

Coping
with
Crossdressing

Tools & Strategies
For Partners In
Committed Relationships

4th Edition

JoAnn Roberts, Ph.D.

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To every couple who struggles with crossdressing in their relationship,
I dedicate this book to you in the hope that you will find the way to
make it work.

And to Dr. Roger Peo, for his help, his insights, his comments, but most
importantly, his friendship.

ISBN: 1-880715-12-0

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Forward

4th Edition

I am very grateful to many people for their contributions and support.

First, I need to express my deepest affection and love for Jaini, who
so loves every part of me. She encouraged me to edit this book into its
current edition. She's my true partner in every possible sense of the
word: best-friend, lover, business associate, and spouse. Come what
may, my love.

I'd like to thank Betty, my ex-spouse of 33 years. She did her utmost
to accept my crossdressing while I attempted to understand it myself.
She bore the brunt of my explorations. It was very, very difficult at
times. In the end, we grew apart emotionally and divorced. I wish her
the happiness I've found.

Next are two professionals that I also consider close friends; Dr.
William R. Stayton, and Dr. Carol Cobb-Nettleton. They helped set the
stage and taught me how to talk to and listen to my partner.

I am also indebted to my friends Denise Mason in Connecticut,
Ginny Knuth (now deceased) in San Francisco, Paula Jordan Sinclair
and Angela Gardner in Philadelphia for their inputs.

My sincerest gratitude goes to Jane Ellen and Frances Fairfax of Tri-
Ess, Vanessa S., author of *The Cross & The Crossdresser*, Angela
Gardner (again) and Denise Mason and her S.O. (again) and to
Vanessa and Linda Kaye for their special essays included in this fourth
edition.

Finally, special mention must be made here of the contributions of
Roger Peo, Ph.D. Dr. Peo worked closely with crossdressers and their
partners, helping them resolve their issues. He wrote extensively on
the subject. Dr. Peo provided much critical input in the beginning
stages of this work and helped reorganize the final draft. I am deeply
indebted to him for his time, effort and concern. Dr. Peo died in 1994
and he has been sorely missed.

JoAnn Roberts
July 2004

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Introduction

This book is about coping with crossdressing in a committed relationship. It discusses some of the background related to the psychological and emotional need of a transvestite to crossdress and it discusses the issues in a relationship that center on the crossdressing activity. I stress the word "activity." Most importantly, it offers ideas and strategies that will allow committed partners to deal openly with crossdressing issues and build a stronger, lasting relationship.

Most people want to have a meaningful and loving relationship with another person and transvestites are no exception. But most transvestites fear that discovery of their crossdressing behavior will result in rejection by their chosen partner. So, not wanting to chance ridicule and rejection, they consciously keep it a secret from their partner. This is a choice with potentially drastic consequences as we shall see later.

Some transvestites believe that marriage or a similar committed relationship will "cure" them of their need to crossdress. This is rarely, if ever, the case and the need invariably continues. As a relationship progresses, the transvestite is faced with a dilemma; should the behavior be revealed, or should it continue to be concealed? On the positive side for disclosure is openness and honesty in the relationship. On the negative side is the possible loss of intimacy in the relationship. A fact that strongly argues for disclosure is that, sooner or later, the transvestite's partner is going to find out.

Transvestites who choose to share the information of their crossdressing can expect a variety of responses, from an immediate walk-out at the worst to complete acceptance at the best. But, even in the best of circumstances, the revelation of crossdressing generally alters the relationship permanently.

A Brief History of Crossdressing

Crossdressing exists and has existed in every culture throughout history. In many cultures, it was viewed as a benign activity. In some cultures, American Indians for example, crossdressers and transgendered people were viewed as special, spiritual people able to be in touch with the best of both masculine and feminine human traits. In many primitive cultures, a Shaman (the medicine man) used crossdressing as part of their religious rituals.

In the middle ages, crossdressing was not the sole province of males. There are many examples of crossdressing women. Indeed, several female saints of the Catholic church were first canonized as males and later discovered to be females. In fact, there are more historical references to women masquerading as men rather than vice-versa during this period. Although men often burlesqued the role of women, they rarely attempted a public gender change as did the women.¹

There is historical evidence throughout Western culture that crossdressing was prevalent in all modern societies. It is known that Elizabethan theatre prohibited women from appearing on the stage and all female parts were played by male actors. Crossdressing or female impersonation on the stage has long been a part of the artistic world. In more modern times, female impersonation was not only accepted, it was elevated as an art-form. At the beginning of this century, Julian Eltinge was so popular as a female impersonator on stage that a theatre was named after him in New York City. It was only after the World War I that crossdressing on the stage began to lose its popularity.

However popular crossdressing was on stage, it was almost never acceptable on the street when indulged by the common man. The case of Bolton and Park in Victorian England is a cause célèbre involving two young men who were prosecuted for crossdressing in public.

It was not until the nineteen twenties that Magnus Hirschfeld published his monumental study of public and private crossdressers and coined the term transvestite.² His work was lost during the war and psychology was deprived of his observations until the nineteen fifties when it was rediscovered.

Meanwhile, acts of crossdressing took on negative connotations after World War I for reasons that are still unclear. But there was certainly a shift in society's view of masculinity, femininity and the roles of men and women. Crossdressing was driven underground and there it remained until the early nineteen seventies when Virginia Prince began to make the rounds of television and radio talk shows. Prince is considered the modern Grande Dame of crossdressers. (She's still alive and kicking at 93. Hi Ma!)

There were others who followed in Prince's footsteps and in the late nineteen eighties, a community of crossdressers emerged, forming independent support groups, at first, around the world, and later integrating into networks that communicate extensively with each other.

In the nineteen nineties, crossdressing has reappeared as somewhat publicly acceptable behavior. Numerous positive articles have appeared in such mainstream publications as *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Allure*. Even *Playboy* magazine took note of RuPaul, a drag queen pop diva. A major historical and cultural work was published by a noted Harvard professor in which it is stated that we could not have a "culture" without crossdressing.³

By the mid-nineties, movies with non-pathological crossdressing as the central theme appeared, such as *Just Like A Woman* (1992), and *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (1994). Actor Jaye Davidson was

nominated for an Academy Award for portraying a transgendered person in the critically acclaimed film *The Crying Game* (1992). These films were followed by a flurry of others as Hollywood jumped on the crossdressing bandwagon. Robert Altman's *Ready To Wear* (aka *Pret A' Porte*, 1994) features Danny Aiello as a crossdressing fashion buyer for a major department store. Johnny Depp appeared in the biopic *Ed Wood* (1994). Mr. Wood, best known for his "Z" movie *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, was also the producer of *Glen or Glenda* and was himself a crossdresser. In the twentieth-first century, crossdressing has become so mainstream that even African-American actors are using it in comedies. There's been *Juwanna Mann* (2002), *Big Mama's House* (2000) with Martin Lawrence, and Shawn and Marlon Wayans star in a movie where these two black FBI agents impersonate two white socialites (*White Chicks*, 2004). African-American men in drag as part of a mainstream movie is a major big deal. Of course, average white guys still do it for laughs, too, as in *Sorority Boys* (2002). In each of these movies, the men learn that their feminine side eventually makes them a better human being, which, of course, was the point in Dustin Hoffman's 1982 movie *Tootsie*.

While the above gives hope that crossdressers and other transgendered people are losing their stigma, the other side of the cultural balance beam is weighed down by a sharp rise in political conservatism and religious fundamentalism. In 1995, many futurists expected this trend would continue as we moved into the new millennium. Sadly, they were right. The Neo-Conservative movement has raised intolerance to new levels and homeland security poses untold problems for all transgendered people, crossdressers included.

The rise of the Internet in the late 90's has had a huge impact on our society and culture. Now, people looking for crossdressing information have to look no farther than their home computer. There are even specific websites for the significant other of cross-

dressers [<http://www.tri-ess.org/spice/CDSO/CDSO.htm>]. While I'm mentioning the Internet, you might want to visit my site [<http://www.cdspub.com/>] and Transgender Forum [<http://www.tgforum.com/>].

Until our society becomes fully enlightened about transgendered people and the act of crossdressing, there will still be problems in relationships due to cultural and religious bias against any sort of behavior that seems "different" from the mainstream.

Footnotes

1. *Cross Dressing, Sex & Gender*: Vern L. Bullough & Bonnie Bullough, Univ. of Pa. Press, 1993
2. *Transvestites* (Die Transvestiten) the erotic drive to crossdress, Magnus Hirschfeld, M.D., translated by Michael A. Lombardi-Nash, Ph.D., Prometheus books, Buffalo, New York, 1991
3. *Vested Interests, Crossdressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber, Ph.D., Routledge, London & New York, 1992

Chapter 1

Working Definitions

Nothing seems to disturb society more than when something is discovered to be different from the rest of the so-called "normal" world. Is it any surprise then that behavior that society deems appropriate for the opposite sex should cause so much havoc in our personal lives? Acceptance of differences begins with understanding and to understand transvestism we need to have a common base of information. In this section I will define certain transgender behaviors in simple terms. These are not to be considered all inclusive, but they'll do.

Crossdressing

Crossdressing is the act of wearing garments appropriate to the opposite sex. Crossdressing is commonly used synonymously with transvestism. In the strictest technical sense, it is not the same thing. Crossdressing is an activity, like running or swimming, and, as such, many different types of people crossdress for many different reasons. An actor may crossdress for a role in a play (e.g., Charlie's Aunt), a female impersonator crossdresses for a living (e.g., RuPaul as a drag diva), a restaurant requires its staff (male and female) to wear tuxedos, or a fashion fad has teenage girls wearing men's boxer shorts as outerwear. These examples are instances of crossdressing, but none have anything to do with transvestism.

Transvestism

Transvestism is a Latin term that literally means "to crossdress." So, a transvestite is someone who crossdresses. Confused? Join the crowd. There is an important addition to the definition of a trans-

vestite, however. A person (male or female) is a transvestite (TV) if he/she crossdresses for psychological, emotional or erotic pleasure. In other words, transvestites crossdress but not all crossdressers are transvestites; the important ingredient being the psychological, emotional or erotic satisfaction.

Initially, transvestism was treated by many therapists as a sexual fetish. After all, the only way therapists even knew about transvestism was through those who came to them for therapy. A person has a sexual fetish if he/she can't become sexually aroused without a fetish object, here female attire. It is easy to see how the link between transvestism and fetishism was made by early analysts. Almost all transvestism has erotic roots. For the male transvestite, the act of crossdressing becomes linked to emotional and sexual release and, at least early on, is usually accompanied by masturbation. Curiously, transvestites who are more active on a social basis seem to dress more and more for emotional satisfaction and less and less for sexual pleasure. This is now recognized by the professional therapeutic community and "transvestic fetishism" has replaced "transvestism" as a diagnosis for the inability to become aroused unless crossdressed. The latter is considered a paraphilia, a mental disorder. Transvestism (i.e., crossdressing), in and of itself, is not considered a mental illness by the professional therapeutic community, especially if the crossdresser is not suffering clinically significant distress as a result of crossdressing.

Transvestism is an activity practiced almost exclusively by males in our current culture. (We may get an insight into why in a later section.) Since women in our society today have almost total freedom in their choice of apparel, female transvestites are rare birds, mostly because they are so difficult to spot. Therefore, when I use the term "transvestite" in this book, I am talking about males who crossdress as women for erotic or emotional satisfaction.

Most transvestites are heterosexual, just as most males are heterosexual. There are, however, bisexual and homosexual trans-

vestites contrary to what some people would have you believe. A person's sexual identity develops along with their gender identity, but sex role (or partner preference) is not directly linked to gender role. There are masculine and feminine homosexuals, just as there are masculine and feminine heterosexuals. For transvestites, clothes make the woman. It is both the visual image and the tactile sensations that create the pleasure in crossdressing. This is important in distinguishing a transvestite from a transsexual.

Transsexualism

A person is a transsexual if they have a deep-seated belief that their gender identity does not match their physical identity. The clichés are "a woman trapped in a man's body" or "a man trapped in a woman's body." Transsexuals (TS) have been in society throughout history. It is only in recent times that the medical profession has had the ability to do anything to help them. Additionally, it is now recognized that there are at least two distinct types of people who present themselves as transsexuals. These have been noted as Primary and Secondary Transsexuals.

Primary Transsexuals are generally believed to have a life-long fixed and consistent gender identity that is opposite to their physical sex. Secondary Transsexuals are generally believed to be persons who, after a long "career" of transvestism, seek gender reassignment in response to some emotional or personality crisis. There are some professionals who believe that Secondary Transsexualism is treatable with psychotherapy. It is estimated by some gender clinics that about 30% of all males who seek sex reassignment are Secondary Transsexuals.

The prescribed treatment for Transsexualism is Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). Unlike transvestism, which is more predominant in males but not unheard of in females, transsexualism seems to occur about equally in males and females alike. The most famous transsexuals are Male-to-Female reassignments that have been sensa-

tionalized by the media, e.g., Christine Jorgensen, Renee Richards, and Caroline Cossey (Tula).

The process leading to reassignment is long, expensive and emotionally difficult. It is designed to make sure that those people presenting themselves for reassignment surgery are really transsexuals. There are many people who believe that reassignment surgery will be the answer to all their problems when all SRS can do is remove one barrier that prevents them from finding real solutions. Guidelines exist for the psychological and physical treatment of transsexualism. Clinics have been set up to administer the guidelines and assist transsexuals seeking reassignment.

Reassignment surgery is an art rather than a science. The risks are great and there are often post-surgical complications. The risk factors depend largely on the experience and skill of the surgeon. While both the transsexual and the surgeon see SRS as a necessary surgical intervention, unfortunately, many medical insurance providers do not. They classify SRS as Cosmetic Surgery or Experimental Surgery and therefore it is not covered by many medical plans. Depending upon where, when, and who does the SRS, cost of the surgery alone can range from \$8000 to \$12,000. The total cost of reassignment, including therapy, hormone treatment, electrolysis, and surgery can be upwards of \$50,000 to \$100,000.

