

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULT CHILDREN OF CROSS-DRESSING  
FATHERS: A RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNT

by

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B.S., Emporia State University, 1999

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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School of Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology

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## **Abstract**

This study was aimed at understanding the retrospective experiences of adults who have fathers who are cross-dressers. This study addressed common concerns that partners of men who cross-dress have regarding the impact of fathers' cross-dressing on children. Previous research indicated that some women in relationships with men who cross-dress actively chose to not have children due to not knowing what effects their partner's cross-dressing may have on children.

Qualitative data from five interviews conducted with adult children of cross-dressing fathers was utilized. Participants reflected upon the following areas: The individual and relational factors that impacted their reaction to having fathers who are cross-dressers; the meanings they created about their fathers' being cross-dressers; the perceived impact on their social development; and advice they would give to others that may promote the adjustment process for children who have fathers who cross-dress.

This study revealed thick description of the adjustment processes for a sample of adult children of cross-dressing fathers. Specifically, the results revealed that the participants adjusted to having fathers who are cross-dressers relatively easily. The closeness of their relationships, the timing and nature of disclosure, their fathers' comfort levels with being cross-dressers, and the familial response to the fathers' cross-dressing were all revealed to play important roles in the participants' acceptance of and adjustment to their fathers' being cross-dressers. Overall, the participants identified more positive effects than negative in reference to their relationships with their fathers and their social adjustment. This research can assist clinicians in helping couples facing this issue to make informed decisions about having children and in deciding the timing and the preferred circumstances in which fathers should disclose their cross-dressing to their children.

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Approved by:

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## CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Men who cross-dress have historically encountered difficulties in terms of their individual adjustment in a gender-dichotomous society. There often is no place in the social order for someone who is neither male nor female exclusively, but both. Men who cross-dress often identify as being men “with a feminine side” (Bullough, Bullough, & Smith, 1983, p. 251). At early ages they are drawn to feminine articles such as women’s clothing, shoes, and purses. At the same time they are pulled toward representations of femininity, they also are wrought with another force – the power of gender dichotomous socialization that says, “men should not play with dolls or wear dresses.” The incongruity between these societal messages and the men’s desires to cross-dress may prompt some men to have feelings of shame and guilt.

During adolescence, cross-dressing may be paired with erotic passions. However, this connection may ease as adulthood ensues (Buhrich & McConaghy, 1977). Adult men who cross-dress more often identify with wearing women’s clothing as a means of relaxation and comfort (Buckner, 1970; Buhrich, 1978; Woodhouse, 1985; Zucker & Blanchard, 1997). Men who cross-dress characteristically have a heterosexual orientation (Buckner, 1970; Buhrich & Beaumont, 1981; Buhrich & McConaghy, 1976; Bullough et al., 1983; Bullough & Bullough, 1997; Docter & Fleming, 1993; Freund, Steiner, & Chan, 1982; Peo, 1988; Prince & Bentler, 1972) and a predominately masculine gender identity (Peo, 1988). They typically do not wish to be women (Peo, 1988) and most often cross-dress in the privacy of their own homes (Buckner, 1970). Individuals who identify as being trapped in the body of the wrong sex are referred to as transsexuals and are different from cross-dressers (Docker & Fleming, 2001). Cross-dressers often are called transvestites but such a term is commonly deemed as offensive and outdated by the cross-dressing population because of the negative social connotation associated with the term. Cross-dressers also are different from drag queens who are gay men who impersonate women as a means of cultural expression (Prince & Bentler, 1972). Drag queens tend to be the most common presentation of “men in dresses” in the popular media.

While there is no conclusive scientific explanation as to why some men experience themselves as having a feminine side, the fact is that a population of men who are drawn to cross-dressing to express their feminine side exists. Without information to validate for them that

others have similar experiences, as children and adolescents, men who cross-dress often experience feelings of guilt and shame as a result of being different (Schott, 1995). For some men, these ill feelings of having a “dirty little secret” may follow them into their adult lives as well.

In addition to these individual difficulties, men who cross-dress experience relational hardships, particularly in their partnerships and marriages (Brown, 1994; Docter, 1988). Men often fear that their partners will end the relationship if they disclose their cross-dressing (Frances & Wise, 1987). Some men also may erroneously believe that being married will eliminate the need to cross-dress (Talamini, 1982).

Men who have not disclosed their cross-dressing to their wives prior to marriage commonly find that it is difficult to conceal. Often, the case is that either their wives inadvertently discover their cross-dressing or the pain of concealment becomes so great that the man chooses to make the disclosure. While the shock of inadvertent discovery may be tremendous, a man making a calm disclosure to his wife also may be an extremely difficult experience for some wives. Many women fear their husbands are gay or want to be women (Stayton, 1996). They also may question their own sexual orientation and wonder if they are attracted to women since their husbands want to dress as women (Hunt & Main, 1997). Furthermore, women may feel a sense of betrayal since their husbands did not tell them earlier. They may wonder why their husbands thought they could not trust them with this information or what else they may be hiding (Brown, 1994).

While men may help to ease their wives’ fears about sexual orientation and transsexualism, often the wounds from the secret keeping and dishonesty are not as easily quelled. The research aimed at understanding marital difficulties between men who cross-dress and their wives has revealed many insights into the factors associated with cross-dressing that may negatively impact marriages. The main finding is that marriages tend to fare better if the disclosure about cross-dressing is made prior to marriage (Brown & Collier, 1989; Reynolds & Caron, 2000; Talamini, 1982; Weinberg & Bullough, 1988). When men disclose about their cross-dressing prior to marriage, they may risk that their partners will terminate the relationship, but this disclosure helps to avoid the tremendous pain of distrust that often occurs when this secret is kept from wives for long periods of time. Although the disclosure being made prior to

marriage may not necessarily be trepidation-free, the earlier the disclosure is made, the less negatively wives tend to react (Reynolds & Caron, 2000).

Additionally, among women's chief worries about their husbands' cross-dressing are concerns about the impact on children (Bullough & Weinberg, 1989). While women who already have children prior to the disclosure may be concerned about the impact on their children, some women in relationships without children actively choose to not conceive because they do not have enough information about the impact of cross-dressing to make an informed decision (Brown, 1994). This is further supported by research that suggests women married to men who cross-dress are significantly less likely to have children than other women of similar demographics. One of the reasons why women do not have adequate information to inform their decision-making about having children is because there are no published studies to date which focus specifically on the impact of a father's cross-dressing on his children. The only information in the literature regarding children of cross-dressing fathers is informed by clinical opinions of professionals (e.g., recommendations by psychiatrists about whether or not to disclose to children about the cross-dressing and the recommended age for disclosure to children). Therefore, it is clear that research on the impact of a child's having a father who cross-dresses is needed. This information will not only benefit women in relationships with men who cross-dress in terms of making informed decisions regarding conception and parenting, it also will be helpful for mental health professionals working with men who cross-dress and their partners and families.

Furthermore, without continued research in this area, two pieces of information, yielded from previous studies on couple relationships where the male partner is a cross-dresser, can cause a great amount of ambivalence for men who cross-dress.<sup>1</sup> Those pieces of information are the two prominent research findings that were mentioned previously, which include the notion that marriages are better off if men disclose about their cross-dressing prior to marriage and the data which indicates that women married to men who cross-dress are significantly less likely to have children than other women of similar demographics. When this information is taken at face value, and considered simultaneously, one can imagine the dilemma these two research findings presents for men who cross-dress.

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that this ambivalence most likely exists only in theory, as it is doubtful that most men who cross-dress are aware of these research findings.

Do men who cross-dress have to choose between the health of their marriage and having children? If men want children, are they going to have to make the choice to bring them into a marriage that is likely to fail? Are they sacrificing their individual well-being and the well-being of the marriage by not disclosing? Without answers to these questions, it appears that men who cross-dress who want to have children may not be left with many viable options.

Not only do these research findings have implications for the men themselves and their families, there are also implications for mental health professionals working with men who cross-dress. With the limited literature available revealing findings that invoke ambivalence, therapists are put in a bind. For some clients, such as men who cross-dress who are preparing for marriage, the ambivalence these two research findings could create may hinder the therapeutic process. For instance, cross-dressing clients may come into therapy in an attempt to muster the courage to tell their partners, prior to marriage, about their cross-dressing and then be placed in even more of a dilemma when the therapist shares this research. For others, the pairing of these findings may evoke other meanings such as in the following example that offers a glimpse into a hypothetical therapy session with Dr. Klein, a marriage and family therapist, and Jake, a 32-year-old cross-dressing client:

Jake began coming into therapy once his wife inadvertently discovered him cross-dressed. She had come home early from work because the power had unexpectedly gone out in her office due to an electrical malfunction. The discovery happened over six months ago and Jake and his wife, Mari, are currently working to renegotiate their marriage. She joins him for sessions intermittently as they work together to process her feelings of betrayal and confusion. Jake has been working on his individual feelings about his cross-dressing and how he has hurt their marriage. He and his wife have two children, Sarah, age six, and Jenna, age four.

“Dr. Klein, I just can’t seem to get past how much I’ve hurt Mari by keeping this from her,” expresses Jake, as he bows his head and cups his forehead in his hands. “Why wasn’t I strong enough to just tell her in the first place? If we’re strong enough to work through it now, I’m sure we could have done it then.”

“Jake, you have to remember that you were at a very different place when you were 24 years old. You had not come to accept your cross-dressing the way you do now. There’s so much more support for men who cross-dress now than there was nearly a decade ago.”

“I know I wasn’t as ready as I am now, but you even said that marriages are better off when men tell their wives before they get married,” Jake says as he shakes his head, looking away.

“Yes, Jake, that is true. Something else that the research shows is that women married to men who cross-dress who know about the cross-dressing often actively choose to not have children.”

Jake curiously looks up at Dr. Klein and tilts his ear to hear more. Dr. Klein continues, “some women find that they don’t have enough information about how their husband’s cross-dressing may impact their children so they choose to not have children at all.”

After a few seconds of silence, with Jake still holding Dr. Klein’s eye, he says with his voice slightly broken, “Dr. Klein, I couldn’t imagine my girls never having been born.”

Even though Jake’s decision to not disclose to his wife about his cross-dressing prior to marriage was not made based upon review of the research literature, this scenario offers a glimpse into the potential consequences of choosing guidance according to one research finding over the other. This creates an additional dilemma because these research findings have not previously been paired in the literature. There is the danger that therapists may only have knowledge of one of the findings. Thus, if therapists inform clients only of the literature that expresses the importance of disclosure prior to marriage, are they compromising the clients’ potential for fatherhood? Conversely, if therapists only discuss the literature that states women married to men who cross-dress commonly choose to not have children because of a lack of information about the impact of cross-dressing on children, are they compromising clients’ potential for healthy marriages if this information steers clients away from disclosure?

This current study serves as a preliminary attempt to begin the rectification of these dilemmas. To begin this process, the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers were explored. Information was gathered through face-to-face and telephone interviews with adult children of cross-dressing fathers. The interviews were structured through the use of an interview guide. The interview guide provided basic questions that were asked of all participants. The questions were informed by the extant literature on the subject and provided information about how children’s lives are impacted, both positively and negatively, by having a father who cross-dresses. This research was aimed at helping women in relationships with men who cross-

dress to make informed decisions about having children and assisting therapists in their work with cross-dressing clients and their partners/families.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Review of Literature**

In order to understand the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers, an exploration of available literature is provided as a context for understanding. To create a holistic picture of the available information regarding adult children of cross-dressing fathers, the following areas within the published literature are presented: a brief description of the types of transgendered men, including men who cross-dress; women in relationships with men who cross-dress and the factors that impact their views on having children; and existing information regarding the effects of fathers' cross-dressing on children.

The majority of the information about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children is from parental or professional perspectives, since there are no published studies to date that elicit information directly from children of cross-dressing fathers. Therefore, literature about children of transsexual parents and gay fathers and lesbian mothers is explored in order to help fill this gap. While it is understood that the experiences of children of transsexual, gay, or lesbian parents are not necessarily similar to each other, it is acknowledged that they have in common the impact of societal stigma associated with these groups. Thus, this information helps to serve as a guide for the exploration of the experiences adult children of cross-dressing fathers.

In addition to a review of applicable literature, a discussion of stages of adjustment of family members of transgendered individuals and theories of cognitive moral development are presented to further provide a context for understanding the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers. Thus, stages of adjustment and theories of cognitive moral development, in addition to guidance gleaned from the extant literature, helps to provide a framework for the exploration of these lived experiences.

### **Types of Transgendered Men**

The term "transgendered" refers to individuals who in some way challenge the normative societal views about how gender and chromosomal sex are related (McAnulty & Burnette, 2001). More specifically, when one's body and one's gender are not viewed as congruent, one may be referred to as transgendered. The groups of men who fit under the blanket term of transgendered are transvestites, transsexuals, and drag queens.



The term “transvestite” typically refers to heterosexual men who experience erotic or sensual arousal from wearing women’s clothing, or “cross-dressing.” Regarding terminology, the terms “cross-dresser” and “cross-dress” will be used throughout this paper to describe heterosexual transvestite men who wear feminine attire. The reason is that, within the cross-dressing male population, the term “transvestite” is commonly seen as derogatory, due to societal stigma associated with the term.

The extent of a man’s cross-dressing may vary from wearing a single article of clothing to being fully dressed as a woman. It also may include having body hair removed via shaving or electrolysis. Despite concerted efforts to look feminine, very few men who cross-dress are able to successfully pass as a woman in public (Peo, 1988). The concept of “passing,” or presenting in public successfully as a woman, is sometimes important to men who cross-dress. The scope of passing may include leaving the house late at night and driving around cross-dressed or may be more extensive, such as going to a busy restaurant in full feminine dress (Wysocki, 1993).

Although it is recognized that passing may be important to some men who cross-dress, it is more commonly noted that cross-dressing tends to be a fairly secretive activity in which men will engage privately (Buckner, 1970). Men who belong to cross-dressing organizations have reported a preference for cross-dressing privately or in confidential organizational meetings or activities (Docter & Prince, 1997). For a more extensive description of research on cross-dressing behaviors, motivations for cross-dressing, and the process of self-acceptance regarding one’s cross-dressing behaviors, please refer to Joy (2002).

Regarding demographics, most men who cross-dress tend to have a heterosexual orientation (Buckner, 1970; Buhrich & Beaumont, 1981; Buhrich & McConaghy, 1976; Bullough & Bullough, 1997; Bullough, Bullough, & Smith, 1983; Docter & Fleming, 1993; Freund et al., 1982; Peo, 1988; Prince & Bentler, 1972), are married or have been married previously (Buckner, 1970; Buhrich & McConaghy, 1976; Docter & Fleming, 1993; Docter & Fleming, 2001; Docter & Prince, 1997; Prince & Bentler, 1972; Wise & Meyer, 1980; Zucker & Blanchard, 1997), are well-educated (Docter & Fleming, 1993; Docter & Fleming, 2001; Docter & Prince, 1997), and have higher-status jobs (Bullough et al., 1983; Prince & Bentler, 1972). In reference to gender identity, cross-dressing men tend to identify as having a masculine gender identity except for when fully cross-dressed (Peo, 1988) and as being men “with a feminine side” (Bullough et al, 1983, p. 251).

Identifying as having a feminine side does not necessarily denote feeling as if one is trapped in the body of the wrong sex. This descriptor fits more with individuals who identify as being “transsexual.” A key difference between men who cross-dress and transsexual men is that when transsexual men wear feminine clothing, it is not usually associated with erotic or sensual arousal, like with cross-dressing men (Stoller, 1971). Instead, transsexual men wear women’s clothing because they feel as if they actually *are* women.

Another group of individuals who often are confused with cross-dressing men are drag queens. Drag queens tend to have a homosexual orientation and also identify as masculine. When they cross-dress, they only act or perform as a member of the opposite gender. However, it is common that drag queens dress outlandishly and exaggerate the notion of female elegance (Gilbert, 2000). Also, drag queens may use their cross-dressing as a homoerotic gesture in an attempt to sexually entice other gay men (Frances & Wise, 1987). Despite drag queens’ challenging of the societal norm of how sex and gender are related through mimicking women, they are sometimes not considered to actually be transgendered. This is because they tend to represent more of a cultural role within the gay community, rather than an actual gender variation (Prince & Bentler, 1972).

## **Women in Relationships with Men who Cross-Dress**

### ***Psychological Characteristics***

The research on women in relationships with men who cross-dress often has been conducted with clinical samples, thus possibly yielding a skewed portrait of such women. For example, women married to men who cross-dress have been described by researchers as having low self-esteem (Feinbloom, 1976), as being “malicious male-haters,” “succorers,” and “symbiotes” (Stoller, 1967) and having a tendency toward “moral masochism” (Wise, Dupkin, & Meyer, 1981). Overall, these women have been portrayed as having marked dependency issues that lead them to tolerate their husbands’ cross-dressing.

Studies with non-clinical samples have challenged these findings. Docter (1988), with a sample of 21 wives of cross-dressing men, reported he did not find that self-esteem and dependency issues were general characteristics of his sample. While direct measures of these factors were not employed, Docter qualified these claims through his extended exposure to the sample through interviews and survey responses over the course of four years. Furthermore,

Brown (1994), with a sample of 106 women who had cross-dressing partners, stated the women had high educational and occupational achievement and low incidence of substance abuse. He suggested these factors could be reasonably associated with self-esteem and personal independence.

While earlier studies (i.e., Feinbloom, 1976; Stoller, 1967; and Wise, Dupkin, & Meyer, 1981) were focused on the psychological characteristics of women in relationships with men who cross-dress, later studies (i.e., Brown, 1994 and Docter, 1988) explored the ways women were impacted by their partners' cross-dressing. Namely, the issues of disclosure, acceptance, concerns over others' reactions, and the impact on children had been emphasized in the literature.

### *Dilemmas of Disclosure*

A man's disclosure to his partner about his cross-dressing can be compared to gay and lesbian individuals who have decided to "come out of the closet" and profess their homosexual orientation to others. This process can be a very difficult and agonizing experience for some men. However, the alternative of cross-dressing in complete secrecy can be just as difficult and agonizing, if not more (Wysocki, 1993).

Marital relationships are greatly impacted when men opt to not disclose to their wives out of fear of rejection. It is common that men do not tell their wives about their cross-dressing in the fear that their partners will end the relationship (Frances & Wise, 1987). However, research indicates that the low acceptance of a man's cross-dressing by his wife is associated with being told after marriage (Brown & Collier, 1989; Talamini, 1982; Weinberg & Bullough, 1988). Reynolds and Caron (2000) reported that the later into a committed relationship that the female partner is either told or discovers her husband's cross-dressing, the more negatively she is likely to respond. Common reactions from women who are told about or discover their partners' cross-dressing after marriage include feelings of betrayal, loss of trust, and wondering what other information their spouses have been withholding from them (Brown, 1994). This greatly affects the level of trust upon which the core of the relationship is based.

