

Adopting Cross-Dressing: A Strategy for Coping with Loss for a Bisexual Man

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ABSTRACT

Cross-dressing refers to the act of donning garments often associated with the opposite gender. Throughout history, cross-dressing has been extensively recorded and is frequently linked to stereotypes such as deviance, fetishism, exhibitionism, sexual deviance, and homosexuality. Coping mechanisms refer to psychological strategies employed by the subconscious mind to shield individuals from feelings of anxiety, social repercussions, and unmanageable circumstances in the immediate present. This study aimed to elucidate that Cross-Dressing is not just attributable to perceptions of sexual deviance and transvestism, but rather, other factors contribute to an individual's adoption of Cross-Dressing. The research methodology employed in this study is a single-design case study. The study found that the participants experienced the loss of their beloved mother as a catalyst for adopting a Cross-Dressing lifestyle, perceiving it as a means to compensate for the void created by her death. The findings of this study indicate that cross-dressing behaviour serves as a long-lasting method for individuals to repress their emotions related to loss rather than being primarily attributed to transvestism or preconceptions of sexual deviance associated with the subject of investigation.

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-dressing refers to wearing clothing often associated with the opposite sex of one's assigned gender at birth (Luo, 2022; Öztop Haner, 2022). This idea has been prevalent for decades, particularly with men donning women's attire. References to cross-dressing can be readily identified in Greek and Roman mythology, as well as in the sacred texts of all major global religions. The term "transvestite" is now widely regarded as antiquated and offensive. It was initially coined in 1910 by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, who classified it as a form of sexual psychopathy (Tommy Dickinson, 2015). The act of cross-dressing and wearing clothing typically associated with the opposite sex was considered deviant sexual behaviour that was believed to have adverse effects on society. In his 2015 paper titled "The Psychology of Transvestism," psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel suggests that individuals who engage in cross-dressing derive satisfaction specifically from being observed while wearing clothing typically associated with the opposite gender (Fenichel, 1930). Fenichel further asserts that these individuals identify as exhibitionists and highlights the interconnectedness of cross-dressing with fetishism and homosexuality (Fenichel, 1930). Several viewpoints regarding cross-dressing have endured today (Eltis, 2023; Wiggins, 2019). Nevertheless, the advancement of the sexual revolution and postmodernism has also posed a challenge to traditional gender standards and the understanding of what is considered normal or abnormal in terms of psychological disorders.

In psychoanalytic theory, defence mechanisms are psychological strategies employed by the subconscious mind to shield the individual from distress and social repercussions, as well as from situations that are presently insurmountable (Herdi, 2023; Horst Kächele et al., 2011; Zahrah & Melky Ayu Wijayanti, 2023). The coping methods can be classified into four categories: pathological, immature, neurotic, and mature (Furnham, 2012). Irrespective of the category, defence mechanisms have the common objective of repressing an individual's genuine sense of reality. While coping methods are frequently linked to personality disorders and mental problems, it is essential to note that they are not inherently problematic. Individuals employ diverse coping techniques throughout their lifetimes to maintain a condition of normalcy and well-being. Excessive dependence on unhealthy ways of dealing with stress for extended durations can result in behaviours that harm an individual's physical and mental well-being.

Across cultures and periods, people have observed the custom of cross-dressing, which involves wearing apparel traditionally associated with the gender. It is becoming more prevalent among people and celebrities, signalling a growing level of acceptance in certain regions. However, societal views on cross-dressing can vary significantly. Societies often view cross-dressing as a means of self-expression or performance, especially within the LGBTQ+ community and various entertainment industries. Influential figures who engage in cross-dressing have the potential to influence opinions, leading to an embrace and normalization of the practice. On the contrary, in Muslim nations and other conservative areas, cross-dressing remains largely taboo. Cultural and religious traditions in these regions typically uphold gender norms, and straying from these norms could result in ostracism or legal consequences. Despite being outdated and discredited by much of the psychological community, some places still perceive cross-dressing as a disorderly attitude that mirrors broader misconceptions and biases regarding nonconformity to traditional gender roles. The ongoing discussions and diverse viewpoints surrounding cross-dressing underscore the urgent need to promote dialogue and conduct research. This is critical to encourage understanding and appreciation for expression in all its diversity and challenge the misconceptions and biases that persist in some societies.