For most transsexuals, crossdressing is not of major importance. The visual image is not as powerful as the mental image they have of themselves in their proper gender identity. With a transvestite the need to crossdress is episodic (frequent and repetitive), for a primary transsexual the dissatisfaction with their physical sex is chronic (all the time). This is the most distinguishing difference between the two.

Transgenderist

For completeness, this category of transgender behavior is included which is relatively new, in a historical sense. About thir-

ty-five years ago, Virginia Prince, author, educator and co-founder of the Society for the Second Self (Tri-Ess) made a decision to live "full-time" in the role of a woman in society. But (and this is an important distinction) Virginia did not seek sex reassignment and to this day has not done so. She coined the term "transgenderist" to describe someone who has changed gender roles but does not wish to change their sex role or their sexual anatomy.

Today, the "transgenderist" alternative to sex reassignment surgery is a choice made by many people who would otherwise have sought SRS in the past. Possibly the most famous transgenderist in recent history is Billy Tipton, a celebrated jazz musician. Mr. Tipton, who had a wife and adopted children, was discovered to be a female upon his death. There are transgenderists throughout our society, both male and female. You just cannot detect most of them and would never guess they were anything other than what they seem to be on the surface.

Chapter 2

Sex & Gender...

the confusion continues

Sex can be a most confusing concept. In the English language the word "sex" has come to have so many different meanings to different people. Is it any wonder that "sex" and "gender" get confused?

Sex refers to the physical manifestations of our genetically programmed body. Gender refers to our behavior as determined by our sex. They are related but separate.

Sex

There is no one "right" way to define sex. Usually we rely on external appearance (gender cues) to decide someone's sex. Obviously, when we start dealing with people who crossdress this means of determination may lead to an erroneous conclusion. Another way to determine sex is by examination of genitals and other physical sex characteristics. This is usually done at birth when the attending physician examines the infant and informs the parents, "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" There have been situations, however, where the doctor has made a mistake and eventually it is discovered that the baby "boy" is really a girl and vice versa. So, examination of the genitals is not always reliable. Finally, with scientific instruments and tests, we can look into the depths of the human body and examine the 23rd pair of chromosomes in the body cells (somatic sex). If we find an XX pair, we declare the person female. If we find an XY pair we declare the person male.

So, what happens then when we find a single X (X0) or an XXY? These combinations are known to occur, and it is the study of these abnormalities that give us some insight into human sexual develop-

ment. Are we dealing with males, females, or who-knows-what in these cases? The answer is not simple and ultimately will be defined by the person themselves as he/she begins to express their gender identity. For most people, gender identity will be congruent (the same as) with their physical/somatic sex. When physical/somatic sex and gender identity are different transgender behavior results.

Sex Roles

Perhaps it is easier to use sex roles as a way of defining male and female. The male sex role is to impregnate. That is to say the male of a species creates sperm to fertilize eggs produced by the female of the species. The female has several sex roles. They are: ovulation (produce eggs), lactation (produce milk), and menstruation (shed unfertilized eggs). Since mammals first appeared on the earth these sex roles have not changed. Sex roles, based on anatomical sex characteristics, are the only real basis for defining male and female. Every other type of sexual behavior is up for grabs. What we often mistake as appropriate male/female sex roles are really gender roles, and gender roles are constantly being defined and redefined by the social structure around us.

Sexual Orientation

Now it starts to get really interesting. To propagate the species, males must be sexually attracted to females so they may impregnate eggs. In all forms of animal life, except humans, this mating urge is driven by a biological clock. Humans, on the other hand, enjoy the ability to have sex for pleasure, almost anytime they want. It is one of the few things that set us apart from other animals. We also have the option of choosing our sex partners. Usually, a male chooses a female, and though the sex act may be for pleasure, occasionally a female becomes pregnant. But, because humans are so different and so much more complex than other animals, there are variations in choice of sex partner. Not every male

is sexually attracted to every female and vice versa. Human sexual orientation is defined by the body image that causes arousal. For most people that body image is one of the opposite sex, while for other people it is the body image of their own sex. Hence the terms hetero-sexual (different sex) and homo-sexual (same sex). If a person is equally attracted to both the same and opposite body images, then the term is bi-sexual (two sexes). Sexual orientation develops along with our sexual identity, but it is not determined by our physical sex or sex role.

Gender Roles

When we start talking about gender we need to use terms like masculine and feminine, not male and female. Why? Because these gender descriptors can be equally applied to either sex, male or female, depending on what we wish to imply about an individual. A positive statement might be, "He is very masculine." A negative statement might be, "She is very masculine."

Despite one's physical or anatomical sex, which is set by nature's hand, a person learns his/her gender role from cues given by society. It is that set of behaviors which society says typifies a male or female. Thus, boys play with fire trucks and girls play with dolls. Gender roles vary by culture and by history. In modern American society, female gender roles have changed markedly in the last twenty-five years. To be sure, male gender roles have changed too, but much less so.

Gender role is usually the outward expression of one's gender identity. It is from a person's gender role (outward behavior) that we begin to make assumptions (often erroneous) about their gender identity, their sexual orientation, and ultimately their anatomical sex. Our society today is heterosexist. Society assumes all men are sexually attracted to women and all women are sexually attracted to men until an individual's behavior suggests the contrary. For example, a male may be effeminate by current

social standards yet be exclusively heterosexual. But, because of our social definition of what is appropriately masculine and feminine, we may assume, incorrectly, that this male is homosexual.

Social politics play a large part in defining acceptable gender roles. In our male dominated Western society, it has always been acceptable to aspire toward male gender roles, even if the aspirant is a female (although with severe limitations). Conversely, it has never been completely acceptable for a male to aspire toward female gender roles. This is the source of guilt and shame over transgender behavior when a male or female steps over the societal boundaries and “bucks the system.”

Gender Identity

So, a person’s gender role is a set of behaviors which society says are acceptable based on that person’s sex (and sex role). When we are comfortable with and accept this societal definition of our gender role, it is because our gender identity is the same as our sex. Gender identity is the personal, psychological, and emotional identification with our sex role. A “normal” male (as defined by his physical sex) acts masculine (gender role) and is psychologically comfortable with his male sex role (gender identity). Whether he ever engages a female sexually (sex role) is irrelevant.

When there is a conflict between society’s definition of gender role and our own idea of our gender identity, we may experience what is termed “gender dysphoria”, or a feeling of being ill at ease with our gender/sex roles.

Some professionals do not separate gender role and gender identity. They see these as two sides of a single coin. They are intimately related. Just as there is no single way to define a person’s sex, there is no single way to define a person’s gender.

Sex and gender—one is physical, one is emotional—and they combine in ways that are almost endless.

Chapter 3

How It Starts...

– Maybe –

Human beings are curious by nature. We have an insatiable need to understand how things work. Human sexual development is an area that only recently has received much attention. Research in this area has given us some clues why some people exhibit transgender behavior.

How Sex Is Determined

We all learned in high school biology class that the Y chromosome from the male sperm cell combined with an X chromosome from a female egg causes the egg to develop into a male child. Until just recently, science did not know how the Y chromosome performed this miracle. By studying people with unusual chromosome sets, some light has been shed on this. Not only do scientists know that the Y chromosome is responsible for “maleness” but they even know location of the gene on the chromosome. In fact, the Y chromosome has been mapped since the first edition of this book was published.

Beginning with the biblical account of the creation of humans in Genesis, society always assumed that being male was the “natural” state of things and that “female” was somehow derived from male as an afterthought. This is known as the Adam Principle or “Man first, Woman second.” (What would you expect from the men who wrote these biblical stories?) In ancient Greece, for example, it was believed that humans only came in one variety; male. Women were simply “underdeveloped” men with inverted penises.

Beginning in the 1940s and up through the early 1990s,

research into sex determining genes indicated that a special portion of the Y chromosome created "maleness." This section of the chromosome was dubbed the "SRY" gene. If the SRY gene was absent or faulty, the fetus would develop into a female. This became known as the Eve Principle. Stated another way, if a fetus is not subjected to masculinizing hormones, it will develop into a female. The Eve Principle was founded on the concept that being "female" was the "natural" or default state of humans and it took a special set of circumstances to create a male from this female.

In late 1994, research stemming from the SRY work, led researchers to discover a "femaleness" determining gene found, not surprisingly, on the X chromosome. A group of four patients studied were found to have the SRY gene intact, yet they exhibited varying degrees of feminization. Three of the four had obviously feminine genitals and the fourth had ambiguous genitalia. All four had been raised as females. The scientists, studying the chromosomes of these people, discovered a doubled DNA pattern which is now called DSS, for "dosage sensitive sex reversal" gene. It seems this double-dose of the DSS gene was enough to override the SRY masculinizing signals and the fetuses developed into females rather than males. This discovery caused a revision of the Eve Principle.

Contrary to the thinking based on the Eve Principle, it is hard work (biologically speaking) to create and maintain a female. It now appears that two DSS genes are required for normal female biological functioning. There are some females who are XO, Turner's Syndrome. They are missing the second X chromosome and although they are physically female they do not develop in a normal way. They only have one DSS gene.

So, what we now know is that every fetus has the potential to develop into either a male or female. There are clusters of cells within each fetus that can become either a penis or a clitoris and cells that will differentiate into testes or ovaries. If a Y chromosome with a functional SRY gene is present, the fetus will be pushed

toward developing into a male. If only the DSS gene is present on a pair of X chromosomes, the fetus will be pushed toward developing into a female. But, as seen from the research on both the SRY and DSS genes, a fetus with two X chromosomes that would normally develop into a female, might become a male if there is a portion of the SRY gene present. Conversely, a fetus with XY chromosomes that would normally develop into a male, might develop as a female if the DSS gene is doubled on the X chromosome.

The above research is cause for great speculation on the origins of transgender behavior. Perhaps the first clues into truly understanding transsexualism are hidden in the SRY and DSS genes. Maybe, after differentiation into male or female, there are other processes that masculinize or feminize the brain; processes of which we presently know nothing. If such a fundamental process as defining a fetus as male or female can be disrupted, what can happen to the developing neural complex we call the brain? At present, there is not one single shred of evidence in brain-sex research that predicts transgender behavior. But, as we've seen with the SRY and DSS genes, we just don't have all the information we need to make any concrete conclusions.

The Brain As A Sex Organ

It is impossible to discuss sexuality and gender roles without discussing the sexual brain. The brain is the second largest sex organ, right after the skin. Most of us never think (no pun intended) of the brain that way. It is the central switchboard for all the signals and stimuli that get us turned-on.

Everybody "knows" that men and women don't think alike, but it is only recently that we've been able to see why this is true. The human brain exhibits sexual dimorphism, which is a fancy way to say there are differences between a male's brain and a female's brain. A controversial study in 1974 pointed this out dramatically while reporting statistically significant physical differences between

the brains of males and females. (The female brain had a particular section that was larger than the male's.) Previously, it had been thought that the brain was "sexless," even in very early theories that concluded that women's brains were smaller and, therefore, simply less developed than a man's brain.

Since 1974, the study of brain-sex has revealed many other sex-related differences. Exactly what these differences mean are not clear, but these differences have nothing to do with intelligence. The major differences are in the way the brain is organized and, consequently, the way in which men and women process information. For example, men, generally speaking, are more visually oriented, while women are more tactile. Guess why Playboy and Penthouse are so successful catering to men.

Using the Eve Principle, we assumed that a developing fetus started with a female brain. Certain female instincts and female behaviors or "scripts" were thought inherent in this developing brain. For a developing male fetus, these scripts needed to be deleted and replaced with appropriate male scripts. The two processes were called defeminization and masculinization and seemed to lend a credible explanation for transgender behavior in males, although it never adequately described transgender females.

Now, however, it is not clear exactly what happens in the developing brain. Does it begin sexless and the DSS or SRY genes set into motion the scripting processes? Is the default brain female anyway? We don't know. Nothing is ever as simple as it first appears.

Nature vs. Nurture

For years, students of human behavior argued whether our actions were determined by our nature (heredity) or by our nurturing (the way we are raised). As is usually the case, the answer seems to lie somewhere between, at least for transgender behavior. The "stage" is set in the developing fetus, but the "play" unfolds after birth, and it is in several "acts."

Sometime between birth and the age of four years we begin to develop our sense of self, who we are. We begin to recognize the differences between males (boys) and females (girls) and we identify ourselves with one or the other sex. Simultaneously, we begin to learn the proper social behavior for our physical sex. In other words, society tries to teach us our gender role. (Little boys don't play with dolls.) All this information flooding our newly discovered sense-of-self is filtered, however unconsciously, by that sex organ between our ears, the brain. The brain sorts the information about behavior into sets. Some behaviors we accept for our own gender identity and are coded positively (Implementation), while others are rejected as inappropriate for ourselves and are coded negatively (Complementation). The remainder are behaviors that we code as neutral, acceptable for either gender (gray area). This scheme is shown in the Figure 1.

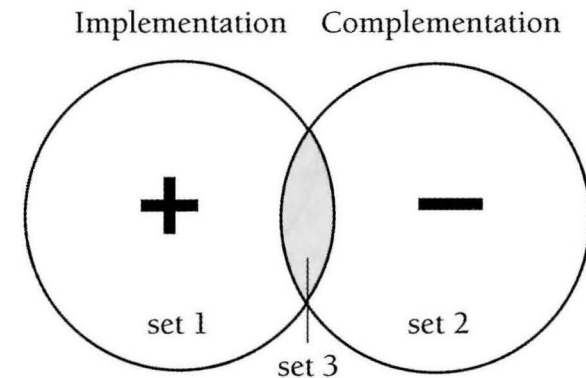


Figure 1: Implementation & Complementation

The diagrams for a "normal" male and female are shown in Figure 2 on the next page. (It is interesting to note most researchers agree that the gray area is increasing for both males and females.)