Regarding disclosure, men who cross-dress have to determine whether or not the costs of disclosure will outweigh the benefits. For some men, the benefits of non-disclosure may be that they do not have to deal with potential negative reactions from their spouses such as rage and

rejection. Conversely, for others, the costs of non-disclosure may be that men must endure a marriage filled with painful secret keeping about their cross-dressing. To aid in the resolution of this dilemma, as a guideline, Peo (1988) posited that disclosing the cross-dressing to a partner should only be on the basis of need. He suggested that, if not telling a person has tremendous consequences, then disclosure should be made. He stated that disclosure should be done in a slow and gentle manner. This may entail telling the person verbally and possibly with pictures. He also strongly urged avoiding disclosure while cross-dressed as he stated most persons have difficulties coping with seeing others cross-dressed.

While these guidelines may be helpful, not all courses of events can be controlled or predicted. Possibly, the majority of men who have been discovered inadvertently by their wives to be cross-dressers may have been operating according to the “need to know” basis and opted to not disclose. Thus, when choosing to not disclose, it is important for men to consider the impact of inadvertent discovery.

Despite the difficulties associated with disclosure, research indicates that committed relationships and marriages between men who cross-dress and their partners are not necessarily fated for failure. Bullough and Weinberg (1988) found that the majority of their sample of 70 wives of cross-dressing men was able to become accepting of their husbands’ cross-dressing. This was achieved through the wives’ making a distinction between their feelings about their husbands’ cross-dressing and their feelings for him in general and through focusing on the positive aspects of cross-dressing, such as their husbands’ being more sensitive, kind, and loving toward them while cross-dressed. Also, even though most of the women did not support their husbands’ cross-dressing and few of the women would recommend a cross-dresser as a husband, almost all of the women reported their marriages as being very happy. Furthermore, Brown (1994), over a six-year period with a sample of 106 women in a non-clinical setting, reported that, despite difficulties associated with adjustment to their partners’ cross-dressing, over two-thirds of the participants in his study had never seriously considered separation or divorce due to the cross-dressing behaviors. Brown indicated that this speaks to the potential for longevity in unconventional relationships that include a husband or partner who cross-dresses.

The research regarding marital adjustment and cross-dressing indicates that marital relationships between men who cross-dress and their wives are not destined to unhappiness and

failure. However, it is important for men to disclose their cross-dressing prior to marriage and for the women to be able to find positive aspects of their husbands' cross-dressing.

### ***Post-Disclosure Concerns***

The most common concerns reported by wives are the fears that other people might find out about their husbands' cross-dressing (Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Reynolds & Caron, 2000) and the impact on their children (Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Peo, 1988). Women also commonly have concerns that their husbands are gay or want to be women (Stayton, 1996). Due to a lack of understanding about the nature of cross-dressing, women may incorrectly make assumptions that, because their husbands want to dress as women, they also want to attract other men. Additionally, women also may confuse cross-dressing with transsexualism and think that their husbands actually want to be women. While men who cross-dress can reassure their wives that they will take as many steps as they can so that specified others do not find out about their cross-dressing and that they are neither gay nor want to be women, the concern about the impact upon their children cannot be attended to as easily.

A way that some women find to manage their concerns about the impact on children is to choose to not have children. Brown (1994) reported that many of the women in his sample of 106 female partners of cross-dressing men stated they made a conscious decision to not have children. The author did not specify the number of women who reported making conscious choices to not have children because this content area was not systematically addressed in the study; rather this information was inductively derived during the research process. Reasons given for this decision were the complexities involved with having a cross-dressing husband; a desire to avoid having to keep the cross-dressing a secret from the children; and simply not having any information that addresses the impact of cross-dressing on children to inform their decision-making. While it is unclear how many women share this reasoning, it is fairly common for women in relationships with men who cross-dress to not have children. In fact, Brown (1994) found that 44% of his sample of 106 women had no children. Additionally, Talamini (1982), with a sample of 50 wives of cross-dressers, and Docter (1988), with a sample of 35 wives, found that 30% and 41%, respectively, of their samples also were childless. Unfortunately, none of the studies systematically examined the reasoning behind the couples' being childless. Brown compared his sample with data from the National Center for Health Statistics. In 1989, in the

United States, only 20% of white adult women up to the age of 35 were childless (National Center for Health Statistics, 1991, as cited in Brown, 1994). Thus, Brown determined, based upon his sample, and supported by Talamini (1982) and Docter (1988), that women in relationships with men who cross-dress were significantly less likely to have children than women of similar demographics.

While the pairing of the two research findings (that relationships are better off when men disclose to their partners about their cross-dressing prior to marriage and the notion that women in relationships with cross-dressers often choose to not have children) has not been previously made, at the very least, researchers have stated that further research on the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children is needed (Docker, 1988; Wise & Meyer, 1980). More specifically, Brown (1994) indicated that studies on children with cross-dressing fathers are needed to help women make informed decisions about having children and parenting.

It is interesting to note that, even though Brown (1994) alerted the field that women were actively choosing to not have children because of the lack of information regarding the effects of cross-dressing on children, there have not been any published studies addressing these concerns. Some advancement has been made through acknowledgement of this research in the most comprehensive review of the transgender literature by Lev (2004). Lev cited Brown's (1994), Talamini's (1982), and Docker's (1988) findings that over 40% of their samples of women were childless but, due to the limited information, she only was able to conclude that, "the importance or meaning of this information is unclear" (p. 274).

Regarding Brown (1994) specifically, Lev (2004) questioned the information that could arise from correlations between body weight, parental status, history of lesbian experiences, substance use, and sibling position of a sample of women in relationships with men who cross-dress. In her challenging of the potential meaning of the significant correlations Brown found, she asked, "Are researchers suggesting that these women chose to be child-free because of the cross-dressing?" (p. 274). In reading Brown's (1994) report of his findings, it is clear that some of his sample of women did make this active choice on the basis of not having enough information about the impact of cross-dressing on children. Therefore, while there is tremendous value in the critique of research, Lev may have overlooked the implications of women's making active choices to not have children due to a lack of information, amidst Brown's host of other seemingly disjointed correlations paired with unsubstantiated speculations. Thus, while some of

the correlations may seem unnecessary at best, and offensive at worst, without Brown's (1994), Talamini's (1982), and Docter's (1988) work addressing parental status, the potential dilemma regarding disclosure of cross-dressing and the decision as to whether to have children may not have been realized.

### **Effects of Fathers' Cross-Dressing on Children**

The effects that a father's cross-dressing has on his children have been suggested as a future area of inquiry (Brown, 1994; Docter, 1988; Wise & Meyer, 1980) but no studies have been published attempting to answer this question. One concern, regarding the effect of a man's cross-dressing on his children, is that cross-dressing can be "passed on" to the children. This concern has been partially validated in the literature by three case studies that reported cases of familial cross-dressing (Buhrich, 1977; Edelstein, 1960; Liakos, 1967). Edelstein noted a case of two brothers, Liakos reported a father and two sons, and Buhrich, reported a father and son who were cross-dressers.

Brown (1994) identified three women in his study who described spontaneous cross-dressing behaviors in their pre-adolescent sons who had been told about their fathers' cross-dressing. Brown indicated that these cross-dressing behaviors could represent a myriad of situations. Among those possibilities were the onsets of gender identity disorder, early transvestism, homosexuality or "simply parental identification and modeling" (p. 525). In support that these behaviors could be consistent with actual pervasive cross-dressing behaviors, Brown cited McConaghy, Armstrong, Birrell, and Buhrich (1979) in their report that 11% of 138 male medical students admitted to experiencing erotic stimulation from wearing feminine attire at some point in their lives. While these instances represent that cross-dressing can occur in multiple members of a family, these studies do not provide definitive evidence that cross-dressing can actually be "passed" to other family members. These studies may simply represent atypical cases, otherwise known as statistical outliers, where cross-dressing is found in multiple family members.

### ***Disclosure to Children***

The debate about whether or not to disclose one's cross-dressing to children exists in the literature but is not supported by research; rather, the information is mostly opinion. For example, Docter (1988) suggests not telling one's children. While citing there are no published

studies about the effects on children, he states that the costs of disclosure appear to greatly outweigh the possible benefits of being “open and honest” (p. 175) or encouraging children to be inclusive of those who are different. He further claims that children “want and need parents who are predictable, available, caring, and dedicated to their families” (p. 175) and implies that disclosure of cross-dressing comes in conflict with those needs.

Docter’s statements appear to be a reaction to assertions by Talamini (1982). Talamini, in his study of 50 wives of cross-dressing men, indicated that the most common reason why disclosure was made, cited by the thirteen women who specified their children had been told about their father’s cross-dressing, was to “teach them to be open-minded as well as to heighten the sense of trust and honesty between parents and children” (p. 34).

A critique of Docter’s argument could be that his opinion of the motivation for disclosure may not be consistent with most parents who are wishing to make this disclosure. Parents’ motivation in disclosure may be neither for the sake of being “open and honest” alone nor being a teachable moment about diversity. Rather, some parents may wish to share this information to express that they *are* predictable, available, caring, and dedicated, as opposed to hiding a secret that could potentially be devastating if inadvertently discovered by the children.

Regarding those who are supportive of disclosure, Peo (1988), while citing that there are no published studies, stated that the consensus among wives and professionals was that disclosure to young children should be avoided; however, telling the children as they become teenagers or older might be appropriate. A slightly differing opinion is that of Stayton (1996) who suggested that the best time to discuss this matter with children was prior to the onset of puberty or in late adolescence. He claimed that children going through puberty might not respond as well, due to their undergoing so many changes themselves. He also indicated that, from his experiences, children could manage the information about their fathers’ cross-dressing as long as their parents were comfortable with the information as well.

While several studies inquired whether or not cross-dressing men and their wives had children (Brown, 1994; Bullough & Weinberg, 1988; Docter, 1988; Talamini, 1982) or whether or not they had disclosed the cross-dressing to their children (Brown, 1994; Brown & Collier, 1989; Talamini, 1982), there is only one study that went beyond these questions and reported on the children’s reactions and degree of acceptance. This study is that of Buhrich (1976) that was focused on the perspectives of cross-dressing club members. He reported that only a minority of



couples involved with the club had disclosed the father's cross-dressing to their children. The children who were told were reported to have been either accepting or indifferent regarding the news. The author did not indicate the age of the children at the time of disclosure, the nature of the disclosure, or any information about how the children incorporated this knowledge into their view of their family. Buhrich indicated that the degree to which children were able to be accepting of their father's cross-dressing appeared to be dependent upon the pre-disclosure relationship. Despite this mention, Buhrich did not indicate the necessary components of the pre-disclosure relationship that enhance a child's ability to be accepting. The main concern of the children was that other children might tease them about their father's being a cross-dresser.

Even though the research is limited, the following information can be reasonably gleaned from the extant literature: acceptance may depend on the parents' comfort level with the topic of cross-dressing and the pre-existing relationship with their fathers; children have fears that other children will tease them about their father's being a cross-dresser; and it is unclear as to what age is appropriate for disclosure.

Clearly, there is little evidence to suggest what the effects are on children. Therefore, research on the effects of having transsexual, gay, and lesbian parents on children was examined in order to supplement this deficit. While these groups are very different, they share sexual minority status and are impacted by similar societal stigmatization.

### **Children of Transsexual Parents**

One of the primary concerns regarding children of transsexual parents is how children's gender development may be impacted. Freedman, Tasker, and Di Ceglie (2002), in their sample of 18 children of transsexual parents, indicated that none of the children exhibited symptoms of Gender Identity Disorder, a psychiatric disorder characterized by discontent with one's biological sex (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Green (1998), in a qualitative study with 18 children of transsexual parents, also reported that none of the children met the criteria for Gender Identity Disorder. Furthermore, Lev (2004), in her thorough review of the transgender literature, indicated that there was no evidence that suggested children being raised by transgendered parents have a greater chance than children raised by non-gender-variant parents of having issues with gender identity or gender development.

### *Disclosure to Children*

In support of Stayton's (1996) argument that adolescents may have difficulty processing their father's disclosure about cross-dressing, both Brown and Rounsley (1996), based on clinical experience, and Ettner and White (2000) in a preliminary study interviewing therapists who work with transgendered clients, indicated that adolescents often have a difficult time coping with disclosure and transition issues regarding a parent's transsexuality. While Ettner and White did not offer any further explanation, Brown and Rounsley indicated the concerns over potential stigmatization and fears they may inherit transsexualism often make this issue more difficult for adolescents. While adolescents may have a difficult time coping with a transitioning parent, having the transition kept secret from them or postponed has been found to place adolescents at an even greater risk for maladjustment (Ettner & White, 2000). Again, the authors did not offer any further information about this increased risk.

Because research indicates that adolescents have a difficult time coping with disclosure and transitions, and because non-disclosure is not a recommended alternative, it is suggested that disclosure and transition best occurs when children are young. Ettner and White (2000) specified that preadolescent children have an easier time adjusting to their parents' transition from one sex to another. Brown and Rounsley (1996) suggested that one of the reasons younger children tend to adjust more easily is their familiarity with fairy tales and cartoons where transformations are commonplace.

Buhrich (1976) highlighted a concern for some children of cross-dressing fathers was that other children might tease them about their father's being a cross-dresser. Similarly, Green (1998) investigated the possibility of peer group stigma in his qualitative study with 18 children of transsexual parents. Green found that three of the children indicated they were highly selective of who they told by only telling peers they could trust. Further, three other children reported experiencing some teasing that had been transient and was since resolved. For the remainder of the children, they did not report any issues with peer group stigma as a result of their having a transsexual parent. Overall, in Green's sample of 18 children of transsexual parents, peer group stigma was not found to be a prominent issue.

Green (1998) also investigated children's ability to understand and empathize with their transsexual parents. Green's sample of children and adolescents were shown, through the use of qualitative exemplars, to have a reasonable understanding of their parents' having gender

dysphoria and the ability to empathize with the plight of their parents. While Green did not inquire about a process of acceptance, the children's quotes clearly illustrate their ability to validate their parents' transsexualism.

Just as Buhrich (1976) indicated the level of children's acceptance of their father's cross-dressing depends upon the relationship prior to the disclosure, similar claims have been made for children's adjustment to disclosure of parents' transsexualism. Brown and Rounsley (1996), from a clinical perspective, stated that children's reactions to the disclosure highly depend upon the familial environment. For example, if the parents are bitter and angry at one another regarding the transsexualism, the children often will feel similarly. Conversely, if the parents are communicative and supportive, the children are more likely to experience the parent's transsexualism in a more positive light. Furthermore, Ettner and White (2000) indicated that high levels of family cohesiveness prior to and following the transition serves as a protective factor for children during a parent's transition. Other protective factors identified were maintenance of contact with the transitioning and non-transitioning parent, cooperation amongst parents, and the extended family's taking an active role in the lives of the children.

When divorce between the transitioning and non-transitioning parent occurs, Green (1998), from the perspective of extensive clinical experience, stated it is a tremendous detriment to the children if contact with the transitioning parent is terminated. Furthermore, he acknowledged that, upon transitioning, "divorce may be inevitable between parent and parent, but divorce need not be inevitable between parent and child" (§23).

While Green (1998) stated there was no evidence to support that a parent's transsexualism adversely affects children, there may be instances where it is not safe for children to be around a transitioning parent. For example, Sales (1995), in a case report of a successful clinical intervention with children of a transsexual parent, depicted a troubled transsexual father who was actively suicidal and who responded aggressively to his children. In this case, when the father was overtly distressed regarding issues of transitioning, contact with the children was not recommended and intervention services were clearly needed. Thus, Sales (1995) presented potential risks for children's being in close contact with distressed transitioning parents but also offered a glimpse into a successful family intervention where the children were encouraged to grieve the loss of one parent and to work toward acceptance of a "new" parental figure.

Lev (2004) recommended that parents need to evaluate their children's age, maturity levels, and the visibility of the gender transition prior to making a decision about disclosure. She also suggested parents should also evaluate their own comfort level with discussing the transition and their own availability to the children during the transition processes.

While the research regarding children growing up with a transsexual parent helps to support some of the information found regarding children of cross-dressing fathers, it is still quite limited. Therefore, we turn briefly to the literature on children of gay and lesbian parents, because it has a more thorough history. Since there have been several literature reviews that have compiled the research from previous decades, those reviews will be explored and a summary will be provided of what is known about the effects of gay and lesbian parents on children. Furthermore, the information from additional literature addressing gay and lesbian parents' disclosure to children about their sexual orientation will be presented.

### **Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents**

The following information regarding the impact of having gay or lesbian parents on children is compiled from the three most recent comprehensive reviews of literature on the topic. First, Fitzgerald (1999) reviewed the literature comparing the effects of children of divorced lesbian and gay parents and planned lesbian and gay families. Next, Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytteroy (2002) examined studies from American, British, French, and Scandinavian literature from 1978 to 2000. Finally, Tasker (2005) completed the most current comprehensive review of literature spanning from 1978 to 2004.

Each of the reviews grouped the existing literature into various categories. They were similar and are collectively referred to here as psychological adjustment, psychosexual development, social development, and familial relationships.

#### ***Psychological Adjustment***

Tasker (2005) identified that the psychological adjustment of children of lesbian mothers has been systematically researched, whereas the same has not been done with children of gay fathers. However, Tasker indicated the presence of many anecdotal reports of children of gay fathers that reveal similar results to the studies with lesbian mothers. She wrote that concerns about the psychological well being of children of gay and lesbian parents might be related to factors such as parental conflict, parental separation, and parental mental health problems. She

noted that none of these factors are directly related to having a gay or lesbian parent. Furthermore, worry about the effects of prejudice from others regarding their familial composition is cited as a concern that may impact children's psychological adjustment. Despite these concerns, Tasker reported that there was not any evidence in the literature indicating group differences between children of gay and lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents on the basis of psychological adjustment, which included psychiatric evaluation, self-esteem, intellectual ability, and behavioral adjustment. Reviews by Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytteroy (2002) and Fitzgerald (1999), regarding both divorced and planned families, concurred with these results.

