of one identity. Catholic religion, especially, has a tradition of censure of clothing and female performance on stage and thus, men dressing as women in theatre has a long history.

With the evolution of religious censure, clothes fashion has followed. Nowadays, styles of gendered clothing are reflected through the mass media that propagates the social stereotypes attached to gender and status. Not only clothes and social status stereotypes are propagated through the media but also the image of the 'other', the different and the deviant. In 1973 Jock Young wrote that the mass media have noticed that people avidly read news that titillates their sensibility, confirms and reinforces their prejudices. So, to sell their story, the mass media will use peoples' hunger for the sensational. This will reinforce or create stereotypes that will be widespread in the imagination of the audience. Also, these constructed stereotypes of the 'other' will be internalised by minorities that are searching for their identity or will be applied to this 'other' by the audience. Stereotypes might be real or not, the audience are unconcerned and will use them to confirm its prejudices against people that do not follow the social expectations.

The stereotypes attached to transvestism usually evoke an outrageous, camp and likely gay drag artist. It is also sometimes linked to men who want a sex change. This image seems to be generated by films that have a wide audience and large success such as *Some like it Hot* (1959), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1977), *La Cage aux Folles* (1978), *Tootsie* (1982), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) and *The Adventure of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (1994). All these films were used by my informants or people I talked to about my research, to refer to certain stereotypes, such as campy, outrageous, effeminate and sex changed, attached to the transvestites' behaviour. As Ekins and King (1997) note, the medical profession has already largely studied the topic of transvestism, but it seems that the coverage of the mass media is even greater and totally different than the medical and psychological literature. Also both approaches cover different aspects of transvestism that

sometimes overlap. The mass media are not only interested in the medical aspects of crossing the boundaries of gender, but also in the possibility of playing with the boundaries of gender.

For example, films such as *Some Like it Hot*, *Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, present much more convincing impersonations and give the image of males disguising themselves for the purpose of achieving another identity to fool people by their female impersonation. As they pass as women, they also discover their own feminine side. These characters are treated with subtle, complex and ambiguous humour. The audience reaction to these films is, like in any comedy, laughter. This reaction is due to our knowledge that the male character is in fact a woman and so, there is an inability to reconcile the actor and his feminine role. The audience's knowledge of the character cross-dressing gives an advantage over the people the character encounters. The character has, without revealing his true identity, to tolerate the attitude of people who mistaken his real gender. As the audience has information about a convincing female impersonator, the film still has to maintain a precarious balance in order to have an effect on the public. The point of female impersonation in films such as *Some Like it Hot* or *Tootsie* is to allow the audience to see through the impersonation as the other characters of the film cannot. The body underneath the costume is the real thing: a man.

In *La Cage aux Folles* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *The Adventure of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, cross-dressers are presented as extravagant and homosexual and sometimes transsexual Drag Queens. This may lead an audience to confuse transvestism with homosexuality or may persuade them that cross-dressing is an aspect of homosexuality. It may also confuse the audience about the distinction between transvestites and transsexuals. To achieve a convincing 'woman', men need to wear a wig, makeup, dresses, jewels, feminine underwear, false breasts and body shape. They also have to use panoply of new vocal and facial expressions, display their emotions and move with more feminine and graceful body language. This process of transformation, as in *La Cage*, often reaches a level that exaggerates the caricature of the female sex. Men use mincing

steps, high pitched voices and are over self-indulgent. These films playing with prejudicial aspects of cross-dressing can reinforce the stereotypes of the transvestites even if they are very far from reality.

Over the past decade it has become more common to feature members of different sub-cultures, such as homosexuals, transsexuals, transvestites or Drag Queens in the mass media. This is particularly true of talk shows, which can provide an opportunity for members of sub-cultures to express themselves (Grindstaff 1997). Members of a sub-culture usually display a common stigma or behaviour. Their identities often develop around these particularities that will distinguish them members of other sub-cultures. The shared behaviours or stigmas may have been displayed long before they were featured in the mass media that have popularised them. However, mass media reproduce medical and social conception (Sagarin 1978, Shils 1995) and thus feature particular behaviours and stigmas that should be displayed in case of particular 'illness' which are reproduced by people still looking for a 'recognised' identity.

