
RESEARCH ARTICLE

TAILORING A FEMININE SELF: CROSS- DRESSING AND GENDER-
CROSSING IN *THE DANISH GIRL*

Poornima R

Designation: Assistant Professor

KAHM Unity Women's College, Manjeri, Kerala, India

Abstract

This paper is a study of Tom Hooper's movie, *The Danish Girl* which narrates the life of one of the earliest transsexual, Lili Elbe. The paper would be focusing on the aspect of transvestism/cross-dressing and the process of 'male-femaling' associated with it using the theory put forward by Richard Ekins, the prominent social psychologist. According to Ekins's study, there are five phases in the career path of a male femaler which may take place in three major modes, body femaling, erotic femaling and gender femaling. The protagonist of the film, Einer Wegener, at a particular stage in his life, realizes that he is trapped in a wrong body and finds the need to free himself from the bondage. Set in 1920's, when the studies on transgenderism had not been developed, Einer tries desperately to seek an answer for his cross gender behaviour passing through the five stages of a body female until he consolidates it through a sex reassignment surgery and becomes a transsexual. The paper also tries to analyze the importance of sartorial practices in defining one's gender identity. Borrowing from Ekins, terms like male femaling and female have been used instead of transgender/transsexual.

Key words: Cross- dressing, transgender, transsexual, male femaling, body female etc

The term 'transvestiten' was coined by Magnus Hirschfeld in the beginning of the 20th century to denote all types of cross dressing including transsexuals. He identified ten variations of transvestism which encompasses different groups like homosexuals, heterosexuals, bisexuals, asexual, fetishist and transgendered people but they were called transvestites in lieu of these terminologies. Among them, those who cross dress with the desire for sex change was termed as the complete transvestite. Later, in 1953, Benjamin differentiated between transvestism and transsexualism. He said, "Cross-dressing exists (with few exceptions) in practically all transsexuals, while transsexual desires are not evident (although possibly latent) in most transvestites" (qtd in Docter 58). Though a transvestite or cross dresser need not be a transsexual, and both a transvestite and a transsexual come under the broader category of 'transgender', it could be deduced that 'transvestism' has been an important phase in the lives of most of the transsexuals. The life narratives of many transsexuals testify this fact. Most of the transgendered people, during their