

The Transvestite Transexual Community
in Britain

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Paper presented to a conference organised
by the British Sociological Association
Study Group on Sexuality at Manchester
University 9th October 1976

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THE TRANSVESTITE/TRANSEXUAL COMMUNITY¹

This paper offers some observations on the transvestite/transsexual² community in Britain and on some other sociological aspects of transvestism and transexualism. The paucity of sociological work in this area³ is perhaps surprising in view of recent sociological interest in deviant behaviour and in sex roles and sexual behaviour. This may perhaps be partly a function of the relative inaccessibility of the area despite estimates that transvestism is 'probably as common as homosexuality.' (Guardian article September 13th 1973) or 'the next most common variation of sexual activity after homosexuality.' (Kenneth Walker quoted by Randell 1973 p.52). There is also the view that it constitutes what Gagnon and Simon call 'a pathological form of deviance' (Gagnon and Simon 1967 p.9) and therefore 'necessitates a psychological or social-psychological perspective rather than a sociological one.' (Ibid p.9). Such forms of sexual deviance according to Gagnon and Simon 'exist without supportive group structures that serve to recruit to the behaviour, train participants in it, gather partners together for its performance or provide social support for the actor.' (Ibid p.9). Whilst this may have been true of transvestism and transexualism as a whole at one time and whilst it may still be true for a large numbers of TVs. and TSS, it is certainly no longer possible to describe the behaviour as completely individual deviation.^{4 5}

In the psychiatric literature transvestism and transexualism are usually distinguished from one another although they are often seen as related phenomena. Like homosexuality, they are largely described as conditions characterising certain persons with the major research emphasis placed on the question of etiology.⁶ And like homosexuality, there is controversy in the professional literature concerning which criteria are to be used in diagnosing these conditions, a controversy paralleled in the TV. or TS.'s own literature. Within the present context, I find it most useful to conceive of transvestism and transexualism not as separate conditions or states but as roles which people engaging in a variety of forms of cross dressing and cross gender behaviour use to make sense of their behaviour. Thus the subculture or community⁷ which I shall outline is not a TV. or TS. community nor is it an amalgamation of two separate communities with somewhat similar problems; rather, it is a community which, amongst other things, provides an environment within which an individual can fashion an identity as TV. or TS, these being the only ones offered by the community, reflecting psychiatric opinion. The TV/TS distinction is an important one for the individual and for others in the community. With the wider availability of sex-change surgery over the last ten or so years, the distinction becomes of more than academic or social interest. Awareness of the possibility of such surgery means that most individuals will have to make a decision with regard to it at some point. The decision may, in some cases, be an easy one; others may remain in a state of indecision for years and others may move back and forth between the two roles.

The problem is one of constructing meanings of ones experiences using rough tools in the form of the psychiatrically created and sub-culturally modified categories of transvestite and transexual. As Ken Plummer remarks with reference to the homosexual 'one cannot see the individual automatically' and intrinsically 'knowing' that he is a homosexual (1975 p.135). These comments imply one thing which my research has brought home to me - that is that there is an immense variety of behaviours and experience covered by the terms transvestite and transexual. What follows this is not a description of the 'true', real or ideal type transvestite or transexual but is in part an outline of the normative structure of one transvestite/transexual community. The existence of such norms probably results in the exclusion from the community of many who from another perspective might be TVs. and TS.s although as I indicate at various points in the paper there would appear to be a large amount of 'situational' deviance (Plummer 1975, 1976).

There are, so far as I am aware, no detailed accounts of TV. or TS. subcultures, either in America or in Britain⁸. Several sociologists who have been concerned with aspects of transexualism have, however, noted the existence of a TS subculture as a part of the 'urban underworld'. Kando (1973) in his study of post-operatives TS's writes of the 'TV/TS subculture that centers around a number of downtown stripjoints and gay bars'⁹. Other sources also attest to the TS's involvement in prostitution, stripping, female impersonation and the gay world (Driscoll 1971: Levine 1975)

Whilst the subculture referred to by the above authors could be said to operate outside of respectable society and its participants assume, at least for a part of their lives, deviant roles and lifestyles, the British TV/TS community I am studying operates beneath the surface of respectable society but not outside it. It's participants maintain respectable roles, lifestyles and self-images and meet each other not in stripjoints and gay bars, but in their own suburban sitting rooms.

Although both types of subculture undoubtedly exist in the U.S.A. and in Britain, I suspect that the first type is more characteristic of the States though this apparent difference may, be simply a product of insufficient research. If there is such a difference, it may be due to the fact that, in the States, cross-dressing seems to be more open to legal sanctions. Also in the States, sex reassignment surgery would appear to be relatively less easily available and also more expensive. Occupations such as prostitution and stripping may therefore seem attractive as a way of amassing sufficient cash in as short as time as possible. The sources referred to above are all concerned with TS's; it may be that the U.S. TV subculture is more similar to that described below.

THE SUBCULTURE

Prior to coming into face to face contact with others like himself the TV. or TS is likely to have spent a long period cross dressing occasionally, in secret, using whatever items of female clothing he can obtain. He has become aware that there are other men who cross dress and who change sex as a result of reading newspaper accounts and books on the subject which he may have searched hard for. He may not be reassured by what he has read; in this quote, the writer is referring to a newspaper article about a man, who dressed as a woman and murdered a man after escaping from a mental institution: "I was fascinated by the idea of a man dressing as a woman but I felt worried too. I wasn't like him. I didn't want to hurt anyone, even though I, too, dressed as a female. Did this tendency in me mean that I'd end up the way that men had?" (Conn 1974 p.66).

