

Gender Differences in Paraphilic Sexual Interest in Women and Men

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Abstract

The present paper aims to highlight potential gender differences in paraphilic interest in women and men. Thus, paraphilic interests such as sexual sadism, sexual masochism, fetishism, and urophilia were targeted. The study was started in the period between 2022-2023, during which a sample of 224 participants of woman and man was selected of which 108 men and 116 women aged between 18 and 48 years. The data were collected with the Questionnaire on paraphilic disorders by accessing the participation link or by scanning a QR code with mobile phones in compliance with the norms of ethics and deontology. The obtained results indicated the existence of significant gender differences in terms of paraphilic-type interests. Men showed a significantly higher interest in sexual interests such as sexual sadism and urophilia. By comparison, women presented significantly higher sexual interests than men in terms of masochistic interests. Regarding fetishist interest, no significant gender differences were identified.

Keywords: Sexual interests, Paraphilia, Gender differences, Woman and man

INTRODUCTION

A famous study investigating gender differences in sexuality-related behaviors, as well as fantasies in the general population, was "A Billion Wicked Thoughts" by Ogas and Gaddam [1, 2]. The authors looked at the online preferences of women and men and revealed that over time, whereas men are visually stimulated and mostly from single cues, women need mental stimulation and numerous cues to achieve arousal. Achieving this state of stimulation is achieved instantly in men after watching something they find sexually arousing, while in the case of women, reaching this state of arousal takes longer, favoring conjuncture representations [3, 4].

One possible hypothesis could be that physical and psychological arousal for men is integrated, while for women physical and psychological arousal are separate, meaning that women need more simultaneous stimulation with different stimuli to reach the state of sexual arousal [5, 6]. Studies [7] also indicate that men are more likely to desire intercourse, while women tend to pursue being desired. As such, women require more emotional, psychological, and intellectual stimulation to become aroused compared to men, highlighting fundamental differences between men and women when it comes to sex, desire, and sexually stimulating materials [8-11]. Therefore, it was hypothesized that there would be significant gender differences in sexual fantasies, paraphilias, and sexual behavior.

In order to comprehend a person's sexual instinct and purpose, they must take into account the gender roles and

relationships that are typically associated with heterosexuality. Freud avoids labeling any deviations from heterosexuality as "degenerate" or "pathological" by rejecting the idea that impulse and object are biologically fixed in his works on the theory of sexuality" [12]. Consequently, he highlights in his reading the overused hierarchical opposition of femininity and masculinity even in the style of reporting towards the typical sexual object and aim. Therefore, Freud's sexual theory suggests that the erotic bond inherently requires a dominating relationship and that the only human relationships that can exist are those of subject and object, activity and passivity, whole and part, and possessor and possession [13, 14].

The understanding of paraphilic preferences can be enhanced by reference to hierarchical oppositional gender roles and the negative forms of social relationships that are based on them

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[15]. Although the literature points out that the non-pathological fetishist avoids the construction of gender roles in relation to sexual roles, and that fetishism can therefore function as a critique of the male model of sexual instinct and relationship, Freud describes sexual fetishism as a distinctly male phenomenon. Freud contends that instinct is inherently "masculine"—at least in the broad sense of "active" as opposed to "passive"—regardless of gender or choice of sexual object (Three Essays 219, note 1). The reason for this can be attributed to the instinct's proactive pursuit of fulfilment [16].

According to Freud ("Instincts" 120-21), pleasant feelings are associated with a decrease in stimulation and unpleasant feelings with an increase in stimulus. Since sexual tension entails unpleasantness, "satisfaction" is the "goal" of instinct, and it can only be attained by removing the stimulating condition from the instinct's source ("Instincts" 122). Conversely, "the thing in connection with which or through which the instinct is enabled to attain its end" is the sexual "object" ("Instincts" 122). The sexual instinct uses the object and purpose to work toward its goals. The reason the object is important is because it can be used to achieve pleasure [17].

Thus, instinct and object play both active and passive roles in the essence of pleasure, as defined by Freud. The relation of the instinct to the object can only be active, and the relation of the object to the instinct can only be passive, because the sexual objective is often negatively valenced as the elimination of the unpleasantness of suppressing sexual tension. The object does not provide pleasurable sensations to the instinct. Reaching the goal and using the thing to remove an internal stimulation from the outside world is the "proper" activity of instinct that brings pleasure [11]. Even though the object has a unique quality, the instinct's activity is valuable, and the object itself is essentially irrelevant. It is solely useful for sexual purposes, and other than that, it can only be stimulating.

Numerous studies have shown that men tend to experience significantly less aversion to most paraphilic interests compared to women and that more men report achieving arousal to most paraphilic interests compared to women. Thus, the hypothesis was drawn according to which men would be more prone to developing paraphilic interests compared to women. There is research that suggests that these gender differences can only be explained by the fact that those with low sexual desire, namely women, tend to use their sexual energy only on their preferred sexual targets and activities because they are limited. Those with high sexual desire, such as men, will focus their energy on atypical targets and preferred sexual activities to release their sexual tension. However, this explanation is controversial because self-reported sexual desire is influenced by social and cultural, as well as medical factors that in turn influence what is reported versus what people do behind closed doors [18].

