
Brief Report

Personal Advertisements of Male-to-Female Transsexuals, Homosexual Men, and Heterosexuals

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Transsexuals, because of their attempts at gender reversal, offer a unique opportunity to study self-presentation, social roles, and stereotypes. The present study is a content analysis of personal advertisements of male-to-female transsexuals (TM, N = 99), homosexual (HoM, N = 64) and heterosexual men (HM, N = 99), and heterosexual women (HW, N = 99). Advertisements were coded for the presence or absence of 11 characteristics either offered or sought, based on the 1984 work of Deaux and Hanna. The content of TM personal advertisements was significantly different from those of HW, HM, or HoM. TM mentioned physical characteristics and sincerity, and requested friendship most often; HoM mentioned sexuality most often; HM offered financial security and status in the form of occupation, and listed marital status most often; and HW offered personality characteristics and attractiveness most often. Several factors may contribute to the pattern of differences observed, including the fact that TM were more likely to be seeking friendship than sexual partners, in contrast to the other three groups.

For many individuals, personal advertisements offer a unique opportunity for meeting potential partners. Because personal advertisements often in-

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clude both the characteristics of the advertisers and the qualities they seek in a partner, such ads have been a valuable source of information about self-presentation, social roles, gender stereotypes, and judgments of attractiveness in heterosexual and homosexual samples (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). The assumption is that the qualities advertised are those an individual believes are attractive to a potential partner, and are influenced by gender stereotypes.

Research on personal columns has shown that females seek sincerity and permanent relationships more often than do males, and that they are more inclined to offer information about their personalities, physical appearance, and youth (e.g., Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Davis, 1990; Sprecher, Sullivan & Hatfield, 1994; Wiederman, 1993; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). In contrast, men seek physical attractiveness, youth, sexual characteristics, and offer financial security (e.g., Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988; Smith, Waldorf, & Trembath, 1990; Thiessen, Young, & Burroughs, 1993; Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). Thus, women tend to advertise qualities sought by men and vice versa (e.g., Koestner & Wheeler, 1988).

Some have hypothesized that such gender differences are based on biological factors related to sexual selection. Because males can impregnate many females, they are primarily interested in female fecundity (Buss, 1989; Jankowiak, Hill, & Donovan, 1992), and both age and appearance have been linked theoretically to female reproductive capacity (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). In contrast, females may be more interested in status, economics, or finding a genetically superior mate (Feingold, 1992; Bailey et al., 1994). However, social and cultural factors, for which the time necessary for influence and change is far less than evolutionary-genetic factors, are important proximate determinants of behavior.

Regardless of the determinants of the gender differences, ads may evoke different responses: those ads which advertise the qualities most sought by the opposite sex should be most successful. Although not studied extensively, available studies are consistent with the latter hypothesis (Lynn & Shurgot, 1984; Rajecki, Bledose, & Rasmussen, 1991).

Studies of homosexual advertisements offer a view of gender-specific mate selection unencumbered by the strategies of the opposite gender (e.g., Symons, 1979). Two recent studies, one that examined attractiveness judgments (Jankowiak, Hill, & Donovan, 1992) and one that examined personal ads (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993), found that gay men also emphasize physical characteristics and mention sexuality more often than do women. Further, heterosexual men sought long-term relationships and mentioned sincerity more often than did gay men (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). In addition, gay men reportedly engage in more uncommitted sex than do het-

erosexual men and women, or lesbians (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1991). Other studies have reported that gay men are similar to same-sex heterosexual men on a variety of variables related to mating psychology, including interest in uncommitted sex, interest in visual sexual stimuli, importance of physical attractiveness and importance of partner's status (Bailey et al., 1994). Such studies suggest that evolutionary and social-cognitive factors may interact with sexual preference to contribute to mating behavior.

Although a number of studies have analyzed the content of personal advertisements for homosexual and heterosexual males and females, there are no similar studies of individuals who are gender dysphoric. Male-to-female transsexualism is defined as, "persistent discomfort and sense of inappropriateness about one's assigned sex" (DSM-III-R), and is often characterized by a desire for a female body and the female social role (Blanchard, 1985). Male transsexuals may be either homosexual or heterosexual (Blanchard, 1985), although male-to-female transsexuals who are androphilic appear to have better adjustment to gender reorientation (Johnson & Hunt, 1990).

Male-to-female transsexuals reportedly adopt stereotypical feminine roles (Blanchard, McConkey, Roper, & Steiner, 1983), and may even exaggerate traditional female stereotypes (Brems, Adams, & Skillman, 1993). As such, transsexuals offer a unique opportunity to study self-presentation, social roles, and stereotypes. The present study is a content analysis of personal advertisements of transsexuals, homosexual, and heterosexual men, and heterosexual women. We hypothesized that transsexuals would be distinctly different in self-presentation from heterosexual or homosexual males, and that characteristics offered would blend both those qualities sought by heterosexual men and those advertised by heterosexual women.