### ***Psychosexual Development***

The category of psychosexual development includes concerns regarding children's gender role development, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Tasker (2005) identified this area as one of the most researched aspects of children of gay and lesbian parents. She concluded that the research indicates that having a gay or lesbian parent does not influence gender role development or sexual orientation. While the majority of children of gay and lesbian parents were found to have heterosexual orientations similar to that of the general population, Tasker noted that growing up with a gay or lesbian parent may be associated with the broadening of children's views regarding possible sexual identities. This implies that children of gay or lesbian parents who identify as bisexual or homosexual may have an easier time accepting their sexual identities, in addition to being inclusive of others with varying sexual identities than children of heterosexual parents. Similarly, Fitzgerald (1999) also found in her review that children's acceptance of others who are different in a multitude of ways was found as a positive outcome of having gay or lesbian parents.

Fitzgerald (1999) reviewed the factors of gender identity development, gender role development, and sexual orientation with children of divorced lesbian and gay parents and planned gay and lesbian families. She concurred with Tasker on the issues of gender role development and sexual orientation, with the exception of one study. This one study, which has yet to be replicated, by Cameron and Cameron (1996) who, with a sample of 5,182 randomly obtained adults from six cities in the United States, found that 17 of the adults reported having a homosexual parent. Of those 17 respondents, consisting of six men and 11 women, four men

(67%) and four women (36%) reported having a bisexual or homosexual orientation themselves. These results were compared to individuals having heterosexual parents, where males reported being bisexual or homosexual less than 6% of the time and females 3% of the time. Therefore, the authors claimed that, in their sample, adults with homosexual parents were disproportionately more likely to have a bisexual or homosexual orientation themselves. The authors acknowledge that their findings are based only on “17 childhoods” and are “too small to prove or disprove these contentions” (p. 768) and that a major weakness of the study was that they obtained roughly a 50% response rate. Thus, the authors acknowledge they are making robust claims based upon limited evidence. However, they justify doing so in that other researchers are doing the same with even less data to support pro-homosexual stances. While this study does not invalidate contrary findings, it does illuminate the need for further research in this area.

Fitzgerald also reviewed literature on gender identity development, an issue that has been recognized as a more prominent concern with children of transsexual parents. She concluded that there was no empirical evidence indicating gender identity confusion for children of lesbian mothers. Fitzgerald noted there were no studies on gender identity development of children with gay fathers. Anderssen et al. (2002) concurred with Fitzgerald’s review regarding all three factors of gender identity development, gender role development, and sexual orientation.

### ***Social Development***

Social development includes peer relationships and peer stigmatization. Anderssen et al. (2002) found that children of gay or lesbian parents were generally not stigmatized or harassed, but they did tend to be teased more than peers with heterosexual parents. The teasing often was related to the potential for the children to be gay or lesbian themselves and about their parents’ lifestyles. Despite the increased teasing, children of gay and lesbian parents were found to have the ability to develop stable peer relationships similar to that of children with heterosexual parents. Fitzgerald (2002) also emphasized that children of lesbian and gay parents were found to have positive social development and relationships with peers. Tasker (2005) suggested that the main concerns for children are the disclosure about their parents’ sexual orientation to peers and finding ways of coping with homophobic prejudice of peers.

### ***Familial Relationships***

Tasker (2005) was the only review of the three that specifically explored the quality of familial relationships between children and their gay and lesbian parents. For families with both divorced gay fathers and divorced lesbian mothers, the existing research suggests that there are no significant differences between the quality of family relationships in comparison to divorced heterosexual fathers and children living with single divorced heterosexual mothers. Tasker indicated there were positive outcomes for children of divorced gay fathers reported in several studies. Among the positive outcomes were that divorced gay fathers reported being stricter in setting appropriate standards for their children's behavior and were responding to their children's needs more often, in comparison to divorced heterosexual fathers. Regarding planned families, there are no published studies exploring this issue with planned gay father families. With planned lesbian-led families, Tasker found in her review of the literature that, in some studies, there were positive differences between planned lesbian families and heterosexual families. Among these positive differences were that children of planned lesbian families had closer relationships with birth mothers, mothers less frequently used physical discipline, and mothers were more likely to engage in make-believe play with children than heterosexual mothers.

Overall, the most significant concern for children of gay and lesbian parents appears to be peer group stigmatization. Based upon the three recent reviews of literature, children's psychological and psychosexual development do not appear to be impacted as a result of having gay or lesbian parents. Additionally, the quality of familial relationships involving gay and lesbian parents and their children appear to be comparable to families with heterosexual parents, with some gay and lesbian parents actually having more positive outcomes regarding parenting.

One issue that these reviews did not attend to is the impact of parents' disclosure of their sexual orientation on the children and children's reactions. Therefore, it is also necessary to briefly explore the literature regarding this process.

### ***Disclosure to Children***

While it is common for parents to delay disclosure or "coming out" to their children until they are adolescents or older (Lynch & Murray, 2000), research indicates that children are likely to respond more positively if the disclosure occurs prior to the onset of puberty (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Schulenburg, 1985). One of the reasons parents are encouraged to come out to

their children when they are younger is because, by puberty, the children may have already been negatively influenced by society's intolerance of homosexuality (Moses & Hawkins, 1982). Overall, regarding disclosure, younger children tend to have the least difficulty with adjustment and adolescents tend to have the most (Lynch & Murray, 2000).

Regarding acceptance, the more accepting fathers are of themselves about being gay, the more likely their children will be comfortable with the father's disclosure (Schulenberg, 1985). For example, if a father feels shame and confusion about his homosexuality, his children may respond negatively to the disclosure. Thus, it is suggested that the more matter-of-fact and accepting fathers are of their own homosexuality, the easier it is for children to be accepting (Bozett, 1987b). The same has been found for lesbian mothers in their disclosure to children about their sexual orientation (Pennington, 1987).

Additionally, following the disclosure, children often learn that they have to be selective about to whom they disclose the information and also need to develop coping strategies for dealing with negative reactions and teasing from others (Lynch & Murray, 2000). Parents often help their children by informing them at the outset that not everyone, including some friends and family members, are going to be accepting. Parents also help children understand that discrimination and taunting by others is wrong and that others' homophobia is their own issue and is not a reflection of their children or family (Lynch & Murray, 2000).

Regarding the influence of the pre-disclosure relationship, Bozett (1987a) indicated that children are unlikely to perceive their fathers negatively following disclosure of being gay if they had a positive and nurturing relationship prior to the disclosure. Further, he indicated it is unlikely for children to abruptly stop loving a father with whom they have had a positive relationship for years prior to the disclosure.

### **Models of Adjustment to Transgender, Gay, and Lesbian “Coming Out”**

Sales (1995) presented an intervention with children of transsexual fathers, who had transitioned into women. It focused on the transition as being a time of loss for the children. This approach has been applied in other areas of the research literature as well, such as for family members' coming to terms with the “coming out” of gay or lesbian individuals (Savin-Williams, 2001). Within the transgender literature specifically, Emerson and Rosenfeld (1996) and Ellis and Eriksen (2002) constructed models of adjustment in family members of transsexual and



cross-dressing individuals, based upon Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief. The stages of adjustment consist of "denial," "anger," "bargaining," "depression," and "acceptance." It is acknowledged that not everyone passes through all of the stages or in the same order. Emerson and Rosenfeld's (1996) adaptation of Kubler-Ross' model is presented as a general way to view the adjustment processes of most family members.

Upon the immediate disclosure of one's being transgendered, family members often experience shock and denial. Family members may respond by thinking this is simply a phase that will soon pass. They also may maintain their denial through avoiding contact with the transgendered family member.

Once denial can no longer be maintained, family members often may experience feelings of anger directed toward the transgendered family member. They may feel betrayed and frustrated, claiming the transgendered person has disrupted the harmony in the family.

As family members try to gain control of the situation, they move into the next stage, bargaining. Often, bargaining is in the form of making promises or threats to the transgendered family member. Spouses may threaten to divorce the cross-dressing partner if he does not stop or limit his cross-dressing. For transsexual individuals, spouses may threaten to divorce and challenge child custody. Family members also may make promises to sway transsexual family members from transitioning, such as offering money or other favors. During this stage, it is clear that family members still see the transsexual person's desire to transition and the cross-dressers' cross-dressing as a problem.

After attempts at bargaining yield unsuccessful results, family members may experience depressive feelings. During this time, the reality of the situation becomes more apparent. They realize that they cannot control the transsexual person's desire to transition or the cross-dresser's choice to cross-dress. Family members most often experience this stage through crying and other grief expressions. Less frequently, others may experience physical illness or respond inappropriately such as with substance abuse or social withdrawal.

After individuals have come to accept the reality of the family member's being transgendered, they are able to move toward resolution of their grief. The acceptance stage often is characterized by realizing they cannot change the transgendered family member. Another key realization that occurs during the acceptance stage is consideration of the plight of the transgendered family member. Emerson and Rosenfeld (1996) indicated that it is during the

acceptance stage that “family members may begin to express concern for the [transsexual or cross-dressing family member’s] welfare” (p. 7). Thus, being able to understand the needs and dilemmas of the “other” is potentially a signal that a family member is moving toward acceptance.

Emerson and Rosenfeld’s (1996) applications of Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief helps to understand processes family members go through in their adjustment to having a transgendered family member. A concern is that this application is based upon clinical experience, validated only by case example, and is not presented with any additional empirical means of validation. Therefore, in this current study, the stages of grief are utilized as a guide for the qualitative interviews in an attempt to explore its usefulness in understanding the experiences of family members of men who cross-dress.

To further enhance the guiding framework for the current study, an application of theory is utilized. Theoretical applications to the process of adjustment or acceptance of transgendered family members have not been previously identified in the literature. Therefore, the theory application in this study is used cautiously and preliminarily.

The theoretical perspective chosen was informed by a key process that is identified as a marker of acceptance in Emerson and Rosenfeld’s (1996) application of Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief to the adjustment of family members of transgendered persons. During the acceptance stage, individuals begin to consider of the plight of the transgendered family member. Prior to this consideration, family members often are caught considering only their own plights. The movement from primary consideration of the “self” to the ability to consider the “other” is a foundational concept of theories of cognitive moral development.

### **Application of Theories of Cognitive Moral Development**

While models are helpful in understanding the process of acceptance, the guidance of a theory helps to provide a more solid foundation. Theory aids not only in the understanding of the process of acceptance, but also provides a framework for asking questions about the entire lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers, including the meanings they make regarding their father’s cross-dressing. Furthermore, the use of theory is necessary to guide research in areas where there is limited information. Otherwise, atheoretical research is at risk of further promulgating information grounded in “opinion,” void of scientific merit, similar to the

very fears of women about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children that is supported by negative societal opinion. Thus, as a theoretical foundation for this study, the perspectives of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan are utilized.

### ***Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development***

Kohlberg's theory of moral development is primarily based upon the rationales people use to resolve moral dilemmas and the ways they incorporate the concepts of rights, duty, and justice in the process (Hoffman, 2000). Kohlberg posited that individuals have the potential to progress from a "preconventional" level (where a person is focused on the consequences of actions for oneself), to a "conventional" level (where decisions are made based upon group welfare and rules), to a "post-conventional" level (based on principled decision-making influenced by a universal perspective). Moral development begins in childhood, expressed by selfishness and egocentricity, and may become more advanced and sociocentric as the individual matures and passes through stages of moral thinking (Muuss, 1996). While there are three levels of moral development, Kohlberg also divided each level, resulting in six stages of moral reasoning. The following descriptions are adapted from Muuss (1996).

#### ***Level 1, Stage 1: Punishment-Obedience Morality***

At the lowest level of moral reasoning, the primary rationale behind one's decision-making is the avoidance of punishment. The notions of "good" and "bad" are defined based on whether or not authorities are obeyed and rules are followed because of the fear of negative consequences. At this stage, the individual values others in regard to their physical characteristics, social status, and the benefits they can provide.

#### ***Level 1, Stage 2: Individualistic, Instrumental Morality***

At this stage, individuals experience a form of moral relativism whereas their decision-making is most informed by the manipulation of others in order to gain rewards. When it is beneficial to the individual, he or she is willing to consider others' needs in their decision-making processes and engage in reciprocity. Therefore, reciprocity depends upon an exchange for desired rewards, as opposed to being a consideration of loyalty or justice.

### ***Level 2, Stage 3: Interpersonally Normative Morality***

This stage is the first within the conventional level. The individual's making the transition from egocentric motivations to a more sociocentric orientation characterizes this stage. Individuals are now able to distinguish between personal needs and morality but often become confused when deciding between social approval and right and wrong. This stage is often referred to as the "good boy-good girl" stage as it is a time of approval seeking. As such, living up to others' expectation becomes more important than doing what is good or right. Therefore, individuals' decision-making processes are primarily informed out of a desire to win approval from others, as opposed to "doing the right thing."

### ***Level 2, Stage 4: Social System Morality***

This stage is characterized by a strong orientation toward duty, law, order, and obeying authorities. The individual is now able to distinguish between moral rules and a desire for approval. One follows the rules to avoid punishment but also realizes the legitimate rights of others. Furthermore, at this stage, a concrete understanding of the principles of justice is incorporated into one's decision-making and social order is maintained at any cost.

### ***Level 3, Stage 5: Human Rights and Social Welfare Morality***

This stage signifies entrance into the post-conventional level. Here, individuals are guided by a belief in individual rights, equality, dignity, contractual agreements, and mutual obligations in their decision-making. This stage, utilizing abstract thinking abilities, is often referred to as the "principled stage" of moral reasoning. The individual believes that laws should promote human rights and dignity, priority is given to promoting the welfare of the larger community, and that unjust law should be altered. Furthermore, laws are seen as modifiable, as opposed to unquestionable rules, which may be altered as long as there is a consensus amongst the larger community.

### ***Level 3, Stage 6: Morality of Universalizable, Reversible, and Prescriptive General Ethical Principles***

Individuals at this level of moral reasoning have developed a conscience that is based on self-chosen ethical principles. They place the highest value on the principles of human life, equality, and dignity. They agree that rules should be followed as long as they stand for human

life, equality, and dignity. At this stage, an individual's concept of justice spans beyond the social order and includes a more universal perspective. As an example, a person may disobey laws out of respect for a morality that is believed to be higher than the law, thus resulting in civil disobedience. The person's rationale for breaking the law is grounded in the principles of justice and out of respect for the rights of individuals. Individuals at this stage believe that no law, contract, or moral obligation can interfere with fighting for the rights of persons about whom they love and care.

### ***Application to Children's Understanding of their Father's Cross-Dressing***

An application of Kohlberg's theory of moral development to children's understanding of their father's cross-dressing has yet to be made in the literature. Therefore, speculations about potential reactions from children are made based upon the different considerations that are salient at each level of moral development. The following speculations involving (1) impact on the self; (2) what others may think; and (3) consideration of the perspective of the other, as they correspond with the three levels of moral development, will be utilized in the analysis of interview data. This will aid in the recognition of participants' potential upward movement through the stages of moral development regarding the meaning they make about their fathers' being cross-dressers and how that relates to their degree of acceptance of their fathers' being cross-dressers.

For Level 1, the impact on the self is the most important. Children's reactions at this level may focus on "how could he do this to me?" or "what does this say about me?" Thus, reactions at this level of moral development are centered on how the child's father's being a cross-dresser impacts the child.

At Level 2, what others may think is of greatest relevance. Children's reactions at this level are still self-oriented as well. Therefore, in combining self-interest with concern for what others may think, in Level 2, Stage 3 particularly, children's reactions to their father's being a cross-dresser may focus on "what will others think?" and "will I be accepted by others?" In Level 2, Stage 4, these reactions may be less egocentric and focus more on whether or not their father's being a cross-dressing violates norms of society.

For Level 3, consideration for the perspective of the "other" emerges with prominence. At this level, concerns for the plight of the other are made and children consider their fathers' feelings in the formulation of their reaction to their fathers' being cross-dressers. Among their

reactions may be “what is this like for him?” or “what does he need?” This level, when compared to Kubler-Ross’ (1969) stages of grief, appears to coincide with one’s resolution of grief and movement toward acceptance of a family member’s cross-dressing. In fact, principled moral reasoning has been found to be associated with individuals’ empathy for others (Chovan & Freeman, 1993; Givner, 1985; Kurdek, 1981) and tolerance of those who are different (Glover, 1994).

### ***Gilligan’s Theory of Moral Development***

Gilligan’s theory of moral development was derived, based upon her impressions that Kohlberg’s theory did not accurately reflect the moral development of women (Gilligan, 1977). Therefore, she developed her own stage model of female moral development. Gilligan posits that moral reasoning is different based on gender in that females’ moral reasoning is based on interpersonal relationships and males’ moral reasoning is based on principles of justice. The following is a summary of Gilligan’s female levels of moral reasoning and the transitions between levels adapted from Muuss (1988).

#### ***Level 1: The Orientation Toward Self-Interest***

At this most basic level of moral reasoning, women have an egocentric orientation and their focus is primarily on self-interest and survival. They perceive morality as the need to obey imposing restrictions because of fear of punishment. Thus, at this level, women’s decisions are based on considerations of what is best for them and do not involve a focus on the needs of others.

#### ***The First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility***

During the transition from level one to level two, women gain an awareness of the difference between what they want and what is their responsibility. This transition represents maturity and the ability to have concern for others.

#### ***Level 2: Identification of Goodness and Responsibility for Others***

At this level, self-interest is replaced with the desire to please others. This occurs as the woman leaves her egocentric orientation and gains more of a societal perspective. At this point, she gains a concern for others, often at the sacrifice of herself, and her decision-making becomes primarily informed by her perception of responsibility to others. Women often equate being a

good person with self-sacrifice and caring for and pleasing others. Unfortunately, this may lead to women's not asserting their needs in fear that others may criticize or abandon them.

### ***The Second Transition: From Conformity to a New Inner Judgment***

During this transition, women begin to critically question their own value. They begin to question whether or not their own needs are selfish or if considering themselves may actually be just as responsible as considering the needs of others.

### ***Level 3: Focusing on the Dynamics Between Self and Others***

At this third level of moral reasoning, women adopt a universal perspective. Women are able to attend to their own opinions and needs yet, at the same time, consider the opinions and needs of others. Women no longer see themselves as subordinate or powerless and instead perceive a sense of equality in terms of their ability to participate in decision-making processes. Now, they are to balance their rationale for the decisions they make, based upon care for themselves and care for others.

### ***Application to Children's Understanding of Their Father's Cross-Dressing***

Even though Gilligan's work is focused on women, for the purposes of this study, her theory will be used as a lens from which to view the responses of both male and female participants regarding the meaning they make about their fathers' being cross-dressers. Just because men have been found to place more emphasis on principles of justice in their decision-making than interpersonal relationships, it does not necessitate that responses from men cannot be viewed through Gilligan's theoretical lens. Therefore, this extended application will be made since it is recognized that both men's and women's decision-making processes, albeit at different magnitudes, are informed by their relationship to others.