For example, before 1952, transsexualism was barely heard of let alone made the basis for a sub-culture. However, the wide media coverage of the transsexual operation of Christine Jorgensen, let others sharing similar characteristics to claim that they were suffering from the same condition. As transsexualism came to be recognised and acknowledged by the medical profession, it created and legitimised new identities. To be acknowledged as suffering from this new condition, people had to display the symptom(s) attached to this illness. Sagarin (1978) argues that the legitimisation of transsexualism led to the amplification of manifestations of this specific behaviour. More and more people who were looking for their true gender identity thought that they could recognise themselves as transsexuals and thus, adopted the required behaviour to get a sex change. Jerry told me once that it would be easy for him to convince a psychiatrist that he is a transsexual and needs a sex change. He knows the different characteristics associated with transsexualism and just needs to enact them. But as a transvestite, he likes being a man who enjoys cross-dressing.

Mass media such as television and cinema use deviant behaviours not only to attract audiences' interest for morbid events, but also to reconfigure social boundaries and assert the existence of diverse and complex human behaviours (Grindstaff 1997). Films explore the norms by transgressing them and thus, circulate the ideologies and values of our society and make us conscious of its boundaries (Hartley 1984). Nowadays, gender ambiguity has become more and more apparent in popular culture films, talk shows and through pop singers such as David Bowie, Michael Jackson, Boy George, and Madonna who cross the boundaries of gender by enacting characteristics proper to the opposite gender. The gendered body has become the focus of critical theories. The body is expected to be "*both (as) physical evidence of gender identity and the site of claims from the corporal body to the body politic*" (Epstein and Straub 1991:9). When the body is a site of ambiguity and ambiguous identity, it challenges the critical theories.

### **5. Political involvement of transvestites' gender identity**

*"Sexual liberation, like any other form of freedom, is political by definition"* (Brake 1976:174).

The sociologists, Ekins and King (1997) maintain that it would have been of little significance to write about the political aspects of gender blending before the late 1960s. It was only with the second wave of feminism that the private practices of transvestism had political significance because of its challenge to established sexual and gendered norms. In the early 1970s, at the inception of the Gay Liberation Front, it seemed that for many homosexuals an era of liberation, spontaneity and openness was rising (Weeks 1991). In retrospect it seems that the transvestite and transsexual communities emerged too late to benefit greatly from the period of change. By the end of the initial period of gay liberation in 1974, following Ekins and King (1997:13), transvestites and transsexuals were still struggling to reach the position from which the gay community had begun. At that time

transvestites did not take their chance, even though high fashion was going through a period of androgyny and transvestites could easily have adopted long hair and dresses. This lack of confidence has been described as being in a "*closed closet*" (King 1996:167)

Still, in that period, due to the influence of gay liberation, several transvestite and transsexual societies blossomed. While talking to the elder transvestites, who started fully cross-dressing in the 1960s and 1970s, several of them told me that they took advantage of the androgynous era by wearing loose long sarongs or dresses and their hair long, rather than dressing as women. As soon as fashion changed, they went back into their men's dress code and back to their bathroom to cross-dress in secret. It is only with the development of *The Beaumont Society* in England and other private groups that they finally had the chance to meet other people like them. The transvestites' lack of confidence to join gay liberation, as explained by Jo, was due to their fear of being confused with gays.

Indeed, most transvestites' groups support conventional attitudes to marriage, family and heterosexuality. Also, they keep their existence as discreet as possible. There are several ways these groups were criticised by gay and women's movements. Gay men criticised transvestites' group for their failure to engage openly in sexual politics and for their low profile ('closed closet'). *The Beaumont Society* was also criticised for its attempt to normalise transvestism by excluding transsexuals, homosexuals or fetishists (Brake 1976; Ekins and King 1997).

