

# THE PROVINCETOWN SYMPOSIUM

PRESENTED AS PART OF FANTASIA FAIR

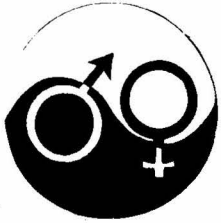
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PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

THE OUTREACH FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

This symposium was presented in Provincetown, Mass. as part of the program of Fantasia Fair 1976. Its purpose was to share with an interested public some new thoughts and directions on the subject of crossdressing, gender and sexuality. We hope that its publication will give the reader new insight and understanding about a misunderstood set of behaviors.

To the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Provincetown, its minister and congregation we acknowledge thanks for allowing the Symposium to be held in their hallowed hall.

To Ms. Denise Reinecke, our thanks for superb technical assistance, without which transcription of this event could not have occurred.

To Sally Casper and John Caston, our deep gratitude for transcribing and typing the Symposium.

--Ariadne Kane  
Coordinator, Fantasia Fair 1976

## DEVIANCY -- ABNORMALITY

Nancy Ledins

A few minutes before we began, Ariadne asked me if I had ever lectured on the subject of cross-dressing before. It suddenly dawned on me that, after hundreds of lectures and speaking engagements in my other role, this was to be the very first time speaking before the public both dressed in this fashion and on this subject. Needless to say, I have never been more nervous!

First, allow me to introduce myself in two ways: my name is Nancy and, by profession, I am a psychologist. The first part probably evokes only a passing curiosity. The second part probably rings a few discordant tones -- a psychologist.

A few reactions may occur: "my god, they come from all sorts of backgrounds;" or, "I just knew it -- all shrinks and psychologists must be strange;" or, "who can you trust these days;" or, "with all of your training, how could you ever become a TV;" or, "isn't that just awful;" etc., etc., etc. Whatever your reaction, I would like to approach the subject of cross-dressing from two angles: (a) deviant behavior and abnormality and, (b) feelings along with reason.

When people do things differently from other people they can be said to be ab-normal -- that is, "away from the norm." The same holds true for the word "deviant." It simply means "away from the road" or, in the vernacular, "off the beaten path." However, our language has, over the centuries, placed heavy emphasis on deviancy and abnormality. These words are usually used in a sexual or mental illness context. This is somewhat unfortunate since it sets up automatic blockades to working out an issue. However, these words are acceptable IF we all realize that each of us, at times, is deviant or abnormal. This is not an accusation, just a fact of life.

Allow me to pursue that thought for a moment. For example, left-handers are deviant and abnormal -- since most people are not left-handed those of us who are can be considered "away from the norm." Having cavities is abnormal -- any dentist will tell you that good, sound teeth are the norm. Sleeping on your stomach is abnormal behavior -- ample studies have shown us that such a posture is very bad for one's well-being. Smoking is deviant behavior -- just ask your lungs! Wearing a bra is quite normal in our society but very abnormal to the Zangi tribe in the lower Amazon. Pinching the derriere is deviant behavior for Americans but a sign of great compliment to the backside-conscious Waticis in Brazil. Kissing each cheek is abnormal to us but normal for French etiquette. The list could go on and on.

My point in all of this is to caution us against stereotyping each other into deviants or abnormal. Chances are, our cherished definitions may come back to haunt us.

This week a number of us have invaded Provincetown to try, for well or for ill, doing it well or not so well, to attempt a style of dress and behavior that is not "normal" (at least in our society). We are, therefore, deviants. We choose to do (and some of us choose to be) something which is frowned upon in the mores of our society. In short, we are cross-dressers, blurring gender lines or even, for a few here, attempting to right what we feel to be a genetic wrong.

We choose to lay aside the external markings traditional with one gender and take on the markings of another. Obviously most of us cannot hide all the things which mark us off. In order to transform ourselves, some of us look a bit "made up." Underneath we have laid aside shorts for panties, girdle and bra, socks for pantyhose, a shirt for a blouse, and English Leather and Mennins Aftershave for Chanel #5, Jean Naté or Charlie. We have also laid aside rough and tumble fingernails for nailpolish and a wallet for a purse.

