

One of the Beaumont Trust's series of leaflets pointing the way to answers to questions about ourselves, and who we are. Call our Helpline, or visit our website, to find out our current list of publications.

Further information is available from the organisations listed on the back cover. An SAE would be appreciated.

This series aims to give the basic facts about issues surrounding how we identify ourselves in terms of gender, and point the way to more specialist groups where more detailed help is available. The trust cannot accept any liability for the information provided, although it has made every effort to ensure the information given is accurate and up to date.

Interested in research on issues surrounding gender?

Then contact Gires, the Gender Identity Research & Education Society

Gires

Melverley
The Warren
Ashted
Surrey,
KT21 2SP

<http://www.gires.org.uk/>
01372 801554

For more information:

The Beaumont Society

27 Old Gloucester Street
London WC1N 3XX
<http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/>
01582 412220 24 Hour Information Line

Northern Concord

PO Box 258
Manchester
M60 1LN
<http://www.northernconcord.org.uk/>

TransLiving International

TLI PO Box 3
Basildon Essex
SS13 3WA
<http://www.transliving.co.uk/>
01268 583761 9 am – 8 pm Mon – Fri

WOBS (partners)

BM WOBS
London
WC1N 3XX
<http://www.gender.org.uk/wobsmatters/>
01223 441246

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The Beaumont Trust

BM Charity London
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BEAUMONT TRUST

Transvestites

A discussion of some of the issues
concerning Transvestites or
Crossdressers



Charity No 297527

One of a series of Helping Leaflets

TRANSVESTITES

There are many different types and styles of Transvestite. The majority of Transvestites in this century are male. For some it may be wearing female underwear under their male clothes. Others may have progressively developed a female 'persona' or image and crossdress to such an extent that they have built a social life in their alternative role. Transvestism is a behaviour, not an illness nor in itself harmful.

Common Theme

There are two common themes for the majority of Transvestites. Usually they have dressed in items of women's clothing from an early age, and often have not found anyone with whom they felt they could share what they consider their "guilty secret". Years of self-enforced secrecy often lead to an intense feeling of guilt, that there is something very wrong and that they are in some way sick or ill. A lack of opportunity to share thoughts and feelings, as well as the lack of rational discussion with others in a similar situation often leads many to make gross assumptions far removed from reality.

What is Reality?

The reality of the situation is the fact that TVs are an integral part of a society, which unwittingly conditions and divides each one of us into to what it considers to be one of two roles, Male or Female. Both roles are constantly changing their definition and boundaries. The greatest change in recent years has been equality for women, who now have far greater lifestyle choices. The male side of society has not changed by anything like the same amount; men just don't have the same degree of flexibility. Reports of men who cross-dress still appear in the newspapers, but with less sensationalism than previously. It does not help when the reporter does not know the

difference between a Transvestite, a Transsexual person, or a Drag Queen. Caution is still called for however. As a recent television documentary showed it is still possible for a Transvestite to lose their job.

What is to be done?

Dressing activity has to be managed, often in the context of family or partnerships, just as every other responsibility in life. There is no magic pill to swallow to cure transvestism, because it isn't an illness, it is a behaviour pattern. Getting the balance right is really important. Time and finance have to be balanced with all the other demands of life in exactly the same way as family, work, the next game of golf, or renewing next year's football season ticket.

Who to tell?

Caution is the keyword here. Once you have told someone something it can't be untold. Should you raise the subject with your wife, parents, friends or workmates? Honesty is important, but be sure of your facts and careful of your motive in "telling" and whom you tell. Is that remark you heard at work, or with a group of friends, really a dig at your little secret, or is it a totally innocent remark with no personal implications for the Cross-dresser? It is far better to share thoughts and feelings with others of the same persuasion, rather than those who might have preconceived ideas of which one is not aware.

Am I gay?

Are football fans drunks and violent people? True some are, but the majority are not. There are gay Transvestites, but they are a minority. Most gay men who dress as females are drag queens who parody women, rather than attempting to emulate them. Support groups will tell you that the spread of sexual preference across their membership is the same as for the population at large. This does not stop the average person on the street coming to

the wrong conclusion. The thought process runs along this sort of line. "A woman wearing a skirt attracts men, therefore a man wearing a skirt will attract other men, and therefore must be gay." Women wear jeans, but it is not generally to attract other women.

Am I on my own?

No! Emphatically not! The very nature of crossdressers' behaviour makes it very difficult to come up with accurate figures. Estimates suggest that one in a hundred men will cross-dress to some degree. It has been suggested that as many as one in ten men have an item of women's underwear tucked away, or that they discreetly 'borrow'. Crossdressers are not a secret society, but a society with secrets.

Is it a fetish?

No, crossdressing in itself isn't. Almost anything can be identified as a fetish object, including female underwear; the more common items are silk, leather, rubber and PVC. Crossdressers may identify certain items of their wardrobe as giving an erotic feeling, but intrinsically the motivation is different.

Partners

Like the rest of the population most TVs are heterosexual, married or partnered. Many women feel threatened by their man's dressing-up. It is important to be considerate and that issues and boundaries be agreed.

Conclusion

Gender is a complex subject. It is not possible to give the answer to all the questions in this leaflet. If you would like further information please get in touch with one of the support groups listed here, call our help line, or write to us, **enclosing an SAE.**