The opportunity to make contact with others only became widespread in this country with the rise of the Beaumont Society in the late sixties. Most TVs and TSs now in middle age and beyond have thus spent most of their lives without such contact. It remains to be seen whether TVs and TSs will now make contact at an earlier age and what effects this will have. At the moment the TV or TS usually comes into contact with the subculture via 'the Beaumont Society', although sometimes via one of the local groups linked to but not run by the Society. He may learn of the Society's existence from a doctor, social worker or an organisation such as Friend or the Samaritans or he may come across it in his reading. Often he knows of the Society's existence for some time before daring to make contact. He may be wary of divulging his secret and he may still be afraid that he is likely to become involved in homosexuality or 'kinky' sexual practices. The writer in this quote has made contact but is still uncertain about what he is letting himself in for. 'I had never knowingly met a TV before and naturally I wondered what to expect. Would I meet him or her? Would we like each other? I had read B.S. literature and knew that I wouldn't meet a pansy, but still, I was a little afraid.' (Candida 4: 1- a B.S. regional magazine).

The degree of involvement in the subculture varies of course, from those who merely receive the Society's literature to those whose social life is dominated by their cross dressing. Occupationally mosts TVs and TSs remain within the conventional culture. Some may be involved professionally in female impersonation but not in the groups I am studying. In these groups only a few individuals make their living in the subculture producing or importing literature, clothes and technical aids for their fellows. So for most TVs and TSs participation remains a leisure time activity. The TV or TS with few worries about time and money can spend most of his leisure time at parties, dinners or meetings for TVs and TSs in some part of the country. In many areas groups are formed which provide social facilities and often programmes of talks or discussions on for example, make up, hair care, psychiatric aspects of transvestism and transexualism, whether to tell the children and so on.

From these national and local functions emerges a network of friendship groups or pairs which provide further opportunities for cross dressing and for more private mutual exploration of feelings and attitudes. It is possible for members to write to each other anonymously via the society and it seems likely that there are a number of members who do not participate in group activities but who correspond with other members in this way, possibly eventually contacting a small number of them in person. Informal contacts formed in this way or through the Society's functions may come to assume more importance than the formed activities for some TVs and TSs who drop out of them and the Society altogether.

This world is a closed one - a socially invisible one and this is its advantage though after a while, it's disadvantage too. The often-noted so-called 'urge' of TVs and TSs to cross dress in public is usually attributed to an exhibitionistic 'streak'. It might equally be simply a desire shared with most stigmatised groups to broaden their social contacts beyond the narrow circle of their 'own'. As Goffman remarks, 'among his own, the stigmatised individual can use his disadvantage as a way of organising his life but he must resign himself to a half world to do so! He later points out that 'the whole matter of focussing on 'the problem' is one of the large penalties for having one.' (1963 p.p. 32-33). Unfortunately for many TVs this semi-public cross dressing is the best they can hope for, their physical appearance or fears preventing them from cross dressing in public. For those who can pass, social activities outside the subculture become more and more attractive although most, unless they move into passing full-time as females, are confined to anonymous social activities like the cinema and theatre. Sometimes gay bars and clubs are used as safe environments for cross dressing; although these are hardly public, they are more open than the closed TV world. The ts, to the extent that he is successful in the creation of a new life as a female, eventually ceased to need the shelter of the subculture, and may actively reject it.

The core element of the subculture is the Beaumont Society,¹⁰ a somewhat unique organisation among deviant groups. Around this has evolved a community in the sense in which Hooker uses the term - 'an aggregate of persons engaging in common activities, sharing common interest and having a feeling of socio-psychological unity'. (Hooker 1967 p. 171). This would seem to be the reverse of the process in the homosexual world, where similar organisations may have, at least partly, evolved out of an already existing community centred upon certain institutions and facilities.

The Beaumont Society has at present around 500 members, approximately 1,200 having passed through it since its inception in 1966. The average age of members is around 38 (Kemmett 1976) with a range from 18 to 82 (Brierley 1974). Beyond the age of 30, the incidence of marriage compared by age is similar to that of the general population (Brierley 1974) but below 30, the incidence of marriage amongst members is less than that of the general population, a fact which Brierley attributes to the high occupational status of members.

Kemmett found that 70% of the Beaumont Society members follow non-manual occupations and Brierley characterised 25% of them as professional engineers or scientists. The age and class distribution of the membership is thus probably similar to such groups as C.H.E. which as Ken Plummer points out 'parallels the middle-class membership of any heterosexual voluntary organisation' (1975 p.166).

The Society is concerned primarily with those TVs 'whose motivation for cross dressing is primarily of a gender rather than a sexual nature.' (Beaumont Society Constitution 1975). The nature of this concern makes it difficult for the Society to exclude TSs and so, whilst the emphasis remains on the heterosexual TV, they are admitted.

Many psychiatrists characterise transvestism as a sexual perversion - a kind of complex fetish in which the TV gains erotic satisfaction from completely dressing and appearing as a female. They also often note that TVs tend to deny their sexual motive. Several writers, however, also point to psychological motives other than sexual ones and most TVs within the Society stress the non-sexual nature of their cross dressing. It may be that this emphasis upon non-sexual motives results in the (self and other) exclusion from the Society of those with sexual motives and this may in part explain the turnover in membership. There seems however to be a, not inconsiderable amount of 'situational deviance' involving elements of fetishism, bondage, masochism and homosexuality.

One image of it's members which comes across through the Beaumont Society's publications is that of the 'suburban matron or conservative middle-class woman' mentioned by Mike Brake (1976 p.189) as shown in this short piece from a Beaumont Society Bulletin; 'It has been rightly said that a true lady is one who helps a man to be a gentleman. Some of us are occasionally escorted by a friend's brother (another TV - DK). How important it is that we should strive even harder not to let our companion down ... to allow the door to be opened for us, remember to make room on the pavement so that our escort may take the outside position, to remain seated when shaking hands, and not to remove gloves. I saw someone lapse recently and use both hands to blow the nose into a tissue. I was so ashamed especially as I caught sight of it in a mirror I vow never to allow this to happen again.'