What does all this signify? I would venture, falling back on my profession for a moment, that it means many things. There is no stereotype which will fit each of us. For some it may be the 'feel' of softness; for others it may be a rejection in early life. For some it may be a fantasy acted-out; for others it may be that women are less threatening. For still others an insecurity over masculinity; for others a wish to be a woman (for a variety of reasons). Or, for some it may be a desperate need to find fulfillment; for others a need to hide behind clothes. On and on the list can go.

This same set of variables runs through most of us -- in different ways. Why do some people gravitate to each other in an almost sadistic way? Why does a person marry an alcoholic knowing that such behavior is bound to bring heartache and friction? Why does a person choose to love another person? Why does a man choose to love another man? A woman to love another woman? Why does a person really become a doctor (when a number of studies show that a high percentage of doctors are very insecure people)? Why does a person really become a policeman (when many studies show that some policemen are one hair-line step removed from the most vile of criminals)? I do not say any of this to condemn. I simply want to emphasize that there is no stereotypic pattern for any of us.

To continue for a moment: why do some people marry for prestige instead of love? Why do some people cheat on their income tax? The gatling gun of examples can run the gamut and is meant to show that deviancy and abnormality stretch far and wide. If nothing else I think it can show us that while I may not choose to do this-or-that, or I may not agree with this-or-that, a deep sense of tolerance is needed by all of us.

Is there some deficiency in the cross-dresser? I would think the answer is "yes." But, much like the entire, human, running race, I

think there is deficiency in all of us. The cross-dresser is trying to find some peace, some serenity, some security. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. In the midst of many hardships (did you ever try to change clothes from "brother" to "sister" in the back-seat of a Volkswagen -- or, wait with pounding heart as the policeman approaches your car and you must show him your real identification?) -- in the midst of many hardships, the cross-dresser tries to achieve a greater sense of fulfillment when she can lay aside one identity and slip into a more serene world -- if only in imagination -- if only for a little while.

History is replete with deception and fraud. All of our lives carry some chicanery and some deceit. We are all, at some time, Walter Mittys. But we live with our benign neuroticisms and our strange behavior. Here again, my choice of words is rather strong to point out that, for example, deception weaves in and out of our lives in many ways. For example, we say "yes" to someone when, in truth, we would really like to say "no." We compliment someone when our heart really cries out to correct the person. We express pleasure at something or someone when, in the privacy of our home, we express our extreme displeasure or disappointment at the thing or person we complimented! How fickle we are at times! Cross-dressers are no exception. But the deception is not undertaken to rob or defraud someone.

On one side we are men -- and given our "druthers", we cannot wait to don a pair of frilly panties or luxuriate in a bubblebath. In that sense there is deception. But we would insist that we are not out to wreak havoc on society through this behavior. A few, called transsexuals, are so concerned about even this apparent deception that they feel they must correct the mistakes as far as humanly and physically possible.

Is what we do harmful? Yes and no. Sometimes we bite off more than we can chew. Our games become very involved: with families, wives, friends, co-workers. We take many risks and chances which could, in society's eyes, tumble a career, ruin a relationship, and provide massive tempests in many teapots. But like most of life, we all take risks. It really answers nothing to say that my risks are sillier, better, or worse than your risks or anyone's risks. A famous suicidologist, Edwin Shneidmann, remarked that, "in order to live we must all brush hands with death and disaster." The cross-dresser merely chooses to brush hands in a different manner. As with most of us, people do things -- even dangerous things -- as long as there is a pay-off in their eyes.

