

## Typology of Male-to-Female Transsexualism

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*This study tested a prediction derived from the hypothesis that asexual and bisexual transsexualism are actually subtypes of heterosexual transsexualism. Two questionnaire scales measuring erotic attraction to males and females were administered to 163 male-to-female transsexuals. A cluster analysis of their scores divided the subjects into four groups: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual. Fisher Exact tests were used to compare the frequency with which subjects in the four clusters reported a history of erotic arousal in association with cross-dressing. As predicted, there were no differences among the asexual, bisexual, and heterosexual transsexuals, and all three groups included a much higher proportion of fetishistic cases than the homosexual group ( $p \leq .0001$ , two-tailed). These findings support the view that male transsexuals may be divided into two basic types: heterosexual and homosexual.*

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**KEY WORDS:** transsexualism; transvestism; gender disorders; fetishism.

### INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research on gender identity disorders has been devoted to their classification. There is now widespread agreement on certain points. Most workers would agree that there is only one major syndrome of gender disturbance in females, and the great bulk of typological study has been carried out on males only. Within the male population, all modern authorities would agree in differentiating transvestites (defined by Freund *et al.*, 1982, as heterosexual males who engage in cross-gender fantasy or behavior only when they are erotically aroused) from transsexuals (men who

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have a long-standing and nonfluctuating desire to possess a female body and to live permanently in society as women). Beyond that point, differences begin to appear in the various typological schemes that have been proposed. Certain workers, for example, have found it necessary to designate a separate category for males who appear to be intermediate between transvestism and transsexualism; other authorities have no separate label for such cases (Steiner *et al.*, 1985). With regard to transsexualism proper, the current trend is to recognize the existence of more than one type. The number of basic transsexual types, however, has not yet been settled. It was to this question that the present study was addressed.

Typical of current, mainstream thinking on the typology of transsexualism is the classification scheme set out in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), commonly known as DSM-III. The DSM-III describes three specific types of transsexualism—heterosexual, homosexual, and asexual—corresponding to the individual's predominant sexual history prior to the appearance of the full transsexual syndrome. The labels *homosexual* and *heterosexual* are used just as they are with nontranssexual individuals, to refer to erotic attraction to members of the same and the opposite biological (as opposed to psychological) sex, and their application is not reversed following sex reassignment surgery. A tripartite division of transsexuals has also been employed by other writers. Bentler (1976) also divided male-to-female transsexuals into heterosexual, homosexual, and asexual types. Person and Ovesey (1974a,b) classified their series as primary, transvestitic, and homosexual transsexuals. The last two syndromes were seen as developments secondary to transvestism and effeminate homosexuality. The primary transsexuals were described as "asexual," and the transvestitic transsexuals as heterosexual; Person and Ovesey's trichotomy, therefore, is roughly congruent to that of Bentler and the DSM-III.

Other investigators have distinguished more or fewer than three types. Hirschfeld (1922, p. 144) distinguished four types of gender disturbance in males: heterosexual, homosexual, automonosexual (or narcissistic), and bisexual. As opposed to *asexuality*, which denotes a lack of sexual drive, *automonosexualism* refers to a strong sexual interest in one's own person, with a concomitant lack of erotic interest in others.

In contrast to the above authors, Buhrich and McConaghy (1978) described only two transsexual types: fetishistic transsexuals, who reported a history of erotic arousal in association with cross-dressing, and nuclear transsexuals, who denied such a history. The fetishistic transsexuals showed evidence of a "more heterosexual orientation" (p. 73). Similarly, Freund *et al.* (1982), using a simple questionnaire method to classify transsexuals dichotomously as heterosexual or homosexual, found that a much higher