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The Meaning of the Self-Concept of Crossdressing Men: A Phenomenological Study on Members of the Indonesian Crossdresser Community

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Abstract:

Crossdressing is the phenomenon of using clothes or other accessories that do not match their gender. The crossdressing phenomenon is negatively stigmatized and the perpetrators are vulnerable to discrimination. The purpose of this study is to find out the experiences, motives, and meanings of men becoming a crossdresser, as well as to reveal the self-concept of crossdressing men. This research method uses qualitative and Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach. Based on the results of the study, it was found that the experience experienced by male crossdressers is a factor in the formation of self-concept. The motives in this study were found to be because of motives, namely the influence of a female-dominated family, getting feminine exposure since childhood, the influence of Japanese culture-loving groups such as anime and manga, liking fashion, and feeling comfortable in women's clothing. Meanwhile, the in order to motives found are wanting to display beauty, wanting to get praise, wanting to educate about the world of crossdressing to fellow crossdressers, and wanting to make a profit. The meaning of crossdressing is crossdressing as art, as an expression of fashion, hobby, and self. The self-concept of male crossdressing members of the Indonesian Crossdresser community is heterosexual, homosexual, private, open, and has a positive self-concept.

Keywords: Self-concept, Crossdressing, Self-Image, Self Esteem, Motive, Meaning

Introduction:

Crossdressing is an activity of wearing the clothes of the opposite sex that is negatively stigmatized in society. Men, when dressed as women, even in terms of theater art, film, or in literature, have been labeled as a laughing stock. Most of the world socially disapproves of men dressing as women (Farooq, 2020). This is the reason for the emergence of crossdressing communities in virtual spaces because it feels safer to express.

The crossdressing community, based on the results of observations, is found on social media. One of them is the Crossdresser Indonesia community which has an Instagram account @crossdreser_id with 440 followers. All members

of this community are male from various regions in Indonesia. This community has conducted direct meetings with various activities carried out.

Crossdressing according to Bullough (1993) quoted from the American Psychological Association (2015) is wearing clothes, accessories, and or makeup as well as adopting gender expressions that are not related to one's sex at birth according to cultural and environmental standards. Based on The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5) crossdressing is not categorized as a disorder or just a craze (Moreira, 2021).

Crossdressing behavior has also been mentioned from various studies abroad in the psychological, medical, and social fields. Marcino (1986) in Farooq (2020) has conducted a survey that the majority of crossdressing perpetrators are awakened from an early age. Based on observations, other things that motivate crossdressing behavior are certain cultural historical values such as the practice of thandak ludruk art, cosplay anime characters, and the Korean pop industry.

In the history of clothing the categorization of clothing for men and clothing for women is not absolute. Types of clothing can vary according to each region and culture. For example, men's clothing in Greece, Rome or traditional Scottish clothing, is very similar to a skirt or skirt cut (Haldani in Pambudi et al., 2019). Thus, crossdressing should have a place to be able to express itself. Clothing functions for visual self-expression that can be done freely.

The phenomenon of crossdressing, in which men dress as women or look feminine, is highlighted as deviant behavior. In Indonesia, dressing up as women they are considered strange and faced with social conflict in various forms of harassment and in the family is considered a disgrace so that they always experience social pressure (Darusman, 2016).

Legally, especially in Indonesia, there are the Yogyakarta Principles on the application of international human rights law on sexual orientation and gender identity. With the aim of shaping a different future, which makes all people born free and equal in obtaining their rights and dignity (Komnas HAM, 2015). However, based on these legal principles, the position of crossdressers has not been explained in detail or is still biased in its legal status.

The acts of discrimination committed by some people against minorities show that in terms of values, norms, and religion, Indonesian society clearly rejects this behavior. Although indeed crossdressing actors have caused unrest when carrying out social interactions in the community. However, this phenomenon needs to be explored further. With this background, researchers are interested in finding the self-concept of male crossdressers.

Research Methodology:

This research method uses qualitative methods. Qualitative research identifies things that are relevant to meaning in the circumstances that occur in the world, human diversity, diverse beliefs and interests with a focus on different forms of things that will cause differences in meaning (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018).

The research approach used is phenomenology. Phenomenology is an attempt to explain the meaning contained in the lived experience of a number of individuals, about a concept or symptom, such as their self-concept or outlook on life (Creswell & Poth, 2018).In this study using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory. Basically, Schutz's phenomenology examines intersubjectivity, to answer questions about the motives, desires, and meanings of other people's actions. Human action is part of the role in society, so an action can come from other people. (Hamzah, 2020).

Meanwhile, to explore the meaning of the types of actions is to know the motive. Two questions about motives according to Schutz are;

1. “In order to motives” means goals described as intentions, plans, hopes, interests and so on.
2. “Because” motives mean that something refers

to the individual's past experience (Hamzah, 2020).

With qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach, this research was conducted on male crossdressing subjects who are members of the Indonesian Crossdresser community. With data collection techniques passive participatory observation, interviews, and documentation content review. Observations were made for several months through the informant's social media and directly in Jakarta as the center of community activities. Interviews were conducted directly to three informants and through zoom meetings to one informant.

Researcher determines informants with purposive techniques, namely data source sampling techniques with certain considerations and objectives (Sugiyono, 2020: 287). That way, the criteria have been determined as follows; (1) The actor is a crossdressing actor (2) The actor is of male biological sex (3) The actor is a member of the Indonesian Crossdresser community who has participated in the Indonesian Crossdresser community event.

The data validity used in this research is source triangulation to psychologists. Source Triangulation is a technique whose research results are tested for credibility by checking existing data using several trusted sources. Then the data is analyzed to produce a conclusion which the researcher then asks for agreement with at least three data sources (Sugiyono, 2020).

Results:

In the results of research and discussion, the researcher describes as a whole obtained from the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study become data that will be interpreted by researchers using Schutz's phenomenological theory. The data selected are all related to the experiences, motives, and meanings of men becoming a crossdresser and focus on the self-concept of men who do the crossdressing phenomenon.

1. Crossdressing Experience for Male Members of the Crossdresser Community

In phenomenological studies, it is necessary to explore the individual's experience of the phenomena he experiences, also in the context of everyday life on the subject under study. Phenomenology also studies all experiences that appear in life and leads to the meaning of what the subject experiences. In this study, researchers explored the experience of crossdressing behavior for men.

Based on his experience, in terms of character building or self-identity, here the researcher uses the term self-image. There are also research results that show informants' experiences that reflect their self-worth, individuals will have value or self-esteem if they get something valuable for themselves. Regarding this, researchers use the term self-esteem.

The first experience of informant Jesmer shows a feminine character when wearing women's clothing and masculine when wearing men's clothing. Jesmer works as a banking employee who has a motorcycle hobby. Meanwhile, when crossdressing Jesmer wants to display beauty based on physicality. Her character (self image) is a sensual, fashionable, and bitchy socialite woman

"Crossdresser for me is another universe, so when I'm a male character, I'm a male. When cding (crossdressing) everything turns 180 degrees like a model who wants to be photographed"

Jesmer's pleasant experience was meeting and sharing stories with other crossdressers. Meanwhile, his bad experience was once spread his identity by a fellow crossdresser, which made him vacate from crossdressing activities for three years. Jesmer also expressed his views on LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) which shows that Jesmer does not identify himself as part of it. The experiences that shape Jesmer's self-esteem, obtained through compliments on her beauty, have made her feel that her identity is

recognized.

The next informant, Indira, conveyed that her daily life experience is very different when she is crossdressing. Every day, Indira works as a graphic designer, which makes her look like a man and has a masculine character. Meanwhile, when crossdressing, Indira displays feminine traits, namely coquettishness and changes her voice to be higher and displays a fierce and annoying female figure, this becomes her self-image when crossdressing.

A pleasant experience during crossdressing is feeling happy when someone accepts her as she is, both from her friends and her boyfriend. In addition, the praise given is also a happy moment, as well as shaping her confidence. In other words, it is the acceptance of others towards her that makes Indira have self-esteem.

"The happy moment is that now I have a partner. My girl fully supports my crossdressing hobby."

Then, she also revealed that she had received sexual harassment through her social media. Indira also gave her opinion that she only accepts LGBT groups, but Indira has a self-identity with heterosexual sexual orientation.

Vivi, who also has a background as an office worker. She has a very different character in everyday life and when crossdressing. Daily, Vivi has a hobby that requires physical strength such as futsal. However, when crossdressing, Vivi displays more feminine characteristics or roles. Vivi admits that he is more spoiled when crossdressing. However, Vivi explained that her character (self-image) can easily change according to the person she is with.

Vivi describes her feelings of joy when being a crossdresser because she can meet many people and share everyone's life experiences. Vivi also explained that she is a crossdresser only because of her interest in style and is not part of a crossdresser who disturbs public order. Vivi once had an identity as a crosshijaber, but eventually experienced an incident that made her vacuum from the crossdresser world and also had a bad experience because of the bad behavior of fellow crossdressers.

"In the past, I used to go out confidently because the suit was closed, the hijab was more noticeable, because if the clothes were oversized, covered with all kinds of things, it was already noticeable, not like that. From there it stopped because there was a case of a crosshijaber in 2018, there was a thief, someone came to a place of worship..."

In addition, he gains self-confidence or feels self-esteem because he can have a family, get acceptance from his wife, and when he changes from a male appearance to a female appearance according to what he wants.