Since Gilligan's theory follows similarly with Kohlberg's three levels of moral development, similar speculations will be made about what the potential reactions from children, regarding their fathers' being cross-dressers, may be based upon the different considerations that are salient at each level of moral development. For Gilligan's theory, the considerations that are salient at each level of moral development are slightly different from Kohlberg's and are as follows: (1) impact on the self; (2) desire to please others; and (3) balance between the consideration of the self and the perspective of the other. While the speculations are similar for

both theories, for applications of Gilligan's theory, the speculations are revised in order to reflect a greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships and a lesser emphasis on principles of justice. Again, just as with the application of Kohlberg's theory to the interview data, the use of Gilligan's theory as a lens will aid in the recognition of participants' potential upward movement through the stages of moral development regarding both the meanings they make and their degree of acceptance regarding their father's being a cross-dresser.

For Level 1, the impact on the self is the most important consideration in the decision-making process. Therefore, children's reactions at this level may focus on "how could he do this to me?" or "what does this say about me?" and are centered on how the child's father's being a cross-dresser impacts the child.

At Level 2, the desire to please others is of greatest relevance. Children's reactions are no longer purely self-interested and are instead replaced with a concern for others. This concern for others often may be at the sacrifice of oneself as decisions are primarily made according to one's perception of responsibility to others. While children at this stage are able to consider others in their decision-making, they do not necessarily focus on the perspective of the other. Therefore, an example of a potential speculation about children's reactions to their fathers' being cross-dressers at this level may be "I accept him unconditionally for the sake of keeping the family together" or "I accept this because he's my father".

At Level 3, individuals are able to consider their own needs in addition to the perspective of others. They are now able to have a balance between concern for their own feelings and the feelings of others. Therefore, at this level, children's reactions to their fathers' being cross-dressers may be "what is this like for him and what do I think about it?" or "what are his needs and what are my needs?"

Gilligan's theory of moral development has continued to be developed by other scholars such as Noddings (2003) and her work on the ethic of caring. She shares Gilligan's concern for the applicability of Kohlberg's theory of moral development to women in that women express moral reasoning through the evaluation of situations rather than through strictly cognitive orientated processes focused on justice. Noddings is also careful to point out that extensions of Gilligan's theory of moral development are not meant to be inclusive of all women or to exclude men.



Because this is a cautious and preliminary application of theories of cognitive moral development, attempts to make hypotheses based on the theories are not made. Rather, the theories are used as frameworks for understanding how individuals make meaning of the disclosure of their father's being a cross-dresser.

## **Conclusions**

The information from the extant literature on children of cross-dressing fathers, and transgendered, gay, and lesbian parents indicates that the following issues are found to be salient amongst researchers, clinicians, and family members: (1) the developmental level of the child at the time of disclosure; (2) the child's pre-disclosure relationship with his or her father; (3) the father's comfort level with discussing cross-dressing (4) the overall familial climate regarding cross-dressing; and (5) the effects on the social development of the child. Additionally, based on this review of literature, applications of the stages of adjustment and theories of cognitive moral development were deemed appropriate to aid in the understanding of the ways individuals make meaning over time of their father's cross-dressing. Therefore, based upon the existing literature, both in the direction it provides and in the apparent gaps in knowledge, the following research questions were devised:

The overarching research question is: What are the lived experiences of children of cross-dressing fathers? The specific research questions are:

- (1) How does the timing and nature of disclosure impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
- (2) How does the pre-disclosure relationship of children with their fathers impact the children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
- (3) How does the father's comfort level with his being a cross-dresser impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
- (4) How does the familial environment regarding cross-dressing impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
- (5) What meanings do children make regarding their father's cross-dressing?
- (6) Does children's understanding of their father's cross-dressing follow predictable stages of moral reasoning?

- (7) Does children's adjustment to their father's cross-dressing follow predictable stages of grief?
- (8) How does having a father who cross-dresses impact the social development of children?

With these research questions, the goal of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers. Through this research, the impact on children of having a father who cross-dresses was explored through in-depth qualitative interviews with adult children of cross-dressing fathers. This research offers information regarding the potential assets and liabilities of children's having a father who cross-dresses. Additionally, this research offers information geared to assist women in relationships with men who cross-dress to make informed decisions about having children.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Methodology**

In order to understand the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers, a sample of five adult children of cross-dressing fathers was procured. The participants were recruited through contacts within a transgendered organization located in a midwestern city in the United States and through a national cross-dressing support organization. Following recruitment, participants were personally interviewed either face-to-face or via telephone in private, secure locations. The interview was pre-tested for content and format. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription process, the researcher utilized the MAXqda (MAX Qualitative Data Analysis) computer software program (Kuckartz, 2001) to qualitatively analyze the interview data.

### **Background of the Researcher**

The researcher is a Caucasian female who was raised in a Midwestern area of the United States. At the beginning of this study, the researcher was 28 years of age and was a doctoral candidate specializing in Marriage and Family Therapy at a Midwestern University.

The researcher has extensive experience with interacting with men who cross-dress and plans to devote part of her professional career to conducting transgender research. Her vested interest in this topic began through her relationship with a mentor with whom she has been in contact since childhood. This mentor is currently self-identified as a heterosexual cross-dresser and has been a strong and positive influence in the researcher's life. In addition, the researcher has had the privilege of interacting with other members of the cross-dressing population. Her increased contact with these individuals occurred through her research for her master's thesis.

### **Sample**

The sampling strategy used was "criterion sampling" (Patton, 2002). This strategy was chosen because particular criteria were used to purposefully select participants. The criteria that the participants met were the following: (1) have a father who is a heterosexual cross-dresser; (2) must be over the age of 18; and (3) must already know about their father's cross-dressing.

Participation was solicited via contacting the president of a transgendered organization located in a Midwestern city in the United States and officers affiliated with a national cross-dressing support organization. These individuals agreed to provide assistance in locating participants for this study and sharing the researcher's recruitment letter with them. See Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment letter.

### **Methodological Perspective**

The methodological perspective utilized was "phenomenology." Phenomenology refers to an approach where the researcher attempts to understand the experiences of individuals or groups of people who have directly experienced the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). This approach was appropriate for the current study in that in-depth interviews with adult children of cross-dressing fathers were conducted. The research questions were aimed at understanding how having fathers who cross-dress impacts children's lives and also the meanings children make regarding their fathers' being cross-dressers. Thus, the goals of the interviews were to understand the lived experience of each participant in regard to having a father who cross-dresses.

### **Procedures**

In conjunction with the attainment of the sample of five adult children of cross-dressing fathers, the researcher coordinated either in-person or telephone interviews in secure, private environments with each participant. Prior to the interviews, participants were either mailed or e-mailed the informed consent document and debriefing statement. See Appendices B and C, respectively, for copies of these documents. Prior to the interview, participants were asked if they read the informed consent document and whether or not they gave their consent to participate. The interviews were conducted utilizing the format from the interview guide presented in Appendix D. Each interview was between 30 - 90 minutes in length and was audio-recorded.

The specific type of interview design chosen for this study was the "interview guide." An interview guide is designed to provide basic questions or subject areas to be asked of all participants. The interviewer is allowed to explore these basic questions or subject areas in differing ways, depending upon each participant's responses (Patton, 2002). Thus, the interview

guide did not provide specific structured questions to be asked in the same way with every participant nor did it leave the interview completely open to *any* questions.

The structure of each interview was informed by the research questions. The research questions included the following content areas, as related to the participants' fathers' cross-dressing: (1) the timing and nature of their father's disclosure; (2) the pre-disclosure relationship with their fathers; (3) the father's comfort level with his being a cross-dresser; (4) the familial environment regarding cross-dressing; (5) the meanings they make regarding their father's cross-dressing; (6) their use of moral reasoning in their understanding of their father's cross-dressing; (7) how their social development was impacted; and (8) the processes/stages of adjustment they experienced.

### **Method of Analysis**

Once the researcher determined that saturation of the data had been reached, or that no new themes were arising from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), data collection ceased. Then, each interview was transcribed verbatim, utilizing audio-recordings, transcription equipment, and computer word-processing software. All identifying information, such as names or specific locations, were given pseudonyms or eliminated entirely, in order to maintain confidentiality of the participants. Following the transcription process, all information was imported from the word-processing computer files into a MAXqda database. The MAXqda computer software program allowed for the interview data to be qualitatively analyzed via the researcher's coding and categorizing the participants' responses (Kuckartz, 2001).

Following the completion of the interviews, a method of qualitative data analysis that involves a continuous cycle of induction and deduction was used. Deductive qualitative data analysis is primarily theory-driven and the data is analyzed according to an established framework (Patton, 2002). Alternatively, inductive qualitative data analysis is primarily data-driven and involves the discovery of patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Patton, 2002). While qualitative research often is inductive in nature, it is common for analyses to include elements of both deductive and inductive approaches (Patton, 2002). When these two approaches are combined, it is referred to as retroduction (Burr, 1973). The term retroduction has a lengthy history as far back as the work of Aristotle. Aristotle originally identified three types of inquiry: deduction, induction, and retroduction (Hanson, 1961). While retroduction originally

was used in basic sciences such as physics, the integration of induction and deduction has been promoted in social science and family research, specifically in the areas of developmental psychology (Kuczynski, 1998), human development (Vuchinich, Vuchinich, & Coughlin, 1992), and social work (Houston, 2005).

A typical form of retroductive analysis begins with the analyst's using deduced hypotheses from previous literature or theory to analyze the data. Then, the analyst inductively analyzes the data by allowing new themes to emerge, while viewing those themes within the original deductive framework. This analysis was deemed most appropriate because this method allows the use of sensitizing concepts from the relevant literature as a basic framework from which to view the data but also offers the flexibility to permit new themes to emerge so that gaps in the literature can be filled.

Specifically, to begin the analysis, a codebook was created from the literature review and as each transcript was read. Initial categories were created and organized in an outline form. In order to examine convergence, the researcher read each transcript multiple times and looked for recurring themes. After the main themes were listed as categories in an outline form, the researcher then looked through the data and found variations within each category and created sub-categories. Then, she ensured that each category was clearly separate from the others (external heterogeneity) and that the data coded into each category clearly were related (internal homogeneity). As each transcript was read, the researcher added new categories and sub-categories to the codebook as they emerged. Each category and sub-category was given abbreviated names. Each transcript was coded by isolating text corresponding with each category and sub-category.

From there, the coded data was moved to specific "codes" within the MAXqda database, so that all similar information was placed together in a "cluster" for further analysis (Kuckartz, 2001). Following the coding and categorization process, the validity of the information found for each research question was examined and the results of the analysis reported.

The validity of the data was established through the use of triangulation. The researcher used a form of "methods triangulation" by comparing the results to findings in the research literature, both from quantitative and qualitative studies. Additionally, a form of "analyst triangulation" was used as a secondary analyst aided in the coding of the data. The secondary analyst was a female master's student enrolled in the marriage and family therapy specialization

at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She had only basic knowledge of cross-dressing populations prior to her assistance with this study. She independently coded each transcript and a consensus was negotiated between the researcher and the secondary analyst regarding the final coding of the data. When differences in coding occurred, consensus was achieved through discussions of coding rationale. The final decision was based upon both coders' agreement of the strongest rationale.

The analysis explored the thick description provided through the participants' report of their experiences. Those experiences are summarized according to the research questions and additional themes arising from the data, reflecting the retroductive nature of the analysis. A report of the results and the proceeding discussion follow.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Results**

This chapter describes the population studied and presents the participants' responses that correspond with each of the interview guide questions. While the participants were specifically asked questions from the interview guide presented in Appendix D, many provided additional information that was not specifically elicited by the interviewer's questions. This primarily inductively derived information is reported as well.

### **Participant Population**

A total of five self-identified adult children of cross-dressing fathers participated in this study. The participants all identified as Caucasian and consisted of three females aged 18, 24, and 32 and two males aged 24 and 37. Regarding relational status, two participants were single, one was divorced, one was engaged, and one was married. Only one participant had a child. Three of the participants held bachelor's degrees and one of those was currently enrolled in medical school. One participant identified completing some college and one had just recently completed high school. Regarding religious or spiritual affiliation, two participants identified as Christian, one identified as Episcopalian, and the remaining two identified as having no specific religious or spiritual affiliation. At the time of the interviews, three participants resided in Midwestern states, one participant resided in an Eastern state, and the remaining participant did not identify geographical location. The participants were individually interviewed by the researcher. One interview was in-person and the remaining four occurred via telephone.

### **Timing and Nature of Disclosure**

The participants' ability to reflect upon the moment of their fathers' disclosure to them about his cross-dressing was impacted by three of the participants' having always known about their fathers' cross-dressing. These participants reported knowing about their father's cross-dressing since they were very young; their earliest memories of their fathers contain knowledge and images of his cross-dressing. Only two of the participants reported recalling an exact moment of disclosure. For both of them, this occurred into their early adulthood. Specifically, two of the participants recalled first knowing about their fathers' cross-dressing at the age of



three, one participant reported being told around the age of six, and the remaining two reported being told by their fathers at ages 19 and 25, respectively.

### ***First Finding Out***

The participants' stories of how they first found out about their fathers' cross-dressing varied from having a sense of knowing since their earliest memories of their fathers to being told explicitly by their fathers as adults. In order to tell these stories, each of the participants has been given a proxy name in order to both complement the illustration and protect their identities. Thus, the characters in the following story are three women, Sabrina, Eva, and Chloe, and two men, Kent and Brendan.

Eva, Chloe, and Brendan report not recalling any specific first memory of being told or knowing their fathers were cross-dressers. All three reported seeming to always have known. Chloe, who reported knowing as early as three years old, reported her earliest memories were seeing her father early in the morning dressed in a skirt and women's shoes. Eva recalled "remembering...panty hose under his jeans, if he didn't have socks on. 'Feet don't look like that, that's panty hose.' A little kid knows that."

Both Sabrina and Kent were told much later than the others, into their early adulthood. Sabrina recalled being told by her father while driving in the car when she was around 19. Kent said his father told him when he returned to live at home during a break from college in his mid twenties.

Kent: I can't remember what words he used exactly but it was like 'you know, since you're going to be staying here for awhile, there's something I need to reveal to you because I don't want to keep it under wraps.' And I think he just kind of said it matter-of-factly that he's a cross-dresser.

### ***Reactions***

In terms of reactions to knowing his father wore women's clothing on occasion, Brendan, due to his knowing at such an early age, reported not recalling any specific reaction to his father's cross-dressing. Chloe recalled that as a young child "I thought it was kind of odd at first but it never bothered me." Eva reflected the sentiment that her father's wearing feminine clothing did not appear "strange or unusual" and that it "really didn't have much of an impact on me as a small child. It just seemed like something, as far as I knew, that was normal in my

family.” Similar to Eva’s reaction, even though she found out much later in life, Sabrina recalled the situation as a subtle event as well.

Sabrina: I just remember going ‘oh, okay’ and going on. It wasn’t a real big deal. It wasn’t any kind of grand announcement or anything. I don’t remember it being this horrible shock or anything like that. The moment doesn’t stand out in my mind very much.

Kent’s story is much different from the other four. He admitted that his reaction was colored by the fact that he had returned to live at home from college due to his being clinically depressed.

Kent: I was really...I was just shocked. I really had no idea prior to that. And it was compounded by the fact that I wasn’t doing very well. I felt like I just wasn’t able to handle many stresses at all. I was just like ‘oh my god, why? Why (laughs), why would you tell me this now?’ I didn’t know how to react.

Kent further described his feeling of shock after the disclosure, “having spent so much time there [at home] and just having something of that magnitude unknown to me. I couldn’t believe it. I thought that I pretty much knew everything there was to know about him and my mother...them being able to keep that big of a secret for so many years just perplexed me and made me wonder what other things are going on that I don’t know about (laughs). I think I told them, ‘I need to know all of these things. I don’t want to be more surprised and shocked.’ The whole image and story you create by yourself was just dramatically changed...I wasn’t in distress or anything, I was just sort of overwhelmed with surprise.”

### *Impact of Circumstances*

Outside of Kent’s personal difficulties at the time of disclosure, he stated that he did not think that the circumstances of his finding out impacted how he views his father’s being a cross-dresser. Sabrina, who also found out in her early adulthood, reflected that she did not think the circumstances impacted her view either. She speculated that her father’s revealing verbally was better for her rather than inadvertently discovering him cross-dressed. Both Eva and Brendan, who had known about their fathers’ cross-dressing at very young ages, stated that they may have had a harder time accepting it if they had been told as older children, such as during adolescence.

Brendan: Never not knowing probably put me at an advantage in terms of integrating that

into my understanding of my family...It's always better to find out from you than from someone else or from walking in on you wearing whatever.

Despite this, both Eva and Brendan reflected feeling it was advantageous to have known so early in their lives. Chloe echoed this notion as well but stated the only aspect of the circumstances of her knowing that bothered her was that her father wanted to keep his cross-dressing very private. She remembered when she would be awake in the early morning as a young child and would see her father cross-dressed that he would quietly leave the room and change into shorts and a t-shirt.

### **Pre- and Post-Disclosure Relationship**

Participants were asked about their pre-disclosure relationship with their fathers and if their relationship had changed following the disclosure. Since three of the participants had known about their fathers' cross-dressing since their earliest memories, they were unable to answer the question. Sabrina described her relationship with her father prior to his disclosure as being "good, real close." Kent's relationship with his father prior to disclosure was somewhat distant but not in an antagonistic way. He reported never feeling a strong sense of connection with his father. He described his father as being somewhat of a performer who was very outgoing and social, yet at the same time someone who did not connect with others on a deep level.

Following the disclosure, Sabrina reported that her relationship with her father did not change. On the other hand, Kent reported that his relationship with his father improved shortly after the disclosure.

Kent: ...he actually seemed to be expressing emotions that he normally hadn't in terms of compassion and concern...reaching out, talking. And I really enjoyed that a lot. I saw that not just with myself but with other people...that was really nice. I don't know if that related to him having told us. It may have.

Although Brendan, Chloe, and Eva were unable to respond regarding their pre- and post-disclosure relationship, each described their relationship with their fathers in general. Brendan described his relationship with his father as being rather close and as being good friends. He also reported highly respecting his father's advice. Chloe said that she and her father have always had a really good relationship and that they have always been a lot alike. Due to these factors, she said that sometimes "we're the only ones we can talk to." Eva expressed being close with her

father and her appreciation of his being “more in touch with his feminine side than most dads.” She saw his ability to consult with her in terms of make-up, nail polish, and clothing when she was entering adolescence as enhancing their relationship.