This emphasis on correct ladylike behaviour is certainly an element in some members ideal although most would probably ridicule it in this extreme form. Another ideal or 'role model' is younger and more attractive than Brake's 'suburban matron'. This attractiveness is not the brash aggressive glamour of the sex symbol or of some female impersonators but is the gentle, passive non-sexual attractiveness of the 'nice girl' suggested by words such as feminine and charm. The 'nice girl' enjoys her attractiveness and is even expected to flirt playfully with men but this must be innocently playful and not sexually provocative. In a letter reproduced in Prince's the Transvestite and His Wife, the writer expresses his admiration for 'beautiful, gentle, soft, delicate, lady-like, weak women.'

Although there is no discussion or even mention of sexual politics, Mike Brake's comments concerning the cultural relativity and achieved nature of gender roles would, I guess, provoke little criticism from Beaumont Society members. Whilst few would see transvestism as sickness, as on balance they find it immensely pleasurable, most would view themselves as having some kind of psychological condition over which they have little control. One of the tasks of the Society is therefore seen as the dissemination of information in order to promote understanding and tolerance on the part of the TV's family and relatives and society in general.

According to Newton (1972), 'transy drag' is deviant in the female impersonator's world. 'Transy drag' refers to female clothing which is 'unrelated to the necessities of the performance' or which is worn by women in every day circumstances. The female impersonator's only acceptable motive is making money out of his performance, not satisfying his private compulsion. Conversely, the TV is expected to wear all feminine clothing, whether or not it contributes to the overall appearance. The TV must pay as much attention to his knickers as to his dress. Also they are expected to wear ordinary, everyday female clothing, although I am told that many TVs have some theatrical creations in their wardrobe which they would not wear in public. Deviance in the drag world is apparently conformity in that of the TV and vice versa. Drag in fact is a term which the TV never applies to himself except in the context of a joke. To speak of a TV as being in drag almost amounts to an insult. There are two reasons for this; firstly it suggests the wearer is homosexual and secondly, it suggests the wearing of female clothing for a theatrical or comic purpose. For the TV or TS the clothes are not part of a masquerade but are an expression of his identity; he is not playing a part but is expressing what he feels himself to BE. 'The wearing of the clothes is just a natural impulse. It seems the only natural thing to do. The dressing in these clothes is the outward expression of the inner desires and emotions.' (TS quoted by Benjamin 1966, p.201). As well as expressing these feelings, the clothes can also give rise to them. Female impersonators however often seem to hold a fascination for TVs and TSs. Histories of female impersonation and picture magazines dealing with drag shows and drag balls form part of the literature consumed by TVs and TSs although few apparently engage in such activities themselves. The TV or TS is perhaps envious of the drag artist's freedom to cross dress and he may be interested in the techniques they use to create a feminine appearance but he does not wish to be presented as a man dressed as a woman - he wants to pass as a woman.

There would seem to be little approaching a subcultural argot in the TV/TS world. TV and TS are of course convenient abbreviations of transvestite and transexual and R.G. is often used to refer to a 'real girl' although this seems to be less frequently used. A TV or TS does not, as I have said, wear 'drag' but when wearing female clothes he is cross dressed or more usually just 'dressed' or perhaps 'en femme'. The TV refers to his female self as his 'sister' when not cross dressed and usually has a 'femme' name.

When cross dressed he may refer to his male self as his 'brother'. He talks about 'passing' and worries about whether or not he has been 'read'. Such terms can be seen to refer to certain of the TVs or TSs concerns but hardly functions as a secret means of communication. As far as I am aware the TV or TS does not use the term 'straight' nor is there an equivalent term. Apparently the TV or TS does not differentiate himself sufficiently from 'respectable' society to require a special term to denote this.

I now want to briefly mention some non TV and TS elements of the community. At most B.S. functions one finds a number of members wives, fiancées or girlfriends and, occasionally, a sister or child. As well as gaining support from others they may participate in the various social activities and if they have the expertise may provide advice on make-up, hairdressing, typing etc.

Secondly at a more formal level, the Society also has contacts with doctors, social workers, priests, psychiatrists, Samaritans etc. Only a few of the TVs I have encountered have had contact with these 'helping' agencies though the psychiatrist has an important role in the life of the TS.

In part the Society sees these contacts as a means of disseminating information and changing attitudes. It may also call upon the services of these groups if required. The Society is probably regarded by these groups as similar to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Thirdly there are those who provide the TV or TS with the goods and services he requires as a consequence of his activities. In part this may constitute what Lemert calls an 'exploitative' culture' referring to the fact that deviants, by virtue of their special needs may be exploited by those prepared to meet these needs. The material needs of most TVs or TSs are the same as those of most women - clothes, wigs, make-up, shoes can all be bought through the usual retailers. There are certain problems here for the TV or TS however and I discuss these below. These can be partly overcome by using one of a number of retailers who are known to members of the community as being willing to knowingly serve TVs and TSs and who may for example, make a back room available for fitting or open after normal hours. Hairdressers, beauty clinics and electrologists may offer a similar service.

For the TV with less conventional requirements, there are a couple of specialist suppliers. One catalogue advertises 'Madam Controller' described as a 'fantastic, extra long deep corset for those that like to feel governed. Not for namby pamby.' Others cater for those interested in acquiring a maids, ice skater's or schoolgirls outfit. They may also supply such aids as false breasts and hip pads and items such as make-up and tights which could be obtained (probably more cheaply) at a usual retailer. In the U.S. one can approach a 'drag consultant' who promises to 'make your boyself into your girlself'.

These thus cater for all TVs not the 'ideal' of this particular community.