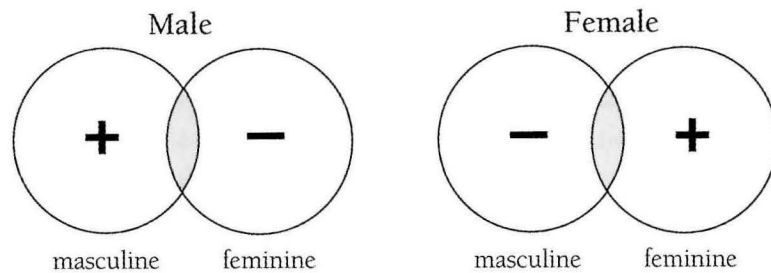


Figure 2: Coding Schemes for "Normal" Males & Females

Now, let's apply this model to transgender behavior. Assume a biological female (XX) who rejects feminine behaviors but accepts the masculine ones and has no gray area. The diagram might look like Figure 3.

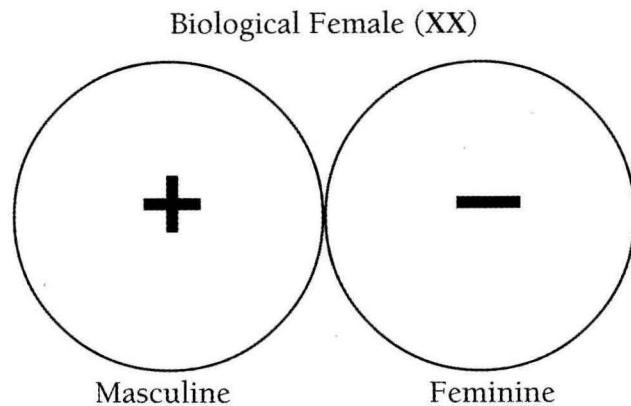


Figure 3: Coding for a Female-to-Male Transsexual

We would say that this person is a female to male (F-t-M) transsexual. Her brain has rejected those behaviors which society says are appropriate for her gender role, based on her biological sex (female), and she has accepted those behaviors that fit more closely to her internal gender identity (male).

Let's take another possible case. Assume a biological male (XY) who accepts both masculine and feminine behaviors. The diagram

might look like Figure 4.

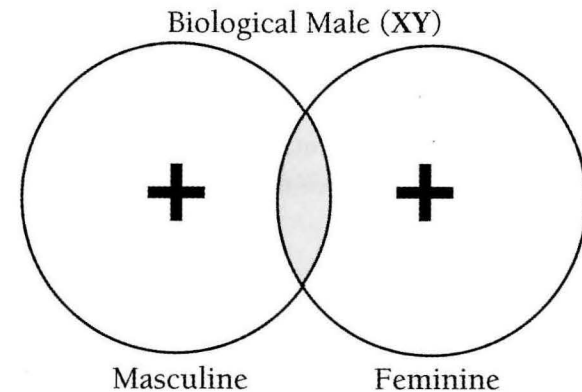


Figure 4: Coding for a Male Transvestite

This brain has accepted and coded behaviors that are masculine and also coded a set of behaviors that are feminine but acceptable only in a specific circumstance, i.e., while crossdressed. There is no confusion over gender identity but rather over gender roles. In this instance, we would label this person a transvestite.

So what does all this coding stuff mean? In essence, it means that it takes both the prenatal influence during fetal development to set up the filters in the brain and the environment around us, as we grow and develop as a person, to trigger transgender behavior. An appropriate analogy might be the development of speech. Almost all of us are born with the ability to speak, but the language we learn depends upon where we grow up in the world.

You can begin to see just how complex transgendered behavior really is. There is just no simple way to explain it all, in its every aspect and manifestation. All the above describes current theories about how transgendered behavior might develop. It does not answer the question why it happens. We may never know why, so for the time being take what little comfort there is in knowing how.

Summary

The rest of this book will deal with crossdressing related problems in a committed, heterosexual relationship where the male partner is a transvestite. Some of what I'll say is applicable to same-sex relationships, so I hope that gay and lesbian partners may find help here too. But, my bias is toward male-female couples, so please don't be offended.

Let's get to the issues.

Chapter 4

Social Issues

The first place that a transvestite runs into problems is with the signals he receives from society. As a transvestite, he suffers from a social stigma and a loss of status.

Stigma

In our western culture, it is acceptable for women to wear a variety of clothing, from sexy and sensual (slinky dresses), to utilitarian and functional (jeans and sweaters). Females have the opportunity to express their innermost feelings and personality through the clothes they choose to wear in public.

In general, men do not have this option. Male attire is traditionally conservative; suits or jacket and tie for business, slacks and open collar shirt for more informal times. Flamboyant male attire, other than in a theatrical setting, is stereotypically associated with wild sexual activity and/or homosexual behavior. Although attitudes toward male casual attire has changed, it has not changed to the point where skirts and high heels are acceptable when worn by a male.

A male in traditional female clothing (skirt and blouse) is usually assumed to be homosexual, sexually perverted, and a generally undesirable person. He is assigned a social stigma for his crossdressing behavior. A female in traditional male clothing will not experience the same labeling process, unless she takes the crossdressing to extremes. Even then, it may be considered only "high fashion." In this respect, a female who crossdresses is less likely to experience a social stigma for her crossdressing behavior and is more likely to "get away with it." Periodically, high fashion raids

the man's closet and praises Menswear as the next "hot" trend. This never happens the other way around.

When we talk about the stigma of crossdressing, we have to look at the social politics involved. American society suffers a kind of schizophrenia. On the one hand, we highly value personal freedom and individuality as the foundations of our democracy. On the other, we ridicule anyone who is different from accepted cultural norms. In other words, we may express our personal freedom and individuality only within a specifically defined range. Express yourself outside that range and you risk being stigmatized as "different" and that equates to being weird, mentally ill or perverted. You only have to look at the current crop of parents, those same people who were the "hippies" and "flower children" of the '60s, clucking and shaking their heads at today's crop of teens who dress in the current teen-uniform-of-the-day to see the hypocrisy in our system of "freedom of expression." We had hoped for a more enlightened society by the end of the last century, but the rise of neo-conservatism means stigmatization issues remain a great concern.

Status

Being different from "normal" males, transvestites must deal with another issue, loss of status. Men tend to order their world in hierarchies. Look at our government. You don't even go that far, look at any male-dominated group structure. You see hierarchies everywhere. With the creation of hierarchy comes position and status. The higher up in the hierarchy a person is, the higher his/her status. Listen to any two men in casual conversation. They tend to talk in stories and one male tries to top the other's story with a better one. This is called "One-up-manship." The one who tells the better story has the higher status. Both men and women vie for status; they just do it in different ways.

Although women have made great strides in gaining equal status in our society, there is still a lingering notion among many that a

woman is less-capable than a man in a given situation. Therefore, any male who presents himself in a less-than-manly fashion automatically loses status. For many male transvestites, this loss of status is a great source of guilt and shame.

Some people, male and female, are so concerned about status and the potential loss of it, that when they encounter a transvestite they immediately attack the person, either physically or emotionally. The one who attacks is threatened by the idea that anyone would willingly give up a position of status. That idea is dangerous and must be curtailed.⁴ People who are different and have lower status must be "contained," and, where possible, "eliminated." They should not be allowed to exist because they threaten the whole structure of the hierarchical society. So, we have fag-bashing, book burning, pornography trials and the like. These activities are attempts to suppress threats to the status quo, the male power structure. The most recent example of this is the political issue of gay marriage. Critics claim it will destroy the fabric of our society. In fact, happily married crossdressers and transsexuals put the lie to this claim. Nevertheless, it is no wonder, then, that transvestites are terrified of being discovered. The potential social consequences are frightening.

Footnotes

4. I was speaking to a class of undergraduates about crossdressing. Two men in the class were very quiet during my talk. The professor commented on their "unusual" silence as these two men were normally active participants. Both the professor and I pressed them about their reticence, whereupon both men became extremely uncomfortable. Eventually they both expressed themselves as totally dumbfounded why a man (me) would want to dress and act like a woman. They did not understand my behavior and, further, did not want to understand it. Crossdressing was totally alien to them. One remarked that the only reason he remained for my talk was that he was required to attend the class. These two men exhibited a mild form of the anti-social response to crossdressing. Perhaps it was because both men were African-American and therefore keenly aware of the issue of discrimination that they did not respond more aggressively to my presence. But clearly my crossdressing disturbed them deeply.

Perspective: Christianity, The Christian Church, And The Crossdresser

by Vanessa S.⁵

It is, I believe, extremely important that Christian crossdressers understand why we so often “beat ourselves up” on a psychological and spiritual basis. We tend to internalize negative self-images, usually at an early age, because of the socialization process that we traditionally undergo as biological males in our culture. Our self-concepts are formed and shaped by this process, and we often grow up feeling (and believing) that we are “bad”, “wrong”, or “sinful” because we have discovered a need to crossdress. Our society teaches us, starting at birth, that boys dress and behave in a certain way (remember the blue blankets for boys and the pink ones for girls?), and we quickly learn to avoid or deny what is considered feminine—at least outwardly. How many of us, in childhood, secretly yearned to dress and behave like a little girl from time to time? Yet, our already-internalized and culturally-instilled guilt simply would not allow that to occur on any sort of regular basis for most of us. On the whole, we grew up and were socialized as boys, with all the attendant expectations of dress and behavior. If we grew up in any type of conservative or fundamentalist religious system, the expectations we “learned” were typically even more intense and rigid. It is this rigidity, this mindset, that so often causes the emotional distress that many Christian crossdressers experience in their lives, and the spiritual confusion and anxiety that results is not unexpected. After all, if one feels an intrinsic need, in the form of crossdressing, to defy institutionalized conventions that one has “learned” all one’s life, the result is bound to be aggravated psychological, emotional, and/or spiritual difficulty and distress.

It is this sense of discomfort that psychologists call “dysphoria.” It is also true that crossdressers who are non-Christian may also suffer from “gender dysphoria” as a result of their cultural/socialization process. But it seems to me that Christian crossdressers carry something of a “double whammy” in that we are often discriminated against, not only by society in general, but by our own Church in particular. I find it ironic that the institution of the Church, which was intended to be a source of strength, comfort, acceptance, and love for all human beings, has through the centuries become instead a bulwark of intolerance, prejudice, and bigotry toward those it considers to be outside the pale of “righteousness” as defined by a literal and legalistic interpretations of Scripture and traditionally-based doctrine.

The crux of the issue for the Christian crossdresser, as I see it, is distinguishing between the concepts of the law, as exemplified by Leviticus and Deuteronomy 6 in the Old Testament, and the good news of the Gospel in the New Testament, which God has freely offered to us as a result of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. The law cannot save us. As fallible human beings, we can never completely fulfill the

requirements of the Old Testament law, so basing our relationship with God on compliance with that law is a fruitless and ultimately condemning endeavor.

The law condemns, while the Gospel is our only hope of salvation and reconciliation. Our salvation does not depend on something we do, therefore attempting to keep the law is pointless. Rather, the saving of our souls and the establishment of a right relationship with God is dependent upon what Jesus has already done for us in our stead. The good news of the Gospel is that we don’t have to do a thing—Jesus has taken care of that on our behalf. We have only to accept the reality of God’s wondrous gift in Christ Jesus, and we are thus entitled to a full and complete standing in relationship with God. There are no conditions or prerequisites that we have to fulfill, and there is nothing else that we crossdressers need to do in order to call ourselves “Christian.” The institutionalized Christian Church often tries to place prerequisites on us, and attempts to set up a series of qualifying steps that we must complete before we can be worthy of having a relationship with God. Dear sisters and brothers, there are no prerequisites—Christ has done away with them for us. All we need do is accept that amazing gift of grace.

As we attempt to comprehend the depth of the relationship that we are entitled to possess in God through the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we can learn to appreciate ourselves as unique, special creations of that God. We who crossdress have a myriad of reasons to be grateful, happy, and proud of who and what we are. Of these reasons, the most important one is the fact that God loves us, and we can thus be empowered to love others as well as ourselves. Love is the only thing that will last—throughout eternity, love will always be the one constant. Hatred, bigotry, prejudice, and intolerance will, by their very nature, eventually die. Those actions and attitudes are ultimately rooted in spiritual death. God’s love for us, however, will never cease, and we can know and experience the richness and completeness to be found in such an all-encompassing love. May we, as crossdressers who are Christians, learn to embrace and express the love of God in every aspect of our lives.

Footnotes

5. Vanessa is the author of *The Cross And The Crossdresser: Personal Reflections On Crossdressing From A Christian Perspective*, CDS, King of Prussia, Pa., 1993, [<http://www.cdspub.com/>].

6. Deuteronomy (22:5) says, “A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.” According to the Interpreter’s Bible 22:5 is a law “directed against the simulated changes of sex in Canaanite religion.” It seems designed to prevent the Hebrews from participating in pagan rituals. Idolatry was a major offense to the Hebrews. This is the only reference to crossdressing in the Bible.

Perspective: Living In A Box

by JoAnn Roberts

The newspaper carried a story today of an 11 year old boy who was kept in a wooden box by his step-grandmother, because she feared he was brain damaged. The boy was found to be mentally normal.

When I read the story in the October 10, 1989, issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, I almost started to cry. What an ignominious way to live! How has that poor child's psyche been damaged? What will happen to him in later life? The whole thing gave me pause to consider my life.

As I thought about that child, I realized that I, too, at one time, lived in a box. My box was made from a variety of woods; bigotry, racism, sexism and parochialism were a few. The nails holding it all together were fear, loathing, ignorance and despair. The wood was supplied, without charge, by the world around me and I pounded those self-made nails. Yes, my box was nailed shut from the inside. I hid the real me in that box for almost 32 years. The person that walked through the world was only a facade, a shadow-person built out of other people's expectations. Then one day something happened. The nails made of ignorance started to rust away. They were soon followed by those of fear.