Several research studies provide valuable insights into topics related to cross-dressing, bisexuality, and coping with loss, which could be relevant to the focus of your research on using cross-dressing as a coping mechanism in response to significant personal loss. For instance, Asmundson offers an extensive overview of psychological coping mechanisms, potentially elucidating aspects connected to cross-dressing and bisexuality (Asmundson, 2022). Additionally, the study by Bailey, Hsu, and Jang delves into the Erotic Target Identity Inversion Theory in paraphilic samples, exploring the interplay between sexuality, identity, and coping mechanisms, which may include cross-dressing (Bailey et al., 2023). Moreover, Curtis and Morris present a single case study, "Cross-dressing as a meaningful occupation," focusing on the personal significance of cross-dressing as a coping strategy (Curtis & Morris, 2015). Luo investigates the cultural and societal layers of cross-dressing, potentially revealing how these dynamics contribute to gender expression and coping strategies (Luo, 2022). Lastly, Oztop Haner offers a literary perspective on gender identity and coping mechanisms through the lens of cross-dressing (Öztop Haner, 2022). These studies collectively highlight the complexity of coping strategies involving cross-dressing and bisexuality, and they provide a broad spectrum of perspectives from clinical psychology to literary analysis, enriching the understanding of how individuals might use cross-dressing as a mechanism to deal with profound personal loss.

The paper details the investigation of a young guy who, in response to a personal tragedy, wore women's attire to cope rather than for the typical motivations linked with cross-dressing. At first glance, this individual appeared to be an unabashed narcissist, exuding both arrogance and audacity. Nevertheless, hidden behind his countenance resides the arduous battle of an exposed individual who employs his garments as a barrier to protect himself from a truth he is ill-equipped to confront. The study's objective enabled the researcher to properly characterize mental health history and symptoms while gaining anonymous insight into the reasoning behind Cross-dressing.

METHODS

The research methodology employed in this study is a single-design case study. This study critically analyzes human interpretation and behaviour, relying on human opinion (Asmundson, 2022; Luiselli, 2018). A single-design case study was chosen due to the limited access to this particular group and only one subject available for study (Hott & Flores,

2023; Ledford et al., 2023). By employing feminist principles, participants are actively engaged at every stage of the study process, and any knowledge gained is faithfully portrayed (Curtis & Morris, 2015). The three data collection approaches are observation, interviews, and literature studies. The data in this study was derived from interviews conducted with a young male who frequently wore women's attire. Evaluating data in this study involves reading interview transcripts, coding pertinent sections, classifying coding findings, and linking coding results and classification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Report of a Specific Case

S.R. is a 24-year-old male from South Sulawesi who resides in the central area of Denpasar, Bali. He was unattached, jobless, and without a permanent residence, frequently transitioning between staying at a communal shelter, residing with acquaintances, and living on the streets. His grandparents and closest relatives resided with him for an extended period. However, their relationship deteriorated, and they began to subject him to verbal and physical abuse. Consequently, he was compelled to vacate his grandparents' residence. S.R. discontinued his education during the ninth grade and resorted to illicit activities such as shoplifting for profit, engaging in street-based sex work, and participating in online platforms catering to affluent individuals seeking discreet homosexual relationships. He used the funds to purchase high-end women's apparel, which he deemed more important than sustenance and essential personal things.

S.R. has been admitted to multiple mental facilities for the previous 11 years. The hospital records indicate a variety of diagnoses, such as conduct disorder, oppositional defiance disorder, major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, polysubstance misuse, and mental problems caused by specific drugs and substances. S.R. claimed to have been arrested on a minimum of 50 occasions and detained for a duration of at least 20 nights. The sentence S.R. received was initially a result of an incident involving an attempted car theft when he was 16 years old. He was detained for 13 months due to an assault. He inflicted lacerations on an individual's face using shards of glass amidst a physical altercation in a public thoroughfare. The majority of his apprehensions were connected to theft or physical aggression.