A similar situation exists with regard to TV and TS literature. Many TVs and TSs will read at some time, the academic literature relating to themselves. These books and certain novels and autobiographies of interest to others besides the TV and TS are available in the usual outlets. They may also be sold by specialist firms (again possibly at inflated prices) together with material less widely available. These may be straight novels with a TV theme, picture books of female impersonators, or TS autobiographies without sufficient appeal to the general market or they may be of the more 'pornographic' type often with elements of bondage and domination as indicated by the titles, 'Enslaved in Lace', 'Captive in Silks', 'Frankie and the Strong-willed Woman who turns boys into girls' and 'Stern, Dominant Women bind Man in Female Attire.' Films with similar themes are also available.

There is, as yet, no national TV or TS organisation comparable to the B.S. in Britain. Last year, an attempt to organise an effective national TS group failed due to a lack of support. The idea of a separate TS organisation has been around for some time, it being felt by some that the needs of the TS are sufficiently distinct from those of the TV to require it. There is also the feeling that the TS needs some kind of pressure groups to fight for certain legal changes and improvements in the provision of medical facilities. Since the TS would appear to have much to gain from such changes it seems reasonable to ask why an organisation has not arisen to try to bring them about. Frank Pearce (1973) suggests that the media react more favourably to TSs than to homosexuals (and one could extend his argument to include TVs with homosexuals). If this could be taken as indicative of the societal reaction in general then it could be argued that the TS has little need of a protective group. However I would suspect that, whilst the reaction may be milder towards TSs than towards homosexuals, nevertheless it is still strong enough to produce a need for group support. The number of TSs in the existing community would seem to support this line of argument. The main reason for the lack of an effective separate TS group lies, I think, in the nature of the TS experience. In a sense, being a TS is a temporary state lasting from when one decides one is a TS to when one obtains surgery and re-enters society as a woman. There are some TSs who remain part of the subculture after making the 'change' but most are only part of it for perhaps a couple of years whilst they are making the transition from living as a man to living as a woman. This high rate of turnover therefore probably works against any attempt to set up an organisation. If the TS plays the psychiatrist's 'game' well enough then he can in large measure, expect an individual solution to his 'problem'. Involvement in a radical TS organisation could, in fact, lead to a postponement or refusal of surgery through the usual channels.

This would seem to be in direct contrast to the situation in the States where according to Sagrin (1969 p.117) 'TSs have made a greater effort towards organisation than the TVs'. He attributes this to the fact that they have a goal (sex change) which they feel organisation will help them to achieve, that they have less to lose in terms of family connections, by exposing their deviance and that they have 'certain

personality traits which, in their highly stigmatising effect, encourage organisational structure.' I am not sure what he means by the last part. Certainly a TS must expose himself as a TS to his family, something the TV may not be willing to do but both TVs and TSs may suffer from wider exposure. In the U.S. however the TS would appear to be more subject to legal sanctions and sex-change surgery seems to be a lot less easily available than in Britain. One may suppose then that the American TS is a TS for longer than his British counterpart. It may be that their only hope, apart from expensive surgery abroad, is to try to effect change by means of some kind of pressure group. Actually how far such organisations are effective, I am unaware; Sagarin only mentions C.O.G. (Change Our Gender or Change - Our Goal) which at the time it was enjoying it's greatest success as an organisation, had 17 registered members' and a breakaway group from COG, CATS - The California Association of Transexuals. (Sagarin 1969 p.123)

The only major alternative 'voice' to appear on the British TV/TS scene has been 'Gemini' which unfortunately only survived two issues. This was produced by the Leeds TV/TS group but much of the material came from TVs and TSs in other areas. Both in form and in content 'Gemini' differed from the B.S. Bulletins and resembled the more radical publications of other deviant groups, revealing an awareness of and a willingness to discuss the issues raised by the gay and women's movements. It was often critical of the Beaumont Society and the Psychiatric profession and also of some attitudes within the gay and women's movements towards TVs and TSs.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE TV/TS SUBCULTURE²

It is plausible to suppose that a subculture or community may emerge around any activity or experience not shared with the society at large. In the case of deviant behaviour, additional pressures towards subcultural formation are experienced in the form of a negative societal reaction which creates problems for the deviant such as those of managing guilt, obtaining access to the things he needs and others to be discussed below. In the present paper I do not discuss the societal reaction in any detail but merely assume without presenting any evidence that it is sufficiently strong enough to create these pressures towards subcultural formation. Most of the usually stated preconditions for the emergence of a subculture would seem to be present in the case of transvestism and transexualism.

Firstly the 'problem' seems to be widespread, whichever estimate one accepts. I have already quoted two authors who suggest that transvestism is at least as widespread as homosexuality.

Moreover it is a 'problem' which either in it's sexual or non-sexual aspects is largely incapable of being incorporated into non-deviant patterns of activity.

TV fantasies can be readily utilised in 'normal' sexual encounters but only rarely will actual cross dressing be acceptable. Legitimate opportunities for cross dressing in a non-sexual way exist but, it seems that these are unlikely to be utilised by the TV or TS who often publicly avoids any kind of behaviour or item of dress which might be thought feminine and may in fact assume an ultra-masculine role. Moreover these opportunities cannot be used frequently enough to satisfy most TVS or TSS since this would lead to a questioning of their motives.

The 'problem' is also a permanent one for TVS and a long-lasting one for TSS. Most authorities agree on the incurability of both. The Beaumont Society has had members aged 80 and over and so it seems that for TVS and those TSS unable to obtain surgery, the problem is a lifelong one. For the TS who is fortunate enough to achieve her goal - integration into society as a woman, the problem is removed although there is usually a period of a few years, probably two or three prior to this in which the TS may benefit from subcultural involvement.