Eventually, the nails were all gone and first one side then the other fell away from my box. I let free the real me. I faced the world for the first time and realized that I could be my own person. I could have original thoughts and feelings. I was not a puppet to be controlled.

I knew I could do almost anything I set my mind to and that ultimately, I could control my life. The key was acceptance of myself and acceptance of the responsibility for my actions. I understood that there is a basic human dignity within everyone and that dignity deserves respect. I resolved never to apologize to anyone for being me. And, I would consider carefully any criticism of others.

So, how many of you are still living in your own boxes? Isn't it about time for you to start pulling the nails free? Isn't it about time for you to kick the boards loose? And, isn't it about time for you to face the world and yourself with the truth?

There are no barriers except those you erect yourself, so tear them down. Look in the mirror and say to yourself, "I have the ultimate control and responsibility for my life." Then believe it and get on with the rest of your life. The past is immutable, so why worry over what cannot be changed? Look forward to the future and new goals. You will be amazed at how much you can accomplish if you will only believe in yourself.

There is no one in this world more deserving of your respect than yourself. For, if you cannot respect yourself, how can you possibly respect anyone else? And, how will you ever break out of your box before you mentally suffocate?

Chapter 5

How Transvestites Feel About Themselves

Transvestites often deal with a variety of internal feelings that they find very difficult to express openly. This chapter will try to put those feelings into words.

Self-Image

At the personal level, transvestites often have very a poor self-image, what is often termed low self-esteem, especially in early childhood. These feelings may come from "messages" sent by family members that the child is "bad" or "unworthy" of love. They also may come from an "inner" feeling that they are "different" and not really what they appear to be. They often experience guilt about their feelings and usually feel extreme loneliness. The loneliness comes from not being able to share their feelings with other people. They "just know" they will be rejected by family and friends because they are "different" and that must be bad. Add an additional burden of erotic arousal while crossdressing, as happens with most transvestites, and they begin to believe they are mentally ill. They carry this burden of guilt silently. Sometimes, the burden is so great they turn to alcohol or drugs for relief from their guilt and "sickness." In the extreme case, they may think about or even attempt suicide.

In reality, transvestites are not mentally ill. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition* of the American Psychiatric Association (1994) clearly states: "Neither deviant behavior, nor conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are mental disorders, unless the deviance or conflict is a symptom of a

dysfunction in the person..." (emphasis mine). Therefore, unless a transvestite is so upset about his crossdressing that he is suffering clinically significant distress, the APA does not consider a transvestite mentally ill, since the conflict is between the individual and what society thinks is normal attire for a male.

Unfortunately, being different, as I've said, even in today's society, can still be a significant source of conflict resulting in a poor self-image. This "unworthiness" makes many transvestites believe they are unlovable and this belief colors all their relationships. Even when they find partners who love and accept them, they have a difficult time accepting it. They may behave badly toward their partner, in a sense testing them, because they can't understand why anyone would want to love someone like themselves.

Some transvestites, because of low self-esteem, put themselves into relationships that are emotionally unhealthy. They may become involved with a partner that is abusive and cruel. They believe they deserve this treatment. This is probably why some transvestites are drawn to the idea of being dominated, or forced to crossdress. If someone else "makes" you crossdress, you are guilt-free. It's a head game they play with themselves.

Guilt

Transvestites who have not achieved self-acceptance carry a great burden of guilt for a variety of reasons. They feel badly about crossdressing because society says it's not "normal." They feel badly about keeping it a secret from their partner. It's like lying by omission. They feel badly about taking time away from their family to crossdress. They feel badly because they cannot share their real feelings openly with family and friends for fear of rejection or ridicule.

They feel badly if their crossdressing is erotic, because society teaches us that sex is dirty and sinful. And, they feel just as badly when they have to end an episode of crossdressing.

These feelings pile up inside the transvestite and feed an inner feeling of being guilty of some terrible crime. The guilt feelings then feed back to feelings of low self-esteem and the vicious circle is completed.

These feelings of low self-esteem can lead to other conditions, one of which is clinical depression. Such depression is a sign that counseling is needed. But, even this need not mean a transvestite is mentally ill. The APA estimates that over 75% of the population suffers from some form of depression at some time in their lives. So, the depressed transvestite with low self-esteem falls in the range of "normal" in this instance.

Isolation

Very early in their lives, most transvestites feel very isolated. Without fail, every transvestite I've ever spoken with says at one time, they thought they were the only person in the world who crossdressed. Try to imagine the immense feelings of loneliness and desperation that must cause. No one to share their feelings with. No one who could possibly understand. No one to turn to for help, or information, or consolation. This loneliness further feeds the fires consuming the transvestite's already low self-esteem.

It all comes down to fear of rejection and loss of love. Everyone needs to be loved by someone. Being loved means that we are worthy human beings. No love means worthlessness and that is equal to being bad. Bad people deserve to be punished. If no one is punishing us, we feel guilty about that too, which is a form of self-punishment. Yet, we are driven by our feelings and often reject love when it is offered because we feel unworthy. The key is to break the chain.

Chapter 6

Partner's Issues

Now we get to the heart of the matter. This chapter will examine the issues that many women have with their crossdressing husbands. Our society has rather rigid guidelines for appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. This stems from the Judeo-Christian ethic that forms the basis of modern western society.

We learn that boys are rough and tumble while girls are sweet and soft. Men must be strong and show little emotion, while women should be nurturing and caring.

When women cross these boundaries into masculine territory, society gives little thought to the excursion, unless it is to an extreme. On the other hand, let a man cross the boundary into feminine behavior and society unloads its full fury onto him. Because of this double standard, women have several related issues about their mate's crossdressing.

Guilt by Association

Many partners fear economic and social reprisals if their husband's crossdressing is discovered. This is not an unreasonable fear. In some job situations, the discovery of crossdressing behavior may be cause, however unjustified, for immediate dismissal. In cases where this dismissal might be actionable in a court of law, the transvestite does nothing because he would have to reveal his crossdressing for the public record. In the aerospace and defense industries, the Department of Defense has issued criteria for denial of certain clearances needed to work on special projects. Those criteria used to include transvestism. The rationale was that the stigma attached to transvestism makes the transvestite a target for potential blackmail. The government would not want to trust its secrets to people who might be blackmailed. A vicious cycle was set up

based on fear of what might happen. In the early 1990's several brave souls successfully challenged this criteria as wrong-headed thinking. The government's paranoia about transvestites was exactly what made them targets, not their crossdressing. In at least two cases of which I am personally knowledgeable, the people were allowed to retain their security clearances, in spite of the knowledge they were crossdressers. So, at least we have made some progress here.

But there are purely social repercussions to consider. How many partners and children want to be associated with someone society-at-large considers mentally ill and perverted? Friendships may be lost. Children will be teased unmercifully. The family becomes outcast. The social stigma attached to crossdressing can make a partner afraid to confide her fears and concerns to anyone else. She fears she will be ridiculed and ostracized for being a partner in such a relationship. This can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness and anger at the transvestite. We like to think that our society is more enlightened than that today, but, sadly, it's just not true.⁷

One might assume that partners in homosexual relationships would be more accepting of crossdressing behavior. This is simply not so. A homosexual partner may fear reinforcing the social stereotype that links homosexuality with behaviors associated with the other gender (the effeminate gay man, the masculine lesbian). So, they too have fear of social reprisals.

Transvestites and their partners must realize that there is an inherent goodness in each of us and that sex, sex role, sexual orientation, or gender role/identity have nothing to do with whether we are a moral, ethical or honorable person.⁸

We must learn self-love first, so that we can share ourselves with others and accept love in return. The things we fear the most are often only those barriers that we ourselves create in our minds.

There will be rejections to be sure, as there will always be people who would rather be ignorant than to have their values challenged and possibly overturned by enlightenment. Rejection may

come from anywhere, family, friends, spouse, and these must be dealt with on a case by case basis. To our great surprise and relief, many transvestites and their partners do not find the rejection they assume will naturally occur.

Sexual Orientation

Women who discover their husbands are transvestites often have doubts about their mate's sexual orientation. The most common reactions by heterosexual female partners are the fears that her transvestite husband might actually be a transsexual, or a homosexual who will engage in promiscuous sex, or a sexual deviate and potentially dangerous. Some of these preconceived notions are reinforced by stereotypes in film, e.g., *Psycho*, *Dressed To Kill*, and *Raising Cain*.

Sometimes, although not often, a wife's fears about transsexualism or sexual orientation prove to be true. In his book, *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Toward a Theory of Cross-Gender Behavior*, Richard Docter, Ph.D., discusses the dynamic nature of crossdressing behavior. It seems to move through stages. In a few cases—not many—the final stage is a declaration of being transsexual. Docter calls these men “secondary” transsexuals. A partner with a husband who is declaring himself a transsexual is in for a rough ride.

Also, some men are gay or bisexual but can't or won't admit it to themselves. They marry women to “fit in” as society expects of them. Crossdressing is an outlet for their homosexual desires and they may have sex with another man but only if they are crossdressed. By far, the majority of crossdressers are heterosexuals who remain faithful to their partners.

However, many partners of transvestites, eventually begin to question their own sexuality. They are in a relationship with a person that desires (at least on occasion) to appear and be treated as the opposite sex. Since male transvestism is intimately tied to eroticism, many male transvestites want to engage in sex with their partners while crossdressed.

What does that feel like for the woman? She might begin to wonder if she might not be a latent lesbian. That can be very scary for many women. Because of the taboos about same-sex activities in our sexually repressed culture, just the thought of homosexuality can cause some people to suffer severe mental anguish. Some men think that since women are the nurturers and primary caregivers in our culture, they should be able to handle crossdressing with no problems. More often than not, this is not true. Further, it is especially not true if the partner has low self-esteem herself.

Whatever the case, doubt about your own or your partner's sexuality and sexual orientation can put a serious additional strain on the relationship.

Loss of Intimacy

It is often remarked by transvestites that their crossdressing activities are harmless. This point of view is a selfish one; not surprisingly since transvestism is a narcissistic, selfish behavior. Quite often a transvestite will become so engrossed in his crossdressing that he begins to neglect the public and private social aspects of a committed relationship. Extraordinary amounts of time, energy, and frequently money are spent developing a “femme” alter-ego. This is time spent away from the family and it can be damaging to a relationship. I know some transvestites that spend three to four hours getting dressed in their “femme” costumes. Think of the other activities that could be done in that same time frame. A couple could go out to dinner and a movie in that time, or entertain friends at home. Any number of activities could be shared between two people, instead of monopolized by one. That's how many partners come to feel about crossdressing, a monopoly, and they resent it... a lot. More than any other crossdressing issue in a relationship, this is the one that does the most damage.

It's really no different from the guy who plops in front of the television on Sundays to watch all the ball games or the man who plays golf every day of the week. It's an obsessive response to a

deep-seated need and the idea is "more is better."

The partner of a transvestite in the throes of this self-involved discovery will often find herself an "outsider" and feeling neglected. This soon leads to resentment and more problems in the relationship.

As I said earlier, some transvestites want to engage in sex while crossdressed. If a partner finds this objectionable and resists, the transvestite may react by withdrawing his physical affection. After all, he has his "fantasy woman" who can please him in exactly the way he wants, no questions asked. Alienation of affection on both sides is the result. The degree of intimacy in a relationship is key to a woman's reaction.⁹

Seeing a transvestite on a television talk-show is one thing; finding out that you live with one is quite another.

Partner's Self-Esteem

Partners, too, can react to their spouse's crossdressing from a sense lowered self-esteem. They immediately ask, "What have I done wrong? How could he do this to me? What is wrong with me?" They immediately blame themselves for their mate's behavior. It doesn't matter that the transvestism was set in motion years before they met, they "know" it's their fault. Partners who react this way usually feel negatively about themselves to begin with and they transfer the "guilt" of the behavior to themselves. So, now we have two guilt-ridden people in a relationship and neither of them quite knows what to do about it.

Many women still define their self-worth and self-identity by the achievements of their spouses. It is no wonder, then, that a heterosexual woman may react negatively to her husband's crossdressing. She may feel that she has failed as a woman, a wife and a lover.

Competition

A partner also may feel she has to "compete" with her husband's feminine persona. She may be threatened by his crossdressing, par-

ticularly if he looks convincingly like a woman. Consider the damage done to a woman's ego if her husband looks more feminine than she does. Society keeps telling her that she must be thinner, sexier and must compete with other women to be desirable, now here's her spouse competing with her too.

Other often heard complaints are: "Why does he need to behave like a female?", "I feel like he's having an affair", and "Aren't I woman enough for him?" Unfortunately, these questions are terribly difficult to answer, but the partner's perceptions are correct: it's impossible to "compete" with a transvestite's fantasy woman, so don't try. It's better to find a way to accommodate "her", if possible.

Some partners feel that their position as the "woman-of-the-house" is threatened by a crossdressing mate. One woman complained that she liked to do the cooking and other household jobs typically ascribed as "women's work" and she resented her transvestite-husband "taking" those jobs from her. She was at a loss about her role in the relationship. In an intimate, committed relationship, if one partner takes on both gender roles, it may leave nothing for the other partner.

