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Helping Wives of Cross-Dressers to Understand and Cope

Acknowledging Concerns and Offering Support

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Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

So, your husband/significant other is a cross-dresser. Welcome to the club! In your quest for information, you have arrived here. Let me reassure you, there are many, many women in your shoes. (You might also say that there are many husbands in their wives' shoes!)

It has been estimated that as many as eight and a half million adult males in the U.S. alone cross-dress. It may be a secret that society has forced us to keep, but it's more common than anyone realises and it is within the range of human normal activity. It occurs in all societies and in all periods of history. It is not a problem because your husband has a problem, but it is a problem because at this point in our history our society has a problem dealing with it.

Our group is about helping you and your cross-dressing husband or husband-to-be deal with a society that refuses to allow men to experience the full range of their personality. As women, we have made great strides in increasing the range of gender choices available to us in clothing, hair, jobs, and personal demeanour. Men are still not only limited, but also punished, for doing anything that society perceives as being feminine. Men are even limited (or feel they are limited) in colour choices, skin care, and even in the way they relate to their children.

Your husband truly admires and loves women, especially their clothes! By dressing in women's clothing, he may express those feminine feelings which society deems unacceptable for men to feel or to display. He probably doesn't want to become a woman in the literal sense, through surgery. In most instances he is happy with his masculine and feminine sides. If he is a cross-dresser (as opposed to a transsexual), he is not willing to give up all of his male needs and desires.

Despite his 'expanded' wardrobe, you cannot judge a book by its cover. It is the person inside with whom you fell in love, and in all probability, he has had these feelings all his life. He is the same person you fell in love with. Only your understanding of his full situation has changed. Despite the shock, hopefully you will stay in the relationship. This is not an easy decision. Cross-dressing is not something that society has yet to fully accept. There are lots of women who are unable to stay in such a relationship.

As you may have discovered, your husband is not like most other men. He has a warm, caring, sensitive and nurturing side. This is a result of the feminine side of his personality being so strong and playing such an influence on him. He is probably more understanding of you than most men. You may, in fact, not have observed this. Cross-dressing can be a complex condition. Men who are cross-dressers usually begin to feel the 'need' to cross-dress at an early age, often about five or six years, and as they mature, society pressures them to suppress their need and keep it as a deep secret. When the stress of middle age, increased financial responsibility of a growing family, and increasing job responsibilities add to their normal stress of hiding their secret inner femininity, some cross-dressers begin to have difficulties in handling their lives. This can lead to conflicts that mask the inner feminine personality and prevent you from experiencing the good side of his cross-dressing - the loving, caring, nurturing and understanding part.

Wives and partners of cross-dressers often report that when a husband or partner is able to finally 'come-out' to the wife, and the wife begins to accept and understand, the cross-dresser often undergoes a major life change that permits the 'good' side to develop and be expressed. Acceptance by the wife or partner often leads to a whole new outlook on life by the cross-dresser that carries over into the relationship.

Discovering that your husband or partner is a cross-dresser is not the end of the world. Cross-dressing does not hurt anyone and it need not shake the foundation of your marriage. In fact, he is a lot less likely to be unfaithful in your marriage than non-cross-dressing spouses. In some couples, cross-dressing has served to strengthen their relationships. Many wives fear that their husband is homosexual or bisexual because of his desire to cross-dress, or to fear that he is 'changing' into a homosexual, but this is not necessarily the case.

The incidence of homosexuality or bisexuality among cross-dressers is the same as in the population in general, meaning that it is not likely that he has hidden, or is just discovering, his sexual orientation. He probably is what he says he is — straight, and in love with you. It is important to remember that one's sex (one's physical identity as 'man' or 'woman' based on one's reproductive organs, chromosomes, and secondary sex characteristics), one's gender (one's mental perception of one's self as 'masculine' or 'feminine'), and one's sexual orientation (who one wants to mate with) are totally independent of one another. It is entirely possible for a person to think of himself as being feminine but still want to mate with women exclusively. Don't jump to false conclusions in this regard.

You are probably deciding whether or not to accept this 'colourful' part of his personality. Believe me when I say that there are many

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cross-dressers whose wives know about the cross-dressing but will not accept it in any form. This is a truly sorrowful situation. Your relationship with your husband can be enhanced because he is a cross-dresser. You have more things in common with him and can enjoy a wider variety of activities than most couples. You can benefit from his developing 'softer side' and your acceptance and support will improve the quality of his life. Some cross-dressers report that they are certain that they would not be alive today due to the stress of hiding their secret were it not for the support of their spouse or partner.

A successful relationship with a cross-dresser can be stressful to you. I know. You have many fears. Will he be discovered? Will our families find out? Will this effect his job and our financial security? Will the neighbours learn the secret? Will he be arrested for cross-dressing, bringing public embarrassment? Will it hurt the kids? Will he turn gay? Will he have a sex change? What will become of me?

A relationship with a cross-dresser is about love and trust. You feel betrayed because you shared your deepest secrets and trust with him, but he hid this secret from you. A relationship with a cross-dresser is about setting limits and about regaining trust and about flexibility.

His cross-dressing can affect you and your security so you have a right to negotiate limits with him. If he wants to go out in public, perhaps this can be arranged on business trips to distant cities or on weekend field trips once a month to a local or nearby support group meeting. Or maybe he can attend one of the regional annual cross-dresser conventions. His outings do not have to be to your local mall where discovery is more likely, although some cross-dressers pass so well that this is simply not an issue.

Set limits on who is to know. Some cross-dressers feel the need to tell someone or to come-out to the world completely. You have a right to help decide these major decisions. Cross-dressing per se is not illegal but you have a right to discuss your concerns about this with him and insist that he not put himself in any situation that might lead to an arrest.

A trip to the mall is one thing, but a trip to the ladies room is something entirely different. Being caught in either restroom cross-dressed is not the time to argue constitutional law with a minimum wage security guard who holds your future in his hands and needs to impress his superiors with his efficiency in clearing 'perverts' out of the restrooms. Set rules in advance that are safe, and stick to them.

Agree on whether to tell the kids, and if you are the slightest bit concerned of this, don't tell. Confront the issue of a sex change. He may be confused at first and he may feel pressure to explore this possibility, but the vast majority of cross-dressers who have supportive wives resolve their confusion and accept themselves for what they are - cross-dressers, not transsexuals. Help him find himself. Above all, be flexible. Both the cross-dresser and his wife must honour the limits they set, but there is room for compromise as you both grow.

The issue of the 'secret' he kept from you for decades is difficult to resolve. Many wives feel life-long hurt about this. But when we discuss this issue in our support groups, the cross-dressers almost universally say that they love their spouse so dearly that they could not bring themselves to discuss cross-dressing with them before the stress and pain forced them to, or until they were accidentally discovered by the wife or partner. Think about it. He endured great personal pain, suffering alone in his 'closet' his entire life. His greatest fear was of losing your love and companionship. He endured to assure the continuation of the marriage. Yes, he betrayed your trust. But there are far worse betrayals. Most women should be so fortunate.

If you choose to accept, you can have fun with his cross-dressing. This is a great attitude to have. Cross-dressing can be fun if you want it to be. Think of the things you can do together that you might not be able to do with a 'normal' husband! Laughter is the best way to go through life and to deal with cross-dressing. Experience has shown that those couples who laugh together are among the happiest and most successful in their relationship. You laugh together about many things. Why not about this?

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

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