There seems to be nothing inherent in transvestism or transexualism which requires contact with others. Homosexual intercourse, swinging, nude wrestling and other forms of sexual and non-sexual deviation require contact with others for their performance and this may be the most important, but not the only, pressure towards the formation of subcultures in these areas. In order to cross dress, to behave and pass as a female, and to undergo sex change surgery, TVs and TSS do not need contact with like minded others, but the psychological and other problems produced by the societal reaction to these behaviours can be alleviated by such contacts and this makes the subculture an attractive place to many.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is necessary that there be effective communication between potential members before a subculture can emerge. In America this vital precondition was met by the magazine 'Transvestia' and the Foundation for Full Personality Expression (FPE). The Beaumont Society was formed by a handful of British TVs and TSS who had joined FPE. By making its existence known through the medical and social work professions, publications dealing with transvestism and transexualism as well as sex in general, the mass media and organisations like Friend and the Samaritans, the B.S. makes provision for initial contact with the subculture and for the development of interpersonal contacts.

THE SUBCULTURAL SOLUTION

In this section, I look at some of the ways in which the individual experience of transvestism and transexualism may be affected by involvement in the subculture and in particular, I am concerned with the way in which the subculture offers solutions to the problems apparently posed by the societal reaction. This section is of course heavily influenced by the 'control' theories of Becker and Box and in particular by Box's characterisation of the deviant's major problems as being those of secrecy,

supply, skills and social and symbolic support (Becker 1963: Box 1971). I use these categories in order to organise the material; the question of the part played by the subculture and the solutions it offers in any subsequent development of the behaviour is a complex one which I do not consider in any depth here, although as I imply in several places below, I do not see the subculture as the only source of solutions to these problems. Whilst in some cases access to skills, opportunities and materials for cross dressing and supportive accounts seems to lead to the emergence of more regular and sophisticated cross dressing, other TVs and TSs develop in this way without face to face contact with others.

Contact with others after years of living with a guilty secret can be an immense relief. It provides the opportunity to talk about ones feelings and experiences and to cross dress without ridicule or censure. One TV in a letter quoted by Prince (1967 p.26) writes 'the relief of being 'home' at last with my own kind was almost more than I could bear after all those years of going it alone.' In fact the new member may find it difficult to talk about his experiences when he has been so used to keeping them to himself. He may also find that if he is bursting to talk about himself, older members are not - they have heard it all before. It may also take time for the new member to find his 'own'; at first he assumes all TVs are the same and it usually takes time to find out that this is not the case and to gravitate towards those who he feels are most like himself.

The problem of secrecy can be considerably relieved or it can be exacerbated by membership of the community. On the one hand membership may provide the opportunity to cross dress more freely, at another members home or at a place hired by a group. He can dress without the anxiety caused by thoughts of his wife, parents or flat mate returning home unexpectedly. On the other hand, he may now have something else to hide or explain; the receipt of magazines and information from the B.S., letters from other members or visits to group meetings. Unless these problems can be solved, his contacts with others remain infrequent. Also the fact that other people now know must increase the chances of exposure. Whilst there is a strong norm requiring secrecy concerning other members, I have heard occasional stories of individuals who have embarrassed or threatened the 'cover' of others.

The problem of supply is related to that of opportunity. A regular supply of sexual partners or of illicit drugs is no help without the opportunity to make use of them. The TV or TS has a number of material needs which I shall discuss in a moment but he also needs a place to dress. The subculture may provide such a place which relieves the problem of maintaining secrecy as I have indicated. Regular provision of a place to dress may lead to a stabilisation of the TVs activities. Knowing that he can dress on a regular basis he is no longer on the lookout for every opportunity to do so. On the other hand, I am told by some TV's wives that the more opportunities he has, the more he wants.

The material requirements of the TV and TS are of two kinds; firstly, those of women in general, mainly clothing, cosmetics and so on and, secondly, the things he requires by virtue of the fact that he is a man trying to look like a woman, e.g. false breasts, perhaps theatrical make up that will cover a heavy beard shadow and so on.

Items belonging to the first category are of course generally available (wigs would seem to come into the second category but in the past ten or so years they have become almost as easily available as items in the first) but there are nevertheless a number of problems facing the TV or TS who wants to buy them. Most items of women's clothing and make up can be legitimately bought by males as presents although some men may experience embarrassment at doing so. The TV or TS, however, is likely to feel 'transparent' (Matza 1969). Somehow, he feels, the assistant and other people in the shop must know the purchases are for him. Usually the desire to obtain the things overcomes this feeling and the second time it may be easier. One respondent of mine told me how he started to buy things for himself after he had bought clothes as presents for a girlfriend and realised how easy it was. Shoes still present a problem as these are not usually bought as presents and the purchaser is expected to try them on. Mail order is a solution although, even here problems of transparency still seem to exist. Occasionally the TV or TS has a helpful female friend or relative who is prepared to purchase the things he needs. Usually, by the time he comes into contact with others, the TV or TS has a small amount of clothing and make up which he has accumulated over the years, items which he has stolen or begged from female acquaintances plus a few things which he has bought himself but it is not usually until after meeting others that he acquires a more complete wardrobe since these others may help him to overcome his fears about buying things for himself and may put him into contact with sympathetic retailers who will knowingly deal with TVs and TSs. Of course contact with the community also creates needs as well as helping to meet them; previously, any female clothes were adequate, now that he is appearing before others he needs clothes that fit, are fashionable and suitable to the occasion - before he may have wished for a long dress but did not need one, now he buys one for the group party. If as a result of meeting others he starts to go out cross dressed he needs a coat, an umbrella, a handbag and so on.

The TV or TS also finds out that there are a variety of technical aids which can enhance his appearance of femininity. Some of these are produced for women with special needs for example those who have had mastectomies, but others are produced especially for the TV/TS market. The neophyte learns of the existence of these items and also where they can be obtained. He may also learn where he can obtain speech therapy and electrolysis. For the TS of course, most important is access to a surgeon, a problem I discuss elsewhere.

