

How else to close an issue devoted to acceptance and diversity than with a warning? This is a caveat to those who operate support groups: 'Ware the predator. Willis and those like him effect not only open support groups, but focused groups like Tri-Ess chapters. Many a heterosexual crossdresser has been aghast to find the hand of another crossdresser on his leg after a meeting.

Willis (not his real name) came to the support group professing a gender need. He was friendly and sincere, pushing all the right buttons when he was screened. He was helpful, volunteering his time and energy, pitching in, showing lots of initiative.

Willis professed heterosexuality, and, indeed, had been married four times, although he was only in his thirties. He admitted to a troubled past, attributing much of it to not dealing with his gender issue. We could sympathize with that.

Willis was shy about cross-dressing; he didn't dress for several months, and when he did, his clothing was somewhat fetishistic—leather skirt, come-f**k-me pumps, long curly wig. We were sure we would be seeing more of 'Wanda.' But next month, he was back to his boy clothes.

Willis was new in town, with few friends. Despite his claimed heterosexuality, it was clear that he found some of the transsexual people in the group attractive. Even though our support group was nonsexual, we weren't unduly alarmed when he began a relationship with another group member.

Meanwhile, Willis had made himself nearly indispensable to the group. He had been elected an officer, he was in charge of correspondence and the mailing list, he was in charge of refreshments, he worked the help line. And then the trouble began.

It started when he continued to show interest in other group members, and came on to them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The first hint of trouble was increased tension between Sharon and Beverly. Initially, Willis

had given equal attention to the two. When he chose Beverly, Sharon didn't deal with it well. Nor did Bev, when he kept on with Sharon. Willis assured us it was their problem.

Donna was in serious need of a reality check. She was barging ahead like a steam locomotive, dismantling her life, disregarding things like electrolysis. Her appearance was very rough, but after a visit to Jim Bridges' boutique at Southern Comfort 1991, she was convinced that she was ready for a modeling career (no fault of Jim's). She believed that she passed in all circumstances, but the rest of us thought that she passed rarely if at all.

The group devoted considerable time and energy to helping Donna to gain a view of herself that was consistent with her actual appearance. We counseled her to proceed cautiously, to get vocational training (she had lost both of her jobs by this time due to showing pictures of herself cross-

with Science; mad at Beverly, he took off one evening. He happened to call me. I used Ringback service to find his location. He had phoned from the female impersonator's house.

Confronted, Willis claimed that the increasing tensions within the group were the fault of the various group members, and certainly not his. He was insistent that he was not the one with the problem.

I was fond of Willis, but as facilitator of the group, there was only one thing I could ethically do. I brought charges, and as a result of the proceedings, he voluntarily left the group. Later he tried to return, but despite the fact that his gender need was legitimate, the officers felt he was a threat to the other group members; his application was declined.

The support group, although open, was a gender support group. On the front end, it was made clear to Willis that sexual advances to group members were inappropriate, and would not be tolerated. Nevertheless, he managed to wreak major havoc before we could detect the problem and deal with it.

Willis was a sexual predator, a shark in the swimming pool.

He and others like him pose major problems for gender support groups. If a group is not to self-destruct or degenerate into a place for sexual liaisons, the Willises must be either eliminated or controlled. The group cannot be allowed to become a hunting ground.

Gender support groups can serve persons with a wide range of lifestyles, gender issues, and sexual preferences. But they cannot serve those who would subvert the group for their personal needs—whether financial, sexual, or self-aggrandizing. They must retain as their focus the needs of the group members, even when that means playing hardball with the Willises of the world. Persons with gender dysphoria are vulnerable and often desperate, and must be safeguarded. Officers and facilitators of support groups must take any and all precautions to safeguard their members. ♣

Closing Words

By Dallas Denny

The Shark in the Swimming Pool

dressed to customers at the registers). "Have electrolysis," we cautioned. "Get experience in your new role." "Don't rush into real-life test." Naturally, she did not take our advice.

We later discovered that Willis, in a desperate attempt to get into her pants, was surreptitiously encouraging her.

Willis was slick, but he was not as smart as he thought. In a weak moment, he admitted to turning a call from a crossdresser on the help line into a mutual fantasy-masturbation session. He told us how sorry he was, swearing that it wouldn't happen again. While we were still reeling from that, he subverted another call, this one from Audrey, a female impersonator, turning it into a personal liaison. Willis was not forthcoming about her, but we suspected that he was up to something. We blinded him