"Which part of the day is (wo)man o'clock?": Desires, urges, and possibilities of (un)becoming

Abstract:

Drawing on Butler's and Deleuze and Guattari's theorising of (un)becoming, we study how male to female crossdressers enact the many fantasies of the crossdresser persona through gendered market objects and rituals to undo gender norms in a body that is at times considered 'lawful' and at others 'unlawful'. We highlight how fantasies participate in the processes of unbecoming and becoming to disrupt the existing gendered boundaries/subjectivities and create new possibilities of being. The market objects, including the mundane and the excess, are operating in the becoming/unbecoming, facilitating temporal gender transformations, while at the same time creating identity residues that persist between the many gendered bodily experiences (male, female or hybrid) permeating time and space. In particular, we highlight how these identity residues can be experienced as pleasurable or risky if not managed carefully, contributing to an enhanced understanding of the affective state of in-between gender and how it intersects with gendered market objects and rituals.

1. Introduction:

The role of market objects in facilitating the ludic, embodied experiences of becoming has been a major topic in consumer research (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Ruvio & Belk, 2018; Seregina, 2019; Toyoki et al., 2013). It has focused on self-expression/transformation (Liu et al., 2012), consumer fantasy (Seregina, 2014), gender performance and/or performativity (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Seregina, 2019; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). This research stream has shown how the human body, as a site of resistance, interacts with market objects to shape experiences and individual identities in a bounded marketplace setting. This is especially the case when it comes to the gendered body.

For example, Goulding and Saren (2009) highlight how the bi-annual goth festival at Whitby serves as a "gendered paradise" where "the bizarre is normalized and aestheticized". This gendered paradise allows festival-goers to destruct existing gender structures and engage in gender play through adopting the costume and paraphernalia of the vampire (p. 41). Within the context of live-action role-playing games (LARP), Seregina (2019) point out that crossplayers undo gender through creating "props" that aid the bodily performance of a gender different from what they identify with. The subjective experience of crossplay performance is observed to develop enhanced reflexivity of gender performativity and alter how the crossplayers do gender in their everyday lives. Thompson and Üstüner's (2015) study underlines the process of becoming derby grrrls via their practices of ideological edgework across interlinked social fields. The performative script of "derby grrrl's physical comportment (e.g., tough, confident, playfully seductive), their appearances (including provocative uniforms), and the overall level of physical and emotional intensity displayed in the

bouts" challenges naturalized gender norms without losing sociocultural legitimacy (p. 245).

Across these prior studies, a recurrent focus is on temporarily crossing the boundaries of gender roles and the criticality of market objects in the production of gendered performances. Here, the process of becoming is to a large extent linear, stable, structured and fixed in that it serves to generate releases (in the performance) and reflexivity (post performance). However, according to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, "the middle space, the borderline that separates but also brings together; and as the transit word, a force of transition towards something other that always entails a coming back" (Nigianni & Storr, 2009: 1). The "coming back" refers to the state of in-between, the contagious exchange or erotic connections between the personas. We therefore still know little about the compulsion of coming back, the instability/fragility, the liminal or the getting stuck in the process of becoming.

Although Ruvio and Belk (2018) describe the identity conflicts transpeople experience in their liminal performance of gender, the conflicts are noted as largely resulting from having to assemble a perceived 'false' self for social legitimacy. Their study is not concerned with the compulsion to voice, merge and/or shuffle between the multiple gendered selves/experiences of un/becoming (cf. Bahl & Milne, 2010). To this end, in this study, we investigate how the gender poles can coexist and collide in the delicate dance between becoming and unbecoming by studying Male to Female (M-F) crossdressers' compulsion to cross the gender lines in a ceaseless oscillation manner and the role market objects play in this process.

Before we proceed further, it is important to note that the terminology around the practices of transvestism and crossdressing can be problematic (Allen, 2014). In North America, the term 'transvestite' is perceived as pejorative (Thanem and Wallenberg,

2016). Because our study focuses on a predominantly North American-based community, and in order to avoid confusion, we will use the term 'crossdressers' to refer to our research participants. However, our usage of the term does not refer to other practices of crossdressing such as the art form of drag and female impersonation performance, and is instead confined to transvestism. While transvestism is frequently perceived as a sign of homosexuality, studies revealed that most transvestites/crossdressers are heterosexual-identifying men (Docter and Prince, 1997). As we shall see, the members of the community we explore differ in many ways including their gender identity (e.g., male, trans, undecided), sexual orientation (e.g., straight, gay, bi, curious), and purpose of crossdressing (e.g., sexual fetish, gender expression). Nevertheless, they converged around shared practices and interests in transvestism. We are interested in such practices and how they shape performative identity formation, particularly in interaction with market objects.

Adopting a theoretical lens inspired by Butler's (1993, 2004) thesis on the "doing" and "undoing" of gender and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work on "becoming", our research findings provide insights on the ways in which market objects participate in the lived experience of gender identities as a liminal entity. More specifically, we show how market objects help M-F crossdressers enact their fantasies from which to engage in gender transgression/ideological edgework that is often affect-laden. We delineate how identity residues and the embodied affects resultant from crossdressing shape the manifestation of their male and female subjectivities that compete to be heard in their performativity of gender. Prior studies on crossdressers have mainly focused on the act of crossdressing in expressing masculine and feminine forms of embodiment and the constructed nature of the casual sex–gender relationship, and not on the liminal nature

of gender identities, embodied affects and residuality (Garber, 1992; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016).