The last paragraph touches on the area of skills. As the TV or TS learns of more skills by which he can enhance his feminine appearance so he may come to require more specialised aids.

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asts,

The area of skills can like supply be divided into two categories; those skills utilised by most women and those required by men trying to appear as women. In the former category fall such things as hair care, use of cosmetics and 'dress sense'. There is a whole area of cultural knowledge here to which the male does not usually have access. (Men who do have access to this area of knowledge, as hairstylists or dress designers for example, are often characterised as less than 'full men' in some way, homosexual or effeminate). The TV or TS may, from an early age, acquire some of this knowledge from observation of females and from reading women's magazines. Ken Plummer writes that 'male homosexuals are 'boy' watchers' in contrast to 'male-heterosexuals who are 'girl' watchers. 'Girl' refers to an attractive woman as Kameny (quoted by Plummer 1975 p.224) uses the term but the TV or TS looks at them not as erotic objects or, at least, not always and not only as such. As one TV remarked to me 'You see a girl walking down the street. The average male wants to be on top of her, the TV wants to be in her clothes'. In part then the look is one of envy 'She was a complete woman. I wished that my hair was as long as hers and I wished that my hips were as wide as hers. She could have a baby.' (Brown 1968 p.129). Also close attention is focused upon women's dress, grooming, mannerisms and so on. This applies not only to women met in the course of daily interaction, but also to women in the media. Women's magazines in particular furnish the TV or TS with many examples of his ideal and provide articles containing advice on how to achieve this ideal. Observations and information thus obtained provide a rich fund of material with which the TV/TS can practice and experiment. Until he joins the subculture, however, he may not have had feedback from other people as to the success or otherwise of his efforts.

Then there are those special skills required by virtue of being male. The TV or TS wants to disguise those features which proclaim him to be a male. He must appear as much like a woman as possible whether or not he will be seen by others. At a minimum, he must disguise his genitals in a reasonably comfortable fashion whilst producing a feminine appearance in just underwear (for his own satisfaction) produce a realistic appearance of breasts and disguise his beard shadow.

Most accounts of the learning of deviant skills seem to portray the neotype as the passive recipient of subcultural wisdom. In contrast, I have found many TVs and TSs to be very inventive with regard to the kinds of problems outlined. Over the years before they meet anyone else they experience with different ways of achieving the appearance they want. Wendy, the TS heroine of Geoff Brown's 'I want what I want' writes, 'I had evolved my technique over the years. My first attempts had been unbearably uncomfortable and unconvincing in appearance. But I had invented better ways of getting the results I wanted.' (Brown 1968 p62) On meeting others the TV or TS may modify his techniques or he may not come across anything better. He may, like one TV I know who had made a very thorough study of make up over twenty years or so, find that he has a lot to teach others.

Finally Box speaks of symbolic support. This refers to an area variously referred to by other writers as motivation, accounts, techniques of neutralisation and legitimation the basic idea being that the deviant must legitimate his behaviour or neutralise the negative labels applied to it by himself and others.

In the literature dealing with deviant subcultures, learning and accounts, the emphasis is usually on the acquisition of 'a complex of meaning' from others which serves to neutralise the prevailing view of the behaviour making it more likely that the behaviour will be continued. Others, both deviant and non-deviant are certainly important sources of such accounts or legitimations but again I would not wish to diminish the importance of individual creativity in fashioning the deviant's own original accounts out of the major tool at his disposal - language. Of course, accounts or techniques of neutralisation may be widely available in any given culture but their modification and use in relation to novel situations requires a certain amount of individual inventiveness and creativity. The process is rather more than simply taking over those accounts current in the subculture. The TV or TS may have developed his own accounts perhaps only for himself long before he meets others like himself or even before he has read anything about them. These accounts will however remain precarious until they are supported by others.

Below I present some TV and TS accounts. These are probably not exhaustive nor would I expect all TVs or TSs to subscribe to them. Neither do I have at present any idea how frequently these accounts I mention occur amongst TVs and TSs.

The first concerns legitimation by labelling. Having identified himself as a TV or TS, the individual sees himself as a certain type of person from which follows certain behaviour patterns. The process is the same as that involved with Cressey's compulsive crimes (Cressey 1962). Seeing himself as compelled or determined by something 'within himself' the TV or TS has little choice but to behave in the manner of those possessed by this condition. Taylor (1972) attributes the persistence of such accounts amongst the sex offenders he studied partly to a lack of contact with others. It remains a problem then why such accounts persist among TVs TSs, who do have such contacts. Another problem perhaps is the existence of such accounts alongside other accounts which deny that transvestism and transexualism are pathologies and which may amongst other things point to the cultural relativity of gender roles. Identification of oneself as feminine also legitimates certain behaviours but of course, the process of a male identifying himself as female requires legitimation itself.

Secondly, and linked to the first is the denial of responsibility. Most TVs and TSs speak of their behaviour, attitudes etc. as determined in some way. Some comments I have heard are: 'It's like a strong urge - it gets hold of you: it gripped me more and more'. One writer in a Beaumont Society Bulletin wrote, 'I feel as though I never had a chance - I did nothing to deserve my fate, it was thrust upon me'.

The same writer talks of 'terrible urges which plague me'. Few TVs or TSs, however, see their 'compulsion' in such a negative way and except during brief periods of remorse, do not wish to be rid of their feelings.

Since transvestism or transexualism is inevitable, the reasoning goes, to try to suppress it will only result in more problems. Prince, himself a TV, expresses this clearly when he writes 'If a person IS anything, TV or otherwise, and refuses to face up to it, he creates mental anguish and problems for himself and others'. (Prince 1967 p.53)

The TS in particular may, as a result of his wishes, need to dissolve certain commitments made as a male - I am thinking particularly of marriage. This may be legitimated somewhat by a denial of responsibility in entering the commitments in the first place. Thus marriage may be seen by the TS as a consequence of being forced by society to fit into the male role.

