

TRANVESTISM: FASHION BEYOND GENDER ROLES

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Concept of Transvestism/Cross-dressing

Cross-dressing, otherwise known as transvestism, is the practise of dressing in clothing and accessories appropriate to the opposite sex in a given society. For instance, A person who identifies themselves as a man, when dressed-up in clothing and accessories typically meant for women, such as skirts and earrings, is associated to as transvestism. This involves quickly changing the gender symbol represented by one's clothing and replacing their gender identity at the level of the signifier in an effort to have their cross-dressing behaviour recognised by the general public. Therefore, the term "cross-dresser" or "transvestite" is used to describe someone who dresses in sex-opposite attire.

Cross-dressing has been used as a literary metaphor for both historical and present purposes as well as a means of disguising. It does not, however, imply a fundamental shift in transgender identity. Although the term by itself does not indicate any motive, transsexual behaviour is typically automatically associated with transgender identity or sexual orientation, fetishism, and homosexual behaviour due to sheer societal unacceptance and norms.

From either the standpoint of social public opinion or cultural studies, the phenomena of cross-dressing appear to be in a long-term aphasic state in the twenty-first century. The term "cross-dressing" has unavoidably borne some prejudice as far as public understanding is concerned, from being kept secret in the past to being overcorrected in modern times. Undoubtedly, cross-dressers still have a very tough time making ends meet. Cross-dressing expressions, however, are also becoming more varied.

The literature on transvestism has seen exciting advances in the past 10 years, despite the fact that the term "transvestite" has been in use throughout the majority of the 20th century. One such advancement is the fact that academics are now talking to transvestites about their

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personal experiences rather than merely writing on transvestism. Additionally, the newly emerging and expanded discipline of transgender studies has recently bolstered this expanding dialogue.

Transgender study largely focuses on the interactions between gender, sex, and sexuality, drawing scholars from gender studies and lesbian and gay studies. Alongside these changes, there is a growing movement to abandon the psychiatric label of "transvestite" in favour of the more widely recognised and accepting label of "cross-dresser."

1.2 Historical background of cross-dressing

The concept and practical implication of cross dressing has been on record for decades now, but it has gained tremendous spotlight starting mid-20th century. From prehistoric times to the present, cross dressing has been documented all around the world. Cross dressing has a long history in Greek, Pagan, and Hindu mythology, and it may be found in their culture, literature, drama, and music. It first appeared in China in the sixth century with the tale of Mulan, in which a little girl disguises herself as a man to replace her father in the army (later made into a Disney film). Cross dressing was prohibited in 45 American towns and several other nations from the middle of the 19th century and World War I. The Greek mythology believes that Cross-dressing in the past frequently reflected deities' transgender behaviour. As a component of religious devotion, it was accepted in this setting and even encouraged. A common association between the changing of gender and the process of approaching divinity by dismantling the categories of everyday human experience is found in this context as well. Therefore, altering clothing is the easiest and most obvious way for humans to do what divine creatures do through other techniques, such as blending genders.

Things first started to change when the Christian Church deemed the practice of cross-dressing taboo. Deuteronomy 22:5 states, "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this". Building upon this, they also decided it went hand in hand with alcohol consumption, underground brothels and prostitution. The church set out on a mission to convince the rest of society to believe in their views on the matter.

Women started leaving the home in the early 1900s to work in factories and in society. Cross-dressing was perceived as a social challenge to the established gender norms. Men were worried that women would become overly "self-esteeming" and lose sight of their status in

regard to men. Some cultures still forbid women from donning attire often associated with men. Ironically, despite a 200-year-old prohibition being repealed, women were not permitted to wear trousers in France until 2013.

It was a different scenario when males dressed differently, though. Their sexuality was the fundamental issue; their gender roles were secondary. Additionally, homosexuality was frowned upon and prohibited in many countries.

1.3 1970s-1990s

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the media had a significant impact on drag culture. A lot of cult classic films, including *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Nomar* (1995) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), featured transgender, transexual, and cross-dressed characters who were portrayed by well-known actors like Tim Curry and Patrick Swayze. Representation seemed to be everywhere. A bigger audience started to comprehend the idea of gender and sexuality on a spectrum as more fans saw their favourite movie stars embrace the concept of gender fluidity.