Below, to ground our empirical analysis, we first present a theoretical overview combining the Butlerian (1993, 2004) approach to gender performativity with Deleuze and Guattari's theorising of becoming (1987), and highlight its relevance to understanding how consumers engage in the un/becoming of gender identity. We then detail the methodology that we followed and present our findings. We conclude this study by discussing how our findings contribute to marketing literature in general as well as gender and queer studies in consumer research.

2. Undoing gender, and the (un)becoming subject:

Butler's work on the performative nature of fantasy describes how fantasy may be central to undoing gender, and embodied to lay claim to reality. In the book "*Undoing Gender*", Butler (2004) defines fantasy not as the opposite of reality but what defines the boundaries of reality, that is, what one can and cannot be according to the prevailing (gender) norms in society. From this perspective, Butler (2004) sees the potential of fantasy serving as a creative and transformative political force through which the 'abject' or the 'illegitimate' could not only question reality but institute new modes of existence. As Butler (2004) states:

> "The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (Butler 2004: 29).

For Butler (1990; 2004), the heteronormative regulation of gender identity is considered as an enacted fantasy that prescribes the legible corporeality of acts and

gestures (e.g., the very attribution of femininity to female bodies and masculinity to male bodies). Embodiment therefore is unthinkable without the recognition of a norm or a set of norms (Butler 2004; Salih 2007). That said, Butler believes that the norm that governs reality, or the cultural life of fantasy, only persists when it is acted out in the social domain and reiterated through the everyday social rituals of bodily life (Bulter 1990; Maclaran 2018). In these terms, the norm is established through an underlying process of normalisation, determining the possibility of becoming – whether our lives are worthwhile, or can be made to be or whether our genders are real, or can ever be considered as such (Butler 2004; Joy, Belk, and Bhardwaj 2015; Salih 2007). Therefore, from a Butlerian perspective, part of the work of fantasy is to open up possibilities beyond the norm. Through its embodiment, fantasy obtains a transformative potential to disrupt what was previously seen as an unreality or oppressive social conditions (Butler 2004).

This perspective has been embraced by many consumer and queer theorists who see fantasy as a means to enact gender play (Goulding and Saren 2009; Seregina 2019), since "heteronormativity has a totalising tendency that can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" (Warner 1991: 8). The resistance to heteronormativity is what Bunch (2013) calls a becoming that is also an *unbecoming* through which not only subjectivity may be altered but the very 'norm' that compels the subject into being may also be altered/expanded. The study of the processes of unbecoming move beyond the doing to investigate the undoing, and beyond the becoming to focus on the refusal to be(come) the expected identity (Halberstam, 2011a). Thus, the emphasis on 'undoing' shifts here from becoming to *'becoming undone'* and the reflexive project of opposing and undoing "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (Butler, 2004: 1).

In order to theorise the processes of becoming and unbecoming in further depth, we connect with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming and unbecoming. From their perspective, corporeality constitutes a site of "transformation and constant, internal differentiation. The self is always becoming different from itself" (Moody and Rasmussen, 2009: 43). The process of becoming entails a construction of a difference, which creates a temporary stabilisation of a self-differentiated entity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This results in a multiplicity of possibilities of becoming and being – it also bears the implication that becoming is inherently unstable and volatile. The volatile and unstable nature of becomings means that they are constantly work-in-progress and 'open-to-change' (Coffin, 2021). This work-in-progress process is described by Deleuze and Guattari as territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. Territorialisation refers to the stabilisation processes, where power apparatuses stabilises the planes of consistencies that represent majoritarian assemblages. Deterritorialisation describes the disruption of said planes of consistencies. Finally, reterritorialization refers to the emergence of new possibilities of becoming. Analysing the affective territorialisations, deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations allows us to theorise crossdressing as an assemblage in itself with its own capacities and fluxes (Fox and Alldred, 2013), and therefore better understand the compulsion to cross the gender lines and the role market objects play in this process.

In these terms, becomings are contingent on the unbecoming from taken-for-granted materialities. As Grosz (2005: 10-11) put it: "[life] needs to unbecome, to undo its actuality as fixed givenness […] to be capable of a new or different elaboration". The concept of becoming is particularly relevant for our study of bodies in a liminal state, as it allows for exploring unbecomings that can collapse back into the normative social order or, instead, provide new possibility of being. As Pullen et al. (2017: 115) put it in

their description of Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming woman', " becoming-woman is a 'minoritarian politics' that holds out hope that individual potentiality can be realized as an effective subversion of exploitative and oppressive regimes of power". The authors explore the concept of becoming-woman as a process to decentre the masculine order that affects workers' livelihood. By doing so, they shed light on the affective experiences and possibilities that resist and disrupt gendered organisations. As Hickey-Moody (2009: 273) suggests, affect is the materiality of change, or "the passage from one state to another"' (Deleuze 1988: 49).

It is important to note that as we combine the work of Judith Butler and Deleuze and Guattari to inform our theoretical framework, we acknowledge the possible tensions that can occur – in that Butler's body of work rethinks foundations of psychoanalysis, while Deleuze and Guattari deterritorialise them (Hickey-Moody and Rasmussen, 2009). Nonetheless, and inspired by Bell (2006) and Hickey-Moody and Rasmussen (2009: 38), we utilise the work of Judith Butler to "offer a located way of thinking 'queer' in relation to Deleuze and Guattari", and galvanise both work's potential to "craft sexual subjectivities that refute majoritarian readings of gender and sexuality". Thus, we focus on the points of convergence, rather than differences, of both works in our inquiry.