Thirdly there is the attempt to stress the normality of the behaviour. Two different types of account come to mind under this heading. The first of these is the view that all men and women embody some personality characteristics of the opposite sex and that the TV or TS is merely expressing his feminine half. This may involve reference to accounts of societies in which transvestism is acceptable in some form. The second claims that transvestism (especially) and transexualism are analogous to other forms to other forms of behaviour not regarded as deviant. Thus following on from the theory about the distribution of male and female personality characteristics, it is argued that it is unjust that women are allowed to express their male characteristics whereas men are not allowed to express their female ones. Wendy in 'I want what I want is dressed and hands her suitcase containing her male clothes to the left luggage clerk.' the man who took it could not have suspected that it contained male clothing. But there was nothing wrong in a woman having men's clothes. It was not immoral like a man having women's clothes.' (Brown 1968 p.124)¹²

Many writers use a similar argument to account for the lesser incidence of transvestism among females.

Another example of drawing analogies with non-deviant behaviours comes from an article in one of the Beaumont Society magazines. In this the writer was commenting on a television programme which was concerned with men who dressed and behaved as cowboys on a ranch in Wales and pointed out the injustice of regarding such behaviour as merely eccentric whereas transvestism is regarded less favourably.

The denial of injury is a common account not only amongst TVs and TSs but also amongst doctors, social workers and TVs wives. It is claimed that TVs and TSs do no harm to society in general.

For TVs in particular it is claimed that they are respectable, law-abiding citizens and fulfil their male roles competently. They do not try to initiate others into the behaviour which is generally a private matter, having little effect on other members of society. Similar claims are made where more intimate relationships are concerned, the TV is a good father, and husband and the contrast is often drawn with gamblers, alcoholics, wife-beaters and so on. Not merely denial of injury is involved, however, but positive benefits are claimed. As noted above, there is the theory that repression is harmful and expression leads to peace of mind and therefore happier relationships. Also it is claimed that a TV husband can benefit his wife because he understands her needs and desires more than other males. There are also benefits for the wider society and mankind in general. I quote from another Beaumont Society magazine article, 'I reject utterly suggestions that our condition is deceitful, unnatural, degrading, dangerous or at best just funny. I earnestly believe that it can be raised to something worthy of dedicated pursuit for it demands the very utmost from our moral, aesthetic and social senses, allowing us to become developed and socially valuable human beings.'

Finally (and this is more characteristic of TSs) there is the account which stresses the individual's lack of fit in the ascribed gender role. This covers not only subjective feelings of being out of place in the male role but occasions when others thought him to be different, for example calling him a sissy, are recounted with a certain amount of pride. The ascribed gender is thus shown to be the 'wrong one' not only from the individual's point of view but also from that of other people. This being the case, 'corrective' surgery is necessary to put things right. This is paralleled by newspaper accounts of sex changes which as Frank Pearce notes, rejoice in the resolution of ambiguity which such surgery provides (Pearce 1973).

As well as devising accounts which permit the behaviour, the deviant will also have to counter other accounts which make his behaviour less acceptable. Some of the accounts I have described are simply negations of alternative accounts - the denial of injury for example. There are however, other attempts to negate common views of transvestism and transexualism which may be discerned.

For the TV in this community there are two major alternative accounts which he must deal with, the imputations of homosexuality and of other sexual motives. The TV feels, probably not without justification, that the most common assumption about his behaviour is that it is an expression of homosexuality. At the community level the denial of this account necessitates the exclusion of those with overt homosexual preferences and denials that TVs have sexual relationships with men. This may involve arguments similar to those used by members of the gay community dissociating homosexuality from cross dressing and effeminacy.

At the individual level sexual contact with other men may be freely admitted but not defined as homosexuality. Thus one letter writer in a magazine for TVs states 'I like to be all girl when dressed and love to be kissed and caressed whilst in my pretty attire I do not consider myself homosexual but rather a girl being treated as a girl.'

Equally, the TV will often deny that his behaviour has a sexual motive or at least that this is the primary one. As Gagnon and Simon state, 'learning about sex in our society is learning about guilt.' (1973 p.42). Sex is thus generally an unacceptable motive in our society and it is not surprising that TVs and TSs should seek to deny or minimise sexual motives. A similar tendency may be discerned in other groups, for example, homosexuals and paedophiles. The Beaumont Society constitution states that it is concerned with the TV 'whose motivation for cross dressing is primarily of a gender rather than a sexual nature' and later that 'members shall be heterosexual TVs who are aware of elements of the opposite gender in their make up and seek to express these by cross dressing' (Beaumont Society Constitution 1975).

Usually it is agreed that at some time TVs have obtained sexual satisfaction from their dressing but like masturbation in general this is sometimes regarded as a form of behaviour appropriate to a certain stage of development, out of which one 'matures'.

TSs, of course, have to negate these alternative accounts not only for themselves but, most importantly for the psychiatrists who are the major gatekeepers to the surgical techniques he requires. Amongst other things the TS has to convince the psychiatrist of the acceptability of his motives for desiring surgery. This involves a denial that he is homosexual and also that he is 'merely' a TV. Thus he may argue that his sexual contacts with men are not homosexual like the writer above. He also has to discount the possibility that he requires surgery to legitimate homosexual desires. The TS also disclaims any special interest in clothes beyond that of 'real' women and thus that he is a TV who he may view as a 'mere' fetishist (see the quote by the TS on p.12). Many TS accounts also attempt dissociation from other TSs with a stress on the uniqueness of their experiences (Garfinkel 1967).