Partner Responses to Crossdressing Acceptance

Sometimes, a woman will express complete and total acceptance of her partner's crossdressing behavior. This may be due to a knowledge of transvestism gained from past personal experience, or because of a sincere belief that all people should be entitled to express themselves in any non-destructive manner. An accepting partner may realize that many of the good qualities that drew her to the transvestite are due to this transgendered nature. Many transvestites when permitted to openly express their feminine side in a relationship are very caring, sensitive and nurturing individuals and these qualities seem to "spill over" into the times when they are not crossdressed. An accepting partner also may not feel constrained by society's definitions of masculinity and femininity. The transves-

tite no longer has to "prove" his masculinity. He learns to be more affectionate and caring. Some women say they feel much closer to their transvestite-husbands; it makes him more interested in her and her feelings as a woman. Many transvestites feel more communicative when crossdressed. This eases open discussion between partners and teaches important communication skills. Believe it or not, there are many very happy TV-couples in the transgender community and the transvestite who has a caring, accepting spouse is a very lucky person indeed.

Some partners react mildly to their husband's need to crossdress, recognizing that the behavior is unusual but generally harmless, if managed properly. Initial acceptance by a partner or at least a willingness to learn and understand is often misinterpreted by the transvestite as total acceptance. He then assumes his partner will become more involved in his crossdressing activities, which may include requests to do things together when he is crossdressed, like shopping or dinner out. These attempts by the transvestite to involve his partner more actively in his behavior may be met with resistance. Many wives would prefer that crossdressing not be a part of their public lives. While a wife may be willing to accept her mate's need to crossdress privately, she may not necessarily want to participate, in public or private. It is much like a guy who plays basketball with his buddies once a week. His wife is supportive of his need to be with his friends, but there is no reason she should have to play basketball with them too.

Such resistance is often seen by the transvestite as a personal rejection when it is *just* a choice not to participate in the activity. A partner who initially shows partial acceptance is more likely to progress to total acceptance when her needs are carefully considered. This often leads to an expansion of shared activities involving crossdressing, but at a pace the woman finds comfortable. A woman's needs in the relationship are as valid as the transvestite's needs.

Commonly, problems occur when the transvestite fails to realize

that his partner does not totally share his enthusiasm for crossdressing, or if he loses sight of the need to have a "public" relationship; i.e., one that the two of them share with neighbors and family members. The transvestite will monopolize the time and energy of the couple in doing things only he is interested in doing, i.e., crossdressing activities. The wife may then begin to move from a position of partial acceptance to partial rejection.

Rejection

At the opposite end of possible responses, the partner unequivocally cannot accept any crossdressing behavior. The stress and strain of keeping the secret is too much for some women. Women share things with other women, and sometimes other men, things that two men would never tell each other. Women talk to each other in a way that makes them feel connected; they share experiences. A man would never share information that would give another man an "advantage" over him. Women are so used to being open and sharing, they may feel the crossdressing is too terrible a burden to carry. Telling lies and keeping secrets from family and friends is too high a price to ask from some women.

In response to this burden, a partner may try to coerce her husband to stop crossdressing with a threat of separation or even public exposure, exactly the things she most fears herself. Some partners may try manipulating the transvestite with statements like, "If you really love me, you will stop." The transvestite now has a dilemma. Of course he loves his wife, but he also knows he can't and won't stop crossdressing. So, he lies, "Okay, I'll stop," knowing full well he won't. He then begins to isolate himself from his partner. Maybe he makes up excuses to be away from home, extends his business trip by a day or two, and indulges himself in his needs then. It has been known for a husband to withdraw sexually from his partner who totally rejects his crossdressing. He perceives rejection of his behavior as rejection of himself, so he responds in kind.

As a result, what started out to be an attempt by the transvestite to share feelings in an open and honest manner, ends with lies and deception. That certainly is no way to strengthen a relationship. Women deserve more credit for being aware of what's really going on in a relationship like this. Pent-up anger and frustration will eventually erupt and spill over into other areas of the marriage. I have one friend who endured years of an incredibly bad marriage and a verbally abusive wife, rather than admit he had not stopped his crossdressing. And, there are many cases of wives who left their husbands when they discovered he didn't stop crossdressing.

Despite good intentions, transvestites cannot "Just Say No" to crossdressing. A complete rejection of crossdressing can and will eventually dissolve the relationship, unless both parties work toward a compromise.

If a partner is repulsed and distraught by crossdressing, but wants to salvage the relationship, the partner may acknowledge the need to dress, yet not allow it "in the house" or "in my presence." Or, the partner says, "you can do it, but I don't want to know about it." Initially, this may look like progress to the transvestite. But if the couple remains at this stage, no longer discussing the behavior, resentment can develop by either individual. This discontent can spill over into other issues and eventually the partners move toward alienation.

If the couple keeps a discussion open and if they explore the phenomena together in a non-hostile manner, the wife sometimes accepts the behavior as not threatening to the relationship. Thus, a partial rejection may eventually become partial or total acceptance.

A Suggestion

Most couples have a difficult time talking about any personal issue. Communication, discussing feelings, is the key, but few of have learned any real communication skills. This is where a therapist or counselor can be of great value in helping partners listen to and understand each other. These skills can be enhanced without

ever discussing crossdressing.

The Matter of Children

One issue that is rarely discussed, is the effect of a father's crossdressing on his children. A wife may become seriously concerned that her children will be adversely affected if they learn of their father's crossdressing. Or, she may fear that her male children will become transvestites too.

No one knows these answers. There is no professional literature studying the effects on children. In my experience, children are not adversely affected by the knowledge, if it is delivered positively and with the cooperative support of both partners. But, there should be a compelling reason to tell them.

Footnotes

7. On the first television show I did crossdressed, there was a couple from Chicago. I thought they were very brave to go on, even though the wife had taken great pains to disguise herself. It was not enough and she was recognized by someone near home. She'd told me she was running for the school board. She had to withdraw when pressure was applied by a few folks who didn't want the wife of a transvestite on the school board. It was really saddening.

8. The preacher-sex scandals of the 1980s and the sex-abuse scandals of the Catholic Church in the late 1990's should give you a hint about apparent behavior and moral/ethical standards.

9. One of my close friends who knows about JoAnn was complaining at lunch one day about her boyfriend. I said jokingly, "You should try going out with a transvestite." Her reply shocked me. "Oh, no! My honey has to be a he-man." "Sweetie," I said, "that's exactly the problem." She could be friends with me, a TV, and even be seen in public with a crossdresser, but she'd never have an intimate relationship with one of us because her perception is that we're not "manly" enough. No wonder she has problems with men!

Perspective: Sex And The Single Transvestite

By Angela Gardner

If you are a crossdresser who is not involved with a woman, how can you find that special woman? Good question, and one I've been asking myself for a while. Having come to terms with my desire to crossdress and having given myself permission to do so, I have had a difficult time finding Ms. Right. I have met and been involved with several women whose acceptance level went from enthusiastic to nonexistent. The enthusiastic ones seemed to have other issues they hadn't dealt with and the ones who couldn't accept me in a dress were out of the running.

It's hard enough meeting someone and developing a relationship when you don't have the extra baggage of crossdressing. To many people "crossdresser" and "transvestite" mean "homosexual." Women who might otherwise be interested in you may end up treating you like dirt or like a girlfriend. Being a crossdresser means you've got to go the extra mile. You don't want your crossdressing to be another reason that keeps you away from a potential mate. It's way too easy to tell yourself you'll never find someone and it's all because you are a crossdresser. But having been around the TG community for too many years to count I can attest that I have known crossdressers who not only got dates with women but have gotten married-and the fiance knew all about the dressing ahead of time.

So how do you approach the subject of your dressing? If you meet an interesting woman, it's probably not a good idea to divulge your crossdressing in the first ten minutes of conversation. On the other hand, you better deal with it before the relationship goes too far. That means sometime after the first date and before the second date you need to have a talk. What most women say they want in a relationship is honesty. If you develop too serious a relationship and then spring the crossdressing on her, you may blow it. "But, I don't want to scare her right after I've met her," you say. Chances are, if she likes you and she's the kind of open-minded woman you think she is, she'll give you the benefit of the doubt. She was interested enough in you to have a conversation and/or go out on a date. If she enjoys your company and if you tell her the truth, she probably won't run away screaming. If she does, run away screaming that is, she's not the girl for you. If she has a negative reaction to the idea and doesn't want to see you anymore you've lost nothing and you had at least two dates.

If she does accept the idea she will likely have some questions. Here's that word "honesty" again. Answer her questions truthfully. Give her good information about crossdressing from a transgender support group. Fear comes from ignorance. If her questions are answered truthfully and she becomes informed about crossdressing, then there is a chance that you could develop a real relationship.

Take it slow, even if she is very accepting. Asking to wear your baby doll to bed

right after you first tell her is definitely rushing it. She needs to get to know you as a person before she can start to make adjustments for your "femme" side. Whatever stage your relationship is in, remember that it's going to be an ongoing negotiation.

All of this can be scary. Particularly if you've been reluctant to approach women for fear they will reject you because of your crossdressing. The worst that can happen is she'll tell you to get lost. Sure, you're putting yourself out there emotionally, but the possible rewards of a relationship are worth the possible pain. Be proud of who and what you are-don't be ashamed to share yourself with a possible life-partner.

Perspective: Children and Crossdressing – Sailing an Uncharted Sea

by Jane Ellen & Frances Fairfax

For eleven years we had explored the peaks and valleys of our life commitment. The sun was shining brightly on our marriage. Along the way Jane had discovered her femininity. Together we explored its ramifications and integrated it into our relationship. We had negotiated such obstacles as security concerns. Having consulted the Bible, and our house church pastor, we were at peace with our God. Throughout our relationship, our commitment to trust each other in all things stood us in good stead. Now it was time to start our family. The terrain changed. From familiar territory we found ourselves on the shore of an unknown sea.

To Tell Or Not To Tell

The prospect was daunting. Always we had based our relationship on openness and trust. To us, parenthood was a sacred responsibility. What fearsome storms would we encounter if we exposed our children to crossgender expression? Would our children, exposed to crossdressing, become crossdressers themselves? Would they be confused by an ambiguous father image? Would our sons be deprived of a role model on which to base their lives as men? By sharing Jane's existence with our children, would we be subjecting them to the judgement of their peers? We didn't know. There was no literature to inform us.

Hiding the crossdressing, however, seemed no less inviting. What harm would we be doing by depriving our children of half their father? Knowing the stereotype is wrong, did we want to perpetuate society's macho model for males? As responsible members of the transgender community, could we justify lies and deception to hide something that had brought nothing but good in our relationship? What kind of example would we be giving to other crossdressers and spouses who would

look to us for guidance? What would the consequences be if the children “found out”? Did we want to share it with them ourselves at a time of our choosing, or did we want to trust to luck? The odds of hiding it did not seem good. From the “age of reason” to adulthood, our children would be at home over 50,000 days, each day representing a chance of discovery. If the children did find out, it would almost certainly be in an atmosphere of guilt and shame. What emotional trauma would they sustain? Above all this whirlpool would hover the issue of trust that binds a family together. How would we deal with the hurt in their eyes as they asked, “Why couldn’t you trust us with this?” The last question decided the issue for us. Inclined by nature to openness, we decided to be honest with our children.

When To Tell

When should we tell them? Given our situation, it seemed wrong to wait until they were adults. There was too much chance of their finding out beforehand, and taxing us with our failure to trust them. It seemed unwise to share crossdressing with them during their adolescence, when they would be struggling with their own sexuality and gender role issues. Adolescence, when peer group pressure emerges as a greater influence than parental teaching¹⁰, and parental IQ progressively declines in children’s eyes, did not appear to be the most fertile field in which to sow the seeds of acceptance. And still there was that issue of trust.

It was tempting to delay telling the children until they reached the “age of reason”, ages 7-11, Freud’s “age of latency.” At that age, we would not have to deal with the conflicts of our children’s emerging sexuality, and they would still be at an age when they were highly receptive to parental teaching. There would be a certain amount of maturity, so there would be less risk of their inadvertently violating security. By the age of 7, however, a child’s personality is largely set, and he has already, especially in these times, been exposed to a lot of outside influences and societal stereotyping. Besides, it was not as if we were telling them about some secret shame. In a very real sense, we would be sharing with our children a gift. Why not make Jane’s existence a part of their lives from Day One?

As she awaits the birth of her child, a mother-to-be prepares her home for the new arrival. Buying baby furniture and clothing, setting up a nursery, and baby-proofing the home occupy her mind. Having made our decision, we reviewed our relationship and discussed issues Jane’s presence was likely to raise. Jane felt good about herself. Frances totally accepted her. Together, we would be able to provide a framework, as Roberts suggested¹¹, for our children’s desired response. They would see agreement rather than conflict. We were united on the issue. Our ship was provisioned; we were ready to set sail. We steered our course toward honesty and openness. Never have we been sorry.

How It Has Worked For Us

From the day our sons came home from the hospital, Jane played with them

and nurtured them. When they started to talk, they would point out and identify objects in their environment. They learned what a “Mama shoe” and a “Daddy shoe” were. A “Jane shoe” was like a “Mama shoe”, only bigger! Frequently, Jane would get dressed and play games with them. When we hosted transgender support group meetings in our home, our boys welcomed the chance to play with other children of crossdressers. When we went to transgender conventions, our sons knew they would be taken on outings to interesting places. Jane’s presence in their lives has been associated with a lot of fun and excitement. At conventions, gender-gifted people treated our sons with kindness, and complimented them on their good behavior. As a result, our children got to know many of them, and accepted them as ordinary friends. They never learned prejudice. Our little guys have a stable home, consistency, lots of love, and lots of friends. Both have become well adjusted children.

Kids Say The Darndest Things

Long ago, Art Linkletter used to interview children on his television show. Asking them questions about their lives and families, he got some most unusual—and sometimes embarrassing—answers. While such answers were hilarious on television, we wonder whether the parents were laughing. In our case, such frank revelations could have serious social and professional repercussions. Most parents teach their children “not to tell others your business.” Crossdressing came under private business, right up there with “how much money Daddy makes.” We informed them that not every Daddy crossdresses, and that people outside the family might not understand it and might give them a hard time. Early on, we made it clear the problem was society’s, not ours. Jane was an integral part of their lives, and they loved her as well as their masculine father.