In sum, the unbecoming subject exists beyond affirmative representations of identity, and emerges as a creative force that both critiques and transforms social order. Queer creativity is imagining possibilities of being beyond taken-for-granted concepts, and thereby disrupting social order. As Schneider and Young (2021: 35) put it: "there is a powerful creativity in queer lives in the very fact of persistence that is both resistance and presence". Accordingly, the 'un' of unbecoming does not refer to the abjection of the norm in a strictly negative light, but more so in a "creative and

transformative politics of becoming" to exist outside the norm (Bunch, 2013: 40). Thus, while a performative lens traditionally explores the processes of bringing-into-being of the subject (i.e., becoming), the concept of unbecoming focuses on the individual capacity to not only create alternative and unlawful subjectivities, but also act back on the very law that brings it into (ill-)being and regulates the available subjectivities. Thus, the existence of the unbecoming subject exposes the constant instability inhabiting the law, and its possible fluidity, paving the way for the possibility to transform the law by those who are abjected. The study of the processes of becoming and unbecomings can pave the way for queering the way we understand and explore bodies in the market, by exploring the possibilities of "liberating the prepersonal singularities they [bodies] enclose and repress" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 362). It takes on a journey with indeterminate trajectory that transcends "controlling or limiting notions of subjectivity or bodily capacity" (Pullen et al., 2017: 115). In our research context of crossdressing, we show how political or creative agency emerges from the process of transient unbecoming through enacted fantasies and their affective force. We emphasise the role of market objects in enacting but also disrupting these fantasies and related affects, as well as the instability/fragility inherent in the liminal processes of (un)becoming.

3. **Methodology:**

To study crossdressing behaviour, we broadly adopt a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2002), and draw our data from the internet community website 'crossdressers.com'. The crossdresser online community caters to various groups broadly organised around their interests in transvestism. The individual members were different in terms of their gender identity, sexual orientation, and actual interest in crossdressing. While some members claim a female gender identity, others don't. Some

use crossdressing as a platform for exploring their gender identity and transition, while others assert their cis-normative gender identity. Some are gay, some are straight, while others experiment with their sexuality when crossdressing. Some members crossdress as a sexual fetish including role play, whereas others reserve it as a form of gender expression. These diverse groups were brought together in the crossdresser online community as a result of their shared practices and interests in transvestism.

The use of Internet forums for online communities constitutes a valuable resource for data in the context of sensitive topics (Glaser et al., 2002; Holtz et al., 2012), as people tend to express themselves more 'freely' in digital spaces behind a username (Seale et al., 2009). The digital space allows for the expression of a multiplicity of topics, interests and viewpoints. Besides, it centres the discussion around matters of concerns to the community – thus, fostering a rich discussion between individuals who usually do not know each other in real life. Furthermore, the perception of privacy of the space alongside the relative anonymity of the crossdresser online forum stimulates contributors to greater openness, and makes them more prone to disclose personal and intimate information, with a great level of detail in their narratives (Holtz, 2012). Finally, the asynchronous yet interactive nature of the forum threads results in participants revealing their day-to-day concerns by actively documenting their experiences within the threads, which gave us an interesting longitudinal aspect to the stories collected (Seale et al., 2009). This meant that the forum constitutes a space for narrating fantasies, that could otherwise not happen in 'real-life' sometimes. Provided the taboo nature of the practice of crossdressing, particularly for heterosexual-identifying individuals living within heteronormative spaces, online spaces such as crossdressers.com represents a haven for crossdressers and wannabee crossdressers alike.

Among the diverse groups, we retrieved data from one of the public forums on 'crossdressers.com', entitled 'male to female crossdressers'. Unlike the many other forums of the website, this public forum can be accessed without becoming a member of the forum/website. We copied the data from the archives of the forum, starting the selection from the beginning of the 'male to female crossdressers' forum, and finishing January 2020. The forum included, at the time of data collection, a total of 67,467 threads and 1,459,234 posts. We excluded all posts with less than 200 replies in order to focus on rich conversations with an adequate level of member interaction and generate a manageable size for data exploration and analysis. The selection process narrowed down to a relevant corpus of 99 threads from the forum. The number of replies per thread ranged from 200 to over 2000 replies, with a total of 34,768 posts overall. The data sampling followed a procedure that is very similar to that elaborated by Holtz et al (2012) and offered us a window into articulated fantasies of (un)becoming that may not otherwise be spoken about outside of the forum.

3.1. Analytical procedure:

Data analysis started as soon as the data were collected. In our analysis, we first assigned pseudonyms to the forum participants to ensure anonymity and changed any names mentioned in the posts that might compromise it. In particular, as suggested by the Ethics Guidelines for internet-mediated research (British Psychological Society, 2017), we paraphrased or combined traceable quotes (post the data analysis stage) to ensure maximal anonymisation, and risk reduction associated with the traceability of posts we extracted from the 'male to female crossdressers' forum.

We then conducted an inductive thematic analysis on the 99 threads to first identify broad topics for abstract categorisation such as fantasy, gender identity, sexuality,

sexual practices, body normativity and expression, relationships, family, work, and so on. In the meantime, following Deleuze and Guattari's theorising, particular attentions were placed to identifying the 'affective intensities' of becoming such as passion, excitement, enjoyment, desire, failure, oppression, tension, humiliation, embarrassment and even feelings of embodied femininity/masculinity. We also paid attention to how the members of the community 'synchronise' becoming (Lorraine, 2008) with others in the cyberspace, and deterritorialise individually and collectively from normative gendered identity. Next, we analyse the speech at the interactional level, and connect it to the wider social, cultural and historical contexts, informed by insights from discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The analysis was an iterative process moving back and forth between the data, the social cultural and historical contexts, and our theoretical framework. Throughout the data analysis process, the authors met up regularly to compare notes and discuss different approaches to interpretations, before a consensus was reached. In presenting our findings in the following section, we refer to the online forum 'crossdressers.com' as 'the forum'.