In the 1970s, only a few academic gay writers, for example Brake, noted that transvestites could suffer the same oppression as gay men and women. Brake perceived them "*as revolutionaries who publicly challenge the notion of ascribed gender* (1976:188)" and thus exist in opposition to our gendered social structure. Transvestites polarise the problems of gay activism and feminism. On one level they are accused of sexism due to their conception and devotion to a traditional, even stereotypical, feminine image. On the other hand, as Brake points out, "*it must be remembered that the masters are not supposed to dress as slaves, and men who dress as women are giving up their power as men*

(1976:187)." Thus, Brake supposes that transvestites' oppression is similar to that experienced by gay men and women and that transvestites should align with gay and feminist activists.

Acceptance of transvestites among gays and lesbians groups is a reality. As already said, transvestites go out in gay bars and night-clubs, but the most interesting thing was to see Jo joining a lesbians meeting on a regular basis. The reason for his acceptance might be that a transvestite is concealing his masculine image when cross-dressing and thus becomes acceptable to lesbians. Jo's explanation for joining them was that when expressing his feminine alter ego he wants 'her' to be perceived as a woman and so joins this 'women only' meeting. I think that Jo wants to impose himself upon these women to pretend that he is a 'woman'. It was my impression that the lesbians accept him because of his personality rather than because he is impersonating a woman.

Feminist theorists often view cross-dressing as a parody of female identity and a reinforcement of traditional gender categorisations by their uncritical appropriation of heterosexual sex-role stereotypes (Butler 1990:137). Indeed, the transvestites I have encountered have a particular image of how a woman should look and they try to enact this image. This notion of parodying an 'original' gender is not shared by Butler (1990) who considers that gender is a performance and not an inner essence. For Butler (1990:138), "*the parody is of the very notion of an original.*" Thus, cross-dressing imitates the performance of femininity and "*reveals the imitative structure of gender itself* (Butler 1990:137)".

Raymond (1996) suggests that cross-dressers and drag artists are seen as expressing how women are socially perceived, rather than challenging existing gender boundaries. Tyler sheds light on this by quoting A. Laurie: "*men who wear women's clothes, unless they are genuine transsexuals, seem to imitate the most vulgar and unattractive sort of female dress, as if in a spirit of deliberate and hostile parody*" (Tyler 1991:41). She here suggests that transvestites do not enact 'femininity', but a parody of it. Some feminists maintain that

cross-dressing for transvestites is just a 'put on' which signal that women lack a phallus and they suggest that transvestites want to be "*phallic women*" (Tyler 1991). Transvestites, as men, possess the penis that women lack. As they represent the sexually 'complete' woman, Tyler (1991) suggests that transvestites want to underline this distinction between them and women and thus prove their superiority upon women.

I would suggest that the transvestite's performance does not play upon sex, but upon gender identity and gender performance. Transvestites express their feminine side to liberate themselves from their expected masculine gender role. Once, Jo told me that after a long stressful day, the best way to relax is to go as far as possible from the male role and thus, to enact the female role. Evans (1993) argues that denying that men can be soft, tender, and emotional, is reinforcing the stereotypes of men. Some feminists have recognised that cross-dressing, drag and transvestism are part of a gender continuum and have sympathy with these men who deviate from acceptable masculine behaviour (Brake 1976).

We should acknowledge that if women have already reached a certain level of freedom and equality with men from the point of view of clothing and behaviours, men are still encircled into a rigid and constraining masculine pattern. Men are still not allowed to cross the boundary into femininity without being considered as deviant. These constraining stereotypes that men have to fulfil or fit into can be very oppressive to some of them, as in the case of transvestites who need to express what they call their femininity. Evans (1993:174) notes that some gay men want to destroy their male privilege by wearing "*political drag*". This political act represents the ultimate rejection of the male image by wearing clothes reserved to women and thus destroying the clothes gender boundaries. But such political queens may also be rejected by gay men because they destroy the myth of masculine supremacy (Evans 1993:174).

There are many ways in which crossing gender boundaries can be understood as a political act. As Butler (1990:137) states, "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency.* Our culture has dichotomised genders that are enacted through stereotypical bodily expression. Clothes are commonly used to express one gender, or even, sexual identity. Gender identity is assumed to be enacted through clothing. So, gender stereotypes are attached to clothing and follow the male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomy. Dress also says much about one's self-definition. In the case of heterosexual transvestites who violate the well-established gender dichotomisation, there is also a political act. It represents an escape from masculine ideology and normative standards.