Aside from television, music culture had a significant impact on the drag movement since punk, rock, and pop musicians made references to cross-dressing in their music videos, album covers, and social media posts.

Before cross-dressing among men experienced a resurgence during the 1990s, benefiting the punk-rock genre with metal-punk bands like Nirvana, many male classic-rock figures, including David Bowie, Elton John, and Freddie Mercury of Queen, dressed in ball gowns, skirts, and heels for concerts, photo shoots, and MTV music videos throughout the 70s and 80s.

1.4 Cross-dressing in the present era

Cross-dressing used to be a common technique for both men and women to experiment with their independence and self-expression. It still has the same meaning now and has grown to represent confidence, equality, and acceptance. You can't, however, walk without something in your way right now in the age of activism.

In order to showcase Harry Styles' achievement with popularity in relation to his second solo album, *Fine Line*, *Vogue Magazine* issued their monthly copy with the British pop sensation on the front cover page in December 2020. Despite Styles' popularity, it was outside the

magazine's pages that the press hounds focused their attention—not on Styles. Styles was pictured on the cover wearing a light blue gown that his partners at Gucci had designed and created. Styles are a sensational icon in the current-era of self-acceptance and gender fluidity. Not only does he contribute majorly in the acceptance and popularization of cross-dressing, he also does it confidently and flawlessly enabling others to try their own unique styles. However, to its downside, the magazine cover did not go well publicly. While December's magazine was one of the most purchased copies of the year, the cover photo did not sit well with many intolerant viewers. Candace Owens, an American author, and conservative activist voiced her particularly strong opinion on Styles' cover via Twitter.

Owens' tweeted, "There is no society that can survive without strong men. The East knows this. In the West, the steady feminization of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence. It is an outright attack. Bring back, manly men." For their target consumers, leading fashion markets have started to offer "gender-neutral" clothes, offering styles that are particular to all sizes and genders. With the history behind their art, men and women who want to cross-dress are no longer restricted to demeaning labels and are free to thrive in their own identities.

The K-POP industry, which is a global sensation, seems to be a step ahead of the western portrayal of cross-dressing. K-pop male idols has significantly contributed to cross-dressing as we can see a lot of Idols wearing gender neutral clothe such as skirts and earrings. They have been breaking stereotypes and setting new standards for the next generation to follow.

One of the fashion boundaries that K-pop idols have been pushing more and more in recent years is that of gender. They are well renowned for being at the forefront of the style world. By choosing androgynous styles or experimenting with gender-swapping trends, idols have demonstrated that fashion transcends gender. One such trend is male idols wearing skirts. Fewer male groups have embraced skirts as a part of their masculinity, breaking gender conventions with their wardrobe choices. While many male groups have tried dressing up as female idols for amusing performances. We need to reconsider the notion that skirts are only worn by women because the male K-pop stars in this article have worn them to work or just out and about.

2. UNDERSTANDING GENDER AND SEXUALITY

2.1 Gender Identity

The term gender identity, which describes a person's ongoing inner sense of belonging to either the male or female gender category, was first used in the middle of the 1960s (Money, 1994). Over time, the idea of gender identity expanded to encompass persons who do not identify as either male or female. According to Lev (2004), "a person's self-concept of their gender (regardless of their biological sex) is called their gender identity." It is "the person's fundamental sense of being male, female, or of indeterminate sex," according to the American Psychological Association². For many years, only those who have undergone genital reassignment surgery were allowed to use the word "transsexual." Today, however, the term "transsexual" is used to describe anyone who has a gender identity that is inconsistent with the sex they were assigned at birth and is therefore currently living in that sex or working towards doing so, regardless of any medical procedures they may have had or may wish to have in the future.

Since the 1990s, the term "transgender" has generally been used to refer to those who reject gender norms and expectations. In addition to those who identify outside the female/male binary and those whose gender expression and behaviour deviates from social standards, it also covers transgender and intersex individuals. People who are viewed or labelled as transgender, including transsexual men and women, may identify in a variety of ways, similar to how it is with sexual orientation.

