

PARAPHILIAS

Characteristics of Subgroups in the Adult Baby/Diaper Lover Community



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ABSTRACT

Background: There is a lack of research on adult baby/diaper lover (ABDL) behavior, particularly from community samples. Prior studies have not examined differences between the AB and DL subgroups in the ABDL community.

Aim: To explore whether endorsements of AB role-play enjoyment and ratings of sexual enjoyment during ABDL activity were related to parenting and attachment variables, negative mood states, and reported problems with ABDL and to explore differences by relationship status and by sexual orientation.

Method: Data from a larger survey of an online ABDL community were analyzed. The final sample included 1,795 men and 139 women.

Outcomes: Participants completed questions about their ABDL interests, the short form of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, the Maternal and Paternal Relationship Scales designed for this study, the shortened version of the Profile of Mood States, and questions about problems with ABDL.

Results: Greater enjoyment of role playing was associated with being raised by a single female caregiver, a more negative paternal relationship, higher attachment anxiety, and more negative mood states. Differences based on relationship status and sexual orientation were minimal. Participants who most liked no sexual activity reported higher enjoyment of role playing and lower enjoyment of sexual activity in ABDL behavior compared with other groups. Regardless of sexual orientation, men rated sexual enjoyment in ABDL higher than role-play enjoyment. Ratings of sexual interest in diapers were generally not different from ratings of sexual interest in adults.

Clinical Implications: ABDL clients who enjoy role playing and want to understand their behaviors might wish to explore family-of-origin experiences more than clients who find diapers erotic. Clients who find diapers erotic are likely to have other sexual interests. ABDL subgroups are generally comfortable with their practices and might not have a need for therapy.

Strengths and Limitations: Despite the lack of a comparison group, this study has a large, non-psychiatric sample of a marginalized sexual subculture and affirms that such individuals should not be readily pathologized.

Conclusion: In contrast to persons who find diapers erotic, AB role playing is more likely to be an interpersonal, non-sexual behavior helping some individuals decrease attachment anxiety and negative mood states. Atypical behaviors are not troubling for some individuals, regardless of the origins and motivations of the behavior.

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Key Words: Adult Baby/Diaper Lover (ABDL); Adult Baby; Diaper Lover; Atypical Sexual

INTRODUCTION

The idea that atypical sexual preferences and behaviors can be classified as sexual deviations, mental disorders, or paraphilias has been challenged by scholars.^{1,2} The fourth edition of the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) defined fetishism as a paraphilia characterized by recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors over at least 6 months involving the use of non-living objects, but the diagnosis could be made only if the fetish was distressing or causing impairment.¹ Although there are many types of fetishes, the present study focused on individuals who wear diapers and/or participate in infant-like role play. This behavior has been called autonepiophilia or paraphilic infantilism by some scholars^{3,4} and adult baby syndrome^{5,6} by others. The DSM-IV listed infantilism under sexual masochism,⁷ but it is not listed anywhere in

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the fifth edition of the DSM (DSM-5).⁸ The DSM-5 changed “fetishism” to “fetishistic disorder” whereby an individual must have “over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent and intense sexual arousal from either the use of nonliving objects or a highly specific focus on nongenital body parts, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors.” To qualify for the diagnosis, the fantasies, urges, or behaviors also must cause distress or interfere with some important area of functioning.⁸

Members of this community generally refer to themselves as adult babies (ABs), those who enjoy role playing as infants, and diaper lovers (DLs), those who wear diapers voluntarily but might not engage in other baby-like behaviors. As a group, they are referred to as adult baby/diaper lovers (ABDL). Psychiatric case studies of ABDL behavior appeared as early as the 1960s and 1970s.^{9–12} More recent cases have been reported of men wearing, urinating in, and defecating in diapers, but also using baby toys, sucking on pacifiers, crawling, using bottles, sleeping with blankets, and expressing desires to become a baby, be treated like a baby, and have their diapers changed.^{6,13–18} Scholars have suggested a person’s relationship with or attachment to a parent might relate to ABDL interests.^{10,11,19} These reports of ABDL cases continue to consist of individuals seeking treatment for different reasons (ie, not always related to their ABDL), rather than community-based samples.

Although ABDL has been classified as an atypical sexual behavior, the degree to which ABDL behavior is actually sexual has been unclear. For example, Caldwell¹⁹ reported a case in which the subject urinated, defecated, and masturbated while wearing diapers but did not show any other baby-like behaviors. Evcimen and Gratz¹⁴ described a patient who wished to be a baby and wore diapers but denied using the diapers sexually. These cases highlight possible differences in the manifestation of ABDL behavior: one case involves the use of diapers and sexual behavior without AB play and the other involves AB play with diaper wearing but without sexual behavior.

A recent article reported data from a community sample of ABDL individuals through an online survey, and the present study is a secondary analysis of data from that project.²⁰ The previous work challenged the notion that the ABDL community is one homogeneous group by finding support for the idea that the ABDL community consists of at least two groups: persons focused on role-play behavior (ie, ABs) and persons who were primarily interested in sexual arousal (ie, DLs) in their ABDL behavior. The previous study also focused on differences between men and women in ABDL practices, but they did not examine differences between the two subgroups they identified.¹⁹ For example, they did not explore the degree to which each specific ABDL subgroup is related to parenting variables and attachment. Moreover, the AB and DL subgroups might have different sexual characteristics that explain the contrasting reports by Evcimen and Gratz¹⁴ vs Caldwell,¹⁹ but prior research has not examined characteristics of these two ABDL subgroups.

Given the lack of literature on the ABDL community and the tendency to pathologize such behaviors,²¹ the purpose of this study was to provide descriptive information on two subtypes of ABDL individuals from a community sample. The present study sought to examine the degree to which each subgroup is related to parenting variables and attachment. Differences by relationship status also were examined. In a third research question, differences by sexual orientation were explored as were differences in sexual attraction to diapers vs adults. Because ABDL behaviors could function to decrease anxiety or negative mood states,²² a final research question focused on the degree to which each ABDL subtype was associated with negative mood states and perceived problems.

METHODS

Participants

The data for this study approved by the institutional review board were taken from a larger survey of an online ABDL community in which the final sample included 1,795 men and 139 women. The participants and procedure used are described fully elsewhere.²⁰ Briefly, participants were recruited through an advertisement posted on ABDL-themed websites. The advertisement requested that viewers complete an online survey to help a therapist gain more accurate information about the ABDL community. The survey was available for 8 weeks.

Participants were informed that the survey was completely anonymous and confidential, that there was no compensation, and that there was no penalty for stopping at any time. Participants consented by clicking on the link to the survey, reading the informed consent online, affirming that they understood the consent form, and verifying that they were at least 18 years old.

The resulting participants were 18 to older than 80 years (mean = 30.7, SD = 12.36). Most participants were men who were attracted to women only. Women tended to be sexually attracted to men and women ($n = 60$) or men only ($n = 47$). Most participants were raised in a two-parent (male and female) household structure (83%). The overall sample reported a mean number of 2.27 lifetime romantic relationships (SD = 2.26, median = 2) and 326 participants (16.8%) reported 0 lifetime relationships. The average age of participants who reported zero lifetime relationships was 25.9 years (SD = 10.18).

Measures

Participants were asked to give their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and household structure (ie, number and sex of parents while growing up). To assess sexual orientation, participants were asked whether they were sexually attracted to neither men nor women, men only, women only, or men and women. Participants also were asked how many hours they wore diapers in a typical day. Using a Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), participants were asked their level of agreement with the statement “I am

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