

Abnormal Behaviors

Fannie · 10/7/99 at 3:45 pm ET

My husband has been surfing the web in sexual/homosexual sites for years. Which lead him addicted to pretend himself as a woman. He orders woman's clothes, underwears, cosmetic and pentyhoses in the web. He sometimes even rent a motel room to put everthings on(which he told me when I discovered his orders). Two months ago, I even found an e-mail he sent to a guy from a gay club if he would intrest in him! I was mad, and when I talked to him and my mother -in-law, they both said that I'm "OVER REACTED". My husband said that he was just curious, he didn't do any "CONTACT" yet.

He addicted to pretend a woman was because he was abusesd by his mom when he was small, and all his aunts always accused his mon in front of him, that's why he hates women from the bottom of his heart.

He promised me that he would adjust himself (five years ago) but whenever he came across with his mon or aunt, talked about his childhood (which they always did) his hates became overflow and the abnormal behaviers followed. I married my husband 10 years and have two boys, I don't think he is really gay, but why he can't stop those abnormal interactions and refuse to seek for consulat, he thought that he was not sick. But sometimes he would regret and thinking of finish his messy life by killing himself. I'm a bit tired and sorry for him. I tried but now really don't know what should I do to help him. If he dosen't pull out this deep-rooted problem, he would be suffering the whole life, or "SOMETHINGS" may happen! Meanwhile, am I really "OVER-REACTED"??

Re: Abnormal Behaviors

Don Nathanson · 10/9/99 at 11:57 am ET

I'm glad you wrote to tell us about this behavior of your husband that has caused you so much confusion and embarrassment. What you describe is well known and pretty well understood. This pattern of behavior is called "cross-dressing" or "transvestism" (which means the same thing). What seems to happen is that a man gets a tremendous thrill when he can dress up as a woman; the better he can fool the public, the more pride he feels.

Even though this behavior seems to have a lot to do with sex, and is often confused with homosexuality, it really is rare that a cross dresser actually becomes homosexual. In fact, one of the parts of this behavior pattern that produces the most difficulty for wives is that such men expect their wives to be proud of them for their success in dressing like women, and to enjoy sex with them even when they are dressed like women. The men seem unable to appreciate that most heterosexual women feel repulsed by the idea of having sex with a woman, and that they are therefore made very anxious by such requests from their husbands.

As you understand, and tell us very well, your husband is full of emotional pain. He suffers from things that were done to him by his parents and family. He suffers from guilt and shame that make him feel terrible. The reason he talks about suicide is that he doesn't know any other way of turning off the pain – death is awful to contemplate but seems like a reasonable alternative when one is in so much pain that nothing seems to relieve it. My own understanding of this condition is that although the reasons that at first a child takes on this type of behavior does have something to do with a sexual fear, as time goes on the behavior comes to be used as a way of handling intense unpleasant emotion of all types. The

therapy that works usually focuses more on ways of identifying one's emotions rather than anything to do with sexuality.

It must be very difficult for you to enjoy anything when the person closest to you is suffering so much, and when he pretends not to understand that his pain also causes you pain. I have worked in psychotherapy with a few people who behave and suffer like your husband, and know just how hard your life must be.

From your writing I suspect that you live far from my world in Philadelphia. Please feel free to contact me at my e-mail address (nathanson@tomkins.org) if you would like, and I will try to find someone in your world who might be able to help. I can't guarantee that I do have such a contact, but at least I can try.

Re: Abnormal Behaviors
Fannie · 10/9/99 at 5:15 pm ET

Thanks for your prompt respons Dr. After reading your letter gave some relieve on my mind. You know the problem I've come across is very personal, my husband had warned me not to tell anybody, I've no one to turn. The worse part of it is he dosen't like to discuss this problem with anybody, even me! I was thinking to show him your letter (he dosen't know I put this problem online) maybe he would understand his problem.

You're right! I live in L.A. California, which, I think the life style here, make his problem get worse! I would appreciate if you can show me somewhere I could turn in handling this matter. I always believe that we should speak out once we come across any problems, I don't know how to encourage my husband to be more open. Thanks again!

Re: abnormal behaviors
Don Nathanson · 10/10/99 at 9:50 am ET

Well, you do live far away from Philadelphia in terms of miles, but not in terms of culture and available help. If you have any sort of health insurance, the easiest thing is for you (yourself) to go through the "gatekeeper" system to get a psychotherapist who sees couples. In order to do this you have to explain clearly that your husband's problems have caused serious problems in your marriage. You will then see the therapist first, and together you and that therapist will map out a strategy to get him to come into the couples therapy. The most important part of this is the plan---we are trying to develop a way that he can see the effect on you of his internal struggle. This in no way suggests that you and the therapist are going to call him sick or crazy or damaged or anything that will make him feel worse about himself, but that you and the therapist are going to help him see that when he is in emotional pain, you suffer also. That way it becomes possible for him to learn more about the many sources of his own emotional pain, to let you be his friend and help him with his pain, and for both of you to live better.

Such a treatment plan offers the best way that I know to improve conditions in your marriage and your home. It removes the problem from the terribly embarrassing focus on gender identity and places it in the correct place — his own, and your own emotional needs. Good luck, and please check back with

us when this process has started. You are welcome to take a copy of these messages to the therapist so he or she can understand the struggle you've gone through so far.