

## *What is cross-dressing?*

Cross-dressing, or transvestism, is simply the practice of dressing as a person of the opposite sex. The term is usually applied to men who dress as women, but there are also female cross-dressers who dress as men. It refers to a whole range of behaviours, from occasionally wearing lingerie under business wear to complete female attire, makeup, behaviour, hormone therapy and even voice training.

## *What's a transvestite?*

A transvestite is quite literally a cross-dresser. Some people reserve the term for those who cross-dress for sexual reasons and refer to those who do it for other reasons as cross-dressers, but the distinction is somewhat hazy.

## *What's a transsexual?*

A transsexual is a person who feels compelled to change their physical sex or has taken some measures to become a member of the opposite sex. The measures can range from simply living and dressing as their gender of choice to hormone treatment and surgery to change their sex. Transsexuals generally consider themselves to be members of their gender of choice and therefore don't consider dressing as that gender to be cross-dressing.

## *Does it mean you're gay?*

No. Regardless of popular assumptions, there is absolutely no established connection between homosexuality and transvestism. While some transvestites are gay, the majority like dressing as women for very different reasons than wanting to "catch a man".

## *Is cross-dressing harmful?*

Yes and no. The current social taboos against cross-dressing can cause intense feelings of guilt and can harm or even destroy personal and family relationships. Cross-dressing can also become an obsession, and like any other obsession can grow to leave no energy or room for anyone else. A cross-dresser's partner may come to feel sexually threatened or inadequate.

However, many cross-dressers who have come to accept their habit and who are in relationships with understanding, accepting partners find that their cross-dressing can be a rewarding, enjoyable aspect of their lives. Many partners enjoy the company of their mate's feminine side and don't see it as a challenge.

## *Is cross-dressing illegal?*

Not per se. However, there are the usual laws against disguising yourself or impersonating other individuals for criminal purposes, regardless of whether they're the same sex as you.

## *What causes it?*

No-one is quite sure, although there are many popular theories. Upbringing and early childhood experiences are often cited. Some recent medical research links hormonal imbalance during pregnancy with a tendency towards transvestism.

## *Can it be cured?*

Not usually. There have, however, been studies involving administering small amounts of female hormones and/or anti-male hormones, which sometimes reduced the severeness of the feelings and relieved the pressure, thereby reducing the urge to cross-dress.

A skilled therapist can also often help a cross-dresser come to terms with his activities, relieving the feelings of guilt and shame that are often experienced.

## *How can I live with it?*

This depends very much on your situation and personal beliefs. Keep in mind, though, that cross-dressing is not illegal, although it may cut across the sexual values of your family and friends. It is perhaps one of the least harmful or exploitative of all sexual unconventionalities.

Cross-dressing is still a social taboo, especially for men. However, there are many safe, accepting places to go dressed and there are social clubs and support groups for cross-dressers in most major cities.

Serious cross-dressing can cost lots of time, energy and money. Whether you view it as a hobby or a lifestyle, make sure you budget for it. Respecting your family's needs as well as your own goes a long way to maintaining trust, understanding and acceptance.

## *Who needs to know?*

Again, your answer depends on your own situation. If you're single, perhaps nobody needs to know. If you're in a marriage or relationship, you should weigh the consequences of coming out to your partner against the consequences of keeping secrets.

Telling your children is always difficult. Generally, young children are much more accepting than older ones or teenagers.

Being able to tell a trusted friend may be a valuable source of confidence and support.

You may wish to tell your neighbours, if only to beat the gossip.

# *The Second Wardrobe*



*Straightforward Information  
for Cross-dressers  
and their Friends*

*Published by  
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## Why do people do it?

There are a vast number of reasons, although of course everyone will have their own individual ones. You may or may not find yours among these:

- Some cross-dressers are fetishists who are sexually stimulated by certain clothing or objects.
- Some people attribute their cross-dressing to their parents dressing them as the opposite sex at an early age.
- Some men have a strong sense of the feminine aspects of their personality and enjoy expressing it through dress and behaviour.
- Female impersonators dress mainly to perform and many rarely cross-dress offstage.
- Drag queens cross-dress outrageously, usually to amuse or offend or to make a statement.
- Cross-dressing prostitutes meet the desires of certain customers.
- "Genderbenders" and the more extreme "genderfuckers" enjoy the shock value of mixing male and female identities such as a beard and a miniskirt or evening makeup and a three-piece suit.
- Some simply prefer the comfort, style, feel or variety of the clothes of the opposite sex; many women wear men's clothes quite openly for these reasons.
- Some enjoy the hobby and the craft of passing as the opposite sex.
- Some religious ceremonies also have a symbolic cross-dressing component.

