

The circle of life starts in the laundry

MICHELLE HAMER

I need help. It's something I realised about a month ago, somewhere between the birth of baby number three and the prolonged (well, it was only a few weeks, but it felt like it was gestating a baby elephant) pregnancy of child number four.

Well there you go — I mean, I was asked for trouble with all those babies underfoot, wasn't I? Suddenly, making a busy job, the care of three children, the demands of growing another, the housework fit into a day became impossible and something had to give. Yippee, my toilet cleaning days were over — I hired a cleaner and then increased my workload to pay for her.

This year, with baby Oliver now part of the family, life has gone even busier, and even without all that dusting and dust, I still can't seem to cope. Yippee, my nappy changes were decreased — I hired a nanny and increased my workload to pay for her.

I often wonder what would happen if I stopped having babies. I'd probably be much richer than I am now, but I'd have to wash my own dishes, make my laundry and go to playgroup every week, and the thought is so terrifying that I keep heading for my home office — here for emergencies and breastfeeding, but with such lovely clean hands!

Look me a while to get used to the whole idea of the Manor bit, but now I think it's just what I can do things for the kids when I'm feeling maternal and generous; like wandering out of my office unexpectedly and announcing, "Hey, who wants to go and get ice cream?"

For once, I get to be the good guy occasionally. But, more often than not, I'm shouting distractingly, "Yes, I'll be there to help with your maths in a minute," or ridiculously trying to coax the toddler, "Darcy, drink the drink. Louisa has made you, it won't taste any different if mummy pours it" — all the while typing furiously, nursing the phone while on hold for someone-or-other important and popping my hidden stash of M&Ms like a crazed addict.

A house where ironing is a big help. In a house where ironing has been outlawed, except for those rare occasions when mummy and daddy give our clothes special together (the last time was our wedding day), Nanny Hamer is a Sunbeam tour de force who runs through the ironing, stiffening and starching garments the very fibre of their being. I don't think it's so much the heat of the iron, but her Austrian heritage that's our otherwise slack, sloppy, undisciplined clothes suddenly rigid with fear. She once told me that Austrian women are prized for their bed-making and ered to teach me the tuck-and-thrust method of gaining compliant linen, but I ghed so much she never offered again. She has an amazing ability to come for list, throw clothes in the wash, hang in tenn, tight rows on the line and whip them off, folding them with vision creases, ironing them (jocks, etc., the lot) and stacking them in the frobe before I can choose the right to begin my next story with.

In extreme cases, the girlish boy will become the adult transsexual. In several studies where feminine boys were re-examined in their early 20s, 60 to 70 per cent were homosexual, 20 to 30 per cent were heterosexual and only a few were either transvestite or transsexuals.

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Netherlands estimated the number of adult transsexuals to be one in 11,000 men and one in 30,400 women.

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Associate Professor Garry Warne, director of endocrinology and diabetes at the Royal Children's Hospital, and a specialist in intersex births, says adults born with ambiguous genitalia often face identification problems. He says that if you are uncertain about your gender identity, it affects your relationships. "For a lot of adults

with intersexed disorders, it's very common for them to wonder who they are; not just 'what sex am I?', but 'whom am I?'

Melbourne writer Jennifer Spry, 52, prefers the term "transgendered" to "transsexual", as she feels it is not her sex or sexuality that has been changed, but her gender.

Jennifer's walk is slow, bouncy and blokey. She has tinted red hair and good skin. She dresses elegantly, with not a crease in her fitted black suit. Construction workers take a perverse, but she doesn't flinch. As she speaks, she slouches over with a hand on her knee like a football player, then daintily sips on her coffee late like a real lady. Her lipstick smudges and stains the glass.

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she says. Her voice is deep. "As a child, you're not going to do anything that gets you into trouble... if you don't get noticed, you're not expected to do anything."

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hair and telling the family: "That's it.

Today, I'm going to be a boy."

Spry wasn't able to talk openly

see "John" walk through the door. Spry grew up in the 1950s, where there was no option of being "transgendered".

She remained in the closet during her childhood and adolescence. The only chance she had of expressing herself was through cross-dressing when the house was empty. At the time, her mother would only tell one person who knew. She respects Jennifer's going into denial. Jennifer says "it's important to be found out to be gay was huge... transsexual wasn't even discovered as a topic".

There is now more public knowledge about it. Popular women's magazines have

articles about people who have changed sex, movies such as the 1998 release *Ma Vie en Rose*, or the 1999 release *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* contain transsexuals, cross-dressing and raise gender identity questions.

Melbourne psychiatrist David Dickey says "there's more awareness about the notion of sexuality... it is more spoken about in various media. Part of that is, frankly, pornographic, which is to do with the visibility of the body... and some of it is the rediscovery of erotica literature. But he believes we still live in a conservative political era, where not all people are as accepting as others."

Spry says if she was a kid growing up, now things would be different. Society has changed so much that there are young boys walking through the city with a kit or a skirt on.

Even though times are different, children still tend to be cruel. Peter suffers from chronic depression. At school he is aggressive. He kicks, punches, bites, pulls other kids' hair and breaks their things. He has school behaviour problems, can't fit in, the other kids like to call him "faggot". He has no friends and is only ever invited to family parties.