Having said all of that, what is probably most frightening about cross-dressers is what the clothes signify. Allow me to say it in a rather blunt way: the sexual and gender signification of clothes. We take it for granted but it needs to be said because this is really where the stumbling blocks lie. Sex and/or gender becomes the common category. Any change in signification becomes a threat to the process of categorization. For example, the wife of a cross-dresser is sometimes frightened

by what the cross-dressing could signify. "My god," she says to herself, "did I marry a drag-queen, a gay, a mama's boy?" "Am I sexually deficient?" "Where did I go wrong?" To other women the TV-TG-TS can be slap in the face. We, the cross-dressers, have invaded a territory or turf which is culturally off-limits. We know, from experience, about girdles pinching, runs in pantyhose, stuck zippers, picking up something with wet nail polish, mascara running, a tight bra strap, etc. -- from an insiders perspective. When a "genuine" woman and a cross-dresser look at each other, both know what the other is wearing. I apologize if that turns you off as a crude statement -- but it should be said to avoid missing the feelings that are often generated. Here is a group of people blatantly daring to imitate women. The cross-dresser's very existence as a changeling raises serious questions of identity, masculinity, femininity -- so sensational because they are so confounding and, in a true sense, very threatening.

And, at times, men have trouble with cross-dressers because they feel their fellow male has betrayed the image of brave, macho masculinity. After all, only "fairies" would dona pair of false eyelashes or step into a pretty slip! To men so confounded by our behavior, I would assure them that most cross-dressers are very heterosexual. Perfume, make-up and a peignoir do not alter that orientation.

Social feelings on this subject run deep. Yes, cross-dressing is deviant behavior. Yes, it is abnormal behavior. But, I would insist, it is but one among many kinds of deviancies engaged in by most people. Yes, there can be "casualties" -- and mistakes -- and tragedies. But the pay-off, the "high" if you will, the satisfaction is worth the risks. As someone has well remarked: "there is no longer the proposition that gender is parceled out one-to-a-customer at birth and cannot be traded in for an exciting, new model." Some of us try "new models" of behavior and mode. Like any such behavior or practice, many people are left scratching their heads. (Each year, for example, I scratch my head at two "deviant" forms of behavior: the race-car driver and the hunter! For the life of me that is such strange, abnormal behavior that I cannot picture myself engaging in that kind of risk-taking behavior! Blasting away at animals and driving around in circles -- it all sounds so bizarre to me. But, one person's deviancy is another person's high!)

You will find a vast assortment of answers as to why we are here today -- all dressed up and calling ourselves by girls' names. Yes, we are "deviant" -- hopefully using that word now in a better sense. All the cold showers and moral admonitions will not resolve the issue. It may well be that "the mind boggles at the possible combinations and permutations of sexual styles, and the vocabulary is scarcely adequate to deal with all the concepts. We hope we have been able to shed just a little bit of light by addressing the issue the way we have.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON CROSSDRESSING

Ariadne Kane

One cannot hope to tell the ultimate truth about a subject as highly charged as sexuality and gender, because the truth is always in the eyes of the beholder. We can only give you our opinion of what we are doing, and what problems we have, and hope that we can stimulate some discussion here tonight.

The initials "TV," "TG" and "TS" stand for transvestite, transgenderist and transsexual. The word trans comes from the Latin and means "cross." In each of these words we are crossing something. "Vestite" is Latin for dress--not just the thing that's worn by women, but any kind of garb. So the word "transvestite" means simply crossdresser. The term transgenderist describes a person who has the need to express a gender duality, that is, to express both masculine and feminine roles at different times. A transsexual crosses sexual boundaries in a physical as well as emotional way.

In Ancient Egypt we have evidence of people crossdressing. From a study of the statuary and styles of clothing worn by the pharaohs and queens, it has been surmised that one of the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom, Ikhnaton, might have been a crossdresser. While conclusive evidence is yet to be established, Ikhnaton certainly looked more like a queen than a pharaoh.

Another example from ancient times is the hetaerae of Hellenistic Greece, in the fourth and fifth centuries, B.C. These were young boys who were dressed as women and trained to serve a patron socially as well as sexually.

There are other examples through the centuries of people crossdressing. There are some very famous cases in the Age of Enlightenment, such as the Chevalier d'Eon, a nobleman at the court of Louis XIV, and the Abbe de Choisey, a diplomatic representative of Louis XV who carried out missions in Russian and Siam dressed as a noblewoman.

