

The TV-TG-TS Phenomenon

by Ariadne Kane

In a recent GCN issue (Vol. I, No. 51) there appeared an article describing the nature and some of the feelings of the transvestite. We should like, now to amplify and supplement that piece with practical aspects of the TV world.

There is a wide variety of behavior encompassed by the terms transvestite (TV), transgenderist (TG), and transsexual (TS) and a great variation in attitude and motivation.

To understand the transvestite (TV)-transgenderist (TG)-transsexual (TS) phenomenon, one must bear in mind the distinction between natal sex and cultural gender, between male vs. masculine and female vs. feminine, and the spectrum that the TV world represents. Most persons are born with a well defined sex and its appropriate anatomy. (The very few exceptions found in recorded medical publications would be classified as hermaphrodites.) As a child develops, it is conditioned by the home and cultural environment to accept its gender. By the norms of society, a sexual male is conditioned toward masculine gender and a sexual female toward feminine gender. Masculine and feminine gender attributes are categorized, generally by societal norms. These attributes (non-physiological and non-anatomical) are arbitrary and have been accepted by society, mainly from a long-standing tradition. During the preadolescent development, a child is open to and will react to all conditioned stimuli, sometimes with positive and, other times, negative feelings. It is the pattern of positive feelings, resulting from a wide variety of stimuli that determines the variation and tone of gender identity, and which may or may not coincide with a child's sexual identity. This is what may give rise to the phenomenon of TV-TG-TS. For our purposes, it will be convenient to consider five general types.

Type I is the "pseudotransvestite." His sex and gender more or less coincide. However, he may have the desire to try on selected apparel of the opposite sex. His sexual preference is for heterosexual experiences.

Type II are the fetishistic TV and include the "drag queen." His sex and gender differ in varying degrees. He may wish to wear a particular item of a woman's wardrobe (panties, bra, girdle, high heeled shoes, nylons, etc.) only, as expressions of feminine gender feelings. The "drag queen" dressed completely as a woman

with the intent of attracting a certain type of male, for sexual pleasure.

Type III is the transgenderist. He is a person whose sex is male, but whose gender is split between masculine and feminine attributes and feelings. He expresses his masculine feelings by doing those things our society expects of a man. He expresses his feminine feelings by dressing completely as a woman, and behaving in ways considered by society as female. He does this in the privacy of his home, if he can, or at a neutral place among a few friends who share and understand his feelings. He is generally married, but has bisexual tendencies. He prefers the company of those who understand and accept both aspects of his gender personality.

Type IV is the female impersonator. He is a person who possesses some feminine physical attributes (small hands or female torso or "womanly" legs, etc.). He dresses as a woman when performing on stage or at a nightclub. He enjoys mimicking the images of women, that are conceived of in a macho-oriented society (the femme fatale, the stripper, famous singers, etc.). Away from the stage, he dresses as a male, and has predominantly homosexual preferences. A few of these female impersonators have become sexual females, as a result of sexual reassignment surgery.

Type V is the transsexual. Here is a person whose sex is male but whose gender is almost completely feminine. His inner as well as his outer expressions are feminine. He may describe himself as a "female in a male body." He has abhorrence for his own sexual equipment and fervently wishes to replace it via sexual reassignment surgery. His desire is to live as a woman, both in outward appearance and inner feelings. He may prefer to be asexual prior to surgery and may want female sex partners, after surgery.

These categories give the reader an idea of the broad spectrum, extant within the TV-TG-TS phenomenon. There are subtleties in variation, within each type. Space does not allow for detailing all of these. The reader is referred to a book called *The Transsexual Phenomenon* by Dr. Harry Benjamin.

What are the needs and problems confronting the transvestite? In this article we will concentrate on the needs and problems for the Type III TV. He, like all minority factions, needs to be understood and accepted by society, in general. If our society adopted a "live and let live" attitude toward the TV, his feelings of guilt

would greatly diminish. He would be more able to express his total gender personality. Until society understands the nature of the phenomenon, he needs the support of other TVs. Such support is invaluable in helping to focus on the problem of his own gender identity. It gives him a feeling of not being alone and isolated. It frees him from some of the burden of guilt that he has lived with most of his life.