Among the transvestites I met, only Jo and his wife Lily are openly involved in gender politics as they have created a meeting group and a help-line for transvestites and are willing to talk publicly about transvestism. They believe that the transvestite community needs to have people like themselves speaking up if transvestism is to become more acceptable. Also, the fact that they accepted me proves their wish to give access to people who might be able to spread the image of the transvestites' 'normality' as men. So, by writing this thesis and accepting the transvestites' account of their 'dedoublement', I am myself involved in a political act. Moreover, I suggest that transvestites are part of a political wave that follows the feminist and gay liberation waves. Transvestites, together with other people who cross the boundaries of gender, are slowly gathering together to bring about social changes and to find their place within society. This movement has also been observed by Elias et al. (1999). These authors define this movement as "*transgenderist*".

## **6. Conclusion**

Labelling theory is useful in this study, as it analyses how social factors define each other and their environment. It also focuses on how a group archives, enforces and uses over other groups. In western societies, non-normative behaviours are often labelled as 'deviant'. The labelling of a behaviour is related to the audience who witness it and decide to categorise it as 'deviant' or 'normal'. People whose behaviour is labelled 'deviant' are often stigmatised and may suffer collective prejudices and discrimination. To manage a negative stigma, people sharing a similar behaviour will tend to gather together and form a sub-culture or minority. Members of a sub-culture may develop a 'double consciousness' (Douglas 1995) that is not easy to combine in everyday life. Such is sometimes the case of transvestites who are part of the mainstream and at the same time considered to be deviant. To avoid being labelled as 'deviant', most transvestites present a masculine image in their everyday life and only indulge in cross-dressing in the presence of other transvestites. They also present their behaviour as a 'hobby' to normalise it.

Gender stereotypes are attached to clothing and follow the feminine/masculine dichotomy. Gender identity is often enacted through clothing, but for some transvestites, having to express themselves in the constrained boundaries of their masculine gender, can be very oppressive. Unlike women who have already reached a certain level of freedom concerning clothing and behaviour, men still have rigid boundaries imposed upon themselves. Thus, transvestism represents an escape from the masculine ideology and normative standards.

Challenging the gender boundaries could be considered as a political act. Still, transvestites did not follow the Gay liberation and it is only nowadays that they are slowly 'coming out'. This movement is called 'transgenderist' (Elias et al. 1999). They are often criticised by the gay community, as they support conventional attitudes such as heterosexuality and are 'low profile' in their political involvement. Still some gays

recognise that transvestites suffer the same oppression as gay men (Brake 1976). A traditional feminist view is that transvestites reinforce gender stereotypes and the socially constructed relation between sex and gender, instead of challenging gender boundaries.

In the 1960s, social theorists such as Goffman (1963) and Erikson (1964) roughly equated personal identity with individuality. Under the scrutiny of the medical profession, new types of illnesses were created and defined in relation to certain types of behaviour and symptoms. The definition and categorisation of non-normative behaviour, such as transvestism and transsexualism, under a medical pathology was for them the recognition of their behaviour. It opened up the possibility for these groups of people to develop and share a new identity and create their own sub-culture within society. For them, it was like finding their identity and discovering a new sense in their life (Weeks 1991).

The creations of new terms to label and categorise people also reinforce the social boundaries of normality. Reinforcing these social boundaries and delimiting some people as 'others', also reinforces the identity of different groups whose members recognise each via their stigma. As Bolin (1996:38) argues, "*this sense of collective interests is important for understanding cultural - historical change in gender identities and in clarifying the relationship of individual experience to the social construction of gender variance.*" Sometimes, it might become prescriptive, telling us what we ought to look like to be 'normal', to be truly ourselves. This message is often reinforced through the media.



