

# The Crossdresser Phenomenon: Between Transgender and Hobbies (Study of Crossdresser Phenomenon on Social Media Platforms)

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article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-02-04 Revised: 2024-06-11 Published: 2024-06-30	This study highlights the important role of Islamic teachings and traditional gender norms in shaping views on gender in Indonesia, which contribute to significant gender gaps in various aspects of life such as education, political participation, access to decent work, and control over economic resources. The phenomenon of gender transition or "Transgender" is often the focus of debate in society, while traditional gender norms are still strong in Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of crossdressers as part of a natural and complex spectrum of gender identities and to reduce stigma and discrimination against individuals who practice crossdressing. Using descriptive qualitative methods and a comprehensive scientific approach, this study uses observation, documentation, and interviews as data collection techniques. Primary data were obtained from the results of analyzing content created by several crossdresser accounts on the Facebook social media platform, as well as the results of interviews with account owners, while secondary data were obtained from relevant literature and references. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of crossdressing, factors that influence crossdressing behavior, and society's views on crossdressers. The implication is that this study makes an important contribution to promoting gender equality and human rights for all individuals, and shows the importance.

**Keywords:** Crossdresser, Hobbies, Islam, Psychology, Transgender.

## Introduction

In Indonesia, Islamic teachings significantly influence perspectives on gender, but interpretations of gender roles within Islam vary, sparking debates about their impact on women's rights and roles (Syed, 2010; Shankar, 2022; Bakhshizadeh, 2023). Despite some progress, gender gaps remain prominent in education, political participation, access to decent work, and control over economic resources (Lwamba et al., 2022; Christopherson et al., 2022). Traditional gender norms persist, shaped by a patriarchal culture that views men as family leaders and women as caretakers of the home (Afif, 2019; Galizzi et al., 2024). One frequently discussed gender issue is transgender identity. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), transgender refers to individuals who change their gender identity. In Thailand, 314,808 transgender individuals have been recorded, though the actual number is likely higher due to underreporting (Winter, 2006; Coleman et al., 2022; White et al., 2023). Cultural and religious beliefs, particularly Buddhism's concept of reincarnation, contribute to a more accepting view of transgender individuals, where gender transition is seen not as a deviation but as a part of destiny (Setiawan, 2023).

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In Indonesia, while there are no official statistics on the LGBT population, the community has become more open and active in advocating for legal recognition. Inspired by global movements and the legalization of LGBT rights in other countries, they strive to change public perception through positive visibility and social inclusion. Based on a CIA survey, Indonesia ranks fifth globally for LGBT population, with an estimated 7.5 million people—about 3% of its 250 million citizens (Wahyuni & Amelia, 2023). In West Sumatra, the West Sumatra LGBT VCT Counselors Association (2018) reported approximately 14,469 LGBT individuals, particularly in Padang, Bukittinggi, and Solok. Research also found 2,501 gay individuals, with 75% aged 15–25 and 43% still living with their parents. Judith Butler (2006) defines transgender identity as a misalignment between gender identity and biological sex, influenced by social, psychological, and biological factors. Explains that crossdressing—wearing attire associated with the opposite gender—is a gender expression that often challenges dominant heteronormative norms (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015; Endsjo, 2020). According to Syafuddin (2020) crossdressing has moved from cosplay events to daily life, especially on platforms like Facebook.

Previous studies on crossdressing are still limited, though several have explored related themes. Syafuddin (2020) found that crossdressing does not always lead to transgender identity, as some individuals only express themselves on social media while maintaining typical male appearances in daily life. However, his study focused narrowly on cosplay-related crossdressers. Hamidah and Mutahir (2023) analyzed media portrayals of LGBT individuals in detik.com, revealing how negative media framing contributes to public stigma. Wijayanto and Rahim (2023) emphasized that religious, cultural, and political narratives in Indonesia strongly influence negative perceptions of LGBT communities. Sipahutar et al. (2023) highlighted Islamic legal views and human rights perspectives, showing tension between moral norms and rights-based protections. Hafni and Erwinda (2023) studied LGBT behavior in West Sumatra, suggesting that psychological intervention may not always be necessary. This research addresses a gap in understanding the roots of crossdressing behavior, which is often mistakenly equated with being transgender (Lau, 2018), and aims to promote gender inclusivity (Scheibner, 2007).