METHODS

Advertisements

Personal advertisements of male to female transsexuals were collected from five issues of *TV/TS Tapestry: A Journal for All Persons Interested in Crossdressing & Transsexualism* (1986 through 1989). Personal advertisements of heterosexual males and females and homosexual males were collected from the *New York Review of Books* (1986-1989). Advertisements from transsexual males ($n = 99$), heterosexual males ($n = 99$), heterosexual females ($n = 99$), and homosexual males ($n = 64$) were analyzed. Male to female transsexuals' advertisements were analyzed only in cases of self-

assigned transsexualism to avoid the inclusion of transvestites' advertisements. Only male to female transsexuals' advertisements were analyzed because there were not enough female to male transsexuals to provide a sample. The majority of personal ads analyzed appeared to be from Caucasian, middle class advertisers.

Coding Categories

Advertisements were coded dichotomously for 10 characteristics offered and for requests for friendship. Very few qualities other than friendship were advertised for, probably because *Tapestry's* circulation includes primarily male-to-female transvestites and transsexuals. All but one of the categories were taken from Deaux and Hanna (1984).

Variable Coding. Positive adjectives for physical characteristics (Physical) were coded. Advertisements included adjectives like "pretty," "handsome," and "feminine." Explicit sexual references (Sexuality), such as sexual fantasies, specific sexual behavior, or sexual adjectives such as, "sensuous," "sexy," and "passionate," were coded. Descriptions of physical appearance (Appearance), such as height, weight, eye color, and thinness, were coded. Mention of the advertisers' financial status, or adjectives such as "prosperity," "financial security" or "successfulness," were coded (Financial Security). References to characteristics exemplifying good character and trustworthiness in a relationship (Sincerity), such as "honesty," "loyalty," and "dependability," were coded. Descriptions of cognitive or personality disposition (Personality), such as "intelligent," "loving," "caring," "thoughtful," and "funny," were coded. Mention of specific hobbies or activities (Hobbies), such as hiking, sewing, sailing, reading, and traveling, was coded. Reference to a specific job or profession was coded as the variable, Occupation. Mention or omission of current marital status was coded. Reference to an exact age or age range, such as "fifties," was coded (age). Finally, specific request for a supportive friendship was the only desired quality that was coded (Friendship).

Procedure

The categories were coded present or absent for the subject offering them as self-descriptors and for requests of friendship. Interrater reliability was analyzed for 12% of the advertisements. Percent absolute agreement was 95.8.

Table I. Percentages of Subjects Including Qualities in Personal Advertisements^a

Quality	HM	HF	TM	HoM	F
Sexuality	3 _b	7 _b	4 _b	17 _a	4.8 ^c
Physical	43 _b	42 _b	85 _a	53 _b	17.7 ^c
Attractiveness	42 _b	75 _a	26 _c	41 _b	19.4 ^c
Personality	55 _b	68 _a	44 _b	50 _b	4.1 ^c
Sincerity	9 _b	8 _b	20 _a	8 _b	3.4 ^b
Hobbies	43	51	54	45	.88
Occupation	73	57	17	48	25.6 ^c
Marital Status	59 _a	5 _c	37 _b	9 _c	17.5 ^c
Age	71	73	70	88	2.5
Friendship	1 _c	5 _c	53 _a	23 _b	47.2 ^c

^aHM = Heterosexual male, HF = Heterosexual Female, TM = Transsexual Male, HoM = Homosexual Male. Means in the same row that do not share the same subscript differ at $p < .05$ in the Tukey's post hoc differences test.

^b $p < .05$.

^c $p < .01$.

RESULTS

Male to female transsexuals (TM) included significantly different qualities in personal advertisements than heterosexual females (HF), heterosexual males (HM), or homosexual males (HoM). The percentages of people in each group presenting specific characteristics were compared, and Tukey's post hoc tests identified pairwise differences. Significant differences were found in the percentage of each group describing personal attractiveness, personality traits, physical characteristics, sexual references, characteristics of sincerity, occupation, and marital status, and the percentage of each group seeking friendship (see Table I). Pairwise differences are described below.

A significantly larger percentage of heterosexual females listed descriptors of attractiveness than HM, HoM, or TM, whereas a larger percentage of HM listed more descriptors of attractiveness than TM ($F(3,358) = 19.4$, $p < .001$; HF 75%, HM 42%, HoM 41%, TM 26%). Descriptors included "pretty" and "handsome." In addition, a larger percentage of HF described personality traits compared to TM ($F(3,358) = 4.1$, $p = .007$; HF 68%, TM 44%). Personality traits included "funny," "outgoing," and "whimsical." In contrast, significantly more transsexual males described physical characteristics ($F(3,358) = 17.7$, $p < .001$; TM 85%, HF 42%, HM 43%, HoM 53%). Characteristics included height, weight, clothing size, and fitness.

A significantly larger percentage of homosexual males made sexual references ($F(3,358) = 4.8$, $p = .003$; HoM 17%, HM 3%, HF 3%, TM 4%).

