



KENMORE STATION, BOX 368  
BOSTON, MA 02215

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ANDROGYNY & CROSSDRESSING BEHAVIORS, A NEW LOOK

BY A. KANE & B. LIND

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, crossdressing behaviors and their motivational roots have been considered by sex educators and therapists to be psychiatric disturbances. Case studies found in the literature and their conclusions, based on small samples, are not valid or applicable for many who are active crossdressers. Our study on over 600 crossdressers, whose sex role preference is stated as heterosexual, from both rural and urban centers throughout the U.S.A. indicate that

- a) many are expressing a gender role preference that is dependent on appropriately receptive environments and times.
- b) a definite cycle of crossdressing behavior exists within the life pattern of a person
- c) certain patterns of crossdressing behavior are indeed androgynic and need viable environments for full expression.

This paper will present evidence to support our thesis.

(This paper is currently being reviewed for publication in a major journal in human sexuality. No portion of it may be reproduced or quoted in other publications without written permission from the authors).

## INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of crossdressing can be traced back to the beginning of recorded history. The identification of crossdressing as a deviant activity is relative. Different societies define crossdressing as negative or positive. The significance of crossdressing varies according to society, time, place, and circumstances. There is nothing inherently deviant about crossdressing. It is not universally defined as deviant in all cultures under all conditions.<sup>1</sup>

The androgyne is a person who is the embodiment of the principal of wholeness of self. Androgyny refers to the psychic structure of the self: a unique combination of masculine and feminine energies.<sup>2</sup>

The first serious studies on crossdressing behavior was done early in this century by Magnus Hirschfeld. He studied cases of married men who wanted to dress as women for part of the time. He applied the latinized composite word, "transvestite", to married males who desired to wear women's apparel.<sup>3</sup>

Over subsequent decades, the term, transvestite, has been used in connection with motivations behind this behavior. The result is that the word has assumed pejorative overtones and this behavior has been classified as sexual deviancy.<sup>4</sup>

In the last 30 years, there has been a sizeable body of formal papers and books about crossdressing behaviors. Particular segments of the paraculture (e.g. transsexuals) have been studied using relatively small numbers of cases in which to validate their conclusions. This has spilled over into other segments of this paraculture with the result that these behaviors and all who practice them are considered sexually deviant.

The Outreach Institute was founded on the basis of broadening our understanding and awareness of the varieties of expression that crossdressing behaviors represent. Several conferences and workshops were developed for the community of helping professionals, to share and expand a mutual understanding of the scope and nature of crossdressing.<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to offer a viable program for the clarification of issues and personal growth to the entire crossdressing paraculture, the Institute has organized Fantasia Fair. This paper will describe the Fair program and share some of its relevant observations about crossdressing behaviors.

## FANTASIA FAIR

The Fantasia Fair is designed as a nine day living/learning experience for all who are interested in exploring an alternative gender lifestyle. It takes place each October in an open, tolerant and friendly environment on the tip of Cape Cod.

The Fantasia Fair has been held for seven years (1975-1981). During this period more than 800 people have participated in the program. While most come from the continental United States, we have had participants from Canada, Mexico, Switzerland, and England.

The program of the Fair provides an interwoven social, practical and educational experience for participants. These include a Fashion/Beauty Program and Makeup Clinic, numerous cocktail parties, dinners, social visits to high points of interest on Cape Cod, and Seminars on Medical, Legal and Sociological Aspects of concern to the crossdresser.

Included among the workshops offered at the Fair, are the Androgyny Experience, a Speech Improvement Program, and the Art and Practice of Graceful Body Movement.

In addition to the above, the Fair presents several major events which are open to all interested local people. These include a Town & Gown Supper with informal chats at a local Church in Provincetown, a Fashion Show using participants as models, a unique Talent showed called Fan/Fair Follies, a Formal Awards Banquet, and a Fantasy Ball.

This smorgasbord of activities and major events is open to all people who want to experience living and exploring an alternative lifestyle.

Two key factors which make the program of Fantasia Fair unique are protection and support from local law enforcement officials and the participants are not restricted to stay within the bounds of their residences. The town and surrounding national seashore are open to the Fair participants. The traditional 'closet' that most crossdressers find themselves in, is absent. In the local town the crossdressers can enjoy lunch with friends and make purchases in the supermarket or jewelry boutiques, or visit art museums and galleries without fear of guilt or social recrimination. Participants who attend the Fair learn by observation how to dress appropriately for various activities, e.g., slacks for daytime activities, skirts, tops, blouses, dresses, and gowns for evening programs, depending on the nature of the activity. The total living/learning experience gives the participant to the Fair added confidence and allows them to explore new dimensions of an alternative gender pattern.

#### ATTENDANCE

Who comes to the Fair? While the Fair is open to all people interested in exploring alternative gender lifestyles (males and females), the overwhelming majority of participants are male crossdressers, many of whom are currently married or were married. We have had participants who were transsexual, as well as several wives of crossdressers. For purposes here, we will deal with the majority population.

