

- 2009 McDonald, C., McIntyre, M. & **Merryfeather, L.** I was asleep to myself for 25 years: Older lesbian's experience of self-disclosure. Paper presentation. Accepted for presentation In Sickness and in Health Conference, Victoria BC, April 2009.
- 2009 McDonald, C., McIntyre, M., & **Merryfeather, L.** Older women's experience of non-heterosexual orientation: Challenging categories and assumptions. Paper presentation. Accepted for presentation Qualitative Health Research Conference, Vancouver BC, October 2009.
- 2013 **Merryfeather, L.** Stories of women who support trans men: An autoethnographic novel. Paper presentation accepted. UBC School of Nursing/Graduate Nursing Student Symposium on April 19. Graduate Centre at UBC, Vancouver, BC
- 2013 **Merryfeather, L.** Found poetry as literature review. Paper presentation accepted. Uvic School of Nursing Research Conference, May 10. University of Victoria, Victoria, BC

### Publications

1. Hetherington, J., Kivi, K.L., Fisher, C., & **Merryfeather, L.** (1999). The spontaneous imaginative life. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 3(1/2), 111-120.
2. Kivi, K.L., **Merryfeather, L.**, Hetherington, J., & Fisher, C. (1999). *Fidelity*. Nelson, BC: Maa Press.
3. McDonald, C., McIntyre, M. & **Merryfeather, L.** (2011). Bringing ourselves into view: Disclosure as epistemological and ontological production of a lesbian subject. *Nursing Inquiry*, 18(1), 50-54.
4. **Merryfeather, L.** (2011). A Personal Epistemology: Toward Gender Diversity. *Nursing Philosophy*, 12, 139-149.
5. Bateman, G. & **Merryfeather, L.** (2014). Practical implementation of Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness: A personal evolution. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 27, 57-61. doi:10.1177/0894318413509725
6. **Merryfeather, L.** & Bruce, A. (2014). The invisibility of gender diversity: Understanding transgender and transsexuality in nursing literature. *Nursing Forum*. DOI=10.1111/nuf.12061&ArticleID=1244432
7. **Merryfeather, L.** & Bruce, A. (2014). Autoethnography: Exploring gender diversity. *Nursing Forum*. DOI=10.1111/nuf.12087&ArticleID=1271025



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

## PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
NURSING

**Lyn Merryfeather**

2006

University of Victoria

BSN

**“Stories of Women who Support Trans Men: An  
Autoethnographic Voyage”**

Thursday, June 5, 2014  
1:00 PM

David Turpin Building, room A144

### Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Anne Bruce, School of Nursing, UVic (Supervisor)  
Dr. Laurene Shields, School of Nursing, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Wanda Hurren, Department of Curriculum and  
Instruction, UVic (Outside Member)

### External Examiner:

Dr. Keith Berry, Department of Communication, University of  
South Florida

### Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Wade Danis, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic

## **Abstract**

"The only true voyage...would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is..." (Proust, 2003, p. 343). This wonderful quote from Proust seems like a fitting place to begin because I wish to take you on an autoethnographic journey of discovery so that you can see for yourself what it was like for the participants and me as we found ourselves in strange and sometimes frightening territory. We realized that we were, sometimes unexpectedly, in positions of support to our friends or lovers who were uncomfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth. Most of us would describe ourselves as lesbian and, when our partners began to explore the possibility of sex reassignment, struggled with our established identity.

My friend Christopher was the inspiration for this exploration. We were domestic partners before and during his early transition from female to male. Both Christopher and I were public figures in the small town in which we lived and our lives were somewhat on display. Christopher founded an organization called *Trans Connect* to provide support to those who present their gender in alternate ways and to provide education to service providers as well as to schools with regard to transgender issues and is well known in that town as well as in the larger gender diverse community as a trans man. Because of this, he has agreed to waive anonymity.

The body of this work includes the entire texts of three papers I have written during the course of my studies as I navigated the path to this research. All of these papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals. I have used these papers to illustrate my autoethnographic journey toward the discovery of diverse gender presentations, to describe the state of knowledge in the discipline of nursing regarding this issue, and to demonstrate how autoethnography works. The centre of the work is the novel I have written based upon the stories the participants and I have shared with one another. The novel is written in everyday language and aims to show, rather than tell, the stories of ten women who love and support trans men. In many parts of the dissertation I have used dialogue, both internal as well as conversation among created characters, as a way to bring to life concepts under discussion. This is in keeping with an autoethnographic style.

The dissertation is organized into three parts. Part one is a description of the process and methods I undertook in order to arrive at the novel. It consists of eight chapters that are placed in a more or less linear way, although the process was not at all linear, from the beginning of my exploration, to a discussion of the overall voyage. Part two consists of the novel, which is the story of experiences of women living with trans men during their transition or consideration of transition, disguised as having been experienced by fictional characters. Part three contains four chapters that are the analysis, a description of how I managed the information gathered, a discussion of evaluation for such a work as this, and some consideration as to dissemination and future for the study.

My research questions were:

- What is it like to be in loving relationship with an FTM during and after some of his transition?
- What are the effects on the relationship for the female partner during this time?
- What happens to the supportive partner's ideas of her own identity?
- Does the balance of power shift during this transition, and if so, how?

The novel poignantly addresses all these questions. To be in a loving relationship with a trans man in the early stages of transition can be very challenging, and for the participants and me, often ended in a breakdown of the relationship. It can be a difficult time for women supporters because their adjustments and struggles with identity and sense of self and community are frequently overshadowed by the enormity, and for some, curiosity of sex reassignment. Often the relationship shifts from egalitarian to one that resembles more of a male-female binary where the male exerts power over his partner. Half of the participants in this study said they would not enter into another relationship with a trans man. That leaves the other half who said they would. The novel might serve as a help to those considering such a relationship as well as to those already walking the sometimes slippery, sometimes exhilarating road of partnership with a trans man. There are no easy answers to these questions. My aim is to reveal a glimpse into the lives of people about whom not much is known. For that I am very grateful.

## **Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

1989:	B.C. Long Term Care Scholarship Award. Continuing Health Care Administration Malaspina College, Nanaimo BC.
1990:	Dean's Honour List. Continuing Health Care Administration Malaspina College, Nanaimo BC.
2008:	University of Victoria Fellowship.
2008:	Harold and Myra Thompson Memorial Scholarship.
2009	University of Victoria Fellowship
2012	University of Victoria Graduate Award

## **Presentations**

2009	McDonald, C., McIntyre, M. & <b>Merryfeather, L.</b> Generating understanding: Readers theatre as hermeneutic "knowledge translation" in the classroom. Paper presentation. Accepted for presentation WRCASN conference, Calgary, Alberta, Feb. 2009.
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