4. Findings:

4.1. Enacting the fantasies:

We found forum participants were calling onto various strategies and devices in order to enact the many fantasies of the crossdresser persona. As we will show, many of these fantasies undo existing gender norms, and require a careful selection of mundane market objects and feminine rituals to engage in characterisation work. By characterisation we mean the construction of a character that one fantasized about in gender transgression.

4.1.1. Mundane market objects and feminine rituals

Gendered market objects and rituals constituted important devices for enacting the crossdresser persona. The gender transformation was accomplished through a set of mundane objects and practices, which stereotypically belonged in the opposite gender realm. For instance, in the excerpt below, Michelle describes her fantasy in relation to her idealized mundane feminine rituals as follows:

*"I certainly look forward to things like going to the nail salon, getting my hair done, shopping, oh the shopping! However, **the things I find myself looking forward to more are more mundane**. Meeting new and interesting friends and spending time with them. Hopefully finding a job that I like. Running errands. Playing sports. (….) Having plenty of time for a relaxing bubble bath with some great music playing. **Enjoying a glass of wine while I put on my makeup and do my hair and pick out just the right thing to wear.** Then enjoy a great evening with [a significant other]. Could be dinner, drinks, a club, a play, whatever." Michelle (emphasis added)*

Here mundane feminine rituals and the objects involved in enacting these attain significance and subjective value for the beholder. Michelle characterises the feminine rituals and objects she looks forward to deploying for her transformation as "mundane", and the description certainly fits that. Enjoying feminine rituals such as *"enjoying a glass of wine while putting on makeup"* represents for Michelle a materialisation of the fantasy within the unlawful space. This process implicates the deterritorialisation of the body, and its reterritorialisation within the new space. The unlawful nature of the space refers to the delineation of the market objects and practices that she discursively links to the opposite gender within a heteronormative framing. Living and consuming the ordinary within a heteronormative framing becomes extraordinary in the unlawful space where the impossible becomes possible. The perceived mundane aspects of gendered market objects and practices to 'cross' the gender poles were experienced as

joyous encounters and spoken about passionately. This passionate attachment was necessary to enact the idea of gender transformation or switch and increase our capabilities to affect and be affected, as Butler (1997: 7) put it, "no subject emerges without a 'passionate attachment' to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent''.

There were several other instances in our dataset, where a mundane marketplace or consumer practice represented a means to normalise the reproduction of specific gender norms within an unlawful space, such as Lisa describing her fantasy as *"working in a high-end women's clothing and shoe store as a sales associate [in her female identity]"*. This process also involved a careful and meticulous selection of gendered market objects in order to enact the crossing of the gender line, as described in the excerpt below by Thea.

> *"I'm in the **process of making my ultimate outfit**; It's a black brocade overbust corset with multicoloured flowers and purple satin trim (god I'm having such trouble with the trim), over a long flowing skirt of black and purple satin with some of the brocade. I'm not sure what to do with the top yet, I may just decide to wear one of my sweaters, but I'd really like something satiny. I'll post pics when I'm done - word of advice girls, **if you can afford the time and patience (and about $200 for a good sewing machine) learn to sew!!! I've had many a failed project but now things are starting to come together and I'm saving so much money on clothes!** Best of all......They're custom-fitted!!!!" Thea (emphasis added)*

Alongside the careful and meticulous selection of gendered market objects, Thea demonstrates a certain level of resourcefulness, materiality, affection and creativity to bring her quest for gender transformation into being with "time and patience". The development of new capabilities and skills (sewing in this case) proved to be helpful

and essential in the creative force of unbecoming from taken-for-granted normative gendered market objects, and the enactments of the new desires and fantasies. Thea 'becomes' her desired gender as she learns to sew her "ultimate outfit" and every attempt brings her closer to enact her fantasy – a hyperfeminine woman not just by the way she dresses but the traditional feminine homemaking sewing skill she also masters. Thea also discusses *"failed projects"* as an intrinsic, affective part of the process, which resonates with the importance of the discourse of failure and resilience in queer narratives (Halberstam, 2011b). In this sense, (marketplace) failure represents an important device to oppose the dominant gender norms. Indeed, according to Halberstam (2011b: 88), failure is both productive and subversive, and can be reframed as "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant (…) failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities". It is these "indeterminate qualities" of gender that excite and entertain our crossdressers in the marketplace empowered gender play.

4.1.2. Characterisation with gendered marketplace icons

Another important discursive strategy to enact the crossdresser's persona across our dataset was characterisation. The calling onto known and often stereotypical feminine iconic characters facilitates the crossing of gender lines and the bringing into being of the alternative possibility for gender switch. For instance, in the excerpt below, Jenny describes a few such characters that she draws on to enact her desired selves and the devices necessary for their enactment.

