

Subjective Ideas of Sexual Change in Male Schizophrenics

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas of changing sex, and the doubt about sexual identity which these ideas imply, are considered to be "invariable" and "pathognomonic" features of schizophrenia by Macalpine and Hunter (1955). The authors quote, in a footnote, a personal communication from Manfred Bleuler dated 1953 which states that Eugen Bleuler would have agreed that "schizophrenics are almost invariably, if not indeed invariably, in doubt about the sex to which they belong". Planansky and Johnston (1962), in an uncontrolled study of 150 male schizophrenics, found that only 15 per cent. (22 cases) exhibited "direct expression of confusion of sex identity" and only 4.7 per cent. (7 cases) had clear delusions of having changed into a woman. Jackson (1960), Weckowicz and Sommer (1960), and Skottowe (1964) state merely that these ideas occur, or occur frequently. A check of the standard English language teaching texts reveals that Allen (1962), Bleuler (1911), Mayer-Gross *et al.* (1960), Noyes and Kolb (1963) and Sim (1963) make only oblique references to ideas of changing sex, whilst Anderson (1964), Arieti (1959), Bellak and Benedict (1958), Curran and Partridge (1963), Fish (1962 and 1964), Freeman *et al.* (1958), Henderson and Batchelor (1962), Merskey and Tonge (1965), and Stafford-Clark (1964) make no reference at all. In their study of schizophrenic delusions Lucas *et al.* (1962) similarly do not mention change of sex. They state simply that (in males) 30 per cent. had a sexual content.

There is a similar lack of precise information about the frequency of genital hallucinosis. Anderson (1964), Fish (1962 and 1964), Mayer-Gross *et al.* (1960), Noyes and Kolb (1963), and Skottowe (1964) state that the phenomenon is "common" or "frequent" but give no precise figures. Curran and Partridge

(1963), Sim (1963), and Stafford-Clark (1964), mention only the possible occurrence, whilst Henderson and Batchelor (1962), and Merskey and Tonge (1965) do not directly mention it. None of the aforementioned teaching texts make direct mention of ideas of a change in size or shape of the genitalia.

Clinical studies are rare. Klaf and Davis (1960) compared 150 male schizophrenics with 150 male non-psychotics (psychoneurotics and personality disorders). They found that 26.7 per cent. (40 cases) of the schizophrenics had delusions or hallucinations of a sexual nature. The incidence in the non-psychotic group was nil. Their study, claimed to be the first one to be controlled, is unfortunately marred by the failure to attempt to separate delusions and hallucinations and by the inclusion of delusions of infidelity. Planansky and Johnston (1962) noted an incidence of 14 per cent. for bodily delusions of a sexual content and state, but gave no figures, that some cases believed their genitalia had changed.

Mayer-Gross *et al.* (1960) and Merskey and Tonge (1965) state that sexual activity may increase in the initial stages of schizophrenia. Lukianowicz (1963) compared 100 men with schizophrenia of under two years duration, 100 normal men and 100 men with depression. He found that in its initial stages the schizophrenic psychosis increased the sexual desire and the frequency of its gratification, whilst in depression the reverse occurred.

This study aims at a controlled numerical assessment of the aforementioned phenomena.

METHOD

All male patients admitted to the acute observation ward of Middlewood Hospital over a six month period (8.2.65-8.8.65) were studied.

Patients suffering from epilepsy, dementia, brain damage, subnormality or underlying systemic disease were excluded—i.e. the “organic” case. The remaining patients were divided into two groups—schizophrenics and controls. The criteria used for the former group were those of Mayer-Gross *et al.* (1960). After this diagnostic allocation had been made, both groups were asked the following six questions and the answers noted.

1. Whether the illness was associated with a change in the interest the patient had in women.
2. A change in his power of penile erection.
3. The presence or absence of genital feelings regarded by the patient as of unusual or abnormal type (hallucinations).
4. Whether the patient believed his genitalia had altered in size or shape.
5. Whether he believed he was changing or had changed into a neuter or eunuch.
6. Whether or not he believed he was changing or had changed into a woman.

Four schizophrenics were so disordered in their thinking and talk that no answers could be gleaned. They have been excluded from this study. All χ^2 tests were done using Yates' correction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. SCHIZOPHRENICS COMPARED WITH CONTROLS

The 70 cases in the schizophrenic group comprised, 3 catatonics, 14 hebephrenics, 31 paranoids and 22 cases with mixtures of these subtypes. The 45 control cases comprised 9 endogenous depressions, 6 manias, 14 reactive depressions and 16 personality disorders.

The mean age of the schizophrenic group was 35.97 years (S.D. 11.84) and that of the control group was 43.56 years (S.D. = 11.39). The schizophrenics were significantly younger—Critical Ratio = 3.40 Degrees of Freedom = 113; .001 > P.

