

Two Clinically Discrete Syndromes of Transsexualism

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Transsexuals are defined as subjects who have a sustained feminine gender identity combined with a wish to alter their bodily appearance towards the feminine. The results of this study indicate that they can be differentiated into two clinically discrete groups.

In an investigation of 29 transsexuals who sought a change of sex operation it was found that those who had experienced fetishistic arousal were significantly more likely to be older, to have experienced heterosexual intercourse, to be married and to show penile responses to pictures of men and women indicative of a more heterosexual orientation. They had less experience of homosexual contact to orgasm as compared with transsexuals who had not experienced fetishistic arousal, but this difference was not statistically significant. Frequency of cross-dressing, strength of feminine gender identity and intensity of desire for a sex change operation did not discriminate the two groups. The fact that desire for a sex change operation may be associated with experience of fetishistic arousal could be one reason for the higher incidence of transsexualism in men than in women.

Introduction

Reports of transsexuals who have experienced fetishistic arousal exist in the literature. Bancroft (1972) reported that 6 of 22 fetishistic patients 'persistently' wanted to live and be accepted as women and sought a sex change operation. Hoening and Kenna (1974a) reported that 9.7 per cent, and Barr (1973) that 4 per cent, of transsexuals seen had experienced fetishistic arousal.

Other workers (Baker, 1969; Stoller, 1973) have considered that subjects who showed a sustained feminine gender identity and sought a change of sex operation should not be diagnosed as transsexual if they at any time reported fetishistic arousal.

The aim of the present study was to establish whether subjects seeking a sex change operation who had experienced fetishistic arousal differed clinically from those who had not had this experience.

Subjects

All subjects who presented to The Prince Henry Hospital Transsexual Clinic between August 1974 and June 1976 seeking a male to female sex change operation were interviewed. One subject was psychotic and was excluded from the study. The other 29 subjects conformed to the commonly accepted definition of transsexualism (Freund, 1974) in that they had a sustained feminine gender identity combined with the desire for a full sex change operation.

Five of the 29 subjects reported a period of fetishistic arousal. The remaining 24 subjects who had not shown fetishistic arousal will be referred to as the nuclear transsexual group and the subjects who reported fetishistic arousal as the fetishistic transsexual group. Four of the five fetishistic transsexuals masturbated during adolescence while wearing female clothes. Two of the four also experienced spontaneous ejacula-

tion when cross-dressed. A fifth subject experienced fetishistic arousal but did not masturbate. With increasing age, fetishistic arousal diminished in three subjects, and in a fourth it ceased in late adolescence. A fifth subject showed no further fetishistic arousal after beginning to take oestrogen.

Information concerning the subjects' cross-dressing history, gender, identity and sexual orientation was recorded in a three-hour interview. Subjects' penile volume responses to a series of moving pictures of nude men and women were measured, and a U-score indicating their sexual orientation was calculated. The method has been described elsewhere (McConaghy, 1967).

Clinical Findings

Age and marital status

The mean age of the 24 subjects in the nuclear transsexual group was 26.4 years (range 19–48), and of the five subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group was 40 years (range 23–56). Subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group were significantly older than those in the nuclear transsexual group ($P < .05$, 2-tailed, Mann-Whitney Test).

Two of the subjects in the nuclear transsexual group had married, but one was separated and one divorced. None were currently living in a heterosexual relationship. Two of the subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group were married and living in a heterosexual relationship. The difference was significant ($P < .05$, Exact Test).

Frequency of full cross-dressing

Four subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group and 10 in the nuclear transsexual group fully cross-dressed at least weekly during adolescence. This difference was not significant.

Three subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group and 14 in the nuclear transsexual group had dressed permanently as women for the previous six months. This difference was not significant.

Gender identity

Subjects were asked the degree to which they felt like a woman. Two in the nuclear trans-

sexual group were uncertain. One subject in the fetishistic transsexual group often felt like a woman, and all the remaining subjects felt like a woman all the time, both when nude and when cross-dressed.