I have attempted in this paper to give a picture of some aspects of a little know world, the TV/TS subculture or community as it appears at this stage of my research using ideas from deviancy theory to structure my observations. Many questions raised by the material presented here remain and there are many other areas of the transvestite/transsexual experience awaiting sociological investigation.

of the individual level, sexual contact with other men may be freely admitted but not
 looked on as homosexuality. Thus one letter writer in a magazine for IVS states 'I like
 to be all girl when dressed and love to be kissed and caressed whilst in my pretty attire
 I do not consider myself homosexual but rather a girl being treated as a girl.'

Finally, the IVS also states that the behavior has a sexual motive or at least that
 this is the only one. As Green and Black state, 'focusing about sex in our society
 is focusing on it only' (1972, p. 12). But in time generally an unconscious motive
 in our society and it is not surprising that IVS and its clients seek to deny or minimize
 sexual motives. A similar tendency may be observed in other groups, for example,

homosexuals and transsexuals. The Harvard Society for the Study of the
 Transsexuals and Transsexuals (HST) has been active in cross-dressing in publicity of a gender
 rather than a sexual nature, and later that members shall be heterosexual IVS.... who
 are aware of elements of the opposite sex in their role up and seek to express these
 by cross dressing' (Harvard Society for the Study of the Transsexuals, 1972).

Finally it is clear that at one time IVS have obtained sexual satisfaction from their
 dressing but like transsexuals in general this is sometimes regarded as a form of
 behavior which is to be contained within a framework, out of which one 'leaves'.

It is of course, true to say that these alternative accounts are only for themselves but
 not primarily for the psychiatrist who are the major participants in the psychiatric
 treatment of transsexuals. However other things the IVS has to convince the psychiatrist

of the need for surgery for gender surgery. This involves a social
 that as is homosexual and also that of the 'gender' IVS. There is no argument that the
 actual contact with men is not homosexual like the written word. The latter is

described as 'socially' that is required surgery to legitimate homosexual behavior.
 The IVS also describes as 'social' behavior in other ways, that of 'social' when and
 that this is a IVS and is not a 'social' behavior (see the paper by the IVS
 on p. 15). Many IVS accounts also attempt to distinguish between IVS with a focus on

the experience of the transsexuals (Gardner, 1972).

I have attempted in this paper to give a picture of some aspects of a little known world,
 the IVS experience or accounts as it appears at the stage of my research being
 a non-homosexual theory to structure of transsexuals. Many decisions raised by the
 material presented here remain and those are the way of transsexuals of the transsexuals,
 transsexual experience leading social, sexual investigation.

NOTES

1. This paper arises out of a research project on transvestism and transexualism which I began in August 1975. My initial contacts were made possible by the Beaumont Society and these have enabled me to meet many other people both inside the Society and outside it. I have immersed myself in the community as much as time and being a non-transvestite allows, attending formal Society functions and being a party to many more, less formal gatherings and conversations. From March 1976 to the present I have also recorded a number of lengthy unstructured interviews.

I would like to record my thanks to the Beaumont Society and to the transvestites, transexuals (members and non-members) and others who are helping me. I am especially grateful to Alice, Caroline and Freda for practical help, conversations and friendship. I am also indebted to Ken Plummer both for his published work and for private discussion and encouragement. Financially the project has been helped by a grant from Liverpool University.

2. For the remainder of the paper, I shall use the abbreviations TV and TS for transvestite and transexual respectively. For convenience and clarity I shall refer only to male TVs and TSs.
3. Because there is so little sociological material, I have included in the bibliography several works which are broadly sociological in their approach, but which I have not necessarily referred to in the text.
4. The emergence of PAL (Paedophile Awareness and Liberation) makes me wonder how true it is of other 'pathological' deviations as well.
5. Aside from the issue of whether or not 'pathological' or 'individual' deviation is an appropriate description of certain forms of behaviour, Gagnon and Simon make the questionable assumption that isolated deviant behaviour is an unsuitable subject for sociology since 'it is linked to the contingencies of (his) biography rather than to social structure.'
(Gagnon and Simon 1967 p.9)
6. See McIntosh 1968.
7. I use the term subculture as synonymous with community in the context of this paper.
8. Sagarin (1969) gives an account of a TV and a TS Organisation in the States but does not cover the subculture as a whole.
9. Kando (1973) includes TVs in this subculture but defines these as pre-operative TSs.

II

- 10. I wish to emphasise that my characterisation of the Beaumont Society is that of an outsider and one which the executive and members of that society might not wish to endorse. Later remarks on the TV/TS subculture or community are to be interpreted as applying to a wider area than the Society's structure and activities.
- 11. This section is influenced by Ken Plummers remarks on sexual subcultures in his Sexual Stigma (1975)
- 12. In this connection Newton remarks (1972) p 101 'The superordinate role in a hierarchy is more fragile than the subordinate. Even one feminine item ruins the integrity of the masculine system; the male loses his caste honour.'

For the remainder of the paper I shall refer to the TV/TS subculture as 'the community' and to its members as 'the community members'. I shall also refer to the TV/TS subculture as 'the community' and to its members as 'the community members'.

Because there is so little sociological material, I have included in the bibliography several works which are usually associated with their own disciplines but which I have not necessarily referred to in the text.

The emergence of the TV/TS subculture (for its history) which is well known to its members is to be seen in the 'Introduction' to the book.

Simon and Simon (1967) and (1968) are the main sources of information on the TV/TS subculture. Simon and Simon (1967) and (1968) are the main sources of information on the TV/TS subculture.

I use the term 'community' as synonymous with 'community' in the context of this report.

Simon (1968) gives an account of a TV and TS Organisation in the States but does not cover the experience in a whole.

Simon (1967) includes TV in his definition but defines them as pre-operative TS.

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