

cross-dressing: inside and out

Dear GCN:

Though I can only offer an opinion concerning cross-dressing, I do feel that to some degree most of the psychological articles I have read on the subject are wrong in some of their assumptions.

I have read that the average cross-dresser is from the middle class, white and college educated. I think, from what I have seen that cross-dressing spans equally all class lines and racial and ethnic barriers. I have not belonged to any cross-dressing organizations, much to my regret, but I have met literally hundreds of cross-dressers and spoken to them.

First of all, the term "cross-dresser" covers a lot of territory. For example, there are heterosexual transvestites who cross-dress on an irregular basis, those who cross-dress all of the time to the total exclusion of all male clothing, female impersonators who entertain on the stage, and homosexual drag queens who work as "female" prostitutes. Then there are the fetishistic people who concentrate and wear only one certain type of female apparel. And more!

I think that many gays and "straights" often judge us (all gays) by the drag queens they meet and see on the streets. This is unjust. Also I have found that many law enforcement officers seem to assume that merely because they stop someone in drag, that that person is soliciting sex. I have lived in female apparel all of my life and when not engaged in some crazy and illegal activity (smile), I have usually tried to hold a regular job. I have worked as a secretary, data entry operator, computer programmer and cosmetologist. One year I worked as a stage performer doing Janis Joplin. I did not lip synch her music, but sang it with a back up band. Don't ask how that got started, but it was fun. I met Janis Joplin personally at Woodstock in 1969.

Dressing as a man all of the time never worked for me in that I would end up driving myself up the wall. I am just unable to function in a male sexual identity. For those cross-dressers who do so only occasionally, they can function in society as a man and, in their leisure, dress as a woman. However, I cannot live comfortably unless I am made up and dressed as a woman. This has finally escalated to the point in my life where I cannot even live my life as a biological male and have so opted for sex conversion surgery.

Wanting to be "feminine" has a lot to do with cross-dressing. I have heard many psychological reasons given for this and I agree with many of them. Wanting to be "pretty" and "desirable" has a lot to do with it. There is, of course, the sexual factor to be considered. Let's face it, nylon and satin lingerie have been synonymous with sex since the beginning. Then again I agree with the statement made by many cross-dressers that wearing women's clothing also brings about a calming and anxiety-allaying effect to the person wearing them. Even here in prison, the queens are always making contraband panties, buying smuggled-in freeworld lingerie, altering t-shirts into blouses, halter tops and nighties and wearing whatever they can convert into makeup. We alter our prison clothes to as close to feminine as possible without catching a disciplinary case. Pants become skin tight, and boxer shorts either hiphuggers or bikinis.

Still the incidence of suicide is especially high among cross-dressers and transsexuals in prison. Denied all of their basic outlets they cannot handle the sudden male-oriented world that they are suddenly thrust into. The experience alters you some way or another in any event.

What is to be done? About the treatment of cross-dressers in the freeworld by society as well as in here? I can't say what the answer is. Obviously, to my way of thinking we should be placed on a separate unit and allowed some freedom in the way we dress and make our selves up, allowing us to have our long hair and to have our hormones.

So what else? Oh, my usual complaint about gay organizations that never answer my letters. I've never gotten an answer from the TV-TS Contact Service; no answer from any MCC group or others in the Gayellow Pages. Even a polite refusal would be better than to be totally ignored. Still, I keep writing since I won't give up. I wrote to the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund for a couple of cases that I needed, but after one shot it appears that they have given out on me too. (grr&%⁸⁶***!)

All that I can do is to keep writing in my own way and to talk to as many people as I can. I want to see thing change and that will only happen when we all learn to put aside our misconceptions and try to live like caring human beings.

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