Eva: ...most fathers [say] ‘don’t wear that!’ not ‘oh, this would look good on you’ (laughs).

### **Impact of Relationship with Father on Response**

When asked if they felt that the relationship they had with their fathers impacted how they responded to knowing he was a cross-dresser, Eva and Chloe stated it was difficult to answer that question since they have always known about their fathers’ cross-dressing. Both Brendan and Sabrina speculated that, if their relationships had not been close, they may have had a more difficult time with the news. On the contrary, Kent, whose relationship with his father was always somewhat distant, stated that, if he had been closer, he may have had a more difficult time with the news. He explained that, if he had had a really strong relationship with his father prior to the disclosure when he was 25 years old, he may have been concerned that the new revelation of his father’s cross-dressing might have changed their relationship. His response appears to be colored by the fact that his relationship with his father and his father’s well-being has deteriorated due to his father’s inability to successfully integrate his cross-dressing into his life.

### **Father’s Comfort Level**

The participants were asked to rate, on a scale from one to ten, how comfortable they perceived their father to be with his cross-dressing when they first found out. Eva, Sabrina, Brendan, Chloe, and Kent offered the ratings of seven or eight, five, six or seven, five or six, and around seven, respectively. All participants with the exception of Kent reported that their fathers’ comfort level now with cross-dressing has increased. Brendan and Chloe reported that they perceived their fathers’ comfort levels now to be a nine or a ten, and a ten, respectively. Sabrina and Chloe did not give numerical ratings but both expressed that their fathers have gotten much more comfortable now. Kent reflected that his father’s comfort level might not have changed over time. However, he stated that, due to his father’s difficulty with integrating his cross-

dressing into his life, it is hard to judge what his comfort level is because his father declines to talk with him about it.

When asked if their father's comfort level with his cross-dressing impacted their view of his cross-dressing, Eva, Sabrina, Brendan, and Kent all stated that, if their father would have been less comfortable, they would have been less comfortable.

Eva: Because if it had been some sort of horrible, shameful secret, I think it would have made me uncomfortable, a thing we're ashamed of... 'Dad does this, but shhh, don't tell anybody because it's a horrible thing.' If that had been the case, I think I would have had a harder time with it. But that was never the case.

Chloe stated that the only aspect of her father's cross-dressing that bothers her is his being very private and somewhat secretive about it.

Chloe: The only thing that bothers me about it is that he wants to keep it so private because I think it's weirder when he wants to hide it. I would like him to feel that he doesn't have to change his clothes or doesn't have to go and hide somewhere when somebody sees him. If he wants to sit around in a dress for a little while, I don't care.

When reflecting upon how his father's current comfort level impacts how he feels about his cross-dressing, Kent reported that he feels more negative about the cross-dressing since his father is so conflicted about it. Specifically, Kent said "I want it to resolve one way or the other. I just really do. I want him to decide if he's going to spend all of his time this way...or decide not to at all, or figure out how he can retrieve some sort of a balance...It's not so much as my opposition to cross-dressing, it's just the way that it's impacting him."

While Kent reported his father was not integrating his cross-dressing into his life very well, Brendan described how well his father has integrated his cross-dressing. Brendan described that his father has appeared to be outwardly cross-dressing less and less as time passes. He said he does not feel it is because anything bad happened, rather it is because "he's become more comfortable with his understanding of himself and what he feels that he needs to do in order to express that side of himself." Thus, Brendan stated he feels his father has been able to incorporate his feminine side in ways other than wearing outwardly noticeable feminine attire due to his increased comfort. As a result, Brendan feels more comfortable with his father's cross-dressing because his father appears to be very much at peace with his feminine side.

## **Familial Environment**

Alongside the impact of their fathers' comfort level, participants were asked to reflect upon the rest of their family's response to their father's cross-dressing and how those responses impacted them. Included were participants' recollection of responses from their mothers and siblings.

### ***Mothers' Responses***

Eva, Brendan, and Chloe reported that their mothers are supportive of their father and are comfortable with his cross-dressing. Sabrina said that, as far as she knows, her mother does not know. Sabrina's parents had divorced prior to her father's disclosing his cross-dressing to anyone. She reported that she does not think her mother would be comfortable with knowing about the cross-dressing and most likely would be negative about it. Kent reflected that, when his father first disclosed to him around age 25 about his cross-dressing, his mother appeared relieved.

Kent: I think she felt relieved that we knew...I think she did because she felt like there was a lot more that she could share now with us and express.

Despite this, as time progressed, Kent said that his mother has become increasingly negative about the cross-dressing as a result of his father's inability to successfully integrate it into his life and into their marriage. He reflected that his mother appears frustrated that his father does not seem to enjoy being his male self anymore. He thinks she would be accepting of his father's cross-dressing if he were able to enjoy the rest of his life at the same time.

### ***Siblings' Responses***

All five of the participants reported having siblings who also were informed of their fathers' cross-dressing in a manner similar to them. Both Eva and Sabrina have a younger sister, Brendan a younger brother, and both Chloe and Kent have a younger brother and sister. All reported that their siblings had views similar to theirs about their fathers' cross-dressing when they first found out and now. Both Eva and Brendan reported that both they and their siblings experienced some difficulties with their fathers' being cross-dressers during their adolescence. They attribute the difficulties as an effect of adolescence that was later resolved in young adulthood.

### ***Impact of Familial Responses***

All of the participants, with the exception of Sabrina, have open communication with their mothers about their fathers' cross-dressing. The same is true for all of the participants, including Sabrina, in relation to open communication with their siblings.

Chloe stated the impact her family's response has had on her was "my family's always been so open about things like that and accepting of different people...so it's probably just made me open and the same." Eva, Sabrina, Brendan, and Kent reflected the sentiment that, if a family member were to have difficulties with the cross-dressing, that would have created more difficulties for them and how they felt about the cross-dressing. Eva expressed that, other than during adolescence, the only other time she had difficulty with her father's cross-dressing was when her mother went through a brief period of time where she was having trouble with it. Brendan echoed this notion by stating that he probably would have felt negative about his father's cross-dressing if it had created any strife for his mother or his brother.

Kent reported currently living through such a situation where the cross-dressing was creating strife for his mother. He said that both he and his siblings are much more negative about their father's cross-dressing because of the negativity their mother feels about the way their father is integrating it in their lives.

### **Meanings**

The meanings children make about their father's cross-dressing were explored as part of the interviews with the participants. To explore this, participants were asked what they thought about their fathers' cross-dressing over time and their views on why their fathers cross-dress. Since Sabrina and Kent first learned about their fathers' cross-dressing in their early adulthood, they were both asked what they thought of their fathers' cross-dressing when they first found out. Sabrina described her thinking about her father's cross-dressing as something that was odd but not anything that made her change the way she felt about him. Kent recalled simply trying to process what his father's cross-dressing meant and what the implications were.

Regarding what they think of their fathers' being cross-dressers now, both Sabrina and Brendan reported that they thought the cross-dressing has improved their fathers' lives.

Sabrina: I think it's probably improved his life. It seems like it's made him happier...In the past he would have to hide things and was not comfortable with the fact of it just

within himself... And so now that he's revealed it to the people who are closest to him and he's much freer with it, it's probably improved him mentally and emotionally.

Brendan: Personally, I think it probably made my dad a better person.

Eva stated that she's never been one to consider normalcy. "Because, really, normal is just what everybody else wants you to be. As far as I'm concerned, normal is not a goal that is to be desired. My dad is who my dad is. I'm who I am. And the fact that he's a cross-dresser, it's part of who he is." She further commented that, if she did not know that her father was a cross-dresser, she would probably think that there was something missing about him. This reflects her thinking that her father's cross-dressing is an integral part of who he is. Chloe stated that her father's being a cross-dresser is something that has never bothered her because "he's always been my dad and I never cared." Brendan echoed this sentiment by remarking that his father's cross-dressing "really just doesn't bother me one way or the other."

When asked what their understanding was of why their fathers cross-dress, Eva and Kent expressed that they thought the nature of cross-dressing was genetic. Similarly, Sabrina described, "I think it's just some desire within him that he's compelled to do... he doesn't feel complete if he doesn't." Chloe also stated her understanding was that her father enjoys the escape from masculine constraints and enjoys conveying his feminine side. Brendan explained that he felt his father's desire to cross-dress was rooted in his family dynamics. He discussed his father's experiencing emotional constraints in his childhood. Brendan's view was that his father's cross-dressing is a way to express his more feminine, nurturing side that was discouraged by and withheld from him in his family of origin. Interestingly, Brendan also expressed that his father cross-dresses less now than he used to and attributes this to his father's increased ability to express his more nurturing side as a man.

### **Moral Reasoning**

In order to understand the participants' stances regarding their fathers' cross-dressing from a cognitive moral development perspective, they were asked about what type of argument they would make to a friend regarding cross-dressing, whether it would be for or against cross-dressing. From these arguments, their responses were determined to be pre-conventional, conventional, or post-conventional in nature. This was done through qualitatively determining



consistency of responses with the descriptions of each developmental level according to both Kohlberg (Muuss, 1996) and Gilligan (1977).

Since all five individuals made arguments for cross-dressing and none of them against cross-dressing, these arguments will be discussed first in terms of their pro-cross-dressing qualities and secondly will be divided into three stages of cognitive moral development as informed by Kohlberg's (Muuss, 1996) and Gilligan's (1977) theories of moral development. Additional comments made throughout the interview that were applicable to cognitive moral development also were evaluated along with the data derived from the interview questions specifically designed to elicit the information.

### ***Arguments for Cross-Dressing***

Sabrina, Brendan, and Chloe helped make their pro-cross-dressing arguments by stating that cross-dressing does not hurt anyone. In addition to Brendan's general argument that cross-dressing is not harmful to anyone, he shared that cross-dressing helps his father's stress level. "He's probably a nicer person; he's a Type A personality...he can be very hard on people too. I think cross-dressing probably mediates that. It probably makes him a better dad as far as I've seen." Eva and Sabrina focused on cross-dressing's being an integral part of the person's identity.

Sabrina: It's part of their identity and taking it away would take away part of themselves. Kent rounded out the arguments by being very pragmatic, "it's better for a person to do what they need to do in order to enjoy life. It doesn't make any sense for the person to consign themselves to a life of misery."

### ***Pre-Conventional Arguments***

When Eva and Brendan discussed their experiences during adolescence where they felt more negatively affected by their fathers' cross-dressing, their reasoning behind their discomfort was consistent with a pre-conventional standpoint. Pre-conventional arguments have a primary focus on the impact on the self.

Eva: When I was 14 or 15, I went through the whole 'I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear about it' phase. But that's just because I was being an obnoxious teenager (laughs)...I think that all has to do with being kids and not wanting people to think your parents are freaks.

Brendan: I think there were times [around adolescence] when I was a little bit more resentful because my dad would wear sort of ambiguous types of stuff and then I'd be thinking 'what if a friend drops by?'...I always loved and accepted my father but then I had to think, 'well, what does this mean? Or is this something that could be embarrassing to me? Is this something I should be resentful about?...What if my neighbors see?'

Even though Sabrina was unaware of her father's cross-dressing during her adolescence, she reflected some pre-conventional reasoning regarding the potential impact of being told when she was younger.

Sabrina: My dad didn't reveal until I was much older but I think if he would have done things when I was younger and was more open with it [gone out in public cross-dressed], it may have caused a little bit more problems for me.

### *Conventional Arguments*

A common theme expressed was that cross-dressing does not hurt anyone. Sabrina, Brendan, and Chloe explicitly stated this argument. Such an argument is considered conventional since it is placing a high importance on group welfare. The principle that cross-dressing is being judged against is the effect on others. Kent reflected a concern for group welfare when he made the following comment about his father's difficulty integrating his feminine persona with the rest of his life: "I may have been more inclined to say, 'whatever, this is a little odd, but what the heck (laughs)'. If it's fun, if it's something that enhances his life and everyone else's around him then that's great, but it didn't seem that way at all."

Some of the comments Kent made, as he reflected on when his father first revealed about his cross-dressing, are viewed as conventional, namely within the context of Gilligan's (1977) emphasis on the desire to please others.

Kent: I felt like I just wasn't able to handle many stresses at all. I was just like 'oh my god, why? Why (laughs), why would you tell me this now?' I didn't know how to react. I was more worried about trying to figure out the proper way to react. What is the proper way to react? I didn't want to disappoint him or anything like that.

This must be considered in the context that Kent reported struggling with depression at that time. His conventional argument could be considered a protective function during a very

vulnerable time and may not have been reflective of his general level of cognitive moral development.

### ***Post-Conventional Arguments***

Despite portions of many arguments being considered as conventional-level arguments, all five of the participants made post-conventional arguments. In fact, the majority of the arguments made and reasoning demonstrated by the participants could be considered post-conventional. Post-conventional reasoning is evidenced, from Kohlberg's perspective, by the ability of the participants to focus solely on their father's feelings and needs outside of but not at the expense of group welfare. Additionally, according to Gilligan's perspective, post-conventional reasoning is demonstrated by individuals' being willing to consider their own needs in conjunction with the needs of others. This demonstrates advancement from a focus on self-sacrifice in the conventional level.

The use of post-conventional reasoning from Kohlberg's perspective is evidenced by Sabrina's and Brendan's identifying that cross-dressing has improved their fathers' lives and Kent's ability to separate his feelings about cross-dressing in general and his feelings about the way his father has integrated his cross-dressing into his life. Further, Chloe's comment "If it makes somebody feel better...why would you want to take that away from somebody?" and Eva's calling cross-dressing a gift and emphasizing that cross-dressing is an integral part of her father that, if he did not express, she would notice that an aspect of his core being was missing are other examples of post-conventional reasoning. Additionally, Chloe cited a few arguments where she discussed her feelings about her father's cross-dressing and the impact on him in relation to herself. The combination of the focus on herself and the well being of her father would be considered post-conventional from Gilligan's perspective as evidenced by her willingness to consider her needs in conjunction with the needs of her father but not necessarily according to the strict rules of society.

### **Adjustment/Acceptance Process**

To help answer the question of whether or not children's adjustment to their fathers' cross-dressing follows predictable stages of grief, the participants were asked to rate their current acceptance level on a scale from one to ten. Further, they were asked to discuss whether or not their level of acceptance had changed at any point in their lives.

Chloe rated her acceptance of her father's cross-dressing as a ten. Eva, Sabrina, and Brendan rated their acceptance as a nine. Kent stated his level was "an 8 or so." When asked if their acceptance level had changed over time, Eva and Brendan both reflected again on their adolescence where they experienced some adjustment difficulties. Sabrina acknowledged that she may have been "a notch lower" when she first found out to account for her getting used to the fact over time. Chloe stated she did not feel as if her acceptance level had ever been any different. In addition to his current level of acceptance of his father's being a cross-dresser, Kent also discussed his degree of acceptance of the way in which his father has incorporated his cross-dressing into his own life. When he first learned of his father's cross-dressing, Kent stated he would rate his acceptance of how his father has integrated his cross-dressing as a five. "Initially, I felt like he was doing a pretty good job, but definitely not now." Currently, Kent rates his acceptance of his father's integration as a one.

### **Social Development**

In order to further understand the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children, the participants were asked to reflect upon ways in which they felt their fathers' being cross-dressers impacted their social development. They also were asked to identify if they had ever experienced ridicule by peers or if they had ever had concerns about others finding out about their fathers' cross-dressing.

#### ***Positive Social Impact***

All participants except Kent identified positive impacts on their social development. Eva, Brendan, and Chloe stated a positive effect was that it encouraged them to not be judgmental of others.

Eva: It makes me less apt to judge people. I try very hard not to judge people because it's not fair. My dad doesn't deserve to be judged and looked at as a freak or whatever because he's a cross-dresser. I've learned, partly because of my dad being a cross-dresser, you cannot judge people by what they look like or by the first words out of their mouth.

Brendan: I don't think I'll ever be much of a judgmental person because that would be pretty hypocritical for me to do. I think that I understand that there's not always an easy explanation for what people do.

Brendan further identified his being less apt to be judgmental “made me better socially.” Illustrating another way to approach being made better socially, Sabrina identified that she has benefited socially through her father’s being a cross-dresser by meeting more people. She explains:

I’m a person that meets others by way of being around people who are with other people (laughs). I’m kind of a tag-along person...I think part of his being around more people is just because he’s more open with himself...because he has let them know about being a cross-dresser. And therefore by him being more social and being around more people, it’s introduced me to more people.

### ***Negative Social Impact***

Only Kent identified a negative social impact of his father’s cross-dressing. He stated that, while he was living at home during his break from college, he felt constrained in terms of inviting others over to his family’s home. He reported that this was very minor and, other than that aspect, he did not feel that he had been impacted socially by his father’s being a cross-dresser.

### ***Experience of Ridicule***

The only participant who reported ever experiencing ridicule by a peer was Brendan. He reported that a babysitter had found out. He said, “I think she made a couple of comments which made me uncomfortable and embarrassed...because I felt like this was a secret she didn’t belong having.” He further stated that the reason for his discomfort was more his being protective of his father rather than “personally feeling ridiculed or uncomfortable.”

Eva and Chloe reported being very selective about the people they tell. Brendan stated that, even though he never told any of his friends, they “have been the kind of people who wouldn’t have made an issue of it.”

Eva: I’ve only ever told anyone that I knew I could trust, because I know there are too many people that don’t understand and, when you have closed-minded people, you can’t explain it to them even if you really try.

Although Sabrina has not experienced ridicule by peers, she recognized that she might have, if her father had been as open with his cross-dressing during her childhood as he is currently. She stated, “I’m just saying that when there’s kids and other people know – ‘oh,

you've got a weird father... or 'he goes and does this stuff' and other people know about it then you could be branded as some freak kid which could probably hurt."

### *Concerns about Others Finding Out*

All of the participants expressed concerns about others' finding out about their fathers' cross-dressing. The fears were about the personal impact on themselves and also on their fathers.

Eva stated she has only one friend who she has been concerned about finding out. She described that her friend would "misunderstand it for religious reasons" and she does not know "how well she would take finding out." Other than that friend, Eva stated, "if somebody finds out, they can either continue liking me for who I am or they can decide they don't like me because they don't understand. And if that's their choice, that's their choice."

Sabrina expressed concerns about her mother's and her mother's extended family's finding out. She reported that, when she and her sister were younger, if they had found out, her mother might have tried to take away custody from their father. Currently, she stated that there might not be much impact now other than "there would still be this whole negativity toward my father."