Secondly, research on crossdressers is also important for developing effective interventions to support the psychological well-being of individuals who engage in the practice. By understanding more about the motivations, experiences, and challenges faced by crossdressers, mental health professionals can design appropriate support programs to meet their needs. In addition, this research can expand the evidence base to help shape policies that support the rights of individual crossdressers, including the right to self-expression and fair treatment in the workplace, in healthcare, and society at large. As such, research into the concept of crossdressers can make a meaningful contribution to promoting gender equality and human rights for all individuals (Henningsen, 2017).

Based on the discussion above, this research hypothesizes that crossdressing behavior in Indonesia is not solely a precursor to transgender identity, but rather a unique form of gender expression influenced by various psychological, social, and cultural factors. The persistence of traditional gender norms and strong religious influences may shape public perceptions and contribute to stigma, yet they do not entirely determine an individual's gender identity trajectory. It is assumed that many individuals who engage in crossdressing do so as a form of self-expression without necessarily intending to transition genders. Additionally, increased visibility on social media suggests a shift in how crossdressing is practiced and perceived. Therefore, this study aims to explore whether crossdressing exists independently from transgender identity, and how societal, psychological, and cultural factors interact to shape these experiences, while also investigating the implications for mental health support and human rights policies.

## Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. In addition, this research will prioritize the study of content created by several accounts on Facebook social media. This research also uses two types of data sources, namely primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source used in this research is the form of data from the analysis of the content created by several Crossdresser accounts on the Facebook social media platform on Indonesia. In addition, other primary data used are also in the form of several interviews with several account owners using unstructured interviews. The secondary data sources are in the form of quotations obtained from relevant literature and references in the form of books, journals, and internet websites (Fazry, 2023).

As explained above, the data collection techniques used in this research use triangulation techniques. The triangulation technique is a data collection technique that includes three things, namely observation, documentation, and interviews. As for what is observed and documented, it includes Facebook content in the form of pictures and videos. Then the interviews used in this study used unstructured interview techniques. This is because the interview process is limited to using Personal Messenger or private chat (Fanasca, 2019). Then the data analysis technique in this research uses data reduction techniques, namely collecting and filtering data that is suitable for discussion in this research. Then the next data analysis technique is the data interpretation technique which includes the process of analyzing and narrating the reduced data based on reasoning and theory which will be used as the main tool in analyzing the issues discussed in this research. The analysis used will be based on the Queer theory that has been proposed by a philosopher and gender critic from the United States named Judith Butler (Butler, 2015). This theory is the basis for discussing the Crossdresser phenomenon.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

#### Motivations and Goals of Individual Crossdressing: Between Self-Expression and Gender Identity

The findings from the interviews indicate that individuals who engage in crossdressing have different motivations and future intentions. One respondent views crossdressing as a form of self-discovery and affirmation of their gender identity, with plans to fully transition through hormone therapy and permanent changes in appearance. On the other hand, another respondent perceives crossdressing purely as a hobby, with no intention of changing their everyday gender identity. For them, crossdressing serves as a safe space to express another side of their personality that cannot be shown in daily life. This highlights that the meaning of crossdressing is highly contextual and cannot be generalized across individuals.

**Table 1. The Results of the Interviews**

No	Question	The Results of The Interviews
1	What's your opinion About crossdressing?	"For me, crossdressing initially became a way to express my true self. Over time, I realized it was more than just about clothing - it was about my actual gender identity." " In my view, crossdressing is a fun and creative form of self-expression. It gives me the freedom to explore another side of my personality without having to change my everyday gender identity."
2	How did you start crossdressing?	" I began experimenting with clothes of the opposite gender because I felt uncomfortable with the gender expectations placed on me. At first, it was just at home, but then I started feeling more 'myself' when doing it." " I first tried it for a costume party and really enjoyed it. Since then, I've started doing it occasionally at home as a way to relax and express a different side of myself."