> *"I would love to be **a bride**. To go through all the pampering to get ready. Nails,*
>
> *hair, make up all done at a salon. Then to the dressing: a white satin corset, sheer*
>
> *white stockings, a pair of lacy silk panties, a long white satin slip, the petticoats and*

finally the white satin lace and pearls embellished gown. Finally the veil then down the aisle to be wed. Another one would be to be going to a formal dance, like prom in high school. Again all the prep at the salon, then dressing in a beautiful gown. being taken to prom and named **prom queen***. Another one is that I am somehow transported to the antebellum south and I am* **a southern belle***.” Jenny (emphasis added)*

Jenny describes three characters she loves and adores: the bride, the prom queen, and the southern belle. Against the culturally dominant setting of the wedding and the prom, both the “bride” and the “prom queen” represent characters that signal important, idealised milestones in the heteronormative narrative of a woman’s life trajectory. On the other hand, the “southern belle” represents an archetype of an idealised figure of womanhood in the U.S. (Faust, 1996; Davis, 2012). It is important to note, however, that the aspiration to the idealised image of womanhood as embodied by the character “southern belle” appears to ignore its history as rooted in white supremacy, oppression and slavery.

In all cases, we observed that materialities are essential in enacting and bringing these characters into being. For instance, consider Jenny’s careful consumer deliberations on the making of the bride’s outfit: “*a white satin corset, sheer white stockings, a pair of lacy silk panties, a long white satin slip, the petticoats and finally, the white satin lace and pearls embellished gown”*. Market objects are often gendered. The corset, the lace, the silk and the pearls are not just feminine. These iconic marketplace choices together help Jenny achieve and assemble the fantasy of hyper-feminine.

Similarly, Chelsea provides a detailed description of her fantasy in re-enacting a symbolic, idealised character of ultra-womanhood: “*I would go back in time and be a*

prom queen at my high school I would be blond, and wear a pink satin strapless dress, white gloves, white six-inch heels and have on a bit too much makeup (especially pink lip gloss), plus a pearl necklace and earrings". For Chelsea, the choice of stereotypical hyper-feminine materials (such as satin), and colours (such as pink) is useful for reproducing binary gender norms but in an unlawful body (as with the case of Michelle and her mundane practices in the earlier section).

Other characters that were popular within the forum include (but not limited to) cheerleader, ballerina, Ice-skater, Hooters girl, business executive, and hockey player (often described as a 'butch' character). Lauren describes how the character 'ballerina' embodies one of her favourite fantasies: *"I think ballerina is also one of my favourites, I love the tutu and the white pantyhose!!! it´s so girly and delicate!".* The use of the amplifier 'so' in "*so girly and delicate*" constitutes a device for relating the hyper-femininity and perceived softness of the character to associated market objects that she passionately attaches to the process of becoming "ballerina". The amplification makes a case for the hyper-femininity that Lauren aspires to and hopes to embody as part of her crossdresser persona.

Finally, we observed that the forum as a support mechanism was providing a feeling of shelter to the participants and helped them indulge in their fantasies without a sense of marginalisation or risk that they often face as a crossdresser in a majority heterosexual-normative world – as the participant Dinah states after describing her ultimate bride outfit, "*Well, that's about it, girls. Thanks for indulging me in my fantasy".* The fantasy that is about being more than real, being indulgent in traditional, exaggerated, femininity with the help of gendered marketplace icons that symbolically articulate women's roles (Zanette and Scaraboto, 2019).

4.2. Liminality, identity residues and tensions:

The nature of crossdressing and the label of being a crossdresser meant that the processes of unbecoming and becoming were temporal and implies a return to the normative body (i.e., their male identity in general). The temporality and return to 'normality' often create feelings of being stuck in-between, resulting in tension and risks that are managed differently across the various members of the forum.

For example, there is a strong indication in our dataset that the forum participants often attempt to carve out the temporal and spatial boundaries between their crossdresser and normative persona, as stated by Kelly: *"which "part of the day" is man o'clock?"* Here, the body is conceived as a liminal space to explore the possibilities and significance of gender play. The market objects are operating in the becoming/unbecoming, enacting temporal transformations or gender switches, as explained by Ally in the excerpt below.

> *"Now like you, and many crossdressers, I have no desire to be a woman. But my gender switches – only temporarily when I dress in female things. The clothes might be the channelling of that switch, but the feelings have to already be there for that to happen." Ally*

The market object, "female things" in this case, only obtains significance when the desire for "gender switches" calls for it. This is what the participant Bea describes as the "calling" of the crossdresser persona: *"The worst thing about crossdressing is Not being able to dress when the need arises – being stuck in male-mode when your inner feminine voice is calling"*. Bea's use of the term *"stuck"* implies liminality. The gendered market objects required for "crossdressing" here serve as ritual objects to help Bea respond to her "calling" without which Bea becomes "stuck" in liminality. For the forum participants, the sense of being "stuck" often results in several felt tensions and conflicts, which we describe in the following sections.

4.2.1. Tensions and conflicts due to transformation residues

Across our dataset, we found tensions often arise when some residues of the crossdresser personae persist in the normative body. These residues represent remnants of the reterritorialisation of the body and the temporary assemblage (that is the crossdresser), and they were permeating time and disrupting the existing boundaries between subjectivities (e.g., male and female). Importantly, we highlight how tensions and conflicts related to these identity residues were linked to both gendered market objects and the forum members' characterisation work for specific personae. For instance, in the excerpt below, Sarah encountered an embarrassing (and potentially dangerous) situation when the residues of her male identity permeated the presentation of her female persona.