In the nineteenth century there is, of course, Georges Sand. She was biologically female, a mother, writer and journalist of high intellect. She not only used a masculine pen name, but also dressed as a man and passed in public.

The art of crossdressing also abounds in the Nonwestern world. In the Orient, crossdressing does not have the stigma of sexual deviation that it has in the West. Certain Eastern societies train males to perform "womanly" functions such as being nursemaids, housekeepers and governesses.

In the American Indian culture in the Southwest, a young man who did not wish to be trained as a brave was allowed to learn the ways of a squaw. He was called a berdache.

In the South Pacific the mode of dress for all men is skirts. Nobody wears pants. In the Western world, there is the kilt of the Scots and the foustanella of the Greek evzone, which might by their style make one think of crossdressers but in fact they have nothing to do with the crossdressing scene.

Four terms that can be confusing in discussing crossdressing behavior are male and female, masculine and feminine. When we say male and female, we are referring to biological sex. However, when we talk about masculinity and femininity, we mean the behavior and characteristics resulting from psychological and environmental development.

It is conceivable to be born male and develop feminine characteristics and learn behavior that is considered feminine in this culture. And vice versa. All of us have combinations of masculine and feminine characteristics which give us our sense of gender identity--of being a man or a woman.

Gender role is how we express our gender identity in public.

Some people feel uncomfortable because of conflict between their biological sex and their preferred gender role. We call this "gender dysphoria" or gender discomfort. People who experience this dysphoria to such a degree that they seek surgery to bring their bodies into agreement with their gender feelings and identity are called transsexuals.

"Gender euphoria" describes a person who feels content expressing a dual gender role. Most transgenderists fall into this category.

One way to look at it is to picture a tree. The seed is the human being, and the roots are the crossdressing behavior, which usually develops at a very early age. As the stem grows, it reaches a junction. I'll call this first junction the TV junction point, because it marks the stage where the person has gone from wearing maybe one or two items of feminine clothing to a complete crossdressed state. At this first junction, the individual usually has a pretty clear gender identity and role. His interest in the art and practice of crossdressing has nothing to do with questioning his gender identity or role.

Then as we go up the tree, we come to the junction marking the transgenderist. This is an individual whose crossdressing includes the expression of what we might call "feminine" feelings. For example, a man who feels that it is "unmanly" to cry can do so without guilt or embarrassment as his "femme" self. Here are the beginnings of developing gender dysphoria or gender euphoria. If gender dysphoria develops, the person may move toward the next junction point, which is the transsexual.

At this point the person seeks chemical and probably surgical means of developing a body that conforms to his preferred gender. Once this surgery is completed the person no longer considers himself or herself a "transsexual" but has become the desired sex--man or woman.

The number of people who move from crossdressing activity to having sex reassignment surgery is very small. Most people reach some junction and stay there; some also lose interest in it entirely. In any case, the crossdressing behavior is only a small part of the total person.



I would like to say a little about sexual preference, since one common misunderstanding is that men who crossdress are homosexual. In fact, some are and some are not. The fact that we crossdress does not imply that we are interested in having sexual encounters as women. Many people think that if a man goes to a bar or lounge crossdressed, he is interested in attracting another man. That is not necessarily true.

I believe that ultimately, if we are to survive as a group, we have to look away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender to a world where individual roles and modes of behavior can be freely chosen. The ideal to which I think we should begin to look can best be described by the term "androgyny." Androgyny is from the Greek andros, meaning "man" and gyne, meaning "woman." It defines a condition in which the characteristics of the sexes are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate. That is something I would like everybody to think about, both for their lives and our lives too.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COUNSELING RESOURCES FOR THE CROSSDRESSER AND FAMILY

Alice Millard

I will refer to TVs, TGs and TS's as crossdressers. The main points I want to get across are: Who are they, where are they, how many are there, and what do they do?

