

# Dress sense and sensibility

## OPEN SPACE

AFTER waiting with some trepidation and great expectations of Polly Toynbee's article on transvestism (December 18), may I say how much all the transvestites I know enjoyed it?

Transvestism is a deviation (not, I hope, a perversion) which causes much misery to its victims and their families and loved ones. We do not need anything more than sympathy and tolerance; it is too much to expect understanding when we ourselves do not know the motivation for our obsession.

There are far more transvestites than people realise. One has only to look at the

thinly disguised fashion for sale adverts in such diverse papers as the Sunday Times, Observer, Exchange and Mart, and now and again in Vogue and Queen. Shops such as Cover Girl and Stage Door deal almost exclusively in clothing for transvestites even though they tend to use the expression stagewear. The abbreviation TV, often thought by non-transvestites to refer to television, is used to indicate their willingness to serve transvestite customers. I have often wondered why they never advertise in the Guardian — many of your readers are TV I promise you. I must stress that these shops fulfil a vital need and I am not for a moment knocking them. We admit their adverts in our magazine.

The purchasing of female clothes is difficult enough for a man but when in addition one is faced with such a

limited range it is verging on the impossible. It is difficult when wearing one's normal clothes to go into a ladies' dress shop and to try on a dress, presuming that you have summoned up the courage to admit it is for oneself. A fancy dress party is the usual excuse but I promise you that most shopkeepers are not convinced. In my experience, confession is the best technique.

I am most concerned for the families of transvestites as my own marriage has been devastated by my wife's discovery of my transvestism. We try and help wives and they can freely come along to any of our meetings in London and "meet and talk to fellow sufferers.

**Jennie Chiles,**  
London Regional Organiser  
Beaumont Society,  
BM Box 3084,  
London WC1N 3XX.



Transvestites in a London bar: picture by Martin Argles