However, since such thinking has not been directly examined, it is possible that the observed differences between men and women could be explained by biopsychosocial factors, including a possible difference in sexual appetite.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Instruments

The data was collected Questionnaire of Paraphilic Disorders QPD [19]. The Questionnaire QPD meets all criteria for the assessment and testing of sexual psychopathology. It has a good inter-item reliability, both whole Questionnaire and of the scales in the Questionnaire. In addition, this Questionnaire reveals a good inter-rater correlation and is in agreement with other similar scales related to the evaluation of paraphilic disorders / deviant sexual behaviours [19].

Procedures and Methods

The research was started in the period between 2022-2023. The selection procedure of the participants was a non-probabilistic online one, based on convenience, based on an announcement on social networks, on the portals of the websites of sexual health institutions (www.sexology.ro) by accessing the participation link or by scanning a QR code with mobile phones.

From the total number of respondents, a number of 43 respondents were removed from the study, who either did not answer all the study questions, or answered "I do not agree" to the statement "I read the explanations and information about the research, I had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and I agree to the provision of personal information only for statistical analysis".

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Every participant in the current investigation fulfilled the following eligibility requirements for the study: must be older than eighteen, have completed secondary and postsecondary education, have begun sexual activity prior to the study, and be free of mental, personality, or other neurodevelopmental or neurocognitive issues. Participants were informed that their participation in this study is voluntary, each participant having the possibility to withdraw from the research. Participants were made aware that the answers they provide are confidential and will only be processed for statistical purposes. All the participants gave their consent regarding the purpose of the research and their participation in the testing, as well as the aspects related to (EU) The following data will be provided by the research team, which is responsible for conducting the study in a secure manner and only for the purposes designated, according to Regulation 2016/679 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and regarding the free circulation of this data and the repeal of Directive 95/46/CE (General Data Protection Regulation) and Law No. 506/2004 regarding the processing of personal data and the protection of private life. The data is optional and includes sociodemographic

information, subjective responses to the assessment tools, and e-mail address.

Methods

The data processing was achieved using the SPSS program (IBM SPSS Statistics). The data were analysed by descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test. The significance level was set to $p \leq 0.05$.

Participants

In order to verify the established objectives from the total number of respondents, 224 voluntary participants were selected who fully answered the questionnaire and who gave their consent for the statistical processing of the data. The sample included 108 men and 116 women between the ages of 18 and 48. Thus, the average age for women was $m=32$; $SD=2.11$ and the average age for men $m=38$; $SD=1.90$. Parameters such as marital status were not taken in consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research focused on paraphilic sexual interests, such as sexual sadism, sexual masochism, fetishism, urophilia.

Starting from the premise that there are gender differences in the sexual interests of sexual sadism, a comparison was made between the group of women and men. The results were summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Differences in sexual sadism

	N	M	Std. Dev.	t	Sig.	Min.	Max.
Male	108	61,5	10,65	33,00	0,000	25	85
Female	116	21,8	6,5			10	48

Following the statistical analysis in the case of sexual sadism, an average $m=61.5 \pm 10.65$ was obtained in men, this average value indicating a moderate level of paraphilic interest. By comparison, women obtained an average indicating a low level of paraphilic interest $m=21.8 \pm 6.5$. It should be highlighted that the maximum score ($MAX. = 85$) obtained in the group of men indicates a high level of preference for sexual sadism. The maximum score obtained in the women's group falls at a low to moderate level ($Max. = 48$). The differences obtained between women and men are statistically significant ($t=33$; $Sig.= 0.000$).

These results could be explained through the perspective of the male arousal hypothesis which highlights men's tendency to emphasize sexual aggression and experimentation as a result of socialization and implies a higher level of arousal and sexual activity in terms of dominance, the expression of power through sexual behaviour and control [20]. Moreover, this tendency identified mainly in men can also be explained through the hormonal background. Studies [21] have demonstrated the role that testosterone level plays in sexual

assault, and have reported a associations between high levels of testosterone on the one hand, and impersonal sexuality and the presence of violent and antisocial behaviours, on the other [15] (*LONGPRÉ, Nicholas; GUAY, Jean-Pierre; KNIGHT, Raymond A. Sadistic Sexual Aggressors. The Wiley Handbook of What Works with Sexual Offenders: Contemporary Perspectives in Theory, Assessment, Treatment, and Prevention, 2020, 387-409.*), [22] *ROBERTSON, Carrie A. Psychopathic and Sexually Sadistic Cognitions, Traits, and Behaviours: Relations with Biomarkers and Stress Responses. Brandeis University, 2017.*).

