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DEFINITION:
Cross-dressing is the wearing of clothing and other effects commonly associated with a gender that is seen as different from the one that is usually presented by the same person.

INTRODUCTION:
There are many different kinds of cross-dressing and many different reasons why an individual might engage in cross-dressing behaviour. 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 behaviour as part of role-play activity or as part of a sexual fetish. 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 runs significantly counter to those norms.

In western society an ambiguity has evolved in more recent times with regard to public attitudes towards the cross-dressing behaviour of men in particular. While it was once considered taboo for women to wear clothes that were traditionally associated with men, this is no longer the case and western women are often seen wearing various items of clothing that in the past have been traditionally associated with men. However in most parts of the world it remains socially unacceptable for men to wear clothes that are traditionally associated with women. Society, it seems, permits women to wear jeans and shirts and other more masculine items of clothing, while in contrast, disapproving of any man who wants to wear clothing that has been traditionally associated with women.

This inconsistency has ultimately given rise to several socially acknowledged assumptions, namely that only men cross-dress; that cross-dressing behaviour is sexually driven and that cross-dressing behaviour is rare. Yet it is possibly more likely that it is these unfounded assumptions combined with the negative social attitudes that have, in fact forced the cross-dressing behaviour of men behind closed doors and subsequently given an impression of secrecy and rarity and through the impression of secrecy, an air of wrongdoing.
PREVALENCE:
As mentioned above, it is very difficult to estimate the prevalence of cross-dressing in western society, with many cross-dressing women publicly invisible through societal acceptance and many cross-dressing men publicly invisible through being socially unaccepted and therefore forced behind closed doors. However, one well-respected paper broaching the subject of the prevalence of transsexualism, has suggested that in the United States, conservative estimates of the number of cross-dressing males indicate a prevalence of between two and five percent of all adult males.

CAUSES & MOTIVES:
There is no definitive answer at present as to why some people exhibit cross-dressing behaviour. 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 recognize 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 behaviour, or why clothing is gender-segregated at all.

UNDERSTANDING CROSS-DRESSING:
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 ones-self 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. This expression may include mannerisms, speech patterns, and emulation of sexual characteristics. Others may choose to take a mixed approach, adopting some feminine traits and some masculine traits in their appearance.
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 transsexual. 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.

**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.

Among the most effective approaches to understanding how your loved-one’s cross-dressing may or may not effect you or your way of life are 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 a free counselling service to all individuals involved in a disclosure of this nature, whether it be the cross-dresser themselves, their loved one, or perhaps a combined counselling session would be more beneficial. To arrange an appointment with the Gender Centre Counsellor, please call **(02) 9569 2366**, Monday to Thursday 9:00am – 4:30pm. The Gender Centre also provides a library service containing many books and other information about the issues that may affect cross-dressers and their loved-ones. 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:

- maintain a library containing up-to-date references, medical and biographical material about cross-dressing;
- hold regular meetings, which are both social and informative, regular outings to restaurants etc.;
- provide the cross-dresser with practical advice such as where to shop and have experts assist their members in their cross-dressing;
- provide guest speakers and literature for interested community groups and the medical profession;
- offer peer support, by cross-dressers and their partners, to cross-dressers, their partners and families;
- offer referrals to professional counsellors and medical practitioners if required; and
- offer cross-dressers a way “out-of-the-closet” to self acceptance and self-respect by being able to meet, question and share experiences with other cross-dressers.

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.).

The Gender Centre is committed in developing and providing services and activities which enhance the ability of the transgender and gender diverse community to make informed choices.

We specifically aim to provide a high quality service which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality to all.

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SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION:
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