([www.fimsite.org](http://www.fimsite.org))



**The Rocky Horror Picture Show**

([www.nominex.com](http://www.nominex.com))



([www.homevideos.com](http://www.homevideos.com))

## Chapter 8

# Summary

Throughout history, some societies have accepted, and some have not accepted transvestites, in the same way that gays and other minorities have found different receptions. At one end of the spectrum, some societies have given transvestites an elevated position, such as the Hijras in India and Berdache in North America, while other societies have persecuted or prosecuted them. In western societies, during the course of the twentieth century, ideas and attitudes towards male to female transvestites have altered. First confined to a medicalised pathology, transvestism slowly attracted the attention of social scientists who perceived it as a "*gender reversal*", "*gender mobility*" or "*gender migration*" (Ekins and King 1997:3). Thus, the issue of transvestism in our society should be understood in the context of the social creation of gender.

The concept of gender is related to sex and vice versa, and is often taken for granted as possessing definite forms and patterns that become reified into current 'norms'. Gender is also assumed to be dichotomous and to reside within the individual. A person will be classified as either 'masculine' or 'feminine', but not both. The social construction of gender acknowledges two sexes, but it also creates social differences between them. In every day life, each of us behaves in gendered ways in response to social contexts. Even in similar situations, men and women are treated differently and behave differently in response. Therefore, if someone refuses to conform, they will confront the social consequences of violating the norms and expectations of the society. Gender is thus a self-fulfilling social creation, which creates differences between men and women (O'Donovan 1995:15-16).

This dichotomous social construction, based on biology is a problem for intersexed people. To be considered normal, people have to fit into the dichotomous gender structure, thus hermaphrodites are almost always treated medically and forced to conform to one or

the other sex role by undergoing surgery. People, such as transsexuals, who have a gender identity that does not conform to their sex, will have to perform a gender role they do not feel to be theirs. It is commonly supposed that people are expressing a gender identity in relation to their sex, but this is not always the case. There is no simple correlation between sex and gender. It is evident that the origins of the transvestites' problems have roots in a gender dichotomous culture and the expectations that are attached to the gender system. Transvestites, whose identity is characterised by what I call a 'dedoublement', represent gender as actively fashioned (Cornwall 1994).

Transvestites' masculine gender identity is acquired through the process of socialisation based on expectations that deny the emergence of feminine characteristics within masculinity. In order to express their 'dedoublement' that draws close together masculine and feminine characteristics, transvestites create their 'double', or alter ego, that fulfils their stereotype of femininity and may sometimes have an altogether different personality. Transvestites' identity relates to conventional gender identities because it makes sense only in relation to them. Because of their gender assignation as male, transvestites have developed a masculine gender identity and masculine image that conceals their femininity, which is expressed only when cross-dressing. Nevertheless, when consciously expressing their feminine 'double' through cross-dressing, they maintain their sense of themselves as men. Indeed, their cross-dressing is temporary in order that they can always return to their original masculine gender.

Transvestites consider the expression of their feminine alter ego to be the expression of the feminine side of their personality. Garfinkel (1967) argues that in western societies the generally held belief is that individuals are locked into one or other gender group for life. Transvestites, in their sometimes open display of femininity, challenge this ideology. Some individuals who have been assigned to a certain gender may rebel and perform a 'dedoublement' or may long for a different identity altogether. Notable thinkers such as Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber view the gender rule breakers, such as transvestites and other people crossing the boundaries of gender, as the very proof that gender is a social

variable. Anyone can change one's gender, construct one's sex, or maintain a status not directly attributable to the masculine or feminine gender. Transvestites and other ambiguous genders challenge western social binary thinking in relation to gender. Their presence within our society questions the existence and accuracy of the dichotomised gender social structure (Epstein and Straub 1991), because this structure tends to suppress variations. So, the presence of transvestites proves the fluidity of gender as they keep on crossing and re-crossing the boundaries of gender in expressing their 'dedoublement'.