Gender differences in masochistic sexual interest were estimated. Therefore, a comparison was made between the two batches, the results being centralized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Differences in the level of interest in sexual masochism

	N	M	Std. Dev.	T	Sig.	Min.	Max.
Male	108	28,9	13,2	40,1	0,000	10	61
Female	116	57,1	7,3			26	79

Following the statistical analysis in the case of sexual masochism, an average $m=28.9 \pm 13.2$ was obtained for men, this average value indicating a low level of paraphilic interest. By comparison, women obtained an average indicating a moderate level of paraphilic interest $m=57.1 \pm 7.3$. The maximum score ($MAX. = 61$) obtained in the male group indicates a moderate level of preference for sexual masochism. The maximum score obtained in the women's group is at a high level ($Max. = 79$). The differences obtained between women and men are statistically significant ($t=40.1$; $Sig.= 0.000$). These results can be conceptualized by the existence of patterns specific to the gender role. Female preferences for masochism exceeded male preferences. They can be interpreted in the context of contextualizing pain as punishment for wrongdoing in an ongoing relationship, in humiliation and domination. These differences can be interpreted in the context of cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity and in terms of masochism as a means of escape from identity [23] (*Baumeister, Roy F. Gender Differences in Erotic Plasticity: The Female Sex Drive as Socially Flexible and Responsive. Psychological Bulletin, 2000, 126.3: 347.*) Other hypothesis about the tendency of female masochism argues that because females are encouraged to be passive, they will be more aroused by masochistic (but not sadistic) activities than males [24]. Some studies have explained this phenomenon as being based on a biologically female tendency to general submissiveness. The radical feminist theory highlights this preference as essentially indicative of patriarchal dogma and also the notions of dominances and submission [18]. Given that fetishism is one of the most common paraphilic tendencies, we conducted a comparative study between women and men,

in order to identify possible differences. The results are centralized in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Differences in the level of interest in fetishism

	N	M	Std. Dev.	T	Sig.	Min.	Max.
Male	108	59,3	9,5	12,9	0,238	10	79
Female	116	48,6	10,2			10	75

Following the statistical analysis in the case of fetishism, an average $m=59.3\pm 9.5$ was obtained for men, this average value indicating a moderate level of paraphilic interest. Women obtained an average indicating a moderate level of paraphilic interest $m=48.6\pm 10.2$. The maximum score (MAX. =79) obtained in the male group indicates a high level of preference for fetishism. The maximum score obtained in the women's group is at a high level (Max. =75). The results obtained between women and men in the case of the sample included in the research do not show statistically significant differences. These results can be explained through the lens of the theory of sexuality from a psychoanalytic perspective. Although numerous studies have shown that men tend to be more inclined towards paraphilic sexual interests, they have more permissive sexual attitudes than women and are more willing to report honestly their sexual behaviours [25] (HARRISON, MA.; MURPHY, BE. *Sexual Fetishes: Sensations, Perceptions, and Correlates. Psychology & Sexuality, 2022, 13.3: 704-716.*), the results indicated no significant differences. Regardless of a person's gender or preferred object, instinct is inherently "masculine," at least in the broad sense of active as opposed to passive, according to Freud's thesis. A similarity regarding fetishist interests could be associated and with the change of gender roles, namely the reduction of censorships, thus encouraging the exploration of sexuality by women as well.

The preliminary analysis indicated the existence of some respondents with preferences for urophilia. Starting from the premise that men have a much greater openness to paraphilic sexual interests, we made a comparison between the group of men and women in terms of preference for urophilia. The results were summarized in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Differences in the level of interest in urophilia

	N	M	Std. Dev.	T	Sig.	Min.	Max.
Male	108	30,6	3,5	24,5	0,014	0	42
Female	116	12,4	1,2			0	18

Following the statistical analysis in the case of urophilia, an average $m=30.6\pm 3.5$ was obtained in men, this average value indicating a low level of paraphilic interest. By comparison, women obtained an average indicating a very low level of paraphilic interest $m=12.4\pm 1.2$. The maximum score (MAX. =42) obtained in the group of men indicates a low to moderate level of preference for urophilia. The maximum score

obtained in the women's group is at a low level (Max. =18). The differences obtained between women and men are statistically significant ($t=24.5$; Sig.= 0.014). These results can be explained in terms of the studies already carried out to date regarding a much more pronounced tendency of men towards paraphilic type interests. These preferences could be associated with preferences related to dominance and subjugation. A majority of men are more excited by images of submissive and distressed women than by images of smiling and cooperative women. Fantasy can have an addictive quality allowing for fun, relaxation, escape from trauma, or boredom.

CONCLUSION

The present research highlighted the existence of gender differences in terms of paraphilic interests such as sadism, masochism, fetishism and urophilia, which were identified in the case of the sample proposed in the present research. On the other hand, we will emphasize the fact that the present research ensured total confidentiality, the respondents remaining anonymous and at the same time the questionnaire was distributed digitally, favouring openness regarding the answers provided. Another aspect that must be emphasized is the age group found in the sample. The respondents' openness to participate in a studio aimed at an intimate topic can also be associated with their flexibility and openness that could also be identified in terms of sexual behaviours.

We will conclude that the particularities of the sexual behaviours and preferences of the paraphilic still remain an insufficiently explored niche. It is necessary to analyse these sexual preferences in association with aspects related to social changes, the dynamics of the individual's evolution, as well as the specificity of the context of evolution.

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