

THE SEAHORSE SOCIETY OF N.S.W. INC.

SUBMISSION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

THE RITE OF PASSAGE” No 1

July 2, 2008

STATEMENT AND SUMMARY ABOUT THE SEAHORSE SOCIETY

INCLUDING DISCUSSION AND DESCRIPTIONS OF SOME OF THE ISSUES FACED BY CROSS DRESSERS.

To begin this presentation, I must first explain who we are and represent as a Society. We are an organisation of like-minded cross-dressers, who are members of this support group. The Society not only provides a situation for social interaction between these people, who incidentally, represent a cross section of all ages, social interests and occupations.

What is the Seahorse society?

A SUMMARY

The Society, not only provides a safe and non-confronting situation for member's family, partners and friends, but also provides access to written material (books, articles, and DVDs) to assist members to understand the “whys” and causes of the phenomena, and suggested ways for helping people cope with this.

We also have access to many counsellors and professional people, not only in the major cities, but also throughout rural N.S.W.

There is also a monthly magazine and public events (e.g. the Seahorse Ball) held throughout the year.

We provide a ‘Big Sister’ program, where our committee personally help and ‘shepherd’ new and/or interested people who approach our Society, either by our website or by the two support phones one run by the members, the other for the wives/partners run by the wives of the committee members.

We also have produced an Outreach Program, in which a group of committee members and their wives/partners conduct a seminar in one of the major country areas (for example, to Coffs Harbour in 2007 and Dubbo in 2008), where invitations go out to, not only our members and people, who may be interested or curious in seeing what cross-dressing is about, but also to the professionals and counselling organizations. We have also taken this program by request to Lifeline, some Mental Health Units, and Sexual Health groups as well. All this is achieved by donations, members' yearly fees, and by a very willing group of volunteers within the Society.

WHY "RITE OF PASSAGE"?

During the time of my last 3 years as President of the Society, I have researched extensively into this phenomena, not only looking at the social history of cross-dressing from past centuries, but how it exists and is assimilated into mainstream cultures throughout the world in the 20th-21st century. I have also written 2 books based on this, as well as the experiences of my own personal journey in life, living and finally finding myself as a true person over the last 60 odd years. It is only in the last 12 years that I have been able to accept the cross-dressing part of myself, although I have been a cross-dresser all of my conscious life from those tender years as a small boy until now.

WHY THE QUESTION "THE RITE OF PASSAGE"?

Over the period of the last 3 years I have observed many misunderstood ideas and experienced first-hand some misguided attitudes from the general public, because of the lack of understanding and plain ignorance that most general people have towards cross-dressing. Western Society accepts without any thought or malice that the female of our species cross-dresses most of the time. You only have to pick up and look at any magazine or news paper at any time to see how accepting women are treated when they present in public, dressed in men's fashions (pants, shorts, boots, jackets, shirts etc. just to mention a few) However, if I go out in public wearing a skirt, I don't need to comment any further on this. Shopping in a women's store, dressed as a man, even raises the odd eyebrow. Women in menswear stores are just accepted as the normal part of every day life.

Then the other problem from this for the cross-dresser is, what if I cannot express myself in public, because of fear of recognition, public attitude of disgust or verbal ridicule, family denial, outrage and being ostracized from relationships, and family break-ups. All these force cross-dressers to remain in the secrecy of a closet, which then creates more and far reaching consequences for the individual. For example, the person moves into areas of severe denial, depression, frustration, self-judgment and total lack of self-acceptance, and loses any feeling of well-being. All these types of inner turmoil, if not addressed early in life, develop into anti-social behaviour and expression being manifested later in life. "The Cause and Effect Syndrome". So cross-dressing, no matter how simple or how out there it is expressed, can act and be a major catalyst for problems for individuals.

Cross-dressing in males can range from the simple wearing of underwear, to those who dress up in the clothes, wigs, shoes of the opposite gender, through to those who live almost totally as a woman, but maintain some areas and public presentation of the male gender that they have been born as.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND MISCONCEPTIONS,

Two examples of the biggest misunderstandings expressed in public are:

The first example is that, "All Cross-dressers are gay, 'ratbags', or perverts"

All cross-dressers are not have the "gay " persuasion, the same as not all "gay" people are cross-dressers. The cross-dresser is expressing "his" femininity within, in other words, the opposite gender. The "gay" person expresses their sexual interests in other same-sex people. One is gender expression, the other is sexual expression. This is why there are both heterosexual male cross-dressers, as well as "gay" cross-dressers, but not all male cross-dressers are gay. This is why that the gay community sometimes are suspicious of cross-dressers, as well through ignorance, occasionally accusing us cross-dressers of being "Pretend Gays". Obviously, there probably does exist a certain element of this type of behaviour throughout the general society, but it is in the minority.

Before I move on, may I say that I hate putting people into categories or name boxes, but for this exercise it is necessary, and my excuse is that we are all “stuck” with the limitations of the English language. I also must thank my “gay” friends for their insight and sharing of their ideas and “culture” to help me understand this side of their existence.

The second example: “A cross-dresser lives out a fetish and we are exhibitionists and we can stop or at the very least control our outrageous self-indulgent behaviour in public”.

There exists many theories propagated by the medical and psychiatry fraternity as to the causes of this phenomena. Cross-dressing does exist throughout the world. It has existed and exists in all cultures and societies and has been around for centuries.