Four of the subjects in the fetishistic group and 23 in the nuclear transsexual group at times passed urine standing. The remaining subjects sat to pass urine at all times.

Sexual experience and orientation

Four of the 24 subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group and 4 of the 5 in the nuclear transsexual group had experienced heterosexual intercourse. The difference was significant ($P < .05$, Exact Test). All four subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group and none of the four in the nuclear transsexual group had experienced heterosexual intercourse on more than four occasions ($P < .05$, Exact Test).

Three subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group and 21 in the nuclear transsexual group had experienced homosexual contact to orgasm. One subject in the fetishistic transsexual group and 12 in the nuclear transsexual group had experienced homosexual contact to orgasm at least fortnightly in the previous six months. The trend for fewer subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group to experience homosexual contact to orgasm and on fewer occasions did not reach statistical significance.

Subjects were rated on the Kinsey Scale by one of the authors (N.B.) on their reported sexual fantasies and experience. Kinsey Scale rating of the subjects in the two groups is given in Table I.

There was a non-significant tendency for subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group to show greater heterosexual interest than those in the nuclear transsexual group.

Penile volume response

Each subject's penile volume responses to ten pictures of men and ten of women were measured, and a U-score indicating their sexual orientation was calculated (McConaghy, 1967). With this method the maximum heterosexual U-score is 100 and the maximum homosexual U-score is 0. A score of 50 indicates equal homosexual and heterosexual interest.

TABLE I
Kinsey Scale Rating

Kinsey Scale	0 (entirely hetero- sexual)	1	2	3	4	5	6 (entirely homo- sexual)
Fetishistic transsexual group N=5	0	0	0	1	0	3	1
Nuclear transsexual group N=21*	0	0	0	0	1	8	12

* Three subjects denied sexual interest and experience.

In the nuclear transsexual group one subject refused penile volume measurement and in two subjects penile volume changes were negligible. The polygraph records of these two subjects were not scored.

The mean U-score for the 5 subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group was 48.3 (range 4-79), and for 21 subjects in the nuclear transsexual group it was 12.8 (range 0-42.5). Subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group had significantly higher U-scores than those in the nuclear transsexual group ($P < .05$, one-tailed, Mann-Whitney Test).

Discussion

Subjects in the fetishistic transsexual group, as compared with those in the nuclear transsexual group, are more likely to have experienced heterosexual intercourse and to be married, and are less likely to have experienced homosexual contact to orgasm. Objective measures of penile volume changes are consistent with the behavioural evidence of a stronger heterosexual orientation in fetishistic transsexuals. No difference between the two groups was found in strength of feminine gender identity, frequency of cross-dressing or intensity of desire for sex change operation.

Fetishistic transsexuals presented for a sex change operation at a later age than did the nuclear transsexuals. Fetishistic arousal and a stronger heterosexual interest may delay but does not prevent subjects from seeking a sex change operation. Fetishistic arousal was still present in three subjects when they requested a sex change operation. Fetishistic arousal had been present in a fourth subject until he com-

menced taking female hormones. It is possible in this subject that oestrogen ingestion, by diminishing his sexual and hence fetishistic arousal, increased his urge to undergo a sex change operation.

The generally accepted criterion for transsexualism is that the subject has a sustained feminine gender identity combined with a wish to alter his or her bodily appearance towards that of the opposite sex (Roth and Ball, 1964; Wälinder, 1967; Kubie and Mackie, 1968; Freund, 1974). The results of this study suggest that subjects who conform to this definition of transsexualism can be divided into two clinically discrete groups on the basis of whether or not they have shown fetishistic arousal.

It is of interest that there are no reports of transsexual women who have experienced fetishistic arousal. A possible contributing factor to the greater incidence of transsexualism in men than in women (Hoenig and Kenna, 1974b) may be that fetishism occurs very rarely in women (Kinsey *et al*, 1953).

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