This love did lead to one interesting situation. When our older son was four, his teacher asked him to draw a picture of his family. In the resulting picture were Mom, Dad, little brother, cats, dog, and... Aunt Jane. The following conversation ensued:

Teacher: “Does your Aunt Jane live with you?”

Robert: “Yes.”

Teacher: “Is she your Mom’s sister, or your Dad’s?”

Robert: “My Dad’s sister.”

Teacher: “You certainly have a nice family.”

As our children grew older we taught them more about the meaning of crossdressing. They learned about the feminine side of personality, about self-expression, about social stereotypes and society’s double standards about dress. We taught them to evaluate people not by what they are, but by what they do. When they encounter prejudice against crossdressers, the facial expressions and tone of voice tell them where the problem really is. Our children are free to express their emotions honestly. They have never lived in the social prison that limits freedom of self-expression.

Will Our Children Become Crossdressers?

Since we regard crossgender expression as a gift rather than a fault, this question is meaningless for us. "But," some ask, "do you want to subject your children to social ridicule?" Throughout history, people have been subjected to ridicule because of race, color, religious beliefs, height, weight, sexual orientation, gender, intelligence, ignorance, wealth, poverty—just about any parameter imaginable. To be human is to be subject to ridicule. Rather than focus on undeserved guilt, or pander to other people's problems, we have simply encouraged our children to be all they can be. Our children see a balance of gender expression. Jane plays board games with them, and opens Christmas presents with them. Unless school is in session, our children go where we go. Transgender community conventions have given them a rare opportunity to see the world—from the Alamo to EPCOT Center to Hollywood to the Rocky Mountains to the Bahamas.

They also, however, have fun with a Dad who is happy in his masculinity. If they do well in school, each son gets a special night out with Dad. The son sets the program. One son likes to dine out at fancy restaurants, bowl, and go to sports events, while the other prefers pizza or an oyster bar, miniature golf, and the batting cages. Both boys, now ages 12 and 10, are Little Leaguers, and Dad is an assistant coach. Other family activities include church, movies, plays, sports events, piano lessons, dining out, and going after Gulf blue crabs. While both boys occasionally help Jane select dresses or accessories, neither has expressed any interest in crossdressing. They are exposed to a kaleidoscope of interests, and the lively world of books, from which they can pick and choose. We are at peace with the probable outcome.

Some Other Considerations

Granted, our situation has been an ideal one. Jane did not discover her existence and begin crossdressing until some years into the marriage. We had many years in which to solidify our relationship before crossdressing became a factor, and before children arrived. We did not have to deal with the trauma of an "accidental" discovery of a "guilty" secret, with its attendant sense of betrayal and breach of the trust that is the bedrock of a marriage relationship. Nor do we happen to live in the sort of fishbowl neighborhood where neighbors (and neighbors' children) drop in unannounced, and expect to know all the details of each other's lives. We have also been blessed with two very intelligent sons, and our relationship with them has always been on a mature level. They have been able to understand both Dad's need for crossgender expression and others' need not to know about it. Hosting meetings in our home, and traveling to conventions, have long since made crossdressing "no big deal" for the boys. It is just another facet of otherwise typical boyhood revolving around school, church, and Little League baseball.

What about other families, whose situations may be less than ideal? More typical are those families where secret crossdressing is revealed only after several years

of married life and the birth of children. How should they approach the subject of crossdressing as far as their children are concerned?

"First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage, Then Comes Baby In A Baby Carriage"

This children's playground chant illustrates the necessary order of human events, an order that is certainly of paramount importance where crossgender expression is an issue. In considering the matter of telling children, or of dealing with children who may have found out already under less than ideal circumstances, so much depends on the quality of the husband-wife relationship. On subjects other than crossdressing, have they enjoyed good communication, worked out compromises, learned the necessity of placing others' needs ahead of their own? Put another way, is their love mature, or selfish and immature? The issue of crossdressing, however carefully introduced, will produce shockwaves in any relationship. How the wife is told (or otherwise finds out) is very important. The entire subject of telling one's wife deserves its own lengthy chapter, but in essence, the crossdresser must first educate and learn to accept himself, then present the issue to his wife in a manner free from fear, guilt and shame. He must be able to reassure her of his love, commitment, and concern for her and the children. Even in ideal situations, there is an inevitable process of adjustment as husband and wife redefine parameters, renegotiate needs and wants and expectations, and find workable compromises. This is a process that goes on daily, even hourly. Unfortunately, it does not go on in a vacuum.

Parental Unity

When children are part of the picture, the utmost in love is called for on the part of both parents. Neither parent can allow his or her own needs or manipulative agendas to impinge upon the children's need for a loving, stable family environment. The parents must present a consistent united front in dealing with the children, particularly in matters of discipline. Children learn soon enough how to exploit parental disunity to play off one against the other. In the context of crossdressing, the parents must first go through their own process of accommodation before considering telling the children. If Dad's crossdressing is presented as something not that uncommon, as not a moral shortcoming but a gift, as a matter of freedom of expression and full personality development, and above all, as not threatening to the parents' marriage nor to the children's own lives and relationships, acceptance is far more likely.

Parental No-No's

If the children see shame and guilt on Dad's part, fear and anger on Mom's; if conflicts erupt over the time and money allotted to crossdressing; if they witness the classic build-up of tension prior to a support group meeting; if they see a Dad

taking risks that may expose not only himself but them and their Mom to public ridicule or worse; if they experience parental manipulation of themselves (the children) as go-betweens or "fixers" of what are really the adults' problems; if they witness hateful and wounding "words" or worse; if one or the other parent slams out of the house to avoid further "discussion" of an issue; etc., the children suffer not only immediate trauma but lasting scars that will impair their own future relationships.

Parents must remember they are parents. They have together conceived children whose needs must take precedence until they reach adulthood. This is not an optional commitment. Research has shown that divorce and/or parental abandonment is far worse on children than growing up in a family with parents who are "staying together for the sake of the kids." The crossgendered person's desire to fully explore and express his "second self" must be modified and certain aspects of his dream "put on hold" until that vital task of child-rearing is accomplished. He must carefully guard against self-indulgence in the use of family resources. He must also guard against abdication of healthy masculinity and family responsibility, either out of a sense of guilt or out of a mistaken notion of femininity. Children need a father and a mother whose life together provides the blueprint for their own future lives as adults. Wives who use their husbands' crossdressing as the lightning rod for all other "static" in their relationship; who use threats of exposure, divorce, and loss of the children in attempts to control and manipulate their husbands; who shame and undermine the father to his children; who refuse to communicate on the subject at all; who make no allowance for responsible crossgender expression within their relationship, let alone in the wider family context; who "run home to Mother" (or anyone else); are themselves failing to act as mature, loving, responsible parents.

The Gift of Love

The emergence and development of crossgender expression should be viewed as a positive growth process for all concerned: for the gender-gifted person, for the wife, for their relationship, and for their family. With priorities established, mutual compromises reached, and an atmosphere of loving acceptance and openness in place, children can only benefit. They experience a father who is in touch with and expressive of his more tender, nurturing side, without surrendering his healthy masculinity and his leadership role in the family. Such children will grow up freer than most from societal stereotyping along genderal, sexual, racial and cultural lines. They learn family solidarity in the face of societal biases. They experience a model of mutual love and accommodation that will serve them well as they build their own adult lives. Their father's "gender gift" becomes a gift of love in their own lives.

"Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of

wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."¹² Love is the compass that will bring the family ship home across the uncharted sea.

Footnotes:

10. Telling the Children: A Transsexual's Commentary, Background Paper 6 from the Renaissance Education Association, Inc., March 1988.

11. The Matter of Children, Background Paper 4 by JoAnn Roberts from the Renaissance Education Association, Inc., January 1988.

12. I Corinthians 13: 4-8, The Holy Bible, New International Version.

Chapter 7 Strengthening The Relationship

Okay, enough of the bad news. Now the good news; cross-dressing can be part of a loving, committed relationship. It isn't easy and it takes both partners to make it work. In this chapter, we'll look at some strategies for coping, but first...

Why Tell?

Guilt: If you have not achieved self-acceptance you may carry a great burden of guilt for a variety of reasons. You may feel badly about keeping a secret from your partner or family. It's lying by omission. So, you may decide to tell about your crossdressing to alleviate your feelings of guilt.

Self-Image: At the personal level, you may have a very poor self-image, low self-esteem. These feelings may come from "messages" sent by a partner or family members that you (as a crossdresser) are "bad" or "unworthy" of love. As stated at the outset, many transvestites fear rejection and never disclose their crossdressing behavior. So, you may decide to tell about your crossdressing in hope to raise your self-esteem.

Isolation: At one time or another, you probably thought you were the only person in the world who crossdressed. You may still have immense feelings of loneliness and desperation. You may decide to tell about your crossdressing because you want to end the isolation.

Freedom: Say you've found a local support group, but since your partner doesn't know about your crossdressing, you are not free to explore your gender issues. So, you may decide to tell about your crossdressing so that you can have more freedom to express yourself.

Sometimes a crossdresser will come to the end of a business career and find he's faced with the prospect of being home with his partner all the time. Business trips may have provided him with excellent cover with which to fulfill his need to crossdress. Facing retirement, he now realizes his cover is gone. How will he keep the information from his partner now? Conversely, how will he fill his need to crossdress? Many men opt to tell their wives at this point, sometimes with disastrous effects. After all these years, she wants to know what else he's been hiding from her?

Accidental Discovery: Perhaps your partner has accidentally discovered your crossdressing and is making all sort of wild assumptions. Some women find articles of female clothing hidden here and there and think their husband is having an affair with another woman. The transvestite when confronted with an accusation of infidelity, confesses his crossdressing hoping the truth will be more acceptable. Sometimes it is; sometimes it's worse. So, you may have to tell in order to do some damage control, correct misinformation, and calm many fears.

When & How To Tell

It's been noted by several researchers that the longer a partner is kept in the dark about transvestism, the more negative their reaction after disclosure. It is, therefore, recommended that a partner be informed as early as possible in a serious relationship, and most certainly before marriage. A woman has a right to know exactly what kind of man she is about to marry. Now, that's easier said than done. Fear of rejection runs high in transvestites. No one likes to be rejected. I didn't tell my first wife before we were married, but then I didn't have a book like this to help me through it either.

The timing of disclosure must be selected carefully. There are no hard rules and there is probably never a "best" time. The transvestite has to go by intuition on this one. The transvestite needs to be extremely sensitive to his partner during this disclosure process.

Remember, most women, in general, have been socialized to reject transvestism out of hand. The transvestite's goal at this time is to provide only information about the behavior and his need to express it, not try to force acceptance. The setting should be intimate and private. The annual family picnic is definitely not the time or place for such discussions. A quiet evening at home or dinner in an intimate setting is more appropriate. Be prepared to spend as much time as necessary answering questions and do not expect this to be resolved or understood in a single session.

Once the initial disclosure has been made, if the partner seems understanding at all, future conversations will be much easier. Above all, honesty is required in response to all questions. If the woman ends the relationship because the transvestite has been honest with her, he may be better off without her and she without him. Before telling your partner, be completely sure you realize the very real possibility of losing her.

Some Guidelines for Telling Your Partner

Don'ts

✘ Don't overwhelm your partner with too much information. Stop long enough to let her ask questions and be prepared to stop immediately if her reaction is one of shock. Don't retract anything that was said up to this point. Sometimes, her reaction may be delayed by days or weeks. Be prepared to deal with this situation over a period of time.

✘ Don't describe transvestism in negative terms; don't say you have a "problem." Transvestism is a part of you, for better or worse, and it will never go away. So, why make it more difficult to deal with by giving it a negative connotation?

✘ Don't surprise your partner by showing up crossdressed. Let her ask to see you crossdressed. It is a good idea to show her a photo first. Later she may ask to meet your "other-self" in person. Be prepared for another possible shock reaction. What may sound

like a fun or neat idea at first can take on a totally different meaning when confronted face to face.

✘ Don't rush your partner off to a transvestite support group meeting until after she's seen you dressed in private or unless she requests it. The sight of a room full of crossdressed men may unnerve her and do more damage than good. Your partner may never choose to see you dressed and may never want to attend a group meeting. If this is the compromise she wants to fit your need to dress into the relationship, you must accede.

✘ Don't assume that your partner's response today will be the same as it was yesterday, or the same tomorrow. People have feelings and emotions that change on a day-to-day basis. Ground rules negotiated last month can change next month, depending on how you behave and how your partner responds, either positively or negatively. That's why it is so important to keep talking to one another about feelings. That way there will be no surprises.

Do's

✓ Do have quality printed information for your partner to read. Start with this book. Avoid transvestite fantasy literature and "adult" TV magazines. They do not truly represent the transgendered community. Additional suitable material would be any newsletter from one of the many transvestite support groups listed online at the *Transgender Forum Resource Center* (<http://www.tgfmall.com/tgfr.html>), or in magazines such as *LadyLike* magazine (<http://www.cdspub.com/ll.html>) or *Transgender Tapestry* (<http://www.ifge.org>). Tri-Ess also has a lot of literature available (<http://www.tri-ess.org/>). Another possible source is the Renaissance Transgender Education Association (<http://www.ren.org>) which has Background Papers available.

✓ Do suggest talking to a qualified professional counselor for impartial answers to questions. Almost every support group in the country has information about counselors and therapists in their

area of influence. Contact a group to find a professional who has had experience in dealing with transgendered issues. Don't waste time educating a therapist who has only textbook knowledge of crossdressers. Most of what has been written in textbooks is inaccurate anyway. I also suggest a psychologist rather than a psychiatrist. You're looking for help and support, not a "cure," because there is no cure. If you are not near a support group, check online at the TGForum Resource Center (<http://www.tgfmall.com/tgfr.html>)

✓ Do suggest your partner join a Partners or Significant Other support group where she can find peer support from the partners of other transvestites. If there is no such group in your area, an alternative is a newsletter specifically aimed at the wives and partners of crossdressers. Such a newsletter is published by S.P.I.C.E. (Spouses & Partners International Conference for Education), c/o Tri_ess International, 8880 Bellaire B2, PMB 104, Houston TX 77036. S.P.I.C.E. also produces an annual conference for wives and partners at which no crossdressing is allowed. This may be exactly the kind of support your partner needs. You can find more info online at (<http://www.rainbowtrail.info/spice/>).

