

# CROSS DRESSING

## INFORMATION



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## definition

Cross-dressing means wearing clothing and other effects commonly associated with a different gender than the one assigned at birth.

## introduction

There are many different kinds of cross-dressing and many different reasons why an individual might engage in cross-dressing. For some, cross-dressing may provide an appropriate avenue for self-expression; others may cross-dress for reasons of comfort or fashion. Cross-dressing has also been used extensively in live entertainment for many centuries, while some may also partake in cross-dressing for sexual reasons. Nearly every human society throughout history has in some way formed a set of social norms, standards, viewpoints and even laws that define the type of clothing that is considered appropriate for each gender. Cross-dressing frequently challenges these norms.

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In Australia public attitudes towards cross-dressing has evolved to be more tolerant. While it was once considered taboo for women to wear clothes that were traditionally associated with men, this is now barely the case. However in most parts of the world it is socially unacceptable for people assigned male at birth to wear clothes that have traditionally been associated with women. Australia, permits women to wear jeans and shirts and other more masculine items of clothing, but still disapproves of anyone assigned male at birth, or who identifies as masculine, wearing clothes or even colours associated with women.

In the past this inconsistency has given rise to assumptions about acceptable and unacceptable cross-dressing; that all male cross-dressing has a sexual component and that cross-dressing is rare, and that those assigned female at birth and identify as female do not cross dress. More and frequent studies have debunked all these assumptions. Cross-dressing can have a sexual component regardless of body types and/or gender identity. Theories like autogynephilia, that those assigned male at birth who cross dress do so for sexual reasons has been found to be both rare and as easily applicable to women, and thus on the whole debunked.

## causes

There is no definitive answer at present as to why some people cross-dress. Some people may begin cross-dressing as young as early childhood yet others may begin later in life. Similarly it is difficult to be certain of the motives of people who cross-dress. The only real proof of motive is that person's own statement. Another problem that many cross-dressers recognise in the attempt to attribute motives for their behaviour, is the pathologising of cross-dressing inherent in this sort of research. Many cross-dressers feel that rather than attributing motives for cross-dressing, research should focus on the reasons why society considers cross-dressing to be unacceptable, or why clothing is gender-segregated at all.

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## understanding crossdressing

Many cross-dressers discover their need to cross-dress during childhood. They have no idea why they feel the way they do, yet they often find that the expression of this part of their nature results in reprimand and alienation from parents, family and friends - the people they love and value the most. This can result in the development of unreasonable feelings of unhealthy personal shame.

So a lot of cross-dressers become secretive about their cross-dressing and do their best to suppress or deny this essential part of their being. But rarely does the need to cross-dress subside, and continued denial of the expression of this essential part of oneself can result in severe emotional disturbance. Many cross-dressers ultimately find it impossible and intolerable to exist like this. They feel compelled to learn more about themselves and to share this important aspect of themselves with other significant people in their lives. While some cross-dressers may be content to simply wear the clothing that has been more traditionally associated with a gender different to their own, others who cross-dress may endeavour to project a more complete impression of belonging to another gender.

However it should be noted that a person's sexuality or sexual preference is independent of their need to cross-dress and that natural human sexual diversity exists amongst cross-dressers in the same basic proportions as it does in the widespread population. Likewise cross-dressing should not imply that a person is trans of gender diverse. Many cross-dressers are aware of and happy with the sex that they were assigned at birth and have no desire, nor any innate need to undergo any medical or surgical intervention to alter this.

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## for loved ones

The news that a loved-one cross-dresses may come as a surprise and may also evoke lots of different emotions. It's good to know however that there is support and options available to help you gain knowledge to understand your loved-one's disclosure. The process of disclosing can often be stressful for those concerned, however it should be remembered that it is likely that this disclosure has been the result of years of soul searching, frustration and anguish and that your loved one has disclosed to you because they love and trust you.

The most effective approach to understanding cross-dressing is knowledge and communication. Before forming any opinions, coming to any agreements or embarking on any course of action, it is hoped that those involved have sought literature on the subject and discussed this with each other and a counsellor. The Gender Centre provides free counselling, whether for cross-dressers, their loved ones, or combination counselling sessions. To arrange an appointment with the Gender Centre Counsellor, please call (02) 9519 7599, Monday to Friday 9:00am – 4:30pm. Cross-dressers and their loved-ones are also welcome to attend regular events held at the Centre.

## more information

In addition to the services offered by the Gender Centre, The Seahorse Society of New South Wales provides mutual support for cross-dressers, their partners and families. They also:

- [The Seahorse Society of N.S.W.](#) Inc. is a non-profit self-help organisation that was established in 1971 and is a Member of the N.S.W. Association of Self Help Organisations and Groups (A.S.H.O.G.).

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