In most cases, gender identity will develop in accordance with physical gender characteristics. A baby with XY sex chromosomes and male genitalia will generally be assigned to the male gender, will show male typical behaviours, and have a male gender identity. Discordance between these gender aspects does occur, however, in some conditions. DSD are congenital conditions in which the development of chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical sex is atypical³. For instance, in DSD, external male appearing genitalia may not correspond with the gonads, and/or sex chromosomes. Gender identity may be in line with the chromosomes and gonads, but not with the external genitalia. Gender dysphoria refers to the distress resulting from incongruence between experienced/expressed gender and assigned

²(2009a, p. 28)

³Hughes, 2006

gender. In gender dysphoric individuals, a gender identity may develop that does not match with sex chromosomes, gonads and genitalia, although the physical sex characteristics all correspond with each other.

The dimensionality and complexity of gender identity and gender issues have drawn more attention and criticism in the literature over the past ten years. There is a claim that people who have gender issues don't always have a full cross-gender identification and don't always require medical care. A wide range of gender identity descriptors, such as "shemale," "third gender," "pan-/poly-/or omnigendered," and "gender fluid," as opposed to male and female or even transsexual, were demonstrated by Bockting. The distress these people go through and their desire to live as "the other gender" are also up for debate.

2.2 Gender dysphoria and psychiatric analysis

According to the United Nations and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people frequently experience various forms of discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion, including physical and psychological abuse, bullying, persecution, or economic alienation. Additionally, encounters with discrimination can take place in a variety of contexts, including familial ties, important interpersonal interactions, and the workplace, educational institutions, and health care. As a result, numerous research overwhelmingly contend that LGBT people are more vulnerable to mental distress when they encounter prejudice and stigma.

However, by the early 20th century, psychiatrists largely viewed homosexuality as pathological in and of itself, and by the mid-20th century, psychiatry, medicine, and psychology were trying to "cure" and change homosexuality. Today, it's understood that higher rates of psychological distress among LGB people are related to their minority status and to discrimination.

It has been quite contentious to make mental health diagnoses for transgender and transsexual people. Through the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (now the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, WPATH), Harry Benjamin's work was crucial for trans concerns globally. Concerning the revision or removal of (trans)gender diagnoses from the primary health diagnostic instruments, there has been a heated debate in recent years among interested professionals, trans and LGBT campaigners, and human rights organisations.

2.3 Sexual orientation

The primary area of sexual attraction is referred to as sexual orientation. Typically, sexual orientation is defined as an attraction to the same sex, the opposite sex, or both, and is therefore homophobic, heterosexual, or bisexual. An alternate perspective is to define sexual orientation as a preference for male or female objects, or as androphilic or gynephilic, respectively, without taking into account the sex or gender of the individual who is attracted to such objects. This is a more logical approach from a scientific standpoint in several aspects, as will become obvious.

People may choose to engage in sexual relations with others or refrain from doing so, and they may also decide to socially adopt a specific gender or sexual identity, but they cannot select their sexual orientation as it is characterised in terms of sexual attraction or arousal. In these ideas, sexual orientation generally seems to be a stable trait, which is resistant to deliberate attempts to change, and is decided prior to birth, or possibly even early in life, by specific biological and environmental factors. However, there is proof that some women change their sexual orientation over their lifetimes and that women's experiences of sexual attraction are more changeable and context-dependent than men's.⁴

LGBTQI+ people have been around historically for as long as there have been living things on the globe, and they have broken down all types of barriers (economic, racial, sex, religion, etc.). For instance, historical documents depict LGBTQI+ people in historic cultures including Ancient Greece and Rome.⁵ In fact, researchers have seen same-sex behaviour in over 450 different species, including dogs, cats, chimps, and giraffes. They have even discovered LGBTQI+ persons in other species. Homophobia—a bias or hate of gay people—is ironically only recorded in one species, humans, despite the fact that homosexuality has been observed in hundreds of species.⁶

According to research, men are more susceptible to category-specific attraction and arousal than women are. In other words, attraction is peculiar to a given sex/gender category. As a result, heterosexual males are attracted by women while homosexual men are aroused by other guys. For women, arousal and attraction seem to be less gender-specific. For instance, heterosexual women may become aroused in reaction to both male and female stimuli.