3 What are your next steps regarding your crossdressing activities?	" I plan to start 'living full-time' as the gender I identify with. This might include hormone therapy and permanent appearance changes. I'll also be consulting with mental health professionals to discuss transition options." " I want to continue crossdressing as an enjoyable hobby. I might join a crossdressing community to share experiences and tips. But I don't plan on changing my everyday gender identity."
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From these interviews, it can be concluded that crossdressing does not have a single definition or motivation. For some, crossdressing is part of the process toward embracing the gender identity they feel is true to themselves. For others, it is a way to express creativity and experience psychological freedom, without any desire to permanently change their gender identity. This difference highlights the importance of distinguishing between crossdressers and transgender individuals both terminologically and psychologically. Therefore, the approach to individuals engaging in crossdressing should be personal and non-stigmatizing. These findings also reinforce the importance of public education to foster an inclusive and non-judgmental understanding of gender expression diversity in society.

### Social Identity, Community Boundaries, and Public Perception

This finding shows that crossdressing has diverse meanings depending on the perspective of the individual and the group. For some, crossdressing is not merely a hobby but a part of the process of exploring and discovering their gender identity. Meanwhile, the crossdresser community, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook, emphasizes crossdressing as a form of self-expression without being associated with transgender or LGBTQ+ issues. This highlights the differences in understanding within the community regarding the role and purpose of crossdressing.

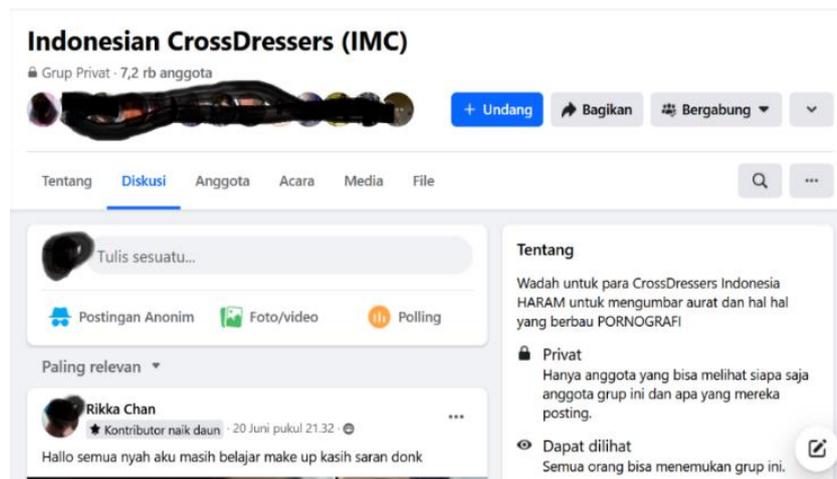


Figure 1. One of the Crossdresser Community Facebook Groups

The findings highlight several key points regarding crossdressing. Involvement in activities like cosplay can influence personal identity, particularly when individuals feel accepted within a community that values diverse gender expressions, aligning with Social Identity Theory (Jost & Sidanius, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). However, many in the crossdresser community view crossdressing primarily as a hobby, not linked to LGBTQ+ or transgender identities (Chess, 2016; Erhardt, 2007). The community is protective of its principles, excluding those who integrate LGBTQ+ or transgender elements. It also criticizes behaviors that violate social norms, such as the "Crosshijaber" case, seeing them as damaging to the reputation of crossdressing. Members

typically engage in "outing" activities in non-controversial ways, such as walking in public spaces, to express their identity while maintaining boundaries acceptable within the community.

Overall, this finding underscores the importance of a deeper understanding of crossdressing as a gender expression that can have various dimensions. The crossdresser community separates this practice from transgender or LGBTQ+ issues and emphasizes the value of self-expression without involving permanent changes to gender identity. The existence of boundaries in public behavior and the rejection of actions deemed to violate social norms reflect the community's desire to maintain the purity of its principles, viewing crossdressing as a positive hobby rather than a transformed gender identity.