S.R. was transported to the emergency department via ambulance after dialling 112 to report being assaulted. S.R. described the incident when he purchased meals and browsed women's apparel in a store located in the Legian district. At that time, a group of men in the vicinity started to take note of him and mocked him. During that period, he was dressed in a form-fitting crimson dress and elevated footwear and was not wearing any undergarments. S.R. said they employed sticks and chairs to forcefully expel me from the establishment. S.R. demonstrated his defiance by refusing to acknowledge that he was not allowed to enter the store. He endured multiple blows to the face and, at one point, was restrained by a group of individuals while others assaulted him by kicking and stomping on his head.

Following medical clearance at the emergency room, S.R. was transported to an inpatient psychiatric ward despite his objections that he did not possess a psychiatric condition. During their stay in the psychiatric hospital, S.R. displayed irritability and consistently declined to take medicine or schedule a session with a psychiatrist for several months. The following week, S.R. refused to participate in interviews and rejected medical intervention. S.R. consistently asserted that he was the individual who contacted the authorities and made the report. Furthermore, he explicitly said that he did not visit the psychiatric hospital to challenge the field of psychiatry directly. On each occasion that he requested to be released but was refused, he responded by spitting on the workers or intentionally vomiting on the floor. This conduct leads to nearly daily intramuscular therapy and confinement in a chamber. Following two weeks, during which he received consistent reassurance and engaged in frequent discussions, he ultimately consented to proceed with the treatment by adhering to the prescribed medicine. He attained a rudimentary psychiatric condition.

Nevertheless, the available therapy could not eradicate the wrath and hatred that appeared to be deeply embedded in his character. Furthermore, he insisted on being released and avoided engaging with the medical personnel and fellow patients. he refused to adhere to the nurses' instructions to participate in group activities and therapy, citing his strong aversion towards everyone and his desire to avoid socializing.

S.R. was interviewed before he departed from the inpatient psychiatric unit to a halfway home. At this time, it was observed that he did not exhibit the appearance expected for his age. He appeared untidy, unkempt, and had not shaved. Additionally, he was wearing the same shirt and jeans he had been wearing since his admittance to the hospital, which was 20 days prior. He possesses a tall and slender physique, adorned with tattoos distributed across several areas of his body, notably having multiple tattoos on his face and neck. Despite repeated requests to bathe, S.R.'s body emitted an unpleasant odour. Due to the unpleasant smell emanating from his body, S.R. disclosed his desire for everyone to be distant from him. Upon discovering he would leave the following day, S.R. exhibited a composed and compliant demeanour during the interview. However, he appeared to be in a sad state, displaying minimal eye contact and frequently gazing downwards. The individual's speaking style and manner are generally commendable, yet occasionally, they may be influenced by a tendency towards monotony and emotional instability. Due to significant dental damage sustained in a prior altercation, S.R.'s speech is occasionally hindered, resulting in unclear articulation of his statements. S.R. demonstrated ordinary cognitive abilities, along with sufficient focus and concentration levels. Additionally, his memory functioned exceptionally well. During the interview, S.R. did not exhibit any overt delusions, hallucinations, distortions of reality, or responses to internal stimuli.

An important aspect highlighted in the interview is his prominent facial tattoo. He comprehensively explains the symbolism behind each tattoo, each possessing distinct significance. Simultaneously, the tattoos collectively communicate his intention to restrict his sexual activity more than others perceive. The increasing prevalence of tattoos is seen as a kind of defiance against the derisive reactions of others.