⁴Baumeister, "Gender Differences in Erotic Plasticity"; Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity*.

⁵Wyatt, 2016

⁶Frassé & Barrientos, 2016

Contrary to category specificity, sexual fluidity refers to the contextual conditions that may cause a woman (or, less frequently, a male) to feel themselves attracted to either men or women depending on the environment.⁷ In terms of their sexual orientation, men generally seem to be much more category specific. Sexual flexibility is more likely to be displayed by women.

2.4 LGBT COMMUNITY AND HOMOPHOBIA

Humans experience homophobia for a number of reasons, the most notable of which is the condemnation of homosexuality in many cultures and religions. For instance, the bible describes homosexuality as a sin and an abomination in Christianity).⁸ Numerous people's limited knowledge about the LGBTQI+ community and the majority of their misconceptions about it are another factor contributing to homophobia. Last but not least, homophobia exists because LGBTQI+ people are a minority, with only 2%–10% of most populations statistically identifying as non-heterosexual. As a result, LGBTQI+ people experience the same discrimination, bias, and judgement as other minorities.

LGBTQI+ people experience extreme discrimination and violence. Additionally, LGBTQI+ people often lack the legal ability to marry, they worry that their union won't be accepted elsewhere in the world, such as in Africa, they find it more difficult to adopt, and they worry that their parenting rights may be revoked. In many locations, LGBTQI+ people not only have less legal safeguards but also frequently none at all, especially when it comes to discrimination and the basic civil rights that everyone else is guaranteed.

Despite all of the negative homophobic consequences, the community has grown over time. The activity of LGBTQI+ organisations, the emergence of LGBTQI+ culture, and people's acceptance to learn about the community through the media, science is advancing our understanding of sexuality, and society is fostering diversity and inclusion. In other words, this growth in LGBTQI+ people aren't necessarily attributable to an increase in the population; rather, it's a result of more people feeling more at ease coming out in recent years as a result of favourable changes to the law and community perception. Unfortunately, no study has yet been able to establish that one's sexual orientation is not a choice, despite society's evolving viewpoint and the historical, statistical, and scientific evidence to the contrary.

⁷ Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity*

⁸ Loue, 2020

2.5 Drawing relation between gender, sexuality and cross-dressing

As the aforementioned discussions have already ruled out no absolute connection and nexus between gender identity and sexual orientation, and has strongly advocated against it being a personal choice, it is highly necessary to highlight the fact cross-dressing has absolutely no connection to one's gender or sexual identity like most research suggests. In the modern, post-historic era, people are breaking barriers and social norms, and making a safe environment for one to grow and self-express themselves in a way they deem fit. The community is still subject to onus of homophobia and discrimination, most of them are denied their basic human rights, but nonetheless, through several contributions from organizations, the community is facing huge victories.

3. CONCLUSION

Although society has changed over time, religion has not. There are several evidences and literature implication of cross-dressing in several mythologies, and has significantly considered to be the deity's reflection in the Greek culture and mythology. However, people tend to be biased and judgemental in accepting it due to various social norms and constructs. Different interpretations have been advanced during this time, and people who accepted specific rules, rituals, and barriers formed their own circle of people who adhered to the same religion, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or another. The LGBT community faces tremendous discrimination globally, and are being denied their basic human rights. Homophobia is a severe crime against humanity, and needs to be condemned. The idea that transvestites are typically associated to the transgender community needs to be undone, as one's sexual orientation and gender identity has nothing to do with their fashion sense. Fashion is high-end, and should not be related to gender and sexuality to ensure it blooms to its fullest and explores a way beyond what is socially accepted. The ultimate aesthetic enjoyment is provided by cross-dressers' coexistence of masculine and feminine beauty, but it also clouds the subject's and the audience's understanding of the genuine gender identity. In addition to savouring the sexual beauty, it also errs dangerously close to the uncontrolled gender line. The amazing cross-dressers on stage are timeless artists who nearly flawlessly balance and coordinate the two very different gender shapes. This comes from the enigmatic charm of physically changing garments. By altering the clothing's exterior sign, they effortlessly cross the sex divide and magically produce the endearing aesthetic of androgyny.