## Discussion

### Exploring Crossdressing: Identity, Expression, and the Intersection with Transgenderism and the LGBT Movement

To begin with, it is essential to differentiate between crossdressing and transgender identity. Crossdressing refers to the act of wearing clothing traditionally associated with a gender different from one's assigned sex at birth (Franklin & Herek, 2008; Hao & Zi, 2019). In contrast, a transgender person experiences a mismatch between their gender identity and their biological sex (Veale et al., 2010; Schwan, 2021). Historically, crossdressing has roots in ancient cultures, often appearing in religious practices, theatrical traditions, or role-playing. For example, in Japanese Kabuki and Noh theater, male performers traditionally played female roles, a practice accepted and celebrated in its cultural context. Conversely, in many Western societies, crossdressing has been stigmatized and is often subject to discrimination (Valentine & Kulick, 2001; Schwan, 2021).

The motivations for crossdressing vary widely. Some individuals find comfort and authenticity in expressing themselves through clothing not typically associated with their gender. For others, crossdressing is a means of exploring or expressing a different gender identity. In some cases, this exploration may lead individuals to identify as transgender (Peletz, 2006). Perspectives on crossdressing and transgenderism differ across communities. While some embrace it as valid self-expression and support the right of individuals to dress as they wish, others hold more conservative views, often rejecting the notion that gender identity can diverge from biological sex (Tazkiyah & Nasrulloh, 2023).

The relationship between crossdressing and transgender identity is nuanced. Although both involve a departure from conventional gender presentation, crossdressers do not always identify as transgender. Crossdressing may be limited to clothing and appearance without a corresponding shift in gender identity (Butler, 2004). On the other hand, transgender individuals align their clothing and behavior with their internal gender identity (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2020; Kurup & Underwood, 2021; Higgs et al., 2021). Thus, while there are overlaps in self-expression, each individual's identity and experience are deeply personal and unique (Bouman et al., 2017).

When comparing crossdressing to the broader LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) movement, both intersect in their challenge to rigid gender norms and promotion of self-expression. However, they differ in structure and orientation. Crossdressers may not always see themselves as part of the LGBT community, especially since crossdressing is not inherently tied to a particular sexual orientation (Shimazaki, 2021; Schmidthorst, 2022). While some crossdressers may identify as transgender or support LGBT advocacy, many prefer to maintain a distinct identity. In contrast, the LGBT movement is a collective that seeks legal and societal recognition for sexual and gender minorities and works to combat the oppression they face (Sedinger, 1997).

Some perspectives suggest that crossdressing can serve as an early stage in a person's journey toward gender transition (Sansfaçon et al., 2020). This idea is based on the experiences of individuals who began by wearing clothes of the opposite sex—such as in cosplay culture—and

later felt that this form of expression deeply resonated with their sense of self. In the world of cosplay, it is quite common for male participants to fully embody female characters, including the use of silicone body parts, wigs, and makeup (Cooper et al., 2020). This practice is not merely a form of entertainment or roleplay, but in some cases, it becomes a means to explore and understand one's deeper gender identity. Some individuals report that these experiences opened their eyes to who they truly are, eventually encouraging them to take further steps toward gender transition. Therefore, crossdressing within the context of cosplay can act as a meaningful medium in the exploration and formation of personal identity (Primo & Freitas, 2000; Muhlisian & Setyono, 2023).

Immersive experiences such as crossdressing can have psychological impacts, particularly when supported by peer acceptance and a welcoming social environment. Based on Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, individuals shape their identity through connections with particular social groups. In this light, frequent involvement in crossdressing communities or cosplay events may lead individuals to associate with groups that embrace gender diversity. This ongoing affiliation can reinforce a sense of belonging and self-understanding, potentially influencing one's decision to explore or pursue gender transition. The validation received from these communities can play a crucial role in affirming one's evolving identity (Pradipta & Resen, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Jost & Sidanius, 2006).

However, many crossdressers view their practice purely as a personal hobby, without connection to transgender identity or the LGBT movement. This perspective is common among members of online communities, such as Facebook groups dedicated to crossdressing, where the activity is strictly understood as a form of self-enjoyment. These communities often distance themselves from LGBTQ+ issues, even going so far as to remove members who introduce related discourse, in an effort to preserve the group's original focus (Chess, 2016; Fadhilaatika & Muthoifin, 2022; Erhardt, 2007).