The interview commences with an exploration of S.R.'s upbringing, educational background, mental record, and criminal record. It is revealed that these experiences originated during his adolescence, namely at 15, which was a crucial period in his life. A lone mother and paternal grandparents brought up S.R.. He proudly states that his mother was a single parent who held a prominent position in the business world in Makassar. However, he developed a drug addiction and struggled to maintain solid love relationships with other men. S.R. stated that his mother had multiple romantic relationships during his formative years and entered into matrimony on three occasions. Despite his imperfections, S.R. regards his as the epitome of motherhood and believes his treatment of his child is entirely beneficial. He stated that his mother was the most amiable individual he had ever encountered. S.R. tragically lost his mother at the tender age of 15 due to a fatal asthma attack triggered by drug consumption. S.R. disclosed that he could still perceive the sound of his mother collapsing onto the floor in an unconscious state. Despite his state of terror, he recollects dialling 112 for assistance. He cradled his mother's head in his lap until assistance arrived, observing the paramedics' relentless attempts to resuscitate her. Even though his mother died over ten years ago, S.R. still experiences a profound sense of connection to her. He claimed to be able to communicate with deceased individuals on some occasions. He shared a feeling of communicating with his mother about his profound longing for her.

S.R. discontinued his education shortly following the demise of his mother. He acknowledges that he could have been academically proficient at school. However, he consistently perceived himself as the institution's most fashionable and well-liked male student. He derived pleasure from engaging in acts of bullying towards instructors, engaging in jests, and disseminating rumours about them. During that period, he initiated cultivating his personality through fashion. S.R. was influenced by the gothic aesthetic, which is shown in their attire, characterized by dark apparel, black eyeliner, and black nail polish. According to S.R., his mother was similarly attired. He has a strong affinity for the band Green Day and frequently watches their music video titled Boulevard of Broken Dreams. The band members donned gothic attire while performing a song, particularly emphasizing the recurring line "I walked alone." Following his mother's recent demise, he developed a fascination for his mother's garments, which remained undisturbed in the bedroom wardrobe. S.R. would spend extended periods in his mother's dimly lit room, deliberately taking deep breaths to absorb the lingering fragrance she left behind. Ultimately, S.R. commenced donning his mother's garments. Initially, he wore the clothes in a confined space, but eventually, he dared to wear his mother's garments in a public setting. S.R. experiences a heightened sense of strength when he adorns himself with his mother's garments. He articulated his perception of his mother's soul merging with his own, resulting in a profound sense of perfection.

During the following years, S.R. only wore his mother's garments. Once the item becomes worn out, he intends to substitute it with a new one that matches the same style. S.R. frequently encounters bullying, which persists daily. In Indonesia, cross-dressing is currently not deemed acceptable due to a cultural intolerance towards men expressing themselves as the opposing gender. Provocations and mockery frequently escalate into instances of verbal and physical mistreatment, occurring from both the instigator and the recipient.

S.R. recollected being subjected to frequent beatings; however, he remained indifferent. He perceives this as his preferred method of observing others without seeking their attention. He acquired his initial facial tattoo over two years after the passing of his mother. Amidst increasing public scorn, he purposefully caught additional tattoos to elicit further insults. S.R. asserted that the tattoo conveyed his indifference toward others' opinions. S.R. engaged in a physical altercation after being insulted by a stranger who used a derogatory term towards him while passing by. As a response, he inflicted a deep cut on this man's face using a knife. S.R. was subsequently apprehended and accused of assault, although he displayed apathy toward his legal predicament. He stated that the purpose of the motion was solely to ensure that the man had facial scars similar to the speaker's and that his acts were deemed equivalent.

S.R. identifies as bisexual but emphasizes that his wardrobe choices are unrelated to his sexual orientation. He claims to have a strong sexual attraction to himself and identifies as a narcissist. He experiences a solid sexual and overall attraction for herself. He asserted that he had engaged in self-stimulation using images of himself. While he is open to engaging in sexual activity with individuals of both genders, he argues that each gender fulfils specific roles. S.R. asserts that his romantic attraction is exclusively towards women rather than men. he exclusively caters to men for sexual encounters and subsequently leaves them.