Sexual descriptors included "passionate" and "sexy." In contrast, transsexual males discussed sincerity more often than any other group ($F(3, 358) = 3.4, p = .02$; TM 20%, HM 9%, HF 8%, HoM 8%). For example, the descriptors "honest," "sincere," and "loyal" were advertised.

Heterosexual males listed occupation significantly more often than any other group, and transsexual males listed occupation less often than any other group ($F(3,358) = 25.6, p < .001$; HM 73%, HF 57%, HoM 48%, TM 17%). These occupations included professor, artist, and professional. Further, heterosexual males described their marital status more often than the other groups and transsexual males described their marital status more often than HF and HoM ($F(3,358) = 17.5, p < .001$; HM 59%, HF 5%, HoM 9%, TM 37%).

Significantly more transsexual males asked for a friendship in their ads than any other group while homosexual males asked for friendship more often than heterosexual males and females ($F(3,358) = 47.2, p < .001$); TM 53%, HoM 23%, HM 1%, HF 5%). No significant differences were found in the percentage of each group listing hobbies or age.

DISCUSSION

The content of male to female transsexuals' personal advertisements was distinctly different from those found in the advertisements of heterosexual males, heterosexual females, and homosexual males. The qualities which were predominant in the ads of HM, HF, and HoM were consistent with the findings of previous research on personal advertisements and with the theory that the qualities people advertise when looking for a mate are a combination of those which they feel are important *in* a mate and those they believe are important *to* a potential mate.

The present study found that heterosexual women offered personality characteristics and attractiveness most often. This finding is consistent with previous findings that women are inclined to offer information about their appearance and personalities (e.g., Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Sprecher et al., 1994; Wiederman, 1993; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Bailey et al., 1994). Women may offer attractiveness in their advertisements as indicators of their reproductive status (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). It is notable that females in the present study did not list their age significantly more often than males. However, very few ads in any category mentioned age.

Heterosexual males offered financial security and status in the form of occupation, and listed marital status more often than did the other groups. This finding is consistent with earlier research reporting that men advertise financial security most often (e.g., Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Koest-

ner & Wheeler, 1988; Smith et al., 1990; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Thiessen, Young, & Burroughs, 1993; Willis & Carlson, 1993; Bailey et al., 1994). Further, the high frequency of reports of occupation by heterosexual men is consistent with the idea that men advertise what women seek. Similarly, the finding that men offered sincerity as often as women may be a response to women's desire for a committed relationship. Women may seek status and economic stability because such characteristics are important predictors of a man's ability to support offspring (Feingold, 1992; Bailey et al., 1994).

Homosexual males mentioned sexuality significantly more often than any other group. This finding is in accordance with previous research which found that homosexual men mention sexuality more often than women (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). In addition, HoM offered attractiveness more often than transsexual males.

In contrast, transsexual males mentioned physical characteristics and sincerity, and requested friendship more often than any other group. In addition, they mentioned marital status as often as heterosexual males. In general, the transsexuals in the study appeared to be seeking friendship more often than romantic or sexual relationships. This primary interest in friendship may have affected the characteristics mentioned in the ads. For example, the lack of emphasis on sexual characteristics and the importance of sincerity in transsexual ads may be related to their strong interest in friendship rather than sexual partnership. Alternatively, transsexuals' interest in sincerity and friendship parallels the heterosexual female's desire for a stable and supportive mate, and such qualities might be related to gender-stereotypic behavioral patterns. The transsexuals' emphasis on physical characteristics, however, is probably the result of their concern and/or pride with passing as female, and may be different from HF's advertising attractiveness.

Further, transsexuals advertised personality traits less, despite their emphasis on sincerity and friendship. Finally, transsexuals rarely mentioned occupation, in contrast to heterosexual men and women and gay men. Sociobiological theory posits that occupation is an important criterion for female mate selection, and would therefore be offered by heterosexual males most often. The present study confirms that heterosexual men advertise occupation most often, and suggests that status and/or finances are not perceived as important selection criteria for transsexuals. This may be a reflection of interest in friendship rather than partnership in some of the advertisements.

In conclusion, transsexuals appear to advertise distinctly different qualities when compared to other categories of gender and sexual preference. They differed from gay men in the areas of sexuality, physical characteristics, attractiveness, occupation, and sincerity. The content of their

ads was most similar to those of heterosexual men, perhaps because of early socialization as males, but differed in the areas of physical characteristics and desire for friendship. Finally, transsexuals differed from heterosexual women in the frequency with which they advertise almost every quality except age, hobbies, and sexuality. These findings confirm the hypothesis that male-to-female transsexuals are distinctly different in their advertising strategies than gay men and heterosexual men and women, although they are most similar to heterosexual men.

Limitations of the study include the risk of Type I error due to the number of comparisons made and the potential confound of using a different publication as a course of transsexual ads. In addition, male-to-female transsexuals are heterogeneous in terms of sexual orientation (e.g., Leavitt & Berger, 1990), and it was not clear whether the transsexuals included in the study were androphilic or gynophilic, primary or secondary; or seeking sex reassignment surgery. Future research should investigate subgroups of transsexuals and their impact on self-presentation in advertisements.

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