✓ Do discuss limits and constraints on your crossdressing activities if your partner seems understanding of your need. Some topics might be: where and when crossdressing is acceptable, both privately and publicly; the role of crossdressing in the bedroom; and whether to tell others, including children, other family members and friends. Discuss the extent your partner is willing to participate in your crossdressing activities.

Coping Strategies

It is important to remember that in any relationship, negotiation is an on-going process. Even if a woman initially agrees to accept her partner's crossdressing, it does not mean she will always accept it. She will not be aware of all her feelings until she's been exposed for a while. Her feelings might change and she may want to rene-

gotiate your prior arrangement.

This does not mean total rejection, but it does mean that open and honest communication is essential to reach a new agreement. As the transvestite in the relationship, you must be willing to change or adjust your behavior to maintain a good relationship with your partner.

Some General Guidelines For Negotiation For the transvestite:

♥ Keep trying to discuss your needs as well as her needs. Talk about your feelings openly and honestly. You must overcome the fear of rejection. Realize that rejection of your crossdressing is not a rejection of you as a person. Listen carefully to your partner's needs too. Talk about her feelings. But, overall, keep the communication lines open. Understand the difference between the way men and women speak and listen. If your partner is saying, "Yeah" as you speak, it does not necessarily mean she is agreeing with you. She may be indicating only that she follows your train of thought.

♥ Maintain a balance between your "public" social life and your "private" crossdressing life. Respect your partner's need to have social interactions with people other than more crossdressers. Just as you want time for crossdressing, your partner will want time for her hobbies and other personal interests, as well as for the family.

♥ Respond to your partner's sexual needs as your male-self, not your femme-self, more often than you think might be necessary. Show love and appreciation openly and frequently.

For the partner:

♥ Recognize some incontrovertible facts about transvestism. It will never go away. If he never ever puts on feminine attire again, he will still be a transvestite. There is no "cure," psychological or physical, for transvestism. Your partner's need to crossdress arises from deep within his personality. It is not a result of failure in your

relationship nor any failure on your part. If you try to change him, he will no longer be the person you married. He is the sum total of all his life-experiences, including his crossdressing.

♥ Try to focus on the positive aspects of transvestism. Some partners find their mates are more sensitive and attentive when cross-dressed. Women who have transvestite husbands may find the men more helpful around the house with chores.

♥ Be willing to compromise, but don't let your needs be overwhelmed by his. Negotiate limits and establish rules.

♥ Consider joining a Partners or Significant Other support group. You may find comfort in discussing your issues with other partners who have similar issues. They can share compromise solutions that worked for them that may also work for you. Many transgender support groups have auxiliary groups for partners. Be aware, however, that what little research there is on partners suggests the most effective Partner and Significant Other support groups are those that are independent of transgender support groups.¹³

Some Specific Issues for Negotiation

Let's talk about some of the specific things that will come up in discussions if not right away, certainly later. This way you'll be better prepared to deal with them as the surface.

Participation

If a partner shows even the slightest sign of accepting or at least trying to understand the need to crossdress, almost without fail the transvestite will press her to participate in his crossdressing. This may come in the form of requests for beauty-tips, or public appearances together or any myriad of other requests. The transvestite is "testing" his partners commitment to the relationship, even if he's doing it subconsciously. In a sense, he's thinking, "If she'll do this with me, then she really loves me."

Well, that's fine and if she does participate, it is a sign that she

really loves you, but - and this is very important - if she chooses not to participate it does not mean she does not love you. It only means she chooses not to participate. That's all.

A partner is most likely to say, "Okay, but I don't want to see it." Accept that and work with it. She may change her mind later. Do not try to force the issue.

For the partner, realize that your crossdressing mate has almost no idea what it means to be a woman and he is looking to you for not only support but education. His idea of a feminine image may be quite different from yours. He may even look ridiculous when crossdressed. Since he's not going to stop, why not look at this as an opportunity to get closer to your partner by "teaching" him what he needs to know so he doesn't look ridiculous? Your "teaching" can bring the two of you closer together.

Frequency of Crossdressing

So, you've told your partner that you're a crossdresser and she reacted favorably, so "When-can-I-do-it" is likely to be the next question you want resolved. It is very easy to go overboard at this point. You may want to release all that pent-up need to crossdress in a solid week of dressing and in the process you'll drive your partner right out the door.

The watch phrase here is: go slow. You'll have plenty of opportunity to crossdress, but those times need to be negotiated with your partner. Don't overwhelm her. One thing that has been noted by many crossdressers who have the freedom to dress when they feel like it is that they don't "feel like it" all that much - once they know they have the freedom.

Partners need to know that a transvestite's need to crossdress varies with time. It may be once a month for support group meetings. It may be once a week. It may be every night. Whatever the frequency of need is, you must negotiate with him for time that is acceptable to both of you. Maybe you want a night out with "the

girls" and he has run of the house to crossdress. Whatever it is, you can work it out.

If you are an accepting spouse, that guilt is still working on your transvestite partner. He may be reluctant to ask you for permission to crossdress. Why not surprise him sometime and suggest it yourself.

Leaving & Entering the Home

Let us assume that your partner is again favorable toward crossdressing and you've joined a support group that has monthly meetings. Almost every support group I know about encourages its members to come to meetings crossdressed, some even require it. Okay, how do you get there?

Obviously the compromises will depend a lot on where you live and the kind of neighborhood you live in. For example, if you live in an apartment, it's going to be difficult to get out without being seen unless you have direct access to your car. Even living in a single family home is no assurance you won't be seen depending on where your neighbors live and how much they can see.

So, you need to set up rules for leaving and entering the home. Perhaps it will be that you may only leave and re-enter when it is dark outside. Maybe you will need to go someplace else to change first. Some support groups provide changing facilities, but many don't. Can you afford the cost of a motel room once a month? Will your spouse agree to that?

Public Appearances

Going to support group meetings in the evening is one thing, but sooner or later most transvestites want to try their wings in the daytime. This can be a very positive experience or it can be a disaster. It depends on how accomplished the crossdresser has become in creating a feminine image. If that image isn't up to current standards of feminine appearance, he may attract unwanted attention.

Invariably, the transvestite will want his partner to participate, sometimes to provide "protective cover."

Support groups are always looking for people that are willing and able to do outreach programs, i.e. radio and television talk shows. This is another experience that can be thrilling or a disaster.

So, will you be seen in public together? My first wife would not go out in public with me in our local area, not even 25 miles away, but she accompanied me practically anywhere else in the country. My present wife will go anywhere with me anytime, no limits. You need rules about public appearances and you must agree to them or else renegotiate.

Shopping & Budgets

Many a relationship has gone down the tubes because the transvestite was too damn selfish, especially about clothing budgets. I can't tell you how many times I've heard a partner complain that "he gets two wardrobes, while the kids and I get one." Money and clothes are very important issues.

If you are a crossdresser, never, never take anything from your partner's side of the closet without asking first. Some women view the use of their clothes without permission as a personal violation, almost as bad as rape.

Sometimes, it is possible to share clothes, but more than likely it's not. If there is specific clothing to be shared, make sure that it is clear which pieces they are. Probably more important is to know which items are not sharable. My partner has a belt that I may not wear under penalty of death. I respect that and fear dying.

The transvestite may want to go shopping while dressed and want to try on clothes. While this is the best way to shop for clothing, I do not recommend it unless he is extremely passable, including voice. The law does not require separate dressing rooms for men and women; separate facilities are simply traditional. However, all it takes is for one suspicious person to complain and

you could be in for a lot of explaining and perhaps some embarrassment.

Is it worth the risk? I don't think so. Take your purchases home where you can try them on in the comfort and privacy of your own bedroom and if they're not the correct size, you can always take them back for exchange or credit.

What about the budget? It is not fair that the transvestite gets two wardrobes. So, make up a budget for "extra" clothing, accessories, etc. and stick to it. Make sure both parties get some of what they want.

Children

To tell or not to tell, that is the question. No one has ever done any research with the children of crossdressers, so we don't have any guidelines for whether or not to tell them about crossdressing. We're all flying blind. See the Perspective on page 49 for a discussion of how one couple dealt with crossdressing and their children.

Family & Friends

The question to be answered here is: who needs to know. For a relatively young couple, perhaps no one needs to know. For a couple in their later years, it may be that fear of discovery after death will prompt a disclosure to a trusted family member or friend. One couple I know decided to confide in their oldest son, who was in his forties. Upon telling him, he disclosed to his parents that he, too, was a crossdresser.

The transvestite will probably find others he can talk to in his support group or through pen pals, but what about his partner? Who does she talk to, especially if the local support group has no provisions for wives and partners? She may decide to confide in a family member or a close friend. She needs someone besides the crossdresser to talk to about this. Sometimes that's not so good, but more often than not, it turns out to be very helpful.

Sex In The Bedroom

Sooner or later most transvestites get around to asking their partner if they can crossdress for sex. It should not be a great surprise since the crossdressing likely got started as an erotic activity. Many crossdressers think that having sex while crossdressed is the ultimate pleasure. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

Having sex with a crossdressed partner, if it is pleasing to both of you, is not sick or perverted; it's just different than the norm. Sexual variations abound in many relationships; this is simply one variation. You may find that lovemaking in this manner is especially stimulating to both of you. On the other hand, if you find this idea wholly disagreeable, you should not be coerced into doing anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Make it clear you are rejecting the activity and not your partner.

See the Perspective on the following pages for how one couple has dealt with crossdressing in the bedroom.

A Word About Counseling

Many adults have great difficulty talking about emotional issues, particularly men. It makes sense then to seek out a professional counselor to help partners deal with transvestism in their relationship. Lack of communication and the inability to discuss one's needs are the most commonly cited problems faced by any couple in counseling for any reason. A competent therapist can help you learn new communication skills. In her book, *You Just Don't Understand*, linguist Deborah Tannen, Ph.D., writes about the ways that men and women miscommunicate in our culture due to the way men and women are socialized. Men and women should learn to listen to each other with a "new" ear.

In addition, the therapist can prevent one partner coercing the other into unacceptable positions; either forcing the acceptance of crossdressing or forcing the cessation of crossdressing. The point of counseling is not to reach one or the other of these

extremes, but to find the “win-win” compromise that will permit both partners to continue in a meaningful and loving relationship.

Divorce: The Final Solution

Sometimes there is no alternative but divorce. A crossdresser may be so self-absorbed that there is little room for a partner in a relationship. Or, a wife may be so distraught because of serious issues that she simply can never accept that her husband might not be “all man.” In cases like these, a divorce may be the only way out of a bad relationship.

If that happens, we can only hope that at least one of the partners in the relationship learns something of value for their next relationship.

Divorce can be devastating emotionally, but most people recover. I’ve known lots of divorced people and they all seem to share one thing in common: they all get remarried. I know several crossdressers who have been married several times. Some of these people just never get the hang of creating a lasting durable relationship and that’s a shame. Others learn from their mistakes and find caring, loving partners who accept them as they are.

After 33 years of marriage I divorced from my first wife. It wasn’t about my crossdressing. In the last five years of our relationship we had grown deeply apart on other issues. Our goals in life had changed and we hadn’t faced that. Although very painful emotionally, we agreed to divorce amicably. Two years later, I married a woman who is my best friend of 20-plus years and my business partner. We’re very happy and she loves my femme side as much as my butch side. We both work very diligently not to make the same relationship mistakes we each have made in the past.

Footnotes

13. A few cautions about Partner’s Support Groups: a partner’s support group should be facilitated by a counseling professional to prevent any one person from monopolizing the group and turning it into a bitch session; beware the woman who is so accepting that she doesn’t understand why you’re having so much trouble—she is incapable of providing you support and understanding.

Perspective: Sex and the Married TV

by Linda (GG) and Vanessa (TV) Kaye

Linda Speaks...

Over the years we have talked with hundreds, if not thousands, of crossdressers and spouses of crossdressers. The range of acceptance levels is as varied as the colors of the rainbow. One interesting fact is the low number of transgendered men who are allowed to express their feminine persona within the confines of the bedroom.

It’s unfortunate that so many women have missed the opportunity to explore, build upon their intimacy and have fun with the partner’s “femme” self. Crossdressers seek to fulfill as much of their inner dream as possible, yet prefer to do so within the marriage. For us, Vanessa is an integral part of our bedroom life. “She” is so completely different than her male-self it is astonishing. As a male, Vanessa is studied, business-like and quite serious. However, in her femme persona, Vanessa is fun-loving, sensual and a bit of a tart!

Role-playing in the bedroom is common among millions of couples. It is no different for us. The evening generally begins with Vanessa getting herself “beautiful”. This is a chore many would dread. Yet, the transformation is marvelous. “She” is meticulous about the smallest detail right down to polishing her earrings.

After a glass or two of wine, we will go out to dinner at a local restaurant and make quite an evening of it. During the evening, I’ll caress her leg or, when no one is looking, slip my hand up her skirt. Vanessa will squirm or say, “I’m not that kind of girl!” Of course, she is and I know it. On the drive home from dinner, she’s quite the flirt and I just love it.

When we get back to the house, both of us will slip into our nightgowns and have a glass of wine with the lights turned down low. Then, it’s off to the bedroom.