Certain communities have expressed criticism toward public incidents involving crossdressing, such as the 2019 Crosshijaber case in Indonesia, where a man disguised himself as a Muslim woman to access gender-specific areas, sparking widespread public backlash (Hidayat, 2020; Butler, 2011). Actions like this are viewed as ethical breaches and contribute to negative stereotypes and increased stigma against crossdressers. In contrast, many individuals who crossdress participate in "Outing"—a more respectful and private form of public expression. These outings typically involve low-profile activities such as strolling through parks, watching movies, or gathering in small private groups, often in settings like hotels (Daniel et al., 2023). This approach emphasizes dignity and privacy, aiming to express gender identity without causing discomfort or violating social norms, and helps differentiate genuine crossdressing practices from misleading or harmful representations.

Theoretical frameworks offer deeper insight into crossdressing and gender identity. Judith Butler's queer theory argues that gender is not a fixed trait but is constructed through repeated actions and behaviors (Ho & Blackwood, 2022). This idea complements Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes that identity is formed through social interactions and belonging to specific groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1998). Additionally, Peter Blau's Social Exchange Theory highlights how individual identity and behavior are shaped and adjusted based on feedback from the social environment and interpersonal relationships (Blau, 2017; Razali & Widaningsih, 2021). Together, these perspectives suggest that gender expression, including crossdressing, can evolve through ongoing social engagement and reinforcement, rather than stemming solely from internal or biological factors.

On the other hand, Patricia Hill Collins' theory of oppression sheds light on how gender non-conforming individuals, including crossdressers, can be marginalized by dominant societal norms.

Her framework supports Butler's emphasis on the liberatory potential of challenging gender roles (Collins, 2022). Islamic perspectives, however, offer a different lens. The concept of *fitrah* in Islamic psychology refers to the natural disposition bestowed by Allah, which includes an understanding of binary gender roles. This view can contrast with Butler's theory, as it positions gender as divinely assigned rather than socially constructed (al-Gazālī, 2007). Nevertheless, Islamic feminist scholars like Margot Badran note that interpretations within Islamic culture vary, with some embracing more inclusive views of gender (Hafez, 2011; Badran, 2013; Greach, 2014; Nawawy & Ahmad, 2021).

### **Crossdressers in the Discourse of Gender Theory and Islamic Nature: A Critical Review**

The crossdresser community often expresses criticism toward certain public behaviors that they believe misrepresent their values and intentions (Canbul, 2022). A notable case that drew widespread attention occurred in 2019 in Indonesia, involving the Crosshijaber phenomenon. In this incident, a man dressed as a Muslim woman—complete with a hijab and veil—entered a mosque and took photos alongside female worshippers. It was later revealed that he was biologically male and still had visible facial hair, such as a mustache, which led to public outrage (Hidayat, 2020). Many viewed the act as being motivated more by inappropriate or fetishistic intentions than by a genuine exploration of gender identity (Butler, 2011). That same year, another Crosshijaber incident took place when an individual entered a women's restroom in a shopping mall and took a mirror selfie, further fueling public concern and reinforcing negative stereotypes toward crossdressers.

These incidents became points of concern within the crossdresser community, where nearly all members condemned such behavior. In contrast, the community practices what is known as *Outing*—the act of going outside while dressed in clothes typically associated with a different gender. However, this is done without engaging in inappropriate actions that may cause discomfort to the public. *Outing* locations are usually carefully selected, such as parks, movie theaters, or, in some cases, private hotel rooms where members gather to freely express their interests within agreed-upon limits (Daniel et al., 2023). From the perspective of gender theory, particularly Queer theory as introduced by Judith Butler, gender is viewed as a social construct performed through repeated acts, rather than a biological given (Ho & Blackwood, 2022). However, this perspective does not always sufficiently address the psychological and social dimensions of crossdresser behavior.

Social Identity Theory, introduced by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, explains that individuals develop their sense of identity—including gender—through engagement with particular social groups. This idea complements Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, which emphasizes that gender identity is continuously shaped and reinforced through social behaviors and affiliations (Abrams & Hogg, 1998). Additionally, Peter Blau's Social Exchange Theory offers further insight by examining how individuals adapt their behaviors and identities based on interactions and feedback from their social environment. According to this perspective, shifts in gender identity can be viewed as outcomes of ongoing social exchanges and the influence of societal expectations (Blau, 2017; Razali & Widaningsih, 2021). Together, these theories suggest that gender identity is not fixed but evolves through dynamic and reciprocal relationships within one's social context.