> *"I once walked into a restaurant (on my own) [and in my female clothing] all ready with the female voice and coughed a very manly cough to clear my throat! Immediate warning to everyone present..."* Sarah

In the situation that Sarah faced, the residues from her male identity highlighted the 'fragility' of the performance and disrupted her consumption experience at the restaurant in which she projected herself as the opposite gender. We also found there were instances of gendered market objects that were intended as deliberate identity residues permeating affect, time and space, such as wearing female underwear under male clothes. In this instance, elements from the realms of the perceived normative (being male) and abject (delightful femininity) personae are experienced and co-exist in the same bodily 'space' at the same time. The excerpts below from Bella and Chloe exemplify such instances.

> *"Ever since I was a young guy I have dabbled at wearing something feminine underneath. I felt the subconscious eyes upon me but nothing further. I know now*

that it was just my mind magnifying my fears. I have worn panties off and on at all

my jobs since I was old enough to have a real one... I don't do 24x7 yet...but that

*time will surely come. **Sometimes the delightful panties interfere with the harsh***

***reality of being male, and I squirm.** Once cooler weather gets here, more panties!!*

Since I own way more pairs of girls undies... it's a shame to let them go to waste!"

Bella (emphasis added)

"This is where it gets funny for me. I am terrified about people finding out about my

other wardrobe and what I choose to wear when I am alone in my house, however,

I wear panties 24/7. I know people can see my panty line and my shirt is not always

tucked in, and I am sure someone has seen the waistband once or twice, but I am

kind of o.k. with that. So the funny part is that I am afraid of people finding out but

*I am not going to any special lengths to hide the fact that I wear panties. **Maybe I***

***just want to be found out?** but the fact is, no one has said anything about it. I need*

to move to a more populated, less rednecky area." Chloe (emphasis added)

Transgressing gender norms can become a dangerous and threatening activity. As Bunch (2013: 47) states, unbecoming-subjects risk "losing social approval (even from one's own family), social status, freedom, personal safety, and in some instances, their lives". Yet, this boundary permeation and the associated risks and feelings of oppression could also be a source of excitement at times, as Chloe noted, "*maybe I just want to be found out?*" This excitement resulting from voluntary risk-taking, or ideological edgework (Lyng, 1990; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015), was a common thread across our dataset. The excitement was sometimes further augmented by imagining being caught by a close other, such as in the excerpt below from Jess.

My favourite fantasy is one that really happened and I replay the mental videotape

all the time: getting caught by my mother. I was prancing around in front of her

mirror wearing her bra and panties. I didn't hear her come home early from work and she walked in on me. I was mortified, but the humiliation was exquisite. She lectured me on what I was getting myself into, but the next week, there was a three-pack of panties in my size in my dresser. I've never had greater affection for anyone else." Jess

Here, it is worth noting that "*bra and panties*" were initially described almost as forbidden fruits, once eaten, Jess would face humiliation and a sense of out of control of her normative identity narrative. The culmination of Jess's articulated fantasy is on being found out followed by acceptance through which "a three-pack of panties" is no longer seen as a risk but appreciation and acknowledgement of her crossdresser identity. In effect, the three-pack of panties are charged with affective flows and possibilities in the process of 'becoming-woman'.

4.2.2. Tensions and conflicts due to both societal and label restrictions

"I believe we're all dealing with competing interests within us to one extent or another (...). I grew up being very interested in sports as a player and as a watcher but was always dealing with this urgent longing inside to dress as a girl or woman. I didn't know how to reconcile these seemingly incompatible urges." Dinah

It is evident across our dataset that tensions between the male and the crossdresser persona are a common occurrence shared by the forum participants. Many questioned whether stereotypical masculine practices may disrupt or even delegitimise their crossdresser identity, as highlighted in the excerpt below from Holly.

"Admittedly, I'm new to (crossdressing) and a bit clueless. I spent part of the Saturday watching football games. The rest was spent having something to do with crossdressing: on line, dressing, and working on pictures of me, a la femme. That's typical of my last couple weeks. 75% of my spare time dealing with some aspect of

crossdressing, and 25% watching sports. Does anyone else watch sports? Or does your interest wane if you feminize?" Holly

It can be construed that Holly experiences consumption practices as gendered and there is seemingly a competition between her male and female subjectivities in terms of embodied affects, time and space. The temporal aspect was constrained by the interactions with family and friends, societal boundaries, and the sometimes-uncontrollable urge to transform.

Dinah and Holly's dilemma of managing their many different identities also reflects how they have struggled with perceived societal norms and the label 'crossdresser' itself. The label itself carries a crossing of the gender line through gendered market objects (i.e., 'dress'), and implies that the crossing means shifting from one gender pole to the other, often represented by the stereotypical imageries of hyper-femininity. An example of such instances is presented in the following excerpt.

*"Crossdressing is quite a personal thing for me, something that I only do on my own and sometimes with my significant other. In my **'real' life I am not very feminine at all** even though I have long hair, and I can't imagine changing that, but I also have no intention of removing the other side of myself." Emily (emphasis added)*

The linguistic use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) "not… at all" (in "I am not very feminine at all") functions as a device to further delineate the temporal and spatial boundary between Emily's two personae, as compartmentalised by her use of perceived feminine versus masculine market objects. However, unlike Emily who seems to have a clear sense of her male versus female personae, Sophie expressed her "female side" as constantly lurking under her male persona.