Conversely, S.R. has never had the experience of being in a long-term romantic relationship. He is unable to form close friendships with women due to his belief that women should be protected from violence. Moreover, S.R. firmly rejects any inclination toward transgenderism. He aggressively asserts his male identity and has genuine contentment with his masculinity. he is not inclined to identify as a woman. He has no intention of presenting herself as one. He trims his hair biweekly and keeps a well-groomed beard when not in the hospital. He abstains from wearing wigs, utilizing artificial breasts, adopting a feminine gait, or employing a feminine vocal tone. In addition, he expressed his intense dislike for guys who exhibit the same level of emotional volatility as women and firmly believes that using the term "faggot" to label someone is wrong.

Discussion

Social disorders, also known as pathologies, frequently arise from departures from norms that connect with aspects such as welfare, physical and mental health, material conditions, and interpersonal and intergroup dynamics (Fajarini, 2019; O'Toole et al., 2014; Turki et al., 2022). Social and cultural norms influence the various actions associated with diseases, resulting in diverse manifestations of cross-dressing. Cross-dressing is embraced in several regions as a commendable act of bravery since it demonstrates the willingness to openly express one's emotions without concern for the opinions and intentions of others. Regarding jurisdiction, legislative safeguards for gender expression exist to guarantee that individuals who cross-dress are granted fair housing, education, and employment opportunities without bias or discrimination. Irrespective of the classification of cross-dressing, concepts and behaviours associated with cross-dressing are consistently classified under exhibitionism, sexuality, and transgenderism (Bailey et al., 2023; Plemons, 2021). However, these categories are outside of S.R.'s. He utilizes women's attire as a versatile coping strategy to evade the tension and stress he encounters.

The primary factor that S.R. relies on for his delight in transvestism is idealism, which serves as his distinctive strategy for defence. The concept of "healthy narcissism," coined by psychotherapist Heinz Kohut, refers to the idealistic tendencies observed in both youth and old life (Schipke, 2017). Kohut also noted that the period of healthy narcissism occurs throughout adulthood when youth has been surpassed (Schmidt, 2019). Suppose the ideal parental figure is absent from the lives of children or adolescents before their developmental stages are complete. In that case, they will perpetually be hindered from reaching the pinnacle of their lives (adulthood) and will rely on others to uphold their self-worth (Schipke, 2017). This holds for S.R., who persistently places considerable importance on the perception of others

to alter his physical look. An individual will undergo substantial alterations to their physical appearance to conform to the perception held by others. When faced with social exclusion, individuals may instinctively alter their looks as a means of attracting the attention of others (Schipke, 2017).

Furthermore, S.R. employs a pathological persistence mechanism called splitting, in addition to idealism. The division will occur when an individual demonstrates humility towards others in their presence. Splitting is an adaptive strategy that seems to be observed in persons diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. S.R. denotes properties that meet the criteria on the border. Individuals exhibiting this characteristic possess beliefs that categorize romantic relationships based on gender, resulting in a division into opposite extremes (Kapoor, 2022; Shell et al., 2022). They perceive love and sexuality as deviant, involving violent actions, and incompatible with the gentle, delicate, and personal characteristics of romance. Given the circumstances, it is unsurprising that S.R. has not experienced romantic love or love beyond his relationship with his mother. The devaluation is evident in S.R.'s approach to romantic relationships. He identifies as bisexual but excludes the possibility of having relationships with both men and women. He views men solely as sources of sexual gratification and dismisses the idea of a relationship with a woman, considering it too conventional for his taste.

One can incorporate several elements of one's identity, such as clothing choices and personal characteristics, into one's overall sense of self. Specific individuals utilize this absorption process as a defensive mechanism. Sigmund Freud extensively explored these defence mechanisms and the potential for regressive behaviours to substitute the object of libido (Leleux, 2023; Sugarman, 2023). While many cross-dressers, such as Capitão, utilize clothing of the opposite sex to express their sexuality, S.R. chooses to wear his mother's dress as an alternative to expressing his sexuality. This elucidates S.R.'s perspective on sex, perceiving it primarily as objective and transactional, except for sexual alternatives that commodify sex for financial gain.