He gets angry when his mother stops him from dressing up and blames his psychiatrist when she tells him it's not appropriate. His parents are worried about his future, the fact that he already wants the sex change.

When kids are separated into boys' and girls' lines at school, Peter cannot help but feel different.

Newman says she tells parents not to pick their child for their against victimisation. A boy who wants to put on his make-up underneath his school shirt needs to be told that all children who go to school wear appropriate school uniform.

It is important, she says, not to try to modify behavior into something we "normal". She tries to broaden their interests at school and in play, so they are not so stereotyped. There are times when it's more appropriate to encourage gender identification and times when it's not. If they are left alone and allowed to fully express themselves, they will continue to face acceptance and be ostracised, she says.

Spry remembers only one dream from childhood. Her compelling memoir, *Orlando's Sleep*, about that dream. She knew that, like Virginia Woolf's character Orlando, one day she would simply wake up as a woman. Her choice came one day when she was sitting on the edge of the road, deciding whether she'd step in front of the truck or do what she wanted. She decided she'd do what she wanted.

She says she feels sorry for a little boy wanting to be the opposite sex in the '90s, because there's still such a stigma. "When you see someone who's so obviously going to have a gender problem, well, I just don't know what's ahead of them."

• Some kinds have been changed to protect privacy. *Orlando's Sleep* (New Victoria Press, \$22.95) is available at Hares and Hyenas Bookshop, Collingwood and South Yarra.

Born a boy, wanting to be a girl. Dealing with gender confusion can be a long and distressing process.

By ELISSAR MUKHTAR

Peter has a dream. At first he's scared, because he doesn't know what's going to happen to him. Then the storms come and end with him. He wonders how that got there, but then somehow, without him feeling any pain, the waves take his penis away. It vanishes.

At six. At his age, boys are saying "I hate girls" and girls are saying "I hate boys". But what happens when a child not only feels the opposite sex, but wants to be the opposite sex?

Peter disturbs our definitions of gender, through he has male genitals, he identifies as female. In clinical terms, this is known as gender dysphoria, where the child experiences discomfort because he feels his anatomy does not match his gender identity.

He also likes Marilyn Monroe and Dolly Parton, women with large breasts and exotic clothes.

He pretends to be a rock model and speaks in a high-pitched voice when he wants to. He won't play with boys. He says he's got the wrong body. He gets laughed at, teased and bullied. Peter is seeing a psychiatrist.

In the US and Britain, Peter's condition rates its own definition in the official manual of mental disorders. It is classified as Gender Identity Disorder (GID) of childhood, where children display an array of sex-typical behavior signalling a strong identity with the opposite sex.

The director of the New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry, Dr Louise Newman, is a child and adolescent psychiatrist who specialises in gender problems. She says "young children don't understand what gender is something fixed about a person". She helps children to identify with the world, rather than trying to change their gender identity. She believes not only are there several ethical and philosophical questions in pigeon-holing children into two narrow categories, but that usually it's too late to too.

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Crossing the great divide

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MONEY

Clothes maketh the woman . . . poorer

By JOCELYN EASTWAY

There's nothing wrong with trying to look smart in the workplace. In fact, good personal grooming can be a big plus if you're going for a new job or a promotion. However, research by Macquarie Investment Management Ltd (MIML) suggests some people — particularly women — are spending more than they need to on personal appearance and, as a result, are missing out on huge opportunities to build wealth.

The MIML research shows an ambitious woman earning \$40,000 a year — about average annual earnings — spends \$4948 a year maintaining her appearance and wardrobe, compared with \$2665 for a big-spending male on the same salary.

If the woman cut her spending to the man's level, she would have an extra \$2283 in her pocket at the end of each year.

If you invested this amount annually for

(Earnings from the non-super investment are taxed at your marginal rate of tax. Earnings from super are taxed at 15 per cent.)

Robyn FitzRoy, a division director at MIML, says women need to spend far more than men to look professional in the workplace.

"But, sometimes, they may take that too far," she says. "That money could be put aside for investment."

FitzRoy says there's a pressing need for women to invest in their financial future, rather than spending all their money on looking good.

"This (research) comes from a strong belief that women are spending too much on their image and it's not going to be returned," FitzRoy says.

"It's not having to spend quite as much . . . and even small amounts (of savings) can make a big difference over time."

The MIML research focused on white-

women in maintaining their appearance and wardrobe. (It is assumed people have a basic working wardrobe to begin with.)

The cost of wardrobe items is based on an estimated average over three years. People on higher incomes are assumed to spend more time, and money, on relatively active lives.

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"Men and women in the small-spender

categories are maintaining a reasonable

these figures show the in-built basic

the sexes," the survey says.

If, for example, your basic wardrobe is in neutral colors, it is a lot easier to mix and match scarves and shirts to produce several different outfits. And, if you buy quality items to begin with, they are likely to last a lot longer.

"Keep your ego out of it, be disciplined and shop smartly," she advises.

"In the end, it can work in women's favor that they don't appear to be concentrating too much on clothes, which can appear to be somewhat frivolous."

Vivienne James, executive vice-president at Bankers Trust, says new clothes — unlike food, transport and shelter — are not an essential item. And, with a bit of thought, it's not that hard to cut back your spending in this area.

In *The Woman's Money Book*, James offers a few tips on "cutting your coat to fit the cloth".

James says it's all a matter of getting