## What kinds of people do it?

Cross-dressing cuts across all social, economic, ethnic, occupational and religious boundaries. Sexual orientation has no observable relation to it. There are men who dress as women and women who dress as men.

There simply are no reliable statistics on how common cross-dressing is among the general public. All we have are wild extrapolations based on the number of people who are "out" or in therapy. After all, no-one else admits to doing it! It might be safe to guess, however, that almost everyone knows a cross-dresser or knows someone who knows one.



## What do the words mean?

There are many common words and abbreviations that have a particular meaning in the cross-dressing community. Here are a few:

- TV: transvestite.
- TS: transsexual.
- TG: transgendered.
- T\* (T-star): any or all of the above.
- CD: cross-dresser.
- Gender Dysphoria: From Steadman's Medical Dictionary: "*Gender*: The sex of assignment by oneself or those who raise the individual. *Dysphoria*: [Phoria, a bearing] A feeling of unpleasantness or discomfort." Hence, the feeling that the gender you believe yourself to be and your physical body don't match, to a greater or lesser degree.
- MTF, FTM: male-to-female or female-to-male (cross-dressers or transsexuals).
- SRS: "the operation"; Sex Reassignment Surgery.
- Drag: "dressed as a girl". There's also the less common opposite term, "drab". Usually used like "drag queen": someone who dresses for entertainment or amusement value, or "street drag": mixed-mode dressing for shock value.

## What other resources are there?

These resources are all in or near the British Columbia Lower Mainland.

- Support groups:** The Cornbury Society holds monthly meetings featuring social events, speakers or demonstrations. Spouses welcome. Box 3745, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Z1
- Conventions:** Esprit is a five-day annual event for transvestites of all abilities, held in Port Angeles, Washington. Esprit, PO Box 1101, Renton, WA 98057-1101
- Bookstores:** Little Sisters, 669-1753.
- Magazines:** Some simply titillate; others are well worthwhile. *Tapestry*, *Ladylike* and *Cross-Talk* are some of the better known ones and are available at bookstores and TV boutiques or by discreet subscription.

- En femme: dressed and acting as a woman.
- Passing: being accepted in public as a member of the opposite sex.
- Being read: being found out when you're attempting to pass.
- Purging and binging: many cross-dressers go through phases where they will renounce their habit and get rid of all their clothes, makeup etc. ("purging"). Most eventually give in to the continuing urge to dress and buy everything all over again ("binging").
  - Hormones: substances that help alter body shape ~~hair~~ etc. with a view to achieving the body form of the opposite sex.
  - Clipping, tucking, padding, binding, taping: various techniques of concealing or enhancing body parts.
  - Coming out: admitting you are a cross-dresser, whether it's to family friends or the public at large.
  - full-time: living 24 hours a day as a member of the opposite sex.



- Internet:** An excellent World Wide Web page at <http://www.cdspub.com/> with links to many transgender resources. Usenet newsgroups alt.transgendered and soc.support.transgendered feature sometimes heated discussions but also provide a safe forum to ask questions of caring people.
- Drop-in:** Women's Resources Centre, UBC Continuing Studies, 482-8585.
- Counselling:** Gay and Lesbian Centre, 684-6869  
Jamie Powers, M.Ed., M.A., R.C.C., 521-8882  
Dr. Donna Hendrickson, 875-2027  
Gender Dysphoria Clinic, Vancouver General Hospital, 875-4100. Doctor's referral required.

## About the Cornbury Society . . .

The Cornbury Society was started in July of 1989 by a small group of heterosexual male cross-dressers. We endeavour to provide a safe environment for the development of feminine appearance in conventional attire, as well as encourage a sense of confidence and well being. Spouses and partners are always welcome at our meetings.

Many of our members must keep their cross-dressing activities confidential, and many have a spouse and other family whom they wish to keep secure from public exposure. Accordingly, we do not hold open meetings and we conduct a short screening interview with all prospective members.

We do not have the resources to handle the needs of transsexuals, gays or lesbians or people seeking professional counselling. We are a social and support group, not a self-help or counselling facility. However, if we cannot accept you as a Cornbury member, we will be happy to help you find more appropriate resources.

Write us for an application form at Box 3745, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Z1, or e-mail us at [cornbury@tgforum.com](mailto:cornbury@tgforum.com).