Many spouses of crossdressers say that having sex with their husbands while he is crossdressed makes them feel like a lesbian. That’s far from the case for me: a male crossdresser is still a male. Caring for Vanessa as much as I do, I want her to experience her fantasy to the fullest extent possible. And, if the truth be known, I prefer making love to “her” as she is sexy!

I am always mindful of “her” need to be feminine, and I do what I can to make her fantasies come to life, especially in the bedroom. However, I must say Vanessa is very considerate of my needs, too.

If you stop to think about it, the level of trust Vanessa has shown to me is amazing. Not only has “she” revealed her “femme” self, but also “her” innermost secrets and desires. She shared them with ME, not someone else. Risking rejection, crossdressers often take this risk with their partners. Too often the result is tragic. But, for those of us who accept, love and care, the outcome is fantastic. In accepting and fulfilling each other’s fantasies, Vanessa and I share not only a marriage, but a friendship and a level of intimacy that most couples will never know.

Vanessa Speaks...

Crossdressing, or at least the desire to do so, is not a choice. The choice is in expressing or denying the feeling. I decided long ago, that Vanessa, my "femme" persona, would always be a part of my life. The search for an accepting partner was not easy, but I have found the perfect mate.

Linda actually seems to prefer being around Vanessa whenever that's practical. We've gone on vacation together, something we call our "Girls' Getaway", been out and about on the town and gone to plays. She always is ready to protect me, should someone say something unkind, and is my best friend. In addition, she is my lover.

I've often joked that if I were to be classified by some terminology, it would be that of "male-lesbian". I am a man who prefers to appear as feminine as possible, yet prefers to make love to a woman.

Linda is always anxious to help me fulfill my desire to express Vanessa, both out on the town and in the bedroom. I'm not transsexual, just a plain crossdresser. I want the best of both worlds. I want to be as feminine as possible when I am Vanessa, and when I am not, I want to be my male-self. I am lucky enough to have a partner who loves both of me.

What happens in the bedroom is fantasy. Linda helps me to explore as much as possible my "femme" persona. I've been glamorous. I've been a school girl. I've been a tart. I've been lots of characters, but all have been expressions of myself that Linda has brought to life. We have had fun, and explored more of ourselves than most people will ever know. What's more, through all of this we have become closer than any two people may ever have been.

Perspective: Divorce & the Transvestite

By Denise Mason and M. (her S.O.)

Denise Speaks...

Over fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. That is a most common and unfortunate statistic. Yet nowhere in that sentence did you see the word "transvestite," but you did see the word "all." More than fifty percent of marriages fail, whether the male is a TV or not, whether the wife knows or not, whether the interaction between TV husband and wife is there or not.

You might think that because I was married for 25 years and my wife knew and participated with me in my crossdressing activities, that I would have all the answers, right? Wrong! I thought I had "done it right." I was up front and honest. Yet, after 25 years, I ended up divorced. I am one of those "over fifty percent" statistics, and not because I am a crossdresser, but just because I was married.

After my first wife announced she wanted a divorce, I was involved with a divorce support group for over four years. I found that ninety percent of all failed marriages did so for two reasons: substance abuse (alcohol & drugs) or infidelity.

Crossdressing was not high on the list of "other" reasons.

Regardless of the statistics, I did not want to spend the rest of my life alone. I decided that if I had to tell every woman I dated that I was a crossdresser, I would. Why? Because if I were to remarry and if I were to divorce again, it would not be because I was a crossdresser.

I've been remarried now for seven years to a super woman. So, may I introduce my wife...

M. Speaks...

I am Denise's Significant Other. I met "Mike" at a divorce support group over seven years ago. At that time, my marriage of 24 years was coming to an end.

Mike and I developed a friendship that was very supportive. We both feel that we couldn't have gotten through our respective divorces without the other. As our friendship grew (particularly in the first few months) I noticed Mike had a particular interest in women's clothing, my appearance and makeup.

As our friendship deepened, he kept saying, "You don't really know me." Then, one evening, he told me that he was a transvestite and explained what that meant. He showed me his photo album of Denise. I remember looking at the album and saying, "Oh!!" and nothing more. (I also remember on the way over to his house that night praying that whatever he told I would be able to accept.)

Within a month or two we went from pictures to an actual appearance by Denise. I stared and stared and stared. Gradually, I began to realize that Denise and Mike were one and the same wonderful person. Both were loving and supportive to me. We saw our relationship growing from friendship toward love with a potential for marriage.

We both went for a few sessions of counseling to make sure all the issues had been addressed (including my acceptance of Denise) and that both of us had been honest in all areas. It took five years of communication to accomplish all of this and we're not done yet. We're still growing.

Yes, we were married and remain happily so. We truly communicate on many levels. There are many qualities about Denise for which I feel truly blessed. The common thread which has to run through any marriage is open and honest communication. We have that.

Denise and I have the common ordinary problems other couples have, but we also have something others don't: a chance to be who we really are and to truly support one another. There is acceptance, encouragement, and a whole new world that has opened for me. I feel that rather than be any cause for divorce, being married to a TV is very rewarding and nurturing.

In my eyes, Denise is "one hell of a woman". It's not the clothes or the make-up. It's the person s/he really is deep inside. Denise always says that she is the same person crossdressed or not. I thank her and love her for all of that.

Perspective: Divorce & the Transvestite Part 2

by JoAnn Roberts

So, you're asking yourself, "Why should I listen to JoAnn Roberts' about committed relationships? She's recently divorced!"

Yes, I separated and divorced from my partner of 33 years about two and a half years ago. You'd think having written the first edition of this book in 1989 that I might have known how to make a married relationship work. As Denise Mason points out in her essay, over fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Mine was one of those fifty percent.

You might also wonder who initiated the divorce. After all, not only am I a crossdresser, I'm one that has a very high profile. So it wouldn't be too presumptuous to assume my ex-wife initiated the process. In point of fact, that would be wrong. I brought up the issue of divorce and we both agreed it was better to separate and divorce than stay together.

The issues that led up to our divorce are not important here other than to note they were not directly related to my crossdressing. In fact, I had done very little crossdressing for about five years prior to the divorce due to severe depression. The depression was brought on by an unconscious awareness (pardon the oxymoron) that my relationship with my spouse had deteriorated severely.

Once I began to address that deterioration and work through the divorce proceedings, my depression lifted. I was able to stop taking anti-depressants and get on with my life. Sometimes, whether you are a crossdresser or not, a divorce is the correct course to achieve self-happiness. That is not to say I didn't want to be in a relationship. I did, just not that old one anymore.

Like Denise Mason and Vanessa Kaye, I am fortunate enough to have found a woman who loves my "femme" side as much as she loves my "grunge-boy" side. She encourages me to be JoAnn as often as possible, and that includes in the bedroom, too.

Having been married for so long and then going through a divorce, I know where the pitfalls are. Hindsight is always 20-20. My partner knows how badly relationships can go, too. So, we're both careful to be honest and open about our feelings before trouble starts.

So, you can have it all, a healthy married relationship, a great sex life, and be a crossdresser, too. Why, in just one book you've found three couples who have made it work for them... just not on the first time around.

Chapter 8 Questions & Answers

I've tried to collect the most commonly asked questions about transvestism. Perhaps they will help in the discussion between partners.

Why does he need to crossdress?

Your husband probably doesn't know himself why he feels this need. All he knows is that it makes him feel good when he does and that the need is nearly irresistible. As long as the crossdressing does not interfere with other aspects of your relationship, it should not be harmful.

If I accept his crossdressing, am I normal? If I don't accept his crossdressing, am I normal?

Just what is normal? Normal has a meaning only in terms of statistics. Normal is the average of all people. No one person can ever meet the exact definition of "normal." We each have our personal idiosyncrasies that make us different from the "norm" in that respect. So, yes, whether you accept or reject your partner's crossdressing, that response is normal for you.

Is this my fault? What did I do wrong?

No, his crossdressing is not your fault and you didn't do anything wrong. Transvestism develops early in childhood and its roots have nothing to do with your particular relationship with your crossdressing partner.

My husband only wears lingerie. Is he a transvestite?

Maybe. It depends on his motivation for wearing lingerie and how he responds to it. If he cannot be sexually aroused unless he is wear-

ing the lingerie, he most likely has a fetish. A fetish may be a sign of a deeper psychological problem, and maybe not. If he can respond sexually without the lingerie, he is more likely a transvestite.

Can a transvestite be a good husband/father?

That's like asking can a left-handed person be a good husband and father. Of course he can. But just as a left-handed person can be a lousy partner, so can a transvestite. The key to a transvestite being a good partner/parent is understanding and defining the role of the crossdressing in the relationship.

Is there a cure for transvestism?

No. There is no known case of a transvestite being "cured" of his need to crossdress reported in any professional literature. The chief reason being transvestites don't want to be cured. They want acceptance. There have been cases of transvestites who have stopped crossdressing for long periods of time. I know one who stopped for 13 years. But, sooner or later, they all come back to it.

I found my husband crossdressed and he promised he'll stop. Will he?

Probably not. Because he doesn't want you to reject him, he'll promise you anything, at the time. He may even really try to stop. Experience shows that, eventually, he will start again.

Aren't all transvestites homosexuals?

This is a common myth; men who wear women's clothes must want to attract other men for sex. Gay men are not attracted to another man in women's clothes. They are gay, remember? They are looking for a masculine image as a sex partner. Most transvestites (but not all) are heterosexual men. There is about the same percentage of gay/bisexual transvestites as there are gay/bisexual men in "normal" society.

Will he want to go "all the way", take hormones and have a sex change?

Maybe, but not likely. A few transvestites decide they must be transsexuals and seek sex reassignment, but the vast majority of transvestites are content to keep their genitals as delivered from the factory. However, there seems to be an epidemic of transvestites on female hormones. Not only is this dangerous, it is totally unfair to do so without discussing the issue first. If you've discovered your crossdressing partner is taking hormones, confront the issue immediately. Hormones should only be administered under a doctor's care.

Is transvestism inherited?

Probably not. There is no evidence that this behavior can be inherited. There are cases of crossdressing brothers and father/son crossdressers but no one can find any statistical link.

Can a child be influenced to crossdress?

Yes, but not in the way you think. A boy who sees his father crossdressed will not necessarily be influenced to try crossdressing himself. On the other hand, a child who is forced to associate crossdressing or being a girl with some kind of reward can be so influenced.

Should we tell the children?

The short answer is "No." Most professionals recommend that children be kept out of the crossdressing issue. A child lacks the power to get out of the situation if it makes her/him extremely uncomfortable. This helplessness can turn to frustration and anger at the crossdressing parent. It may not even be wise to tell adult children unless there is a compelling reason. On the other hand, many parents have told their children about a crossdressing father and the anecdotal information shows no adverse reactions from the children.

If I agree to his crossdressing, won't he want to do it even more?

Most likely, especially if the two of you can't agree on limits. If you are accepting, he will want to explore his new found femininity. If you allow it, his explorations can overwhelm you. You must be firm and state what you want and need in return for trying to accept and understand his crossdressing.

Setting limits on where and when crossdressing will be allowed in the relationship takes a lot of the worry out of "when next?" and relieves his anxiety.

He wants me to go out with him crossdressed. I don't want to do it. Is that wrong?

Absolutely not. There is no reason you should have to do anything you find unpleasant or frightening. Many transvestites want to go out and use their wives as camouflage. A real woman would only be out with another "real" woman, wouldn't she? Some crossdressers just can't believe they can be read when out in public.

In any case, make sure that he understands your refusal to participate in public outings is not a rejection of him, just a rejection of that particular activity.

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Crossdressers and Those Who Share Their Lives, Peggy Rudd, Ed. D., PM Publishers, PO Box 5304, Katy TX 77491, 2000

Appendix B

Internet Resources

Transgender Forum - <http://www.tgforum.com> - The oldest and largest online resource for transgender people. Free resource center and subscription access to weekly e-zine. The Resource Center has a searchable database of support groups.

Society for the Second Self - <http://www.tri-ess.org/> - An organization with a focus on married crossdressers. Lots of info and support for spouses.

Spouses & Partners International Conference for Education - <http://www.rainbowtrail.info/spice/> - A non-crossdressing event for partners focused on the attributes, effects, consequences and coping skills needed when women are confronted with and attempting to adjust to crossdressing in their male partner.

CDSO Listserv - <http://www.tri-ess.org/spice/CDSO/CDSO.htm> - A Listserv and Forum for wives and significant others *only*. Crossdressers do not apply.

International Foundation for Gender Education - <http://www.ifge.org> - IFGE publishes *Transgender Tapestry* a quarterly magazine for all transgendered people.

Renaissance Transgender Education Association - <http://www.ren.org> - A national organization for transgender education. Renaissance publishes Background Papers on many subjects which include general background on crossdressing, one on partners and one on children. These are available by mail for a small fee or free on their website.

Looking for some serious help with your relationship? Well, here it is.

It's time that someone put crossdressing into perspective when it comes to crossdressers and their partners. Too often, a woman is expected to simply accept her partner's crossdressing without really understanding the behavior or the issues involved. That's what this book is all about: understanding.

This book looks at crossdressing from both sides of the relationship, discussing the issues that arise for both partners. Then, it suggests positive ways for both partners to cope with the behavior. It stresses communication, negotiation and compromise. This is a serious book for every couple struggling with the role of crossdressing in their lives.

This fourth edition includes Perspective essays from crossdressers and their partners on such subjects as religion, self-esteem, children, sexuality and divorce, adding personal experience to the solid advice already here.

About The Author

JoAnn Roberts is an author, a publisher, co-founder of the Renaissance Transgender Education Association, past-member of the board of the International Foundation for Gender Education, past-chair of the board of the American Educational Gender Information Service, co-founder of the Transgender Forum, and a crossdresser. She's married and has two adult children who have known about her since they were pre-teens. Her family is very supportive of her activities in the transgender community.

Roberts has counseled many couples trying to deal with crossdressing. This book is the result of her years of experience working with these issues.