Who are they? They are everybody. They are large, small, wide, tall-- they are every human type.

Where are they? They are throughout the country. They are next door to you, perhaps. They are everywhere. They don't have a sign on their forehead, or a label on their collar, so you don't necessarily know who they are.

How many are there? That's a good question. A conservative estimate is 2-3% of the entire adult male population in North America, in Europe, throughout the world. There must be millions of them around, and we don't know who they are for the most part. Those that you see here in Provincetown have had the courage to "come out" and are only the tip of the iceberg.

What do they do? They do what you do. They are not restricted to one line of work. They are in every profession.

My own background is quite varied. I have served in the military. I have been an ice hockey player in a major national hockey league. I have been in business and also in science. I have a wonderful, tolerant and understanding wife (she is here tonight), and we have five children. One of the children knows about me and is very understanding. Her attitude is very much like that of many of you who are here tonight. It is such a wonderful feeling coming to Provincetown and being welcome here and free to walk around. This is not necessarily the case in the rest of the country.

This past summer my wife and I traveled up and down the country, and met over 200 crossdressers and their wives and girlfriends. My wife helps counsel wives and girlfriends, and I myself meet with many crossdressers and help them understand and accept themselves and not feel guilty about what they are doing.

Where do crossdressers meet? They do not have the facilities and opportunities that other people have for getting together, so they organize secret clubs. Most of these groups meet once a month, often in someone's home. There is one that meets very openly in a hotel, and is accepted by the community there. Another meets in a church. The three organizations are the National Alliance in the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. area; F.P.E. (Foundation for Personality Expression) and Tri Sigma in Los Angeles, and TVIC in Albany, New York. There are also groups on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Boston, New York and many other cities.

The groups and clubs give crossdressers a chance to meet each other and talk. Often they feel much better about themselves, and find relief from feelings of guilt and tension. Wives, too, have a chance to meet

and talk and learn more about it. We try to help each other by getting together, having coffee, taking pictures of each other, going to restaurants, beauty shops, boutiques.

I do a lot of public speaking, primarily in the Midwest--the Bible Belt--where there is a lot of suspicion and mistrust. I speak to many different groups--Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, legal groups, classes of young interns and nurses--so that they will have some understanding and less fear of crossdressers should they happen to encounter one. For instance, it may happen that a man wearing feminine undergarments gets into an auto accident and is taken to a hospital. In many cases, they have been treated horribly, treated as misfits, deviants--"Lock them up, get rid of them, we can't let them loose in society." If medical professionals can understand that for some people crossdressing is a way of relieving tension, letting off pressure, maybe they'll give them a little consideration and understanding.

We are not asking people to be like us. We are asking you to try to understand that this is our thing. We do it. We are not trying to hurt anyone at all. But we do like to try to be understood.

#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: How does crossdressing help to fulfill the need for peace and wellbeing and serenity?

A: For crossdressers the clothes themselves--their softness, style, cut, what they signify--can bring a sense of peace and serenity just by wearing them. For the transgenderist, the clothes carry a different significance--they are part of one's whole bearing as a woman. For the transsexual, the clothes are to some extent merely functional--they put the stamp of serene approval on arrival at what I should always have been.'

Q: Are most or many crossdressers homosexual?

A: No. Most are married or divorced and crossdress for relief of tension, not to attract another man. Maybe 15% are bisexual and 10% homosexual.

Q: Is crossdressing illegal?

A: There are no statutes in Massachusetts expressly prohibiting crossdressing, although there may be local ordinances. It is different for different localities.

Q: Would you prefer to dress as a woman all the time if it were possible?

A: Yes. I would guess that the majority would say yes, although for most people it would not be practical because of jobs, families, community attitudes.

Q: Are you super-macho men or male chauvinists in your other role?

A: Some of us are, but many crossdressers are more sensitive to women, and don't feel compelled to prove they are he-men. They know what they are.

Q: Why do you do this?

A: With the crossdresser it is an obsession, not only to crossdress but to get out and circulate and be seen by others. It's wonderful therapy.