TABLE I
Schizophrenic and Control Groups Compared for Various Factors

				Schizophrenic Group		Control Group		
				No.	%	No.	%	
Marital status	Single	43	61%	12	27%	Single vs. Rest $\chi^2 = 11.9$.001 > P		
	Married	19	27%	30	67%			
	Other	8	12%	3	7%			
Interest in women	More	8	11%	2	4%	Less vs. Same or More $\chi^2 = 4.88$.05 > P > .02		
	Same	36	51%	16	36%			
	Less	26	37%	27	60%			
Capability (Potency)	More	8	11%	1	2%	Less vs. Same or More $\chi^2 = 2.32$ NOT SIGNIFICANT		
	Same	39	56%	22	49%			
	Less	23	33%	22	49%			
Genital hallucinosis	Present	21	30%	0	0%	$\chi^2 = 14.6$.0005 > P		
	Absent	49	70%	45	100%			
Genital size or shape change ideas	Present	14	20%	3	7%	$\chi^2 = 2.88$ NOT SIGNIFICANT		
	Absent	56	80%	42	93%			
Delusions of being a eunuch or neuter	Present	11	16%	0	0%	Figures too small for significance		
	Absent	59	84%	45	100%			
Delusions of being a woman	Present	13	19%	0	0%	$\chi^2 = 7.66$.01 > P > .005		
	Absent	57	81%	45	100%			
Delusions of being no longer a man	Present	19	27%	0	0%	$\chi^2 = 12.74$.0005 > P		
	Absent	51	73%	45	100%			

The first two comparisons in Table I agree with Lukianowicz (1963) and show that male schizophrenics have a significantly greater proportion of single persons, a lower incidence of loss of sexual interest, and a (non-significant) suggestion that an increase of interest is perhaps more common in them, than the control group.

Table I shows that genital hallucinosis (pulling, drawing, electricity, etc.) was confined to the schizophrenic group. These hallucinations separated easily from delusions of a change of size or shape of the genitalia. The schizophrenics held these ideas as delusions. The three control cases who stated that their genitalia had changed in size or shape were all over 60 and suffering from endogenous depression. They considered that their genitalia were shrinking with age and general illness. Their delusions struck the investigators as depressive, and clinically seemed different from the schizophrenic's expression of genital shrinkage. None of the three depressives thought there was an alteration in shape.

Ideas of being in the process of becoming, or of having become a eunuch, neuter, or a woman were confined to the schizophrenic group and were always held phenomenologically as delusions. In no case were they complained of spontaneously, but in all cases simple questions elicited a clear response, provided thought disorder did not prevent coherent talk.

Only two patients were worried lest they were homosexuals. None believed that they were. Neither of the two had genital hallucinosis or ideas that their genitals were changing in size or shape. Neither were coded as positive for sex change, as both were definite that they did

not think they were changing sex. Cases who did believe that they were changing sex were equally definite that they were not homosexuals. In brief, all patients clearly distinguished between the idea of changing sex and the idea of being a homosexual. This distinction which tends to be blurred in some analytic literature, is stressed by Macalpine and Hunter (1955) and Planansky and Johnston (1962). The distinction is accepted in this study, which is not concerned with possible interpretations of the delusional content but solely with the clinical phenomenology.

II. THE SCHIZOPHRENIC GROUP

The presence or absence of genital hallucinosis was found not to be significantly related to the following factors: age, duration of the schizophrenic illness, type of schizophrenia, marital state, change of interest in women, change in sexual capability, ideas that the genitalia had changed in size or shape. There was a positive relationship between genital hallucinosis and delusions of being no longer a man. (Table II).

Sex change delusions (of being no longer a man) were significantly associated with being single, and with genital hallucinosis. However, the "overlap" between genital hallucinosis and delusions of sex change is not perfect and confirms Bleuler's (1911) view that sexual delusions cannot be explained on the basis of altered or hallucinatory sensations. No significant positive association was found between delusions of sex change and the following factors: age, duration and type of schizophrenia, change of interest in women, change in sexual capability or ideas that the genitalia had changed in size or shape.

TABLE II
Relationship Between Sex Change Delusions, Marital Status and Genital Hallucinosis

				Delusions of being no longer a man				
				Present N = 19		Absent N = 51		
				No.	%	No.	%	
Marital status	Single	16	84%	27	53%	$\chi^2 = 4.47$.05 > P > .02
			Others	3	16%	24	47%	
Genital hallucinosis	Present	12	63%	9	18%	$\chi^2 = 11.57$.001 > P
			Absent	7	37%	42	82%	

CONCLUSIONS

Schizophrenics (male) are less likely than controls to consider that their illness has reduced their sexual interest in women.

Genital hallucinosis occurred in 30 per cent., and delusions of sex change (of being no longer a man) in 27 per cent. of (male) schizophrenics, and was absent in controls. In doubtful cases these findings may have a certain diagnostic value.

Delusions of sex change are associated with being single.

There is a significant, but far from complete, association between delusions of sex change and genital hallucinosis in male schizophrenics.

SUMMARY

Seventy male schizophrenics were compared with 45 male controls. The controls consisted of all the non-schizophrenic admissions to the same acute observation ward during the same six month period, with the exclusion of "organic" cases and subnormals.

The two groups were compared for their responses to questions about the following symptoms: changes in sexual interest and capability, genital hallucinosis, ideas of a change in size or shape of the genitalia and ideas of changing sex.

The schizophrenics were less likely than controls to report loss of sexual interest in women. Genital hallucinosis and delusions of sex change occurred in 30 per cent. and 27 per cent. respectively of the schizophrenics and had a close but not complete association with each other. These symptoms were absent in the controls and so may have some diagnostic value. Delusions of sex change were more likely to occur in the unmarried schizophrenic.

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