The fact is that we do exist and have been recognised in the public domain. However, the main consensus of information coming through, from TV, magazines and periodicals, is that cross-dressing is passed through our make up or being at birth. There is an element of genetic background or, put simply, it is a pre-wiring of the brain, as to the thought processes that drive this expression. This “drive” will always exist, although we, as cross-dressers, are able to control this urge, as to how or when we will follow the inner suggestion from our brain thought processes. However, there is no cure because it is not an illness. We are just who we are, and this expressed behaviour is just another part of our personal make-up.

SO WHEREIN LIES THE RITE OF PASSAGE?

Society, as a whole, thinks that the existence of cross-dressers is the wider community is very small and insignificant, when it comes to dealing with diverse behaviour exhibited by those who are confident to express their other gender. Cross-dressing is seen more as a part of public entertainment, such as found in movies, plays, and adds a bit of human interest.

However, judging by the number of phone approaches and hits on the Society website, as well as inquiries from professional circles, many counsellors are not well-informed, when they are trying to help a client on the causes of crossdressing and behaviour

consequences to this person, who finds that they are not able to mentally cope with situations caused by their cross-dressing. They may have crossed that sexual bridge by acting out a whim or experiment, only to find that this is not really what they wanted. It is one thing to imagine what some act would be like, or feel like, but once you put this whim into action, it is a bit hard to “re-virgin” one’s self to be a virgin?

Even when I have approached the Government bodies (local member and one of the managers of The Mental Health Service) to try and get some financial assistance and direction, with the Outreach Program, the answer is always the same. We are acknowledged that we do exist, but because we don’t fit supposedly into their understanding or criteria of mental illness, or that we don’t have a big enough client base to justify support help or being included in main stream social issues, we just get a thank-you, but no thank-you response. I feel that this is mainly due to the fact that most people think that cross-dressing is really not that prevalent within the greater Australian society and if it really does exist, it is behind closed doors in the closet, and therefore a harmless fetish. However, the increasing demands, made on our Society and other transgender support groups for information and support, tell a very different story.

I would challenge the members of the general public, and even the professionals, out there, to see how many families, friends, and relationships that have been directly impacted by the effects of someone, expressing a different behaviour, whether it be sexual (gay) or gender (cross-dresser) or some deviation from the normal (what ever that is). I would love to be able to define what is considered normal. I think that the scales would tip rather heavily to the side that most people would rather not admit to.

For example, one question that I always love to ask, when I am in a seminar situation or confronted by someone. “Will you answer a question honestly for me? At any time or age, have you ever dressed up in the clothes of your opposite gender? And the second part of the question, and I ask for an honest answer, is and at the time: “Did you enjoy the experience?”

Again people would be surprised at the many times I have asked this question, and the answer is “yes!” Yes a lot of boys and men

dress up in women's clothes from time to time, but that does not necessarily mean that all who do will be or become or are cross-dressers, as we know.

HOW WILL THIS RITE BE ACHIEVED?

FIRST: Let us look at this from the cross-dressers prospective.

By meeting like-minded people, sharing experiences and achieving a position of self-knowledge by finding some answers to those questions, that we all ask of ourselves, as people, especially if we are cross dressers, how can we attain self-confidence and raise our own level of self-esteem.

By looking at how cross-dressing can be a catalyst for relation disruptions and behaviour dysfunctions, and being totally honest in our evaluation of ourselves, we can find our true self within, and become more content within our own persona and thus be able to cope better with the "normal" problems of life and relationships.

SECOND From society's point of view.

We need to reassure the general public that we are not trying to convert them to all be cross-dressers nor that we are trying to change the perception and demeanour of what we understand is "male".

My statement is, "Yes, I am a male, who occasionally likes dressing up and wearing woman's clothes and presenting as a female. I do not become a female when I am dressed as a woman and I am not doing this to attract another male sexually. I am still a male even though I am dressed this way, at that particular time. Also, you cannot catch "gay" or "cross-dressing". It is not some contagious disease. I am not even suggesting that the general public must completely accept completely who we are and what we do when expressing ourselves in our other persona. Nor must we expect this response from other individuals".

However what I am asking for and suggesting is a Rite Of Passage, based on a basic tolerance and acceptance, so that we, as cross-dressers, are able to move around freely in public with dignity, and

without fear of facing unnecessary disgust and/or intolerance from the general public.

Again the reactions that we have faced, is and has been only a normal reaction from people – who are ignorant of us as people, and of their own fears of the unknown. This is a 2-way street for both the general public, and us, as cross-dressers. We have the duty as cross-dressers to prove that we are not a threat or confronting to people. We should dress and behave in a manner that is acceptable to general society when presenting in our other persona and, if the opportunity presents, inform the curious people in a non-confronting way that approaches us.

As to the professionals and councillors: the following statement. We, the Seahorse Society are a part of the greater Transgender Community. We endeavour to provide support and information to our members, and to any other people who approach us on either the website or the phones.

Our Society may only have a reasonably small membership base, but our communication base reaches all over Australia and our Society is normally the first point of reference for a cross-dresser, who is seeking help and the company of like-minded people. Some move on in their journey, and then come back into the Society at a later date.

Now that finally, the government bodies have realized that transgender issues affect many people in the greater Australian community, we are offering to continue our services of support and information, for those in need. The time is NOW. Now to address the problems of social diversity and of human rights and to embrace the opportunities of change, to communicate with each other, and build a better and stronger Australian community.

Thank you.

Julia Crawshaw

Member 478

(President of the Seahorse Society of N.S.W.INC. 2008)