Brendan stated he did not think that he ever had "real concrete fears" but that he had been concerned about having friends or girlfriends over to his house when he lived at home that they may notice pictures his father had displayed of himself cross-dressed. Brendan reflected, "... 'well, what if they put two and two together and realize that this is not my dad's sister' (laughs)." Currently, Brendan stated that he's not concerned about others' finding out and that his prior concerns occurred mostly during his adolescence.

Chloe reported, "it does concern me a little bit, because if certain people were to bring it up or certain people were to find out, I could get criticized for it. My dad could get criticized for it and I don't really want to deal with that." Despite her concerns about some people she knows finding out, she reported that, in general, she feels that most people are sensible enough that, if they did find out, they would not bring it up since it is a private matter.

Kent reported feeling mildly concerned about his colleagues at work finding out. He stated that he did not fear they would be openly hostile, but may "form strange assumptions about me and act differently." Otherwise, he did not report any other concerns because, "I don't want to live in fear of that kind of thing. It just doesn't make any sense to do that."

## **Advice to Children**

The participants were asked what advice they would give to other children of cross-dressing fathers. Because this interview question did not target particular areas previously identified in the research, the responses from this question are grouped into themes derived inductively from the interview data. Information elicited explicitly from the interview question about advice for children is included in addition to similar information shared by participants throughout the entire interview.

### ***Validation of Conflicting Feelings***

Eva, Brendan, Chloe, and Kent all offered validation that children may feel some confusion or hurt upon finding out and that this is part of a normative reaction in their opinions. While Brendan validated children's feelings of confusion and resentment, he also advised that children should focus on moving through their difficult feelings and to acknowledge the importance of their relationship with their father.

Brendan: I think it's perfectly natural and understandable for someone to be confused or hurt or resentful or hateful. All of these things are part of the normal reaction, but I think ultimately it's important for someone to get past those initial feelings and get down to the basics, which are, you know, this is your *father*.

### ***Father is Same Person***

In addition to offering validation for feelings of resentment and confusion, Eva, Brendan, and Chloe emphasized that children should understand that, even following disclosure of the new information about their father's cross-dressing, their father is still the same person.

Eva: As adults are finding out, they need to remember that it doesn't change who their father is. He's the same man he was when you were born.

Brendan: Sure it changes your perspective of who this person is on some level, but it doesn't change who they are fundamentally.

Chloe: I still saw him as my dad. I didn't think of him any differently.

### ***Open Communication***

In order to resolve distress, Brendan, Chloe, and Kent suggested that children should have open communication with their fathers about their concerns or questions about his cross-dressing.

Brendan: I think ultimately the best way to understand and kind of come to grips with everything and do the most justice both to your parent and to yourself is to kind of think things over and figure things out together.

Further, Kent recommended that the cross-dressing should be discussed as a family.

Kent: I would encourage them to really try to talk about it as a whole family group.

Really get it out in the open in front of everyone...and almost turn it into a positive and give something for the family to form a strong cohesiveness around.

Outside of discussions with family, Eva recommended, “if you’re just finding out and you’re having a hard time with it, look for a support group. Reach out and ask for help.”

### ***Concern for Well-Being of Fathers***

In addition to seeking out a support group, Eva further stated that, if children do not address their feelings, they might end up being resentful toward their father and it could negatively impact the father-child relationship. Sabrina, also in looking out for the well-being of fathers, recommended that children “not freak out” because she hypothesized that, if children are non-accepting, fathers may believe that they are not good people and that may cause undue harm to fathers who are already struggling with trying to integrate cross-dressing into their lives. Further, Brendan agreed that fathers struggle with accepting their cross-dressing and added that their disclosure is made out of caring for the child: “they wouldn’t have told you if they didn’t care about you and want to be there for you...I think they probably struggled with it a great deal over the course of their lives and the fact that they’ve come to this point means it’s for real.”

### ***Advice to Fathers***

The participants were asked what advice they would give to fathers who want to tell their children about their cross-dressing. Similar to the responses elicited about advice to children, inductively derived themes are presented. Additionally, while some of the following themes were



elicited from participants upon being asked about the advice they would give to fathers, “advice” mentioned at other points in the interview are included here as well.

### ***Open Communication***

Eva, Brendan, Chloe, and Kent all expressed the importance of open communication by fathers with their children about their cross-dressing. Eva expressed that it is important for fathers to have open communication with their children about their cross-dressing because, if they do not, their parent-child relationship could be impacted negatively.

Brendan relayed the importance of children’s finding out from their fathers rather than from someone else. He also mentioned that it is important for children to be told by their fathers rather than walking in on them cross-dressed unexpectedly.

Chloe acknowledged fathers’ potential fears of disclosure but at the same time expressed that it is important for fathers to have open communication with their children about their cross-dressing. She stated, “you shouldn’t be scared of it because they’re always going to be your children no matter what, so you might as well tell them. And the more open you are, the better.” In addition to Chloe’s acknowledgment that fathers may be fearful of their children’s reactions, she further expressed that “children are more accepting than you think.” Brendan mirrored this sentiment by stating, “ultimately, I think kids are more likely to be accepting than not. I mean, there are worse secrets to have than being a cross-dresser.”

Kent expressed the potential positive outcomes of fathers’ communicating openly with their children about their cross-dressing. He added the element of a father’s disclosure to his children as being a symbol of trust.

Kent: My advice is – do it, tell them. I think they’ll appreciate it. Maybe not all of them (laughs)... I think that children appreciate their parents’ being open and honest and trusting them. But don’t stop there. Keep them engaged in a dialogue about it.

Brendan also expressed potential positive outcomes resulting from disclosure. He stated, “as a general rule, it’s good to tell your children because... I think it can help with their understanding and maturation.”

### ***Recommendations for Disclosure***

As stated previously, Brendan recommended that fathers have open communication and tell their children rather than having their children find out through inadvertent discovery or

through being told by someone else. The participants further provided other recommendations for disclosure. The two primary themes within these recommendations were the consideration of children's feelings and the appropriate age at which to tell children.

Both Sabrina and Brendan expressed the need for fathers to consider their children's feelings when deciding to disclose. Sabrina stated she felt it was highly important for fathers to determine their depth of disclosure to others in conjunction with their children's feelings. She reported that her father did not reveal his cross-dressing until she was 19. Further, she expressed that her father is very open with his cross-dressing with his friends and in the community in which he lives. Within the context of her father's high degree of openness, she stated that she felt good about his waiting until she was older to disclose. She said that, if she had been younger, her feelings about the disclosure and his degree of openness would have been very different "just because it's not socially acceptable."

Sabrina: If I was in middle school or high school or if other people would know that, they would ridicule you; make comments. During those kinds of times it's a lot more difficult to deal with that sort of stuff."

Further, Sabrina expressed that being told younger would have been less concerning as long as it was kept private within the family; her concerns were mainly regarding her father's degree of openness and how she would have been impacted socially by ridicule.

Brendan's perspective on fathers' being considerate of their children's feelings focused on the way the disclosure is approached. He recommended that not only should fathers understand that their cross-dressing "is a big thing to understand; wrap your mind around" but also to be confident in their disclosure so that children do not perceive that cross-dressing is wrong or something about which to feel ashamed. Further, he said that fathers should "present things in a way that really puts it out there, in a manner that is not confrontational and too challenging and shaking of a reality that the child has had already. You can't shake everything they've understood about you all in one swoop. I think you have to understand that this is something that requires some understanding on your part of what they're going to be thinking and what they're going to go through." Additionally, Brendan stated that it is essential for fathers to have worked through most of their own personal issues with cross-dressing prior to telling their children. He expressed taking things slow and allowing children time to adjust to the new information was vital.

Regarding the participants' recommended age for disclosure to children, Eva, Chloe, Brendan, and Kent all agreed that the younger the child, the better. Eva, Chloe, and Brendan all stated it was advantageous that they had known about their fathers' cross-dressing at very early ages (school-aged and younger). They all said they believe that it is much easier for young children to incorporate their father's cross-dressing into their lives than for older children (adolescent and older). Kent, who was told when he was 25 years old, said that he "would have preferred to have learned about it much earlier in time." Further, he said that knowing when he was younger would have made it easier for him to integrate his father's cross-dressing into his view of his family.

Kent: I probably would have known much better what this meant without all of the baggage that our society attaches to it. I could have been free from that in my reactions to my father. That would have been nice.

Both Brendan and Chloe reflected Kent's notion that it is easier for younger children to incorporate knowing about their father's cross-dressing than older children because of the relative absence of societal pressures.

Chloe: Cross-dressing would probably bother somebody that was older and found out something like that. But, little kids dress up in different clothes and everything. It just doesn't bother them.

Brendan: It was easier knowing from the beginning so I didn't have to deal with the [negative] societal point of view.

Sabrina stated she felt her learning about her father's cross-dressing when she was 19 was a good age for her. She reflected that, because of her father's degree of openness about his cross-dressing in the community following his disclosure, her learning about it when she was more mature helped her to be more accepting. Overall, Sabrina indicated that merely revealing to children when they are young would be fine but, if the father is going to be publicly open with his cross-dressing, waiting until their children's early adulthood is a better recommendation.

## **General Impact**

The following themes were those that were inductively derived and not specifically elicited through the questions within the interview guide. These themes fall under the overarching premise of additional areas of impact of a father's being a cross-dresser on children.

### ***Problems during Adolescence***

Given that the participants either recommended that children were told very young (school-aged or younger) or post-adolescence, it is clear that initial disclosure during adolescence was perceived to be the least appropriate time for disclosure. This was further supported by the fact that two of the participants, Eva and Brendan, who were told about their fathers' cross-dressing at very early ages, still had trouble with their fathers' cross-dressing when they reached adolescence. Eva reported that, around age 14 or 15, she started having difficulties with her father's cross-dressing. She reflected that, when she was younger, "you don't really think about it, then you hit teenage years where so many things are so important to your identity – I hit that point and for about probably two years I had a real hard time with it." Eva expressed that reactions of teenagers being embarrassed by their parents is a normative part of adolescence and not specific to teenagers who have fathers who are cross-dressers.

Eva: It wasn't until I got older, you know, teenage years – 'oh, God, my father's a freak' that kind of thing. Of course, most kids think that about their parents at some point. But, you know, to general society, I actually had substantial proof of supposedly my father being a freak (laughs).

Eva stated that she was able to finally move through her discomfort during her adolescence when she told a close friend. She stated that her friend's acceptance and understanding helped Eva to reestablish her acceptance of her father's cross-dressing.

Brendan expressed that he always loved his father, but during adolescence he started having some difficulty with his father's being a cross-dresser. He discussed feeling resentful that his father would wear ambiguous looking clothing or lip gloss at times and would be concerned about having friends over to his house. He reported acting passive-aggressively at times toward his father such as giving him "the silent treatment" and "being a little bit resentful on some small level." Overall, Brendan stated he was able to work through his resentment during adolescence toward being "nearly one-hundred percent accepting." Like Eva, Brendan speculated that his

concerns were mainly due to an effect of being an adolescent more than about his father's being a cross-dresser. Brendan complimented his parents on doing a good job of helping him incorporate his father's cross-dressing into his life. He said that the only aspect he would have added would have been his parents' being more understanding of his feelings during adolescence. He suggested that it would have been helpful if they would have asked about his comfort level and if they could do anything differently to accommodate his feelings.

Brendan: I don't know how they would have done that but that probably would have helped things a little bit. But, you know, as a whole, I think it went pretty well. Pretty well done.

To further illustrate the participants' difficulties during adolescence, both Eva and Brendan stated that their younger siblings had difficulties with their fathers' cross-dressing during adolescence as well. However, they both stated that their siblings, like themselves, were able to move through that period to being accepting once again.

### *Negative Societal View*

All five participants addressed the impact of the existing negative societal view on cross-dressing. Brendan, Chloe, and Kent, as mentioned previously, expressed that it is advantageous for children to know about their fathers' cross-dressing prior to adolescence so that they can be freer of the negative connotations society attaches to cross-dressing. Eva, in her expression that children should be told about their fathers' cross-dressing as young as possible, stated that, if parents are going to initially disclose to preadolescent children, they need to inform them that "this is not something that can be told to everyone because some people just don't understand." Thus, Eva emphasized that parents need to educate children that they cannot reveal about their father's cross-dressing out of fears of discrimination.

Brendan expressed that his difficulties with his father's cross-dressing during adolescence were mainly due to society's negative view of cross-dressing. He identified that his resentment came mostly from concerns about others finding out and ridiculing him.

Eva, Brendan, Chloe, and Kent expressed having to be careful about whom they tell about their father's cross-dressing because of the negative societal view of cross-dressing. Outside of the participants' own concerns, both Sabrina and Kent discussed awareness of the negative societal perspective and its impact on their fathers' ability to be self-accepting. Sabrina

stated that her father had suppressed disclosing his cross-dressing to others for many years out of fear of social rejection. Kent also expressed that his father has difficulty with his personal integration of his cross-dressing for similar reasons relating to negative societal views. Due to this, Kent speculated that if society were more open to cross-dressing that individuals and families would have a much easier time with integration.

Kent: If society were more embracing of it, I'm sure it would be a lot easier for people to accept it and I could see it being, you know (laughs) maybe even fun.

### ***Children's Disclosure to Others***

The participants were not asked explicitly about their own disclosure to others about their fathers' cross-dressing. However, Eva, Chloe, and Kent discussed being very careful about who they choose to tell. Mostly, they expressed awareness that not everyone would understand, due to the prevailing negative societal connotation. Eva and Kent reported having told previous dating partners. Also, Eva shared about her father's cross-dressing with her husband prior to their marriage. Brendan stated that he has not told anyone outside of his immediate family. He expressed his reason for not telling anyone is his honoring his father's request for him to "just tell people on a need-to-know basis." He stated he reserves sharing this information for when he is to marry and create a family of his own.

### ***Degree of Father's Public Openness with Cross-Dressing/Impact of Secret-Keeping***

All five of the participants reported regularly having seen their fathers cross-dressed. However, the degree to which the participants reported their fathers' being open about their cross-dressing outside the home varied. Eva, Brendan, Sabrina and Kent reported that their fathers left the house cross-dressed. However, only Sabrina and Kent reported that their fathers were very open about cross-dressing in the communities in which they live. Chloe stated that her father is very private about his cross-dressing and did not report that he does so outside of the privacy of his home. Chloe stated that, if she could change one thing about her father's cross-dressing, she would choose for him to not be so secretive about it.

Further regarding secretiveness, Sabrina reported that her father was impacted negatively by his being secretive for many years and not disclosing to anyone about his cross-dressing. She reported that his revealing drastically improved his mental well-being. She expressed concern for him that he felt he had to keep it a secret. However, she acknowledged that he probably did not

reveal his cross-dressing to anyone earlier because “maybe he wasn’t ready to say it.” Kent echoed similar sentiments about his father’s keeping his cross-dressing a secret from his children for decades. He stated he felt both his father and mother were burdened by this secret keeping. He reported noticing signs of relief and increased comfort in both of his parents following the disclosure. He stated his parents actively made a decision to not tell their children until they were older out of fears that the community would find out and that his father’s job as a child educator would be compromised.

Eva and Brendan both speculated about how life may have been different for them if their fathers had kept their cross-dressing a secret or more secretive during their childhood. As mentioned previously, Eva reported she would have been very uncomfortable about her father’s cross-dressing if he had been very secretive about it and ashamed. Brendan speculated that he might have felt hurt if his father had kept his cross-dressing a secret from him. Despite this, he recognized why fathers may feel the need to do so.

Brendan: I think I also would understand not telling us because it’s not something that people get much practice in telling and certainly people keep secrets like that about themselves because they’re not sure how people are going to react. They don’t want to lose people they care about.

## **CHAPTER 5 - Discussion**

This chapter includes a discussion of the collective lived experiences of the five participants who have fathers who cross-dress. Prior to the discussion of the results in relation to each research question, the overall significance of the findings is presented.

### **Significance of the Findings**

If the results from this study were to be summarized into one statement of significance, that statement would be as follows: The results of this study offer preliminary evidence that a father's cross-dressing is not inherently detrimental to children's development or well-being. This statement clearly acknowledges that this study provides only preliminary evidence and is in no way a definitive statement about the impact of fathers' being cross-dressers on children. There are many variables to consider, such as the way in which a father's cross-dressing is integrated into the father's life individually, into the parental subsystem, into the family, and into the child's life individually.

Overall, this research indicates that the timing and nature of disclosure, children's relationships with their fathers, fathers' comfort levels with being cross-dressers, and the familial environment are all salient factors related to children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses. Further, the results illustrate the relationship between more sophisticated levels of cognitive moral development and empathy for others and tolerance of those who are different. The results did not support the existence of a grief process. No specific stages or processes of adjustment were identified. Finally, the results indicated no noteworthy negative impact of fathers who are cross-dressers on their children's social development. Rather, the study indicated that there may be the potential for more positive than negative influences on social development. These results converge with the existing literature with the exception of the lack of indication of a grief process.

Factors potentially related to adjustment difficulties for children who have fathers who are cross-dressers also are reported. Those factors are the developmental stage of adolescence, parental disagreement about the father's cross-dressing, and fathers' difficulty with individual integration of being cross-dressers. Additionally, the data provide advice the participants would



give to both children of cross-dressing fathers and fathers who cross-dress themselves to assist them in the process of integration of the father's cross-dressing into their lives.

### **Discussion of Timing and Nature of Disclosure**

To help to answer the research question regarding how the timing and nature of disclosure impacts children's adjustment to having a father who is a cross-dresser, the five participants presented two different scenarios. Three of the participants had known about their fathers' cross-dressing since their earliest memories. All three of them identified this as advantageous in terms of their adjustment.

The remaining two participants had been told by their fathers in their early adulthood. Sabrina recalled the disclosure as being a very subtle event that did not stand out much in her mind. Kent's recollection of the disclosure was colored by his being clinically depressed at the time. He expressed a dislike for this "secret" being kept from him by his parents. The difference between Sabrina's and Kent's reactions may be further explained by the fact that Sabrina's father had disclosed to her around the same time that he had first "come out" to anyone as a cross-dresser. Kent's father had been "out" with his mother for quite some time prior his disclosure to Kent and his siblings. This may have been problematic for Kent since his father was actively keeping a secret from him and his siblings. This differs from Sabrina's situation in which her father was keeping the secret from everyone, as opposed to disclosing to other significant persons in his life but leaving her out. Thus, Kent may have felt more left out and deceived than Sabrina, given their differing circumstances.

Even though none of the participants had walked in unexpectedly and discovered their father cross-dressed, both Sabrina and Brendan speculated that they would have had a much harder time with knowing about their fathers' being cross-dressers if they had inadvertently discovered them cross-dressed rather than being told openly. These speculations, paired with Kent's dislike for having a high magnitude secret kept from him by his parents, suggests that open communication by fathers with their children about their cross-dressing is important.