"My feminine side has always been there... in the background... waiting... expressing herself as I cross dressed during my lifetime. Now that I have let her out of the closet... so to speak... out in society... dressing in masculine and feminine attire... I love letting her have control. I love how she dresses me and the feelings she expresses." Sophie

However, the 'coming out' can be an affective force that disrupts the temporal and secretive nature of crossdressing, and therefore destabilise the boundaries and balances put in place between the different aspects of the self. That said, the destabilisation as expressed by Sophie was not always perceived as negative: "I love letting her have control". This is different from the instance of "calling" described by Bea or "urge" by Dinah, where such feelings had to be managed. For Sophie, "letting her have control" was welcomed and embraced as an affective trajectory to produce the many facets of the self. We argue this sense of nomadic (un)becoming highlights the liminal, fluid and affective nature of gender identities, and the residuality that can drive the pleasure and compulsion of crossdressing in subversive yet affirmative ontological gestures. As Deleuze and Guattari (1986) maintain that the body as an assemblage is never static but always in the process of temporally becoming and unbecoming. As they put it, an assemblage is "a concretization of power, of desire, of territoriality or reterritorialization, regulated by the abstraction of a transcendental law" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 86). The enactment of desire and fantasy of the crossdresser is contingent on the unbecoming from gender-normative market objects and rituals.

5. **Discussion:**

5.1.Gendered market objects and rituals as a catalyser for the creative force of becoming the alternative persona:

The creative force of becoming of the alternative persona manifests through the deployment of various imaginaries of gender identities or personae and the ongoing interactions with market objects that are often gendered. These include making careful and deliberate choices for feminine wear/dressing up, the associated market objects required to bring 'fantasised' characters into being, and techniques that aid bodily transformation including a thought-through characterisation process. Together, they constitute an essential means for the temporary enactment of the crossdresser persona that is often indulged in with a sense of excess through the selection of culturally relevant hyperfeminine market objects/icons (e.g., silk, tutu, lace, corset etc.). These hyperfeminine market objects/icons help enact idealised feminine figures of womanhood (e.g., bride, ballerina, prom queen etc.) and the related performativity (Butler, 1990).

Importantly, we conceptualise the process of transient unbecoming as taking place broadly in two interlinked stages: first, through the passionate investments of the subject in the opposing and defying strict gender norms in a heteronormative society that constrain their desire to embody the crossdresser persona. Second, the temporal enactment of the crossdressing desire through their passionate attachment (Butler, 1997; Thiem, 2008) to a fantasised self and the market objects that are deemed essential to its realisation in forms of the mundane or excess. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we view this desire as a passionate creative energy that connects bodies, market objects, and digital spaces to deterritorialise gender norms and create a new assemblage – that is crossdressing.

Market objects and rituals, in this case, are treated as essential affective devices for enacting the multiplicity of passionate attachments – in both a material (through their usage), and discursive (through imagination and creativity) manner. These embodied

affects are both functional and political – in that they allow and compel the crossdressers to transgress gender norms and enact their fantasies, desires and urges to transform.

Our findings also show that the passionate attachments to market objects, in both their 'positive' (e.g., fantasy) and 'negative' (e.g., abjection) affective expressions, are indispensable to the enacting of the crossdresser persona. The transient unbecoming subject is a project of temporarily undoing the passionate attachment to the normative subjectivities available with one that challenges it (i.e., subjectivities of the crossdresser persona). The undoing of the passionate attachment to the normative gender law results in the fragmentation and multiplicity of the passionate attachment. This fragmentation and multiplicity are experienced as freeing and creative, but also risky (as seen in our examples in the findings' section 4.2). To our crossdressers, gender transgression and ideological edgework (Thompson and Utsuner, 2015) are what compel their fantasies, embodied desires and urges to transform (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). However, the potentially risky nature of these transgressive practices can limit the possibilities of new becomings.

Furthermore, we note that the creative force of (un)becoming was both unleashed and constrained by the label 'crossdresser' itself (e.g., Kelly: *"which "part of the day" is man o'clock?"*). Indeed, the performative effects of the label 'crossdresser' were both liberating, as well as creating boundaries and constraints for imagining possibilities beyond the taken for granted gender norms. The label represents the metaphorical and literal crossing of the heteronormative gender norms – or the normative self-presentations in relation to gendered market objects – both mundane and iconic. The 'dress' in 'cross-dress', as a gendered market object, is a necessary felicitous element

in the enacting of the transient unbecoming. The dress refers in this case to both the material and discursive resources available to the subject. It is also a dress in a cultural sense, referring to a piece of clothing culturally constructed for the female pole of the binary. By discursive resource, we refer as well to the power of 'talking about' and 'imagining' dressing and transforming the self – this transformative process becomes possible through either narrating the fantasy to bring it into being, or creatively imagining the fantasised self.

It is also in this transformative process that we highlight the potential interfering nature of gendered market objects that are competing to be realised in the processes of becoming and unbecoming (e.g., watching sports as masculine pursuit while crossdressing as a feminine quest; the urge/calling of crossdressing). The constant negotiations and appropriations of gendered market objects and rituals are interesting because they help enact the temporal and dialectical processes of becoming and unbecoming. Indeed, according to Appau et al. (2020: 169), Turner (1969) understands certain people may be permanently liminal and liminality, despite the potential for creating danger and chaos, is "potentially liberating and creative because the conventional rules no longer apply". The crossdressers in our study can be conceptualized as being permanently liminal. Whereas the religious poor in Appau et al.'s (2020) study are characterized as experiencing permanent liminality as they engage in an ongoing spiritual tug-of-war between the good and the evil, our crossdressers do not see a clear boundary between the good and the evil but experience their embodied being as in transitional states, undefinable, driven by their affective urges of the fantasized selves and the desirous cravings for the various, creative possibilities of (un)becoming. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's desire theory, Kozinets et al. (2017: 659) conceptualize desire as "energetic, connective, systemic,