The creation of the transvestites' double, or alter ego, is progressive. At an early stage of cross-dressing, female clothes are sometimes used as a fetish. At first they do not really attempt to create a feminine image and just a few items of feminine clothes are used. It is later that they create their own feminine image that is the transvestites' 'double'. Transvestites when expressing their feminine alter ego, enact their stereotype of femininity. They do not want to be a woman, but to present a convincing feminine image within the limits of their masculine features. To fashion their feminine gender, they will not only use feminine clothes, make-up and a wig, but also feminise their body by padding, removing male hair and by adapting their body movements and speech. They will fulfil a feminine 'personal front' (Goffman 1959) that will allow them to be mistaken for women. This more or less convincing feminine image is very important for the transvestites who want to go out in public and 'pass' as a woman. So their clothes will fashion a new public self and hide their masculine gender. People in the street are not expecting a man to wear feminine clothes and at first sight will assume that any person wearing feminine clothes is a woman. When very sure of their feminine image some transvestites also like to be recognised as cross-dressed men. So, the concept of 'passing' also invokes the concept of 'reading'. If transvestites are spotted when trying to pass, they will be recognised as non-normative and may be subject of rejection or legal prosecution.

Early classification of transvestism labelled it as a perversion that needed to be cured. Different cures were proposed, which were often based on Pavlovian reflex theory. With surgical techniques, the possibility of having a sex change emerged. This newly

created 'condition' was called transsexualism. The medical distinction between transvestism and transsexualism created different sub-cultures. These sub-cultures may gather together, but remain separate. The creation of new terms also reaffirmed the social boundaries between normality and deviance, and labels the different behaviours to fit one category or the other. These terms also reinforced the identity of the different groups of cross-dressers. The process of identity formation analysed by Weeks (1986) involves both categorisation by self and others. This process restricts and inhibits, but at the same time it offers security and reassurance for the labelled individuals (Plummer 1975). These persons may be restricted by a generic term under which they are classified, but at the same time such restrictions offer a recognised identity that can be used politically and in other ways to claim respect.

Erikson (1964) argues that deviance needed to be controlled because it only occurs when there is something going wrong within the social organisation itself. It is an accident of the societal machinery that needs to be regulated. Douglas (1995) suggests that social systems defend against anomalies by reinforcing their social norms and controlling them by rejecting any deviance from the norms, as well as labelling these deviations as dangerous and thus reinforcing approved categories. Society, by defending itself against anomalies, keeps a permanent and recognisable shape. So, deviance can be understood as a normal product of a stable institution that preserves the stability of the social order. In our western society, the deviant is often used as scapegoat. Media also explore and strengthen the boundaries of normality by giving the image of the 'others' and convey a certain stereotype attached to these non-normative behaviours. The public image of the transvestite is often that of the camp homosexual or sometimes transsexual. On the other hand, media facilitates the appearance of transvestites during television programme such as talk-shows and in magazine interviews where they are provided with an opportunity to express themselves.

Since the feminist revolution, women have gained access to masculine jobs and it has become acceptable for them to exhibit masculine characteristics such as wearing masculine clothes and undertaking what were previously considered masculine jobs. However, these changes did not allow men to integrate overt feminine characteristics. So masculinity and femininity are continuous objects of reinterpretation and exist only within history and culture. Masculinity is not a simple concept. Men think masculinity speaks for itself, but cross-cultural studies show that there are different ways of being a man. Relationships between men and masculinity vary from one culture to the other. It is not a fixed concept. Traditional masculinity in both of my research fields areas is challenged by both capitalist economy and feminist revolution. Furthermore, transvestites, by expressing femininity within an overarching masculine identity, are in total opposition to the social expectations prevalent in North East of England and Liège in Belgium.

Society drives people who do not follow the norm to conceive of themselves as deviant. To avoid social repression, many transvestites tend to keep their cross-dressing secret and exhibit a masculine image in public that hides their feminine side. Ekins and King (1997) said that transvestites, in order to be able to pass as ordinary men, need to hide their deviance from others. So, expressing their masculine image does not always satisfy them as they wish they also to express their femininity. This situation may provoke a 'double consciousness', as they have to express an identity that does not always satisfy them. As they do not want to be considered deviant, they enact a masculine image and, try to normalise their cross-dressing by presenting it as another hobby. So, many transvestites tend to stay secret in order to avoid being labelled as deviant. To avoid guilt and secrecy, they have also created groups and formed sub-cultures that reflect their ideology of femininity. Thus, we can say that transvestites are doubly deviant. Firstly, they deviate from the mainstream, as they present a non-normative behaviour and secondly, they present a non-normative behaviour, but unlike most deviants, they are part of the mainstream when not cross-dressing.