Based on Jesmer's statement, Indira, and Vivi have similarities in the way they crossdress privately. According to psychologist Amanda Angela S.Psi M.Psi, people who have different personalities in their lives are very natural. The informants of this study are considered flexible in adjusting themselves.

"Psychologically, to determine whether it's normal or not, the easiest thing is whether it's distressing or not, if it's not distressing and doesn't affect other aspects of life, it's not a problem. If you like fashion, it's not a problem. In fact, this person is flexible."

Slightly different from Jesmer, Indira, and Vivi. Hari has openly practiced crossdressing activities in his neighborhood. Because he has a job as a fashion designer and make-up artist, Hari has a strong character (self-image) by combining masculine and feminine styles, which is also called androgyny. This character makes him memorable and recognizable to many people. Hari feels that her appearance is often the same as women in general.

In addition, Hari also shows his identity as part of the LGBT, namely as gay. Before choosing to become a crossdresser, Hari first

accepted himself as a gay man (homosexual). Hari also found that he had achievements that made him feel more valuable (self-esteem). During his career, which was only a fad to make a profit by creating makeup content, until the time he felt comfortable being a crossdresser and having a career as a makeup artist, there were experiences that he did not realize were proud achievements.

The informants' experiences show the twists and turns of being a crossdresser. Then, through this experience, it can also show the self-image of a crossdresser in his life both showing two sides of himself or the same, and also the value in himself.

2. Motives of male members of the Indonesian Crossdresser Community to become crossdressers

The explanation of the motives is conveyed based on the informants' answers regarding their reasons and desires to become crossdressers. The motives found in this study are relevant to Alfred Schutz's theory which divides the motives of an action motivated by something oriented to the past (because of motives) and also the future (in order to motives)

3. Because of Motives Male Members of the Indonesian Crossdresser Community Become a Crossdresser

The past motives that researchers found came from the family environment and events that occurred in the past had a great influence on informants. Because of motives found come from the influence of the family environment since childhood, this was found in informants Jesmer, Indira, and Hari. Jesmer, the reason for crossdressing is because of the closest family factor.

Jesmer received feminine exposure as a child from her sister who loved fashion and makeup. Indira became a crossdresser from the influence of a predominantly female family working as a flight attendant, often getting beautiful compliments, and being dressed like a woman since childhood. While Hari has liked the feminine look since childhood, but first perceived himself as a feminine homosexual (gay) man before changing his appearance and becoming a crossdresser.

Unlike the others, Vivi began to know the term crossdresser since adolescence from a group of Japanese culture lovers such as manga, anime, and cosplay. Here, researchers found quite diverse results from the informants regarding their motives for becoming crossdressers based on the events they experienced in the past.

4. In Order to Motive, Male Members of the Indonesian Crossdresser Community to Become a Crossdresser

Researchers try to explore the future goals or motives of male crossdressers. Future motives can show the reasons why informants continue to be crossdressers today in the midst of a conservative society and the many negative sentiments about male crossdressers.

Jesmer and Indira had a desire to be complimented on their beauty and were challenged to go above and beyond with different fashions of women's clothing. Hari, who has a background of working in the fashion industry, revealed that she had an initial goal that led to profit, for example through the creation of makeup content. However, Hari found comfort in the use of women's clothing and makeup. Unlike the others, Vivi experienced an event that motivated her to want to provide education about the world of crossdressers to fellow crossdressers so as not to enter the negative circle that exists in the crossdresser world itself.

The meaning created by Schutz is a process that makes an agreement that is not trapped only in social scientific thinking, but rather in the interpretation of daily life based on the agreement of the researcher with the "object of research" who is also a subject who interprets the social world within the framework of the search process in the process of understanding the construction of meaning from a process called intersubjectivity

(Hamzah, 2020).

Based on this, the researcher will discuss the meaning created from the experience passed by the informant. The meaning is interpreted by informants who experience the crossdressing phenomenon and agreed upon by the researcher. After exploring the past motives and future motives of the informant to become a crossdresser, it has been found that becoming a crossdresser occurs for various reasons related to childhood experiences, factors of the closest people, certain desires in the future, and the results of his own self-perception.

The experience that made this research informant a crossdresser has created its own meaning for the informant. This time the researchers got four meanings from Jesmer, Indira, Hari and Vivi as male crossdressers who are members of the Indonesian Crossdresser community, namely; (1) crossdressing as art, (2) crossdressing as a fashion expression, (3) crossdressing as a hobby, and (4) crossdressing as oneself.

After understanding the motives, experiences, and meanings of male crossdressing members of Crossdresser Indonesia. Then, researchers can determine the self-concept of each informant. Self-concept according to Brooks (in Rakhmat, 2019) relates to views and feelings about oneself, not just a descriptive self-image but an assessment of self, and can be perceived as psychological, social and physical.

