

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

How Transsexuals Cope with Discrimination: A Grounded Theory

*A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University*

BRONWEN AVIS ROSKILLY
1996

ABSTRACT

The coping strategies of transsexuals who experience discrimination have previously received little research attention. The primary objective of the present study was to generate a grounded theory to explain how transsexuals cope with discrimination. Eight transsexual individuals were interviewed and each interview was audio taped and transcribed in verbatim. The data was qualitatively analysed utilising the grounded theory methodology. Participants collectively described experiencing numerous instances of discrimination and described using a variety of coping strategies to help alleviate anxiety caused by discrimination. The core category of 'understanding discrimination to be an anxiety-provoking phenomenon' emerged from the data. It was determined that the core category was established by three pre-existing conditions. The first of these was an awareness of the self to be vulnerable to discrimination. The second condition was an awareness of discrimination to impact negatively on the self, and the third entailed an understanding of why discrimination occurs. The coping strategies were broken into three selective codes. Participants adopted constructive strategies which were primarily rational and realistic. Cognitive coping strategies addressed anxiety caused by discrimination by changing the appraisal of cognitions pertaining to the discriminatory experience. Direct action strategies were behavioural approaches which entailed the altering of the situation. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to clinicians working with transgendered people, with emphasis on the common occurrence of discrimination and its detrimental impact on the transsexual.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to those who have made this research project possible:

My thesis supervisor, Dr. Keith Tuffin of the Psychology Department, Massey University, who was always encouraging of my ideas, and whose knowledge, wisdom, and experience guided the research process.

My second thesis supervisor, Ms. Cheryl Woolley of the Psychology Department, Massey University, for her valuable comments and time spent with me reading over the work in the later stages the research.

Psychologist Samantha Christensen for kindly taking the time to send me information and for sharing her knowledge and expertise in the later stages of the research.

Those who participated in the research, for their cooperation and willingness to share their histories and experiences with me. I am especially grateful for their warm hospitality while visiting their homes, and to those who went out of their way to transport me around the city and lend me material.

My parents, Marina and Colin Roskilly, for their unconditional love and support throughout my studies.

Shane, for his support and belief in my abilities.

My flatmates, Kathryn and Glyn, for their encouragement and consideration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
Quote	viii

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

- Overview of introduction	1
CHAPTER 1: Conceptualising Transsexualism	
- History of Transsexualism	3
- Definitions	5
- Prevalence of transsexualism	8
- Etiology	9
- Transitioning	12
- Psychological impact of transsexuality	15
CHAPTER 2: Prejudice and Discrimination	
- Definitions	18
- Discrimination and transsexuals	19
- Legal aspects	20
CHAPTER 3: Cognitive Dissonance in relation to Discrimination Against Transsexuals	
- The establishment of cognitive dissonance	22
- The drive for dissonance reduction	24
- Coping strategies	24
CHAPTER 4: Grounded Theory	
- Definitions	27
- The origin of grounded theory	28
- Rationale for adopting a qualitative approach	29
- Rationale for adopting a grounded theory methodology	30
- Coding and data analysis techniques	31
- Criteria for assessing qualitative research	33
CHAPTER 5: Method	
- Objectives	36
- The participants	36
- Ethics	37
- The method of data collection	38
- The process of data collection	40

PART TWO: FINDINGS

- Overview of findings	43
CHAPTER 6: Participant profiles and Experiences of Discrimination	
- Participant profiles	44
- Instances of discrimination	48
CHAPTER 7: The Core Category and its Pre-Existing Conditions	
- The core category	53
- Recognising the self to be vulnerable to discrimination	56
- Recognising discrimination to have a negative impact	57
- Recognising why societal discrimination occurs	65
CHAPTER 8: Constructive Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	
- Distraction by activity	75
- Physical behaviour	79
- Seeking help from professionals	81
- Making information well known	82
CHAPTER 9: Cognitive Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	
- Defense Mechanisms	85
- Positivity	91
CHAPTER 10: Direct Action Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	
- Discursive	93
- Avoidance	98
CHAPTER 11: Integration	
- Integration of concepts, data, and the grounded theory	103
- Participants' responses to the summary of findings	107

PART THREE: DISCUSSION

Overview of discussion	109
CHAPTER 12: Discussion and limitations	
- Discussion	110
- Evaluation of the objectives of the study	113
- Evaluation of the quality of the research	113
- Limitations of the study	115
CHAPTER 13: Implications	
- Implications for future research	117
- Implications for clinicians and those working with transsexuals	119
References	122
Appendices	132

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: The Core Category and its Pre-Existing Conditions	54
TABLE 2: Constructive Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	76
TABLE 3: Cognitive Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	86
TABLE 4: Direct Action Strategies which Address Anxiety caused by Discrimination	94
TABLE 5: The Grounded Theory	106

"I told my staff...that something had happened to me. It was as if the male and female ego inside me had been fighting and suddenly it had stopped and the female had taken over and the male was taking a back seat. And I suddenly felt content with the world, or content with myself. At this point, I did not realise what the world was about to unleash on me in terms of discrimination." (excerpt from a participant's transcript)

PART ONE
Introduction

OVERVIEW OF INTRODUCTION

How transsexuals cope with, deal with and understand discrimination is largely an uninvestigated area and thus, there is an extreme dearth of literature pertaining to this precise topic. Literature concerning the phenomenon of transsexuality is reviewed and structured so as to enable the reader to conceptualise transsexualism. A firm understanding of the nature of transsexualism is necessary for the reader of this work, particularly since much discrimination arises through misinformation and ignorance surrounding transsexuals and transgendered people. A brief discussion of history, definitions, prevalence, etiology, the transitional process, and the psychological impact of transsexuality is presented in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 investigates the psychological conceptualisation of discrimination and prejudice. The concepts are defined and discussed in relation to transsexuality. Legal aspects pertaining to discrimination against transsexuals are also discussed.

The following chapter introduces cognitive dissonance and the related cognitive processes leading to the subsequent adoption of coping strategies.

Chapter 4 establishes an understanding of the analytical methodology of grounded theory. This is achieved by providing definitions and rationales firstly for utilising a qualitative approach and then for using a grounded theory approach. The coding and data analysis techniques are outlined, followed by discussion of criteria for assessing qualitative research.

The final chapter of the introduction outlines the method applied to conduct the present study. The objectives of the research are firstly listed, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the participants and ethical considerations. The method of data collection (interviews) is discussed, accompanied by the rationale for using a semi-structured interview format. The precise process of data collection, entailing description of initial contact with participants, the interview process, the process of transcribing, and the follow-up is described.

The introduction provides insight into the background of the phenomenon under inquiry. It outlines the methodological procedure and provides clear rationale for utilising such methodology in relation to the present study.