Some transvestites cross-dress in the secrecy of their bathrooms, but some of them will reveal or be discovered by their wife. If cross-dressing is enjoyable for the transvestites, it might not be so for their partner. Transvestites, knowing that their behaviour is non-normative, but unable to stop it, will hesitate to reveal their cross-dressing to their partner or wife. When they do reveal it, or if discovered, several reactions can be expected, from acceptance to rejection. In the case of rejection, divorce is very likely to occur. In the case of acceptance or at least tolerance, the transvestite will feel more comfortable about his cross-dressing as he will not be under the fear of being discovered anymore. He will develop his 'dedoublement' and will want to cross-dress more regularly. To please their wives some transvestites will attempt to stop, but their urge generally returns. Therefore, the wives soon discover that transvestism cannot be stopped and that it is a part of their husband's personality. Even if the wives accept their husband's transvestism, it does not mean that they like it. For some wives, their husband's 'double' will be considered as a third person that comes between of them.

To prevent their husband's alter ego from appearing too often, wives will lay down ground rules. If they do not, their husband may try to cross-dress more frequently, grow confident about his transvestism and go out cross-dressed in order to have his alter ego evaluated by the public. So, the development of transvestism will often depends on the degree of a partner acceptance. If just tolerated, transvestites will continue to cross-dress in private or at transvestites' meetings. If the partner is completely accepting, the transvestite is likely to become increasingly open about his behaviour. Wives are likely to have influence on the frequency of appearance of their husband's alter ego and may also influence the style of clothes, make-up and degree of body feminisation adopted by their husband. For instance, some will accept that their husband removes his body hair while others will only accept make-up and nail varnish.

Women, who discover their husband's transvestism after years of marriage, are called to reassess their husband's masculinity. As this can be a very disturbing experience for them, support groups for wives and other members of the family have developed

alongside transvestites' groups. In these meetings, they can share their feelings about living with a transvestite. Wives are often afraid that their children will not understand why their father is dressed as a woman and also that their boy(s) may imitate him. If their father's behaviour is explained to children at a later age, there might be different kind of reactions depending on the relationship between the children and their father. Transvestites may also face rejection from their parents and friends who may confuse their cross-dressing with homosexuality, but again this will depend on each individual.

In the context of gender variance and deviance, it is important, then, to look at transvestites' wives and the part they play. By accepting their husband's cross-dressing, they too are challenging the rigid structure of gender dichotomisation. Accepting a behaviour that is considered as non-normative can lead wives to be also considered as deviant. It is one of the reasons they try to present an image of normality and keep their husband's transvestism under control.

Transvestites did not take their chance to come 'out' during the Gay Liberation movement of the 1980s and it is only now that they are slowly attempting to be recognised. However, if some transvestites have found the strength and courage to reveal their behaviour to the public and enjoy the fulfilment of their full gender identity, a large majority still remains in the darkness of personal shame and public incomprehension. Still we can notice a slow coming out of this group as more and more of their representatives appear on television shows or are heard from in newspaper's interviews. Some transvestite groups have even created their own cyber sites and chat sites. The slow coming out of transvestites and other people crossing the boundaries of gender are part of a political movement called 'transgenderist'. However, this movement is not homogenous. As we have seen, Belgian transvestites have not reached the same level of openness as the British transvestites in their process of 'coming out'. This difference presents a potential for further research into the understanding of the process of transvestites' 'coming out'. What does influence this process? And how will evolve the transvestites' network in England and in Belgium in the future?

Finally, I would like to stress to which extent transvestites reinforce gender dualism. When cross-dressing, these men do not "bend" or "break" the boundary of gender, as they are fully aware of it. They "dedouble" themselves to fit in one category or the other and thus reproduce gender stereotypes. As in a mirror, there is the man and his reflected image; the image being the feminine creation. The concept of "dedoublement" can be used for people who are fully aware of our society's gender boundary and who cross it without disturbing the social order by reproducing the gender stereotypes attached to one gender or the other.

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