The formation of the self-concept of each informant, found factors that influence informants to become crossdressers, namely reference groups, significant others and self perceptions. After knowing the factors that influence self-concept, researchers will further discuss the important components of self-concept. In forming a self-concept, a

person also looks first within himself, perceives his experiences and interprets his experiences to show the self-image and self-esteem of that person.

Self-Image is the type of self that the self believes it is. Self-image arises from the views of others towards him and also comes from his self-perception when looking at himself. As discussed in the conceptual review, a person's self-image will determine the good or bad actions and relate to communication with individuals or groups in the daily environment. This is similar to what was found in the male crossdresser informants of this study.

Table 4. 1 Self Image of Male Crossdressers Member of Indonesian Crossdresser Community Self-image

Self-image
Crossdressing with a fashionable outfit that depicts a sensual woman
Crossdressing with a feminine look with brightly colored *dress* clothes and portraying a nature
Crossdressing with a monochrome clothing look that depicts a fierce and fierce nature
Crossdressing with an androgynous look that portrays both feminine and masculine sides

Self-esteem is an assessment of oneself for the results that have been achieved, self-esteem comes from other people and personal experiences (Sari & Abrori, 2015). The self-esteem obtained by informants in this study comes from various experiences that occur continuously from childhood or adolescence and will continue to develop.

Table 4. 2 Self-Esteem of Male Crossdressers Member of Indonesian Crossdresser Community

Self-esteem
Male *crossdressers* have self-esteem because they get compliments on their beauty when *crossdressing*.
Male *crossdressers* have self-esteem because they feel confident in their appearance when *crossdressing* in accordance with the expected expectations.
Male *crossdressers* have self-esteem because they are accepted by those closest to them, namely their family, friends and .
Male *crossdressers* have self-esteem because they are proud of their successful international career achievements.

Source: Key Informant Interview Results and Researcher Data Processing (2023)

Finally, the discovery of is the result of a person's self-image and self-esteem. The self-identity of a male crossdresser shows distinctive characteristics. Jesmer, Hari, Indiria can give roles as men to their female partners and make adjustments to jobs that need to display the masculine side. While Hari as an open crossdresser, can provide maximum performance in his work.

Table 4. 3 Self Identity of Male Crossdressers Member of Indonesian Crossdresser Community

Self Identity
Male ***crossdressing*** with homosexual sexual orientation
Male ***crossdressing*** with heterosexual sexual orientation
Crossdressing men do *crossdressing* in *private*
Crossdressing men *crossdressing* openly
Crossdressing men have a positive self-concept

Thus, the results of the discussion of research on the self-concept of crossdressing men in members of the Indonesian Crossdresser community. Furthermore, the researcher made a chart that shows the results of the previously discussed research. The chart combines the entire discussion and shows the relationship with each other.

Suggestion:

For future researchers, if they conduct research on crossdressers, it is recommended to conduct research related to dramaurgi theory and comparative studies with objects in other communities, for example on crossdressers in the Facebook or Twitter community.

For male crossdressers who are members of the Indonesian Crossdresser community, they should increase their gatherings or activities with fellow crossdressers to educate about the world of

crossdressers, sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression. For the community or people closest to the perpetrator of crossdressing, they can approach individuals who do crossdressing first. People who want to prevent crossdressing behavior need to assess and reconsider the factors that cause crossdressing behavior obtained in this study.

Conclusion:

The experience of male crossdressers who are the key informants of this study is to display fashionable, sensual, feminine, and androgynous characters. Key informants also have good experiences and bad experiences that come from interacting with fellow crossdressers.

The past motives (because of motives) of male key informants to become a crossdresser are the influence of a female-dominated family, exposure to feminine things since childhood, the influence of groups of Japanese culture lovers who like anime and manga, like fashion, and feel comfortable in women's clothing. At the same time, the future motives (in order to motives) found are wanting to display beauty, wanting to get praise, wanting to educate about the world of crossdressers to fellow crossdressers and wanting to make a profit.

The meaning of crossdresser for male crossdressers who are key informants is as art, fashion expression, hobby, and as oneself. Then, based on this meaning, the self-concept of male crossdressers who are key informants seen from the self image is as a crossdresser with a fashionable and sensual clothing display, a feminine look, has a bitchy, fierce nature, and an androgynous look. Meanwhile, the self-esteem found is that she has self-esteem because she gets compliments on her beauty, feels confident in her appearance, is accepted by those closest to her, and is proud of her career achievements. Finally, the self-identity obtained is a private crossdresser, a closed crossdresser, a crossdresser with heterosexual sexual orientation, a homosexual crossdresser, and all key informants have a positive self-concept.

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