Meanwhile, Patricia Hill Collins' Theory of Oppression discusses how marginalized groups experience systemic discrimination. In the context of gender identity, this theory supports Butler's emphasis on resisting traditional gender norms and highlights the importance of individual autonomy and liberation from oppressive structures (Collins, 2022). From an Islamic psychological perspective, the concept of *fitrah*—the natural disposition given by God—is often cited in

discussions about gender identity. According to this view, gender is divinely ordained and integral to a person's innate nature. Consequently, Butler's notion of socially constructed and fluid gender identity can be seen as conflicting with the religious view of fixed gender roles (al-Ġazālī, 2007).

Margot Badran, in her exploration of gender in Islamic culture, illustrates a spectrum of perspectives—ranging from adherence to traditional gender roles to more inclusive and evolving interpretations that accommodate diverse expressions of identity (Hafez, 2011; Grech, 2014). This suggests that there is room for dialog between contemporary gender theories and Islamic thought, even if tensions remain (Badran, 2013; Nawawy & Ahmad, 2021). Tariq Ramadan's ethical approach in Islam emphasizes respect for human dignity and fairness in social relations. Within the context of gender identity, this framework promotes compassion and inclusion, advocating for the fair treatment of individuals regardless of how they express their gender (Ramadan, 2009; Morrow, 2009; Soesanto, 2022). This ethical lens can act as a bridge between Islamic values and contemporary theories like Queer theory by focusing on respect and mutual understanding (Sakinah & Kurniawan, 2023).

Despite various theoretical insights, crossdressers in Indonesia continue to encounter substantial social barriers. The country's predominantly Muslim population and prevailing negative views toward the LGBT community contribute to the lack of public acceptance of crossdressing (Suherry & Mandala, 2016). While crossdressing and transgender identities are fundamentally different, they are often misunderstood and treated as the same by the broader society, which further fuels stigma and discrimination. As a consequence, many crossdressers choose to express themselves primarily through online communities, where they find greater safety and support. When engaging in public activities, they tend to participate in private and respectful "Outing" practices, carefully avoiding actions that could attract unwanted attention or social backlash (Sihombing, 2020). This cautious approach reflects their efforts to navigate societal norms while maintaining their identity and sense of expression.

## Conclusion

The crossdresser phenomenon is a compelling topic in the context of gender identity. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using observation, documentation, and interviews. It explores various supporting theories, such as Judith Butler's Queer Theory and the Social Identity Theory of Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, while also examining the role of oppression and Islamic perspectives on gender. The findings provide in-depth insights into why individuals become crossdressers and how society perceives them. This research contributes significantly to the understanding of gender identity, equality, and human rights, emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual's experience. It also highlights the importance of ongoing research and open dialogue around gender to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on gender identity by integrating Western gender theories, such as Queer Theory and Social Identity Theory, with perspectives from Islamic psychology. It offers a nuanced understanding of crossdressing as a form of identity expression shaped by social interaction and cultural context. Practically, the findings encourage greater social awareness and sensitivity toward crossdressers, promoting respectful treatment and reducing stigma. For policymakers and educators, the study provides a foundation to develop inclusive policies and educational materials that respect diverse gender expressions without conflicting with cultural or religious values. It also serves as a reference for mental health practitioners in providing appropriate support to individuals exploring or expressing non-normative gender identities. Overall, the research advocates for open dialogue and inclusive practices to foster social environments that uphold dignity and equality for all individuals, regardless of gender expression.

Future research is recommended to explore the psychological experiences of crossdressers in greater depth, particularly in relation to mental health, identity development, and societal acceptance. Comparative studies between crossdressers in urban and rural settings could reveal the influence of environment on gender expression. Additionally, longitudinal research could investigate how crossdressers' identities evolve over time and under various social pressures. Further studies may also examine the intersectionality between religion, culture, and gender identity to provide a more comprehensive view of how these factors influence individual choices. Engaging more diverse participants, including voices from within and outside the crossdresser community, would enrich the findings. Finally, collaborative research involving gender theorists, religious scholars, and psychologists could foster more balanced and inclusive understandings, contributing to both academic discourse and social policy development.

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