and innovative" in motivating production and consumption, especially in the context of technocapitalism. Liminality from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) can thus be understood as being filled with productive energy to transgress normative boundaries and destabilize the sphere of the humanly intelligible. Butler's (2004: 28) concept of fantasy then further situates liminality in relation to embodied desire and helps us take "the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is". It highlights the liberating potential of challenging the public regulation of fantasy by engaging in, for example, crossdressing to defy public expectations and advocate new, creative ways of imagining our being-in-the-world. As Thomassen (2014) argues, liminal experiences are fuelled by the modern consumerist societies that promote the new, the diverse and the forward-looking (we add from the Butlerian perspective, fantasies). In these terms, embodied desire is a liminal thing that dissolves the binary oppositions of gender categories. Gendered market objects, including hyperfeminine marketplace icons, in this case participate in the weaving of fantasies through which the embodied desire becomes unbearable urges that need to be realized and bring these fantasies to life.

5.2. *Undoing gender norms by repeating them temporarily in an unlawful body*

In addition to the freeing, transformative possibilities, liminality also brings about uncertainties of the in-between (Thomassen, 2014; Turner, 1969). While the defiance against gender norms is risky, the crossdresser as an unbecoming subject represents a disruption to gender norms. That said, it is worth noting that this defiance against the normative still occurs within the gender binary (i.e., stereotyping idealised figures of womanhood). With this in mind, we argue that the performative processes of undoing should be understood in the context of repeating and reiterating gender norms (Butler, 1993), and the role of market objects and rituals in enacting these repeated performative

acts. For the crossdresser, the act of defiance thus materialises in performing and repeating these norms in an unlawful body. The unruliness of the crossdresser body (Flinn, 2002) transgresses the law and disrupts the anticipated normative outcome of gender performativity. In a sense, the crossdresser represents a moment of leakage of the stabilised gender dispositives where "the socially determined coordinates of familiarity-identity-gender no longer add up to a legible (legitimate) pattern, when materiality itself escapes the frame of representation, because this frame is built on gender binarism" (Fournier, 2014: 121). This leakage, caused by gender disruptions, creates a space where affective intensities create alternative ways of becoming.

Although crossdressing may not always be possible due to societal constraints (Bunch 2013; Butler, 1990, 1993), the liminal nature of gender switch allows us to document identity residues of the crossdresser personae that were permeating time and disrupting the existing gendered boundaries/subjectivities. These identity residues were a result of the duality of the normative subjectivities and the abject all inhabiting the same body that is at times deemed 'lawful' and at others 'unlawful'. The embodiment of the crossdresser persona is intermittent due to the transient nature of the unbecoming and becoming processes. The enactment of the abject subject is necessary as part of these processes. As Bunch (2013: 48) stated, abjection "facilitates the double exposure of the fragility of the subject, and also the fragility of the law." And it is this fragility that creates male to female or female to male identity residues, resulting in tensions and conflicts in the processes of undoing or doing gender norms with relevant market objects and rituals. These identity residues shape the manifestation of the crossdressers' male and female personas and the affective experiences that compete to be heard in their gender performativity. It is these tensions and conflicts that endow one with the creative potential of becoming and unbecoming. As Davy (2019: 93) put it:

"assemblages appear through conflicts, tensions and flows arising from desiring bodily aesthetics that attend to the limits of the body, the limits of technology and the limits of the laws, as well as intersubjective negotiations of the world that is (re)territorialized on an ongoing basis". We found that the ultimate decision of crossdressing is driven by the urge for bringing an alternative or hybrid identity into being (even in secret; e.g., Bella's delightful panties) and the passionate attachments to market objects that can help materialise this being.

These processes constitute a constant work-in-progress process of internal differentiation without a predeterminate trajectory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This journey of internal differentiation is "not in pursuit of the fixed or predefined positions that are privileged in dualist ontologies" (Pullen et al., 2017: 115). Instead, the unbecoming subject exists outside the limitations delineated by the anticipated normative outcomes of performativity. The refusal and transgression of the expected identity/gender role are essential to the process of unbecoming/undoing. As such, the politicisation of gender transgression and the 'inappropriate' use of gendered market objects and rituals happen because of and not despite the tensions and conflicts inherent in the unbecoming subject that might disrupt the social order of a majority heteronormative society. These tensions and conflicts push the limits of normative fantasy, and the creative potential of the subject in both becoming and unbecoming.

To conclude, prior consumer research has focused on how market objects assist the temporal crossing of gender boundaries in producing carnivalesque performances (Goulding and Saren, 2009), broadening naturalized gender norms (Thompson and Üstüner, 2015), enacting desired gender identity (Ruvio and Belk, 2018) and developing enhanced reflexivity of gender performativity (Seregina, 2019). Drawing on Butler's (1993, 2004) and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theorizations around the

(un)becoming subjects, our study contributes to this literature by demonstrating (1) how the mundane and the excess – hyperfeminine marketplace icons for characterisation – participate in the undoing of gender to realize new possibilities of being and enact multiple fantasies/embodied desires. And (2) how gendered market objects are compelling and operating in the processes of becoming/unbecoming, and how they intersect with identity residues that persist between the many gendered subjectivities and bodily experiences (male, female or hybrid) (cf. Bahl & Milne, 2010). Importantly, we highlight how these identity residues can lead to pleasurable affective indulgences (albeit secretive at times) or risky encounters if not managed carefully. Future research can further investigate the political implications of these identity residues and affects in the marketplace, as the gender neutrality movement is on the rise and brands are rushing to join this bandwagon.

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