Overall, the results support the clinical opinion present in the research literature that cross-dressing should be disclosed to children either at early ages or post-adolescence. However, it must be noted that all of the study participants were either told at early ages or post-adolescence. Thus, the impact of children's being told about their fathers' cross-dressing during

pre-adolescence and adolescence needs to be further researched. Additionally, the results supported the value of children's being told openly by fathers. The only negative aspect identified regarding the timing and nature was Kent's experience of his contending with his own significant stressor of clinical depression at the time of disclosure and the distress created by learning about his parents' keeping his father's cross-dressing a secret from him and his siblings for many years.

### **Discussion of Impact of Relationship with Father**

All of the participants with the exception of Kent identified having very close relationships with their fathers. The three participants who have known about their fathers' cross-dressing since their earliest memories were able to report only about their post-disclosure relationship with their fathers. Sabrina stated that her relationship with her father pre- and post-disclosure was very close. Kent revealed that his relationship with his father was somewhat distant prior to the disclosure and became closer immediately following disclosure. Kent attributed the distance and then increase in closeness as being related to his father's disclosure of the cross-dressing. He speculated that his father's distance was a result of his not being able to fully express himself since he kept his cross-dressing a secret from his children. Further, he speculated that his father's disclosure allowed him to share his entire self with Kent, which freed him to be more emotionally available. Unfortunately, Kent reported that his relationship with his father has continually deteriorated as a result of his father's struggle to incorporate his cross-dressing into both his individual and family lives.

The remaining participants expressed that their relationships with their fathers have mostly been the same throughout their lives. Brendan and Sabrina speculated that they might have had a more difficult time with knowing about their fathers' being cross-dressers if their relationships were not as close. Sabrina reported that her speculation was a logical conclusion and did not offer much elaboration. Brendan stated that, if he did not perceive his father as being a good person and a good father, he might have been less understanding. Brendan's explanation appears to be associated with the notion that the better the relationship a child has with his or her father, the less negatively the child will perceive actions on the part of his or her father. Conversely, Kent stated that he felt he might have had a more difficult time with learning about his father's cross-dressing if they had been closer prior to the disclosure. He stated that he might

have been more protective of the relationship they had and would have been fearful about how the relationship might change. This response can be understood through the speculation that, if Kent felt that he was close to his father prior to the disclosure, the knowledge of the secret keeping would have challenged his perception of the degree of closeness with his father and reasonably created a fair amount of cognitive dissonance. This situation may be different from Sabrina's because she indicated that her father had just started revealing about his cross-dressing to others when she was told, while Kent's father had disclosed to his mother years earlier.

Overall, the results indicated that the participants who identified having a close relationship with their fathers did not report difficulties with learning about their fathers' cross-dressing. This parallels the research literature emphasizing the importance of the pre-disclosure relationship on children's ability to be accepting (Buhrich, 1976). For Kent, who did not have a close relationship with his father prior to finding out about his father's cross-dressing, it appeared that his parents' decision to not reveal about the cross-dressing might have negatively impacted Kent's relationship with his father. This seemed to have occurred in two ways. First, Kent speculated that his father was more distant in his relationships with others because he did not allow himself to be open about his feminine side. Second, Kent discussed feeling distress about his parents' having kept such a big secret from him and his siblings. At the time of disclosure, Kent expressed feeling that his sense of reality had been shaken and he became concerned about what else his parents had been hiding from him. His reaction appears similar to the reaction of wives who learn, later into their marriages, about their husbands' cross-dressing. Wives who are told or inadvertently discover their husbands' cross-dressing after marriage often experience distress associated with feelings of betrayal. They often wonder why their husbands did not trust them with the information or what else their husbands may be hiding from them (Brown, 1994).

Potentially, there is a parallel between the negative impact of active secret keeping between husbands and wives and fathers and children where cross-dressing is concerned. While children may not experience the same distress as wives do regarding concerns about sexual orientation and gender identity (Hunt & Main, 1997; Stayton, 1996) following their husbands' disclosure, based on Kent's report, it appears that children may experience a similar reaction in terms of feelings of betrayal resulting from active secret keeping. Again, Kent's situation may differ from Sabrina's, since her father had not colluded with anyone in his secret-keeping

because he had only began revealing to others about his cross-dressing around the same time that he had told Sabrina. Thus, a key element, regarding disclosure to children, may be that fathers should disclose to their children about their cross-dressing if they have disclosed to other significant persons, especially other family members.

### **Discussion of Father's Comfort Level**

The data indicate a positive relationship between the participants' fathers' comfort level with being cross-dressers and children's comfort level with their fathers' being cross-dressers. Thus, the more comfortable the participants' fathers appeared to be with their cross-dressing, the more comfortable the participants reported being with it. Again, the results support previous findings in the literature, adapted from research on children of gay fathers, indicating the more accepting fathers are of themselves, the more likely children will be comfortable with their father's disclosure (Schulenberg, 1985). Four of the participants specifically expressed they felt they would have been impacted negatively in terms of how they viewed their fathers' cross-dressing if their fathers had been uncomfortable themselves. While this is based on speculation, Chloe's report of feeling slight discomfort regarding her father's cross-dressing when he is secretive about it, also supports these speculations.

All of the participants, with the exception of Kent who indicated he was unsure of his father's comfort level due to his father's refusal to talk with him about his feelings about his cross-dressing, reported they perceived their fathers' comfort level with being cross-dressers has progressively increased over time. Upon first finding out, the participants rated their fathers' comfort levels with being cross-dressers within a range between five and eight on a scale from one to ten. This appears to indicate that fathers may not necessarily have to be completely comfortable with cross-dressing prior to disclosing it to their children for their children to feel comfortable about the disclosure. However, based upon the participants' speculations, it appears that fathers would need to at least be moderately comfortable, as evidenced by a mid-range rating on a scale from one to ten.

### **Discussion of Familial Environment**

The impact of family members' responses to their fathers' being cross-dressers appears similar to the impact of their fathers' own comfort level with his cross-dressing in that there is a

positive relationship. At the time of disclosure, four of the participants reported that their mothers already knew and were supportive of their fathers' cross-dressing. All of the participants reported that their siblings' responses seemed to mirror their own across time as well. Additionally, Eva and Brendan reported that their younger siblings both had difficulties with their fathers' cross-dressing during their adolescence just as they had, reflecting their siblings' experiencing similar developmental adjustment. Further, four of the participants speculated that, if a family member were to have difficulties with their fathers' being cross-dressers, that would have created more difficulties for them in terms of their acceptance. This is further supported by the notion that both Kent and Eva reported having more difficulties with their fathers' being cross-dressers when their mothers were experiencing distress as a result of the cross-dressing. Overall, the results indicate a positive relationship between children's acceptance and adjustment to their fathers' being cross-dressers and their family members' own acceptance and level of adjustment. In other words, the more comfortable children's mothers and siblings were with their fathers' cross-dressing, the more comfortable the children were themselves, and vice versa. These results mirrored Brown and Rounsley's (1996) perspective, adapted from research on children of transsexual parents, that children's reactions mirror the reactions present in the familial environment.

### **Discussion of Meanings**

Common themes across the meanings participants made about their fathers' cross-dressing were that they saw their fathers' cross-dressing as an integral part of their fathers' well being and that the cross-dressing did not bother them much. Thus, it appears that the participants tended to understand their fathers' cross-dressing as a positive aspect and also an aspect that helped make their fathers happy and better people.

When asked about why they felt their fathers cross-dressed, participants shared hypotheses about the potential impact of genetics and family of origin influences, the desire to escape masculine demands, and the drive for completeness of masculine and feminine selves. These meanings all appear to have themes that are not necessarily problematic.

## **Discussion of Moral Reasoning**

In order to understand participants' levels of cognitive moral development, they were asked to make an argument for or against cross-dressing in a hypothetical conversation with a friend. The researcher and secondary analyst qualitatively determined the consistency of the participants' responses with the descriptions of each level of cognitive moral development. It must be acknowledged that this method of measurement is not consistent with methods used by Kohlberg (1981) and Gilligan (1977). Thus, the current comparisons should be viewed with caution.

All of the participants made pro-cross-dressing arguments, suggesting at minimum tolerance for their fathers' cross-dressing and at most a high level of acceptance. Additionally, all participants shared responses that were consistent with post-conventional thinking regarding their fathers' being cross-dressers. Since all of the participants expressed high levels of acceptance of their fathers' being cross-dressers in addition to their sharing of responses consistent with advanced moral reasoning, this study supports the research indicating that more sophisticated levels of cognitive moral development are associated with individuals' empathy for others (Chovan & Freeman, 1993; Givner, 1985; Kurdek, 1981) and tolerance for those who are different (Glover, 1994).

Additionally, the results indicated that the participants differed from the general population in terms of cognitive moral development. Kohlberg found that, in general, the majority of people reason mainly at the conventional levels of cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1981). He posited that people tend to make most of their moral decisions based upon convention. Further, he stated that this makes sense for society in general so that most people can agree on what is part of standard behavior for the society. However, children of cross-dressers, by the nature of their fathers' cross-dressing being non-conventional, have been exposed to exceptions to convention. Therefore, in regard to their moral reasoning, they may be less bound by conventional thinking and more likely to become post-conventional thinkers as a result of their experiences. This would enable them to have more empathy and understanding of those who are not bound by the rules of convention. This hypothesis may explain why all five of the participants demonstrated more sophisticated levels of cognitive moral development in comparison to the general population.

## **Discussion of Adjustment/Acceptance Process**

The literature regarding individuals' adjustment to having a transgendered family member suggests family members may experience a grief process during their adjustment to knowledge of the family member's being transgendered (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). In this current study, none of the participants expressed experiencing a grief process in response to their knowledge of their fathers' being cross-dressers. This process may be different for women in relationships with men who cross-dress and for individuals with transsexual parents. Women in relationships with men who cross-dress are grieving over losses. As examples, wives grieve over the loss of trust in their husbands' honesty and the loss of the images they held of their husbands as men. Children of transsexual fathers suffer a similar loss. They remember fathers who were masculine and who presented an identity of being male in their families. When fathers have decided to transition to the opposite sex, they presented a different image of themselves and confessed to having feelings that were kept secret from their children. This image was placed before the children and the old memories of their fathers were ripped from their reality. Consequently, for children of transsexual fathers, there is also a major grieving process. In contrast, children of cross-dressing fathers may be presented with a different image of their fathers when they discover their fathers' cross-dressing, but, unless the father spends all of his time cross-dressing (which is seldom the case), the children still have access to the image of their fathers that they previously held. Consequently, the transitions of children's images of their fathers are not as extreme nor as total as those of children of transsexual fathers. Therefore, there may be a mourning process but it is not as well defined as it is for children of transsexual fathers.

Considering that three of the five participants in this study had reported always knowing that their fathers were cross-dressers, there was no transition for them to experience. There was no sense of loss because they never experienced their father any other way. Consequently, there was no need for a grieving process for something they never had. For the other two participants who were told about their fathers' cross-dressing after adolescence, they had an integrated image of their fathers that they developed through their childhood and adolescence. Instead of grieving the loss of that image of their fathers, they made an adjustment to the images that they had previously held. Instead of seeing their fathers as abandoning their previous identity or in some way being deficient, they began to conceptualize their fathers' identity as having new, although unconventional, facets.

Two of the participants identified a developmental process occurring in adolescence evidenced by an increased discomfort with their father's cross-dressing during that time. Both of the participants reported their younger siblings experiencing a similar process.

Children's adjustment processes were viewed not only within the context of grief but also within the context of cognitive moral development. All of the participants shared responses that were consistent with post-conventional, or advanced, moral reasoning. Therefore, psychosocial and developmental characteristics would appear favorable for the children to empathize with the cross-dressing parent. It seems that children of cross-dressers may not go through predictable stages of grief prior to being able to empathize with the plight of the other. It was previously hypothesized that, based upon literature detailing processes of grief experienced by family members of transgendered individuals, a potential key to resolving one's grief regarding family members' being transgendered related to one's ability to empathize with the plight of the other. Specifically, this hypothesis was based upon descriptions of how individuals' reactions to transgendered family members change throughout the grief process (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). Once family members entered the acceptance stage of the grief process, their thoughts regarding the transgendered family member were focused on the well being of the transgendered family member, rather than being primarily self-focused. Thus, based upon the results of the current study, it appeared that children of cross-dressers were able to arrive at giving consideration for their fathers' well being, without experiencing the distinctive grief process that may occur for women in relationships with men who cross-dress and individuals with transsexual family members.

While the results support the research indicating a correlation between individuals with more advanced levels of cognitive moral development and tolerance of others who are different, this study did not provide sufficient information to assess the potential for a connection between children's process of acceptance of their fathers' cross-dressing and their advancement in cognitive moral development. The researcher attempted to elicit specific information about children's process of acceptance; however, none of the participants were able to identify specific developmental processes other than two of them having transitory difficulties during adolescence. Overall, it appears that these children may have a more subtle transition to acceptance of their father's cross-dressing than wives typically have with their husbands and individuals typically have with transsexual family members.



## **Discussion of Social Development**

Based upon the results, it appears that having a father who cross-dresses does not necessarily destine a child to social maladjustment. Rather, having a father who is a cross-dresser seemed to be socially beneficial to most of the participants. For example, Eva, Chloe, and Brendan identified themselves as being less judgmental of others as a result of having fathers who cross-dress. Experiencing their fathers' being judged by others and the hurt that ensued has led them to have empathy for people who are different who may experience similar judgment. None of the participants identified any significant negative impact on their social development.

All of the participants appeared to have been cautious regarding to whom they revealed their fathers' cross-dressing. Only Brendan reported experiencing ridicule by a babysitter who had found out about his father's being a cross-dresser. Despite not experiencing significant amounts of ridicule, all of the participants identified being concerned about others' finding out about their fathers' being cross-dressers. This indicated that the concern about others' finding out does not necessarily arise from previous negative experiences. Rather, the concern about others' finding out appears to serve a protective function for the participants' own integrity in addition to that of their fathers. Specifically, children's caution about to whom they reveal their fathers' cross-dressing may be based upon both their own avoidance of and their protection of their fathers' being negatively judged by others. Thus, ultimately, it appears that the need for protection arises out of avoidance of judgment spawning from negative societal messages about cross-dressing.

## **Discussion of Advice to Children**

When the participants were asked to provide advice for other individuals who have fathers who cross-dress, they offered information that demonstrated their understanding of the plight of the child and father. They validated that children may feel confused, scared, or resentful about having a father who cross-dresses. While they offered validation to children for these feelings, they also carefully reminded them that their father is still the same person. They encouraged having open communication within their families about the cross-dressing as well.

Eva, Sabrina, and Brendan reminded others to consider the well-being of their fathers. Brendan poignantly stated that a father's disclosure is made out of caring for children. Both he and Sabrina clearly recognized that a father's disclosure is essentially an act of love and bravery,

in that they acknowledge how difficult it must be for fathers to risk rejection by their own children. Fortunately, it appears that children have the capacity to be accepting as young children and as mature adults, as demonstrated by these five participants.

It is interesting to note that the participants offered validation that children may feel resentment and even hostility toward their fathers, following his disclosure of his cross-dressing. This appears contrary to the participants' report of their own experiences. Unfortunately, this connection was not made at the time of any of the interviews and thus no follow-up questions were discussed with the participants about their perspectives on this discrepancy. It could be speculated that the participants offered this advice knowing that other children may be influenced in their views of their fathers' cross-dressing by prevailing negative societal perspectives.

### **Discussion of Advice to Fathers**

In their advice to fathers, again, they considered both the plight of the child and father. Chloe encouraged fathers to not be scared to disclose their cross-dressing to their children. Kent, despite his difficulties in his familial relationships as a result of his father's difficulty with integrating his own cross-dressing into his life, was a strong proponent of disclosure to children. He advised fathers to "do it. Tell them." He added that he felt most children would appreciate being told. Open communication between fathers and children and within entire families was strongly encouraged by participants.

While the participants wanted fathers to be strong in telling their children about their cross-dressing, they also reminded fathers to consider their children's feelings. Among the recommendations were: To be mindful of the ridicule children could experience if peers knew about the cross-dressing; to consider children's cognitive abilities in determining pacing and depth of information; to disclose with confidence so children do not perceive fathers as feeling shameful about the cross-dressing; and to ensure that fathers have most of their personal issues with cross-dressing worked out prior to the disclosure.

The participants recommended that cross-dressing should be disclosed to children either during pre-school or school-aged years or post-adolescence in order to avoid potential turmoil during adolescence. This recommendation conflicts with Peo's (1988) clinically based assertion that young children should not be told. However, this parallels Stayton's (1996) clinical

recommendation that fathers' cross-dressing should be disclosed to children either prior to or post adolescence. Three of the participants acknowledged that disclosure to children when they are young is advantageous so that they can be relatively unburdened by negative societal messages about cross-dressing during their initial understanding. Thus, early disclosure allows children to understand their father's cross-dressing from a perspective of childhood innocence, as opposed to an adolescent's or adult's perspective that is subject to greater societal influence that is often negative about cross-dressing.

The results strongly support that disclosure during adolescence is contraindicated. This is best evidenced by Eva's and Brendan's reports of both their own and their siblings' difficulties with their fathers' being cross-dressers during this time. Both attributed their difficulties as being an effect of their developmental stage as opposed to specifically being about their father's cross-dressing. In particular, they equated their discomfort with their fathers' cross-dressing as having more to do with adolescents' general dislike for and sensitivity to being embarrassed by their parents, rather than being specific to their fathers' cross-dressing. Such increased sensitivity during adolescence could be related to adolescent egocentrism, particularly the notion of the "imaginary audience" (Elkind, 1985). The imaginary audience refers to adolescents' having the tendency to exaggerate the degree to which they believe others are thinking about them. This is suggested to result from adolescents' limited capacity to distinguish between their own thoughts about themselves and their ideas about the thoughts of others. Thus, with adolescents' development of the ability to think about thinking, or metacognition (Arnett, 2004), perhaps their degree of acceptance of their fathers' cross-dressing is challenged as they incorporate thoughts about the perspectives of others.

One could make the claim that telling young children should be avoided so that children going through adolescence do not have to endure the resentment toward their fathers for being cross-dressers during that time. However, the potential toll taken on the father-child relationship as a result of the father's nondisclosure for their entire childhood should be considered as well. An example of this is the distress Kent reported experiencing as a result of his father's active secret keeping about his cross-dressing. A compromise may be that fathers who cross-dress should be recommended to work at being more attuned to their adolescents' privacy and identity development concerns during this time. Brendan offered the suggestion that parents communicate openly with their children during this time about their comfort with their father's

degree of expression of his feminine side. Thus, it is recommended that parents, if they have disclosed to their children about the father's cross-dressing prior to adolescence, anticipate changes in children's comfort levels with their fathers' being cross-dressers during adolescence.

