

Setting the record straight

Professors: Cross-dressing not perverted

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

There is no sexual perversion involved in the many different types of cross-dressing, according to James K. Cole, University of Nebraska-Lincoln psychology professor.

Cole said men have historically played the roles of women in traditional theater, which involves assuming the dress and roles of female characters.

Among homosexuals, cross-dressing offers a chance to act out, imitate or caricature the appearance of the opposite gender, he said. It can function "as a statement, almost political," Cole said. "It can be an anti-society orientation to straight masculine and feminine roles."

Another type of cross-dressing, transvestitism, "represents an erotic orientation involving cross-dressing," Cole said. He added that trans-

vestitism is not necessarily a form of homosexuality.

"Many transvestites have a predominantly heterosexual orientation," he said.

Cole described a fourth type of cross-dressing which occurs among transsexuals -- those people who feel they have the wrong physical body, such as a biological male who has all the psychological and emotional feelings of a female.

"They dress as females because they feel it is the correct role for them," Cole said.

Cole made another distinction in the use of the term "drag."

"Drag refers to an almost theatrical caricature of the opposite gender," he said. "It is not necessarily a male dressing as a female, but is so most often."

UNL Psychology Professor Richard Dienstbier said there are large numbers of cross-dressers who are heterosexual.

"It may have an arousing quality, a sense of 'getting away with it,' an element of risk," he said.

Typical responses to people

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UNL psychology professor

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dressed in the clothes of the opposite gender might include being taken aback, discouragement or disgust, Dienstbier said.

"There is a fear of people whose sexuality is different," he said. "There is great tension expressed; anger and insecurity are elicited by those who cross-dress."

According to Dienstbier, such

responses are not likely to change a great deal in the next few decades.

"The sex roles we are taught to accept are reasonably well-established in different societies," he said. "Sex roles may be different in different cultures, but they are fixed within each culture."

"I don't think there are many societies today where a cross-dresser would be fully accepted," Dienstbier said. "At some ceremonies it occurs, but those are tightly prescribed situations."

More men than women are seen as cross-dressers, Dienstbier said, who pointed to a greater permissiveness in America toward the wearing of men's clothing by women.

He described a growing acceptance of homosexuals and transsexuals since his college days but said, "The current generation does not seem accepting of sexual vari-

ations of any kind. You can read graffiti on the john walls and see how uptight people are about their sexuality."


"The prevailing attitude is not one of acceptance of differences, especially for young men growing up feeling tension and conflict about whether they can really establish themselves in an adult male sex role," Dienstbier said.

"Those insecurities are often expressed as great dislike or distrust of those who don't show traditional adult male sex roles, whether they are homosexuals, transsexuals or cross-dressers," he said.

Dienstbier said people who cross-dress in a more casual way don't necessarily experience arousal, but they may do it for a variety of reasons.

According to Cole, it is "who the individual is," not the person's age or other factors which determine cross-dressing.

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