In the case of S.R., this tattoo exemplifies a defence mechanism that is employed but has yet to attain full development. Young people engage in attention-seeking and rebellious behaviour as a defence technique. Fenichel states that activities that stray from coping mechanisms are taken to suppress past experiences (Millar Et Al., 2021; Raj & Bajaj, 2023). This allows an individual to utilize the perception of emotions to exert influence over their lives, although temporarily. To put it differently, receiving a tattoo on S.R. is a form of treatment. Therapeutic measures are implemented for an individual who poses a high risk of causing physical harm to themselves. Nevertheless, its therapeutic impact is temporary, and the sensation of hate that it will eradicate will inevitably resurface.

CONCLUSION

Cross-dressing does not just pertain to transvestism, as it can also serve as a coping strategy in pathological circumstances. Individuals can wear clothing typically designed for the other gender without encountering any psychological impairment. The notion that cross-dressing is a type of deviation is a widely held and antiquated belief in contemporary society. For instance, S.R. demonstrates that his choice to wear women's clothing is not a departure from his inherent masculinity but a result of his personal experiences.

To expand this discussion, it is crucial to acknowledge that cross-dressing, in certain situations, can serve as a method of expressing oneself, engaging in artistic performances, or participating in cultural practices. Throughout various civilizations and historical eras, the act of wearing clothing traditionally associated with the opposite gender has carried a range of interpretations and consequences, frequently unrelated to concepts of gender identity or sexual orientation. This expanded comprehension challenges the oversimplified perspective of cross-dressing and paves the way for a more sophisticated recognition of its function in human social and cultural processes. The selection of attire by an individual should be regarded as a component of a range of human actions, demonstrating a diverse array of personal, cultural, and historical factors.

Defence mechanisms, as per psychoanalytic theory, serve the primary objective of eradicating anxiety and conflict. Essentially, the defence mechanism enables individuals to repress the terrible reality within themselves. Another

inference is that S.R. donned attire typically associated with women and adorned his face with tattoos, not as a deliberate expression of style or rebellion against societal norms but as an automatic mechanism for dealing with emotions of grief. For specific individuals, cross-dressing is a coping method to alleviate the emotional impact of losing something precious from a former existence. It extends beyond transvestism and the misconceptions of sexual deviance associated with the subject of study.

It is essential to comprehend that the conduct of cross-dressing, as observed in instances such as s.r.'s, frequently signifies intricate psychological mechanisms. These techniques are not solely concerned with superficial appearance; they can be intricately connected to an individual's cognitive and emotional strategies for dealing with substantial obstacles. The multitude of motivations underlying cross-dressing underscores its function as more than a mere sartorial preference or means of gender representation, but rather as a complex psychological phenomenon. This viewpoint changes the emphasis from a critical perception of sexual abnormality to a more compassionate comprehension of the diverse human encounters and the distinct psychological approaches individuals utilize in their quest for emotional recovery and self-exploration. When further examining this topic, it is crucial to acknowledge that cross-dressing, in certain situations, can serve as a method of expressing oneself, engaging in creative performances, or participating in cultural traditions. Throughout various civilizations and historical eras, the act of wearing clothing traditionally associated with the opposite gender has had a range of interpretations and consequences, frequently unrelated to concepts of gender identity or sexual orientation. This expanded comprehension challenges the oversimplified perspective of cross-dressing and paves the way for a more intricate recognition of its function in human social and cultural processes. The selection of attire by an individual should be regarded as a component of a range of human actions, showcasing a diverse array of personal, cultural, and historical factors. Engaging in a discussion about cross-dressing entails delving into a highly intricate matter that holds significance for numerous individuals. Other researchers, especially those conducting future studies that provide a more nuanced understanding of cross-dressing, can use this research as a reference point. It goes beyond stereotypes and simplistic categorizations, instead delving into a comprehensive examination of how cross-dressing influences the development of one's identity, social interactions, and cultural expressions. This technique enhances intellectual perspectives and promotes empathy and understanding in everyday social circumstances.

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