The typical Fantasia Fair participant is a white male, whose average age is 44 years, is or was married, and holds a managerial position in the world of commerce or industry or, is self-employed or retired from business or, holds a position in a state or federal government. Among the many reasons for attending Fantasia Fair, the following are given as major ones:

- o A chance for crossdressers to live in an alternative gender role for a long time period (1 week), continuously.

- To learn more about the art and practice of cosmetic usage, comportment, speech modification, and other such attributes that will aid in their transition toward a more realizeable alternative gender role.
- Exposure to all practical and social aspects that will make a participant feel comfortable and obtain much needed self-confidence.
- To meet others from different parts of the world who are of like persuasion and are interested in forming new relationships.
- For vacation and fun.

#### STUDY/SURVEY

Within a month after the end of Fantasia Fair, an Evaluation/Survey is mailed to each participant.\* In addition to general post-Fair comments and suggestions for improving this or that program, we also get responses to the following types of questions:

- Give a brief description of your crossdressing activity prior to coming to Fantasia Fair (Fan/Fair)?
- In what ways, if any, did a Fan/Fair experience influence your attitude about your behavior?
- Which program(s) helped you to clarify and realize your goal?

#### RESPONSES & OBSERVATIONS

Of the 800 Surveys that were mailed over the seven year period, 5/8th (500) of these were returned to our office. From the N of 500, the following observations have been drawn:

- 80% of the Fair attendees described their crossdressing activity, before the Fair, as being private and restricted to the 'closet'. Some did have occassional exposure to paraculture social contact functions, away from their local area.
- 90% of returned Surveys indicated that an experience at Fan/Fair
  - Helped to clarify gender concerns with regard to their crossdressing.
  - Provided various levels of self-confidence in exploring an alternative gender role.

\* See Appendix 1, Sample Study/Survey

- Improved their ability to cope with crossdressing issues in their home areas.
- Experienced a noticeable reduction in stress/tension pattern, not only during the Fair period, but for a long period after.
- 95% felt that their attitude toward their behavior changed as a result of the Fair experience. Some of these changes include:
  - Reduced compulsiveness in their need to crossdress (a probable result of the length of time spent in an alternative gender role at the Fair).
  - Noticeable affect in tempering their fantasies about clothing styles, to want a more realistic and appropriate choice of fashion.
  - Awareness of the need for professional help in areas of practical concern, and, with it, see marked improvement in their self-image.
- 75% found the practical programs of the Fair to be most helpful.
- 60% found the Seminars and Workshops important in answering questions in specific areas of social concern.\*
- 90% felt that the Fair environment allowed for sorting out some of the complexities of gender roles and for exploring new social relationships.
- 80% gained more confidence in exploring alternative gender roles. They learned to set some limits on what could be realized in an alternative gender role.
- 95% reported that the Fair has been helpful in improving practical aspects of their transition in an alternative gender role, provided new opportunities to realize their fantasies, and experience an improved sense of self-confidence, (i.e., a participant as a model in the Fashion Show or performance in the Fan/Fair Follies).

#### CONCLUSIONS

These data and observations, lead us to suggest that crossdressing behavior, though complex and diverse within the paraculture, can and should be viewed from an interactive social and personal growth perspective. Furthermore, from our Survey and other unpublished sources, we can say that

\* This % applies to participants who actually registered for specific Seminars and Workshops.

- There is a need to explore alternative gender roles within the fabric of conventional mores.
- A critical factor in this exploration is the specific nature of the environment (i.e., a friendly, tolerant town).
- Many crossdressers want and need a particular time frame, that is continuous and moderately structured in order to examine and experience aspects of gender issues.
- Fair participants experience periods of light and intense crossdressing activity over a long period of time. It is inferred that this might be a reflection of coping with stress/tension.
- The pattern of crossdressing behavior, as seen at the Fair, are attempts to deal with the masculine/feminine energies (androgyny) within each participant and how these may find realizeable expression in conventional gender modes.

#### REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1

STUDY/SURVEY OF FANTASIA FAIR (SAMPLE)

On a scale of 1-10, please rate your overall experience at the Fair as you perceived it. (1=poor, 10-outstanding)

1. PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THE FAIR.
2. PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU LIKED LEAST ABOUT THE FAIR.
3. PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE ADDED TO THE FAIR PROGRAM.
4. PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE CHANGED IN THE FAIR PROGRAM.
5. PLEASE COMMENT ON THE SEMINARS YOU ATTENDED.
6. PLEASE COMMENT ON THE WORKSHOPS YOU ATTENDED.
7. IN WHAT WAYS DID FANTASIA FAIR HELP YOU IN UNDERSTANDING YOUR CROSSDRESSING BEHAVIOR?