These are general, obvious needs and problems, but there are also particular problems of getting dresses and learning feminine ways. The TV would like to know where to buy apparel that fits and enhances his own feminine image. Does he go to a thrift shop and take his chances that the items he buys will fit well on him? Does he spend much money on an expensive wardrobe, never certain that what he bought fits him and is "right" for his "femme self"? He needs a place to dress, without fear of being exposed and ridiculed. Such places, apart from his home, are difficult to find and maintain. Correct application of cosmetics is an art learned only through much trial and tribulation. A TV would like to know which selection of cosmetics is best for him. How can he choose such a selection with a minimum of expense and time? The choice of wig is important in giving the TV a sense of attractiveness about his "femme self." How does he select the "right" wig for his femme personality? Should it be real or artificial hair? What should he spend for a wig?

Between 60-70% of all TVs are married. Many problems are created within the marriage because of a lack of understanding about the nature and practice of cross dressing. Many TVs avoid the subject by not telling their wives about their interest in wearing feminine apparel. Are there ways of opening discussion with the wife of a TV, such that she becomes sincerely interested in this interest of her husband? Does a TV tell his betrothed of his interest prior to marriage? What problems arise for the TV who may have children? How can the problem of understanding gender identity as something apart from sexual identity, best be dealt with?

These are some of the needs and problems a TV in our society faces today. It would be a triumph to Male Liberation, if a TV could find a public place where he could be accepted as his "femme self" without recriminations of guilt and ridicule. What places are open to the TV who does not barhop? Efforts toward resolution of some needs and problems are being made today.

Most significant of these efforts has been the formation of the Gender Identity Service of New England. Organized two years ago, it has been established to help TVs and TSs with their problems. They provide a variety of professional services, including a complete gender evaluation of a person, counseling of TVs and their wives, offer legal counsel for TVs and TSs, recommendation of proper medical personnel for hormone treatment and sexual reassignment surgery. Their presence and contribution towards understanding and acceptance of the TV-TG-TS phenomenon by society, has been of great value to all.

TVs and TSs are coming out of their "closets" today. A start has been made to help TVs meet other TVs. For the past month and continuing through the summer, a TV rap group has been meeting at offices in Boston. Every alternate Tuesday of the month, any and all parties interested in transvestism, are invited to attend. Consult the Gayway radio program on WBUR FM, Thursday evenings at 9:00 p.m. or call HUB (536-6197) for information about time and place. This spring, a group of TVs, representative of the spectrum of the phenomenon, participated in a workshop at the New England Gay Conference. It was probably the first time the active gay community had an opportunity to meet and talk with TVs. A valuable exchange of views and ideas took place and resulted in an education for all.

TVs are persona grata at the Charles Street Meeting House Cafe. In Provincetown, a TV presents his "femme self" as passable in public, can enjoy the ambiance and fun of a sensitive and dynamic community. As yet, it is not possible for a TV to go anywhere he wishes in the Greater Boston area. However, certain shops in this area have been understanding and helpful in providing for some of the wardrobe needs of the TV.

This is the present status of the TV-TG-TS phenomenon. In American society, today, among the plethora of Liberation groups, there are those men who wish to be free from the fetters of a macho-oriented society. They want to express their total gender personality, as they perceive and feel it. Males who dress in women's apparel represent a small group, attempting to loosen themselves from the shackles and burdens our society has placed upon them. The practice of cross-dressing serves as an expression of feminine gender feelings and is a release from the demanding tensions of their work and responsibilities. It is, if one views it, an approach to Male Liberation. We hope that this and the previous article have helped to create an atmosphere through which real depth of understanding and positive exchange of feelings between us and society can be achieved.

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