### **Discussion of General Impact**

Several themes emerged purely inductively as they were not specifically inquired about within the interview guide questions. One of those themes regarded the problems encountered by children during adolescence. The discussion of the impact of this theme was included within the discussion of recommended age for disclosure previously.

While not specifically addressed in the interview guide, all of the participants spoke about the impact of prevailing negative societal views about cross-dressers on their experiences. Participants spoke of having to be careful to whom they disclose about their father's cross-dressing due to fears of harassment and rejection. Brendan acknowledged that his difficulties with his father's cross-dressing during his adolescence were primarily due to his fears of ridicule by others as a result of negative societal views. Kent eloquently stated that, if society were more embracing of cross-dressing, many of the problems associated with fathers' being cross-dressers would disappear. Thus, it could be gleaned from Kent's statement that the real issue with cross-dressing that impacts children is societal prejudice against cross-dressing.

The degree of fathers' public openness and the impact of secret keeping by fathers about their cross-dressing were addressed by participants in the absence of specific prompting via the interview guide. The overall message received from participants is that fathers' keeping their cross-dressing secret from their children is not preferential. This was evidenced by Chloe's report that the only aspect of her father's being a cross-dresser that bothers her is his propensity to be secretive about it. Further, Kent expressed distress over his father's hiding his cross-dressing from him until his early adulthood. Brendan speculated he would have felt hurt as well if his father had kept his cross-dressing a secret during his childhood. Further, Eva expressed that, if her father had kept his cross-dressing secret, she probably would have sensed that something about him was missing.

Despite Brendan's acknowledgement that he most likely would have felt hurt if his father had kept his cross-dressing a secret, he again was able to empathize with the plight of fathers who keep secrets. He expressed understanding that fathers keep secrets out of fear of losing

people they care about. It can be reasonably speculated that this fear arises from impact of negative societal views about cross-dressing. Thus, it is the researcher's hope that this study will help to lessen the perceived evidence supporting the promulgation of negative societal assumptions about the impact of cross-dressing on others.

### **Limitations**

A primary limitation of this study is the small sample size. Despite having reached saturation of the data, the sample size is a concern due to the potential of existing response bias. It is reasonable to suspect that the individuals who volunteered to participate in this study were more likely to be supportive of their fathers' being cross-dressers. Thus, this research is most likely biased by having a homogeneous sample in terms of level of acceptance. This bias also most likely impacts the rate at which saturation of the data was attained.

Further, the participants in this study may also differ from other children of cross-dressing fathers simply because of their willingness to participate despite the strong social stigma associated with cross-dressing. Perhaps there is another subset of this population who are unwilling to participate, regardless of their level of acceptance, chiefly because of the pressures of social stigma.

Three of the participants' always having known, as far back as their earliest memories, about their fathers' cross-dressing demonstrated advantages for their adjustment. However, their always having known presented a limitation for this study. It is a limitation in that the research questions involving the circumstances and reactions to the initial disclosure and the impact of the pre-disclosure relationship with fathers on children's acceptance were unable to be answered by over half of the participants. Thus, some of the research questions were addressed by a sample of only two. In actuality, rather than the participants' always having known being the limitation, it was the researcher's lack of realization of this phenomenon while conducting the interviews that was the real limitation.

The use of telephone interviews as opposed to face-to-face interviews may have impacted the data received. Only one interview was conducted face-to-face due to geographical limitations. Perhaps, with face-to-face interviews, greater breadth and depth of experiences may have been elicited.

An additional limitation is the limited racial/ethnic diversity within the sample. Since all of the participants identified as Caucasian, cultural factors related to adjustment within racial/ethnic minority families is not highlighted in this study.

It must be acknowledged that adult children of cross-dressing fathers are a hard-to- reach population. Thus, the limitations of this research are best accounted for by the effects of marginalization of this population rather than by methodological design.

### **Implications for Research**

Impetus for this study was based upon the research literature indicating that women in relationships with men who cross-dress are significantly less likely to have children (Brown, 1994; Docter 1988; Talamini, 1982). The basis for this research was further developed when this information was paired with the indication that some women actively choose to not have children based upon having limited knowledge about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children (Brown, 1994). While this study does not eliminate the need for further research on the impact of fathers' being cross-dressers on children, it does provide preliminary evidence that fathers' being cross-dressers is not inherently detrimental to the well being and development of children.

This study indicated a few factors potentially related to integration difficulties for children. Those factors consisted of the developmental period of adolescence, parental disagreement about the father's cross-dressing, and fathers' difficulties with individual integration of their cross-dressing into their sense of self. These factors should be addressed in future research as they pose the potential to negatively impact children's adjustment to having a father who is a cross-dresser. Additional qualitative research conducted with children who experienced difficulties with adjustment to their fathers' cross-dressing may help to isolate the salience of these factors for others in addition to providing information about other factors not identified through the current study that may contribute to children's difficulty in adjusting to having fathers who cross-dress.

Qualitative studies, including information from father-child dyads, may be useful in providing both the parental and the child perspective on children's adjustment processes. Having both perspectives merely enriches the thick description within the data and provides a fuller picture of children's adjustment to having fathers who cross-dress. Further, future qualitative studies could address the difference between women's and children's adjustment to husbands'

and fathers' being cross-dressers, respectively. This research could be completed through data collection with individual samples of wives and children or through mother-child dyads. The use of mother-child dyads for this research would be valuable, since they would be reflecting upon experiences with the same individual, both husband and father. This research may explore the hypothesis that women in relationships with men who cross-dress grieve the loss of trust in their husbands' ability to be open and honest with them but children do not really have a loss to grieve. Rather, children of cross-dressing fathers merely need to adjust to the addition of an aspect to their knowledge of their fathers' identity.

Due to the difficulty in procuring samples of children of cross-dressing fathers, quantitative studies geared at furthering this area of research may not be feasible to undertake. While it may not be likely to obtain a sample of children that is large enough for a quantitative study, it is highly possible to obtain a large enough sample of men who cross-dress who are fathers to children. Future quantitative research with cross-dressing fathers could provide information related to aspects of fathers' reports about their relationships with their children and their perception of their children's adjustment. This would allow for variables that are either associated with the promotion of or predictive of both adjustment and maladjustment of children to be isolated.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research helps to begin to answer questions related to women's concerns about what the impact of a father's cross-dressing is on children. This research indicated that children who have fathers who cross-dress are able to successfully adjust to having a father who is a cross-dresser and to develop throughout their childhood relatively free of significant negative impacts on their development.

Contrary to Docter's (1988) assertion that disclosure to children about a father's cross-dressing comes in conflict with children's needs for their parents to be "predictable, available, caring, and dedicated" (p. 175), this research encouraged parents to disclose in order to provide those aspects for their children. Thus, this study supports clinicians' encouragement of parental disclosure to children about fathers' cross-dressing.

The results indicated that children may not experience a marked grief process in their adjustment to their fathers' being cross-dressers. It is possible that women in relationships with

men who cross-dress, who experience a strong grieving process following the attainment of knowledge about their male partners' cross-dressing, may assume that their children would undergo a similar process. This study hoped to understand the acceptance process of children; however, there was no indication of a pointed process occurring in children. Thus, it is important for practitioners to be aware that children may not experience a grief process as a result of fathers' cross-dressing's being disclosed. Again, it is speculated that the difference in grieving by wives versus children may be accounted for by wives' experiencing a loss as a result of their husbands' disclosure related to issues such as trust and children's merely experiencing their fathers as having an additional aspect to their identities.

This study indicated several areas of concern for parents in regard to their children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses. These concerns included, both individually and collectively, parents' need to have their personal issues with cross-dressing mostly resolved prior to disclosure to children. Parents also need to be aware of children's additional needs for privacy and respect for their developing identities during adolescence. Clinicians can help to facilitate adjustment in children by encouraging parents to address their own personal issues regarding cross-dressing prior to disclosure to their children. Also clinicians can educate parents that, as their children enter adolescence, fathers may need to adjust their levels of openness with cross-dressing in order to accommodate to adolescents' increased privacy needs.

Further, parents should anticipate that their children's level of acceptance and comfort with their father's cross-dressing will be influenced by the levels of acceptance and comfort exhibited by their parents. Thus, it is particularly important for parents to resolve any difficulties they have regarding the cross-dressing. Clinicians can assist couples in this process through couples therapy. Hopefully, this study will help to resolve some marital difficulties regarding the father's cross-dressing by alleviating some of the concerns about the impact on children. Clinicians can use the results of this research to illustrate to their clients salient factors associated with children's successful adjustment to having fathers who cross-dress.

This notion of alleviating couples' marital distress by sharing information about the impact of cross-dressing on children has led to the formation of an "integration hypothesis." This hypothesis posits that marital distress, resulting from concerns about the impact of cross-dressing on children, can be quelled through information focused on children. Further, individual men's distress regarding the impact of their cross-dressing on their marriage may, in turn, be alleviated



through decreased distress in the couple relationship. Thus, focusing on the impact on children may have strong clinical implications for both couple and individual distress.

Overall, as a result of this study, clinicians have more information to better assist their clients in navigating decisions about disclosure to children and working toward creating a familial environment conducive to children's successful adjustment to and integration of their fathers' being cross-dressers. Specifically, clinicians can inform their clients about the importance of the timing and nature of disclosure, the degree of closeness in children's relationships with their fathers, fathers' comfort levels with being cross-dressers, and the existence of open communication and support within the familial environment.

### **Conclusion**

For women in relationships with men who cross-dress who are concerned about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children, this study will hopefully serve as a breath of fresh air. Based upon the distress women often feel about their partners' disclosure about their cross-dressing, it is understandable that they would want to protect their children from experiencing the same feelings. This study indicated that parents' attempts to protect their children's well being by keeping the father's cross-dressing under wraps may be contraindicated. This research supported parents' disclosure to children when they are young, as long as the father individually and parents collectively are relatively accepting and comfortable with the father's being a cross-dresser. This study also indicated that parents should not assume that their children would automatically undergo an extensive adjustment and grieving process. This exemplifies that the process of children's adjustment may be very different from the adjustment processes of their parents. Perhaps the freedom from negative societal messages about cross-dressing that youth provides, in conjunction with a supportive familial stance on cross-dressing, is the optimal environment for children to learn about their fathers' being cross-dressers. This hypothesis parallels the results from this study that indicated that a father's being a cross-dresser was not inherently detrimental to the development of children; rather it appears that negative societal messages may be the real culprit behind women's fears about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children.

Women in relationships with men who cross-dress need information about the impact of a father's cross-dressing on children. Hopefully this will, in turn, help to alleviate some of the

relational tension that occurs out of women's concerns for the welfare of their children. Further, by potentially alleviating some of the common relational concerns, this research will have an impact on individual men's adjustment to being cross-dressers, because often their own discontent with their cross-dressing arises out of relational conflict with their partners.

Essentially, this study may simply begin a process of undoing damage done to individuals, couples, and families by misinformation and negative societal messages about the nature of cross-dressing. While the strength of these negative messages is profound, with the help of Eva, Chloe, Brendan, Sabrina, and Kent, its power is beginning to waver.

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## **Appendix A - Recruitment Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Allison Reisbig and I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University in the College of Human Ecology. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. The research I am doing is aimed at understanding the experiences of individuals who have a father who cross-dresses. I am conducting this study primarily because there is no published research to date which focuses specifically on the experiences of children of cross-dressing fathers. I believe that this research will be valuable to others who have fathers who cross-dress in addition to men who cross-dress and their spouses/partners who wonder about what impact a father's being a cross-dresser has on children.

The questions I would like to ask you involve your experiences with how you found out about your father's being a cross-dresser, your reactions, and what factors influence what you think about your father's being a cross-dresser. I'm also interested in the advice you would give to others who have fathers who cross-dress and to fathers themselves.

I would like to invite you to participate in a confidential telephone interview with me about your experiences. I anticipate that the interview will take between 45 to 90 minutes of your time. I am available to schedule interviews during the day or evenings on weekdays or weekends, depending upon your availability.

If you are interested in participating, please e-mail me at [amj9374@humec.ksu.edu](mailto:amj9374@humec.ksu.edu) or call me at my office at (785) 532-4018 so that we may set up a time for an interview. You are welcome to simply contact me to discuss any questions you have about the research as well. Also, if you prefer, you are welcome to not identify yourself by name and may just say that you are someone who is interested in participating in this research.

I have included copies of other documents in this packet that are necessary for you to have if you would like to participate, so please keep them on hand for your interview. I have also included a pre-paid calling card so that you may call me at no expense to you.

I look forward to hearing from you and answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Allison M. J. Reisbig, M.S., LMFT  
303 Campus Creek Complex  
Kansas State University  
Manhattan, KS 66506  
(785) 532-4018  
amj9374@humeec.ksu.edu

## **Appendix B - Informed Consent Form**

Kansas State University

### **Informed Consent**

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Lived Experiences of Adult Children of Cross-Dressing Fathers: A Retrospective Account

**APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT:** 03-30-2006

**EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** 03-30-2009

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Anthony P. Jurich, Ph.D., LCMFT

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):** Allison M. J. Reisbig, M.S., LMFT

**CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Anthony P. Jurich: (785) 532-1488

Allison M. J. Reisbig (785) 532-4018

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:**

Rick Scheidt, Ph.D., Chair, Committee on Research

Involving Human Subjects, 1 Fairchild Hall,

Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506

(785) 532-3224

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:** The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers. More specifically, this study seeks to understand the impact having a father who cross-dresses has had on individuals' lives.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:** You will be asked to participate in an audio taped interview which will be guided by the interview topics described in the recruitment letter.

**LENGTH OF STUDY:** Each interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:** There are no known physical or social risks involved. Potential psychological risks may be that the interview could possibly influence areas of previous distress to emerge associated with the topic of cross-dressing. Possible areas of distress may include concerns about gender, sexuality, or familial relationships. However, if this were to occur, the interviewer is trained in providing immediate mental health services and is prepared to offer referrals for more in-depth services, if needed.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:** The expected benefits for participation are that you will be given the opportunity to share your experiences with having a father who cross-dresses in a supportive environment. Your participation will also benefit other individuals and families who have a cross-dressing family member in that research in this area is limited.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will be kept confidential and will remain in the possession of the interviewer. The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed. All identifying information, such as names and specific locations, will be either omitted or replaced with fictitious names when the interviews are transcribed in order to preserve anonymity. All audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept behind lock and key throughout the duration of this study and will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION AND STATEMENT OF VERBAL INFORMED**

**CONSENT:** I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, decline to answer any question, and stop participating at any time without explanation or penalty. **I also agree that by my verbal acknowledgment of receipt of this statement and by my verbally giving consent to participate, I am expressing that I understand this consent form and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described.**

## **Appendix C - Debriefing Statement**

**If you would like any further information concerning this project, please contact:**

Allison M. J. Reisbig, M.S., LMFT

(785) 532-4018

amj9374@humecc.ksu.edu

Anthony P. Jurich, Ph.D., LCMFT

(785) 532-1488

jurich@humecc.ksu.edu

**If you have any further questions regarding the research and its affiliation with Kansas State University, please contact:**

Rick Scheidt, Ph.D.

Chair

Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

1 Fairchild Hall

Kansas State University

Manhattan, KS 66506

(785) 532-3224

**In the event you have experienced some distress following the completion of this interview, please contact Anthony P. Jurich, Ph.D., who will refer you to a qualified mental health professional in your area:**

Anthony P. Jurich, Ph.D., LCMFT

(785) 532-1488

jurich@humecc.ksu.edu

## Appendix D - Interview Guide

Demographic information to be requested:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Race/Ethnicity
4. Relationship Status
5. Number of Children
6. Education Level
7. Religious Affiliation

The overarching research question is: What are the lived experiences of adult children of cross-dressing fathers? The specific research questions and corresponding interview questions are as follows:

1. How does the timing and nature of disclosure impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
  - a. Tell me the story of how you learned about your father's being a cross-dresser. (Prompt for age, specific circumstances, reaction, etc)
  - b. Do you think the circumstances of your finding out impacted how you view your father's being a cross-dressing? If so, how?
2. How does the pre-disclosure relationship of children with their fathers impact the children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
  - a. What was your relationship like with your father prior to (and after) finding out about his cross-dressing? Has your relationship changed over time? If so, how?
  - b. Do you think your relationship with your father impacted how you responded to learning he was a cross-dresser? If so, how?
3. How does the father's comfort level with his being a cross-dresser impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?

- a. On a scale from one to ten, how comfortable would you say your father was with his being a cross-dresser when you found out? Has that changed over time? If so, how?
  - b. Do you think your father's comfort level with his cross-dressing impacted how you felt about his being a cross-dresser (when you first found out/now)? If so, how?
4. How does the familial environment regarding cross-dressing impact children's adjustment to having a father who cross-dresses?
  - a. How did/does the rest of your family respond to knowing about your father's being a cross-dresser (when you first found out/now)? Have their reactions changed over time? If so, how? (Request for participant to answer specifically about each family member separately)
  - b. Do you think how the rest of your family responded to your father's being a cross-dresser impacted how you felt about his being a cross-dresser (when you first found out/changed over time/now)?
5. What meanings do children make regarding their father's being a cross-dresser?
  - a. What did you think about your father's being a cross-dresser when you first found out? Has that changed over time? What do you think about it now?
  - b. What is your understanding of why your father cross-dresses?
6. Does children's understanding of their father's cross-dressing follow predictable stages of moral reasoning?
  - a. If you had to make an argument, with a friend of yours, for or against cross-dressing, how would you make that argument? (Prompt for how that argument may have differed when they first found out/over time/now)
7. Does children's adjustment to their father's cross-dressing follow predictable stages of grief?
  - a. On a scale from one to 10, how accepting would you say you are of your father's being a cross-dresser?
  - b. Have you always been this accepting? Tell me about the process.

8. How does having a father who cross-dresses impact the social development of children?
  - a. Would you say that having a father who is a cross-dresser has impacted you socially, either positively or negatively? If so, how?
  - b. Have you ever experienced ridicule by peers because of your father's being a cross-dresser?
  - c. Have you ever had concerns about others finding out about your father's being a cross-dresser?
9. Closing Questions
  - a. What advice would you give to others who have fathers who cross-dress?
  - b. What advice would you give to fathers who cross-dress wanting to tell their children?
  - c. Do you have anything else you would like to add?