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ABSTRACT

Reported partner knowledge of and involvement in Adult Baby/Diaper Lover (ABDL) behavior were examined based on responses from 1,795 male and 139 female members of the ABDL community. Individuals in a relationship often divulge their ABDL interests early in dating. Some partners may have tried ABDL activity initially, but most are not involved. Involved nonpartners may be sanctioned ABDL friends. Nonpartners are usually not involved in ABDL practices because it is viewed as infidelity. Individuals who have never been in a relationship may be working to reconcile their ABDL interests with building a romantic relationship.

Key Words

Adult Baby Diaper Lover, paraphilia, infantilism, ABDL, fetishism

INTRODUCTION

Atypical sexual preferences and behaviors have been classified as sexual deviations, mental disorders, or paraphilias (Kafka, 2010; Moser, 2016). Prior research on paraphilias often includes individuals presenting for treatment (e.g., Kafka & Hennen, 2002) and case studies (e.g., First, 2005). Research on paraphilias has typically not focused on community-based samples. In one exception, a large Australian study suggested that paraphilias are not associated with psychopathology and simply reflect a sexual subgroup (Richters, de Visser, Rissel, Grulich, & Smith, 2008).

Little research has examined characteristics of the romantic partners or relationships of persons who have an atypical sexual interest. More papers have been published on bondage and discipline, sadomasochism or dominance and submission (BDSM) than other types of atypical sexual interests (Williams, Prior, Alvarado, Thomas, & Christensen, 2016), but most of these studies focus on characteristics of the people who practice BDSM (e.g., Richters et al., 2008). In one exception, 21 BDSM practitioners were who interviewed about their lives reported an enhanced sense of communication, trust, and intimacy in their romantic relationships (Herbert & Weaver, 2015). A 2009 study of German males with paraphilic sexual arousal patterns found that 16.9% of the sample was single and that being single was associated with a greater likelihood of having at least one paraphilia-type sexual arousal pattern (Ahlers et al., 2011). The authors could not conclude if the atypical sexual interests were related to the lack of building or maintaining a romantic relationship.

Fetishism is a paraphilia characterized by recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving the use of nonliving objects. Although there are many types

of fetishism, the current study focused on individuals who wear diapers and/or participate in infant-like role play. This behavior has been called autonepiophilia or paraphilic infantilism (Money, 1986; see also Money, 1984), Adult Baby Syndrome (Pate & Gabbard, 2003; see also Giles, 2012), or a type of sexual masochism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). A simple internet search suggests that a large number of adults engage in these behaviors. Members of this community generally refer to themselves as adult babies (AB), those who enjoy role-playing as infants, and diaper lovers (DL), those who wear diapers voluntarily but may not engage in other baby-like behaviors. As a group, they are referred to as Adult Baby/Diaper Lovers (ABDL).

In the psychological literature, case studies of ABDL behavior appeared as early as the 1960s and 1970s (Bethell, 1974; Dinello, 1967; Malitz, 1966; Tuchman & Lachman, 1964). More recent reports of ABDL cases continue to consist of individuals seeking psychiatric care (Croarkin, Nam, & Waldrep, 2004; Evcimen & Gratz, 2006; Kise & Nguyen, 2011; Lehne & Money, 2003; Pandita-Gunawardena, 1990; Pate & Gabbard, 2003; Sanders, 1997). These reports have typically provided little information about the ABDL individual's romantic relationship history. Evcimen and Gratz (2006) described an ABDL patient (age 57) who was married and experiencing psychiatric problems. Other papers described ABDL individuals who are single and in their 30s (Croarkin, Nam, & Waldrep, 2004; Kise & Nguyen, 2011), some of whom have dated in the past (Pate & Gabbard, 2003). Lehne and Money (2003) describe in detail an ABDL case of a man who married at 21, but he also exhibited cross-dressing and abusive behaviors with his son; the man in this case did not identify as ABDL until age 45. Per the case report, his wife initially tolerated his cross-dressing before sex and later during sexual activity, but subsequently no longer tolerated it. She would not have sex if he had cross-dressed,

but did not prohibit his cross-dressing socially. Little information was available about his wife's reaction to his ABDL interests except that he would sleep separate from her at times for his ABDL activity (Lehne & Money, 2003).

Hawkinson and Zamboni (2014) reported data from a community sample of ABDL individuals via an online survey, and the current study is a secondary analysis of data from that project. Per their report, when compared to females, males in the ABDL community identified their ABDL interests earlier and may be more focused on sexual aspects of ABDL practices. Both males and females perceived being dominated as important in their ABDL behavior. With regard to relationships, they found that 49% of the male participants and 47% of the female participants were currently in a relationship. There were no sex differences in the following variables: number of lifetime committed relationships, relationship duration, number of years their romantic partner has known of their ABDL interests, and frequency of a nonpartner being involved in their ABDL behavior. Female participants reported a higher frequency of their romantic partner being involved in their ABDL behavior when compared to males. In their survey, most participants were comfortable with their ABDL behavior and reported few problems (Hawkinson & Zamboni, 2014).

Given the lack of literature on the ABDL community and the tendency to pathologize such behaviors (Moser, 2005), the purpose of this study was to provide descriptive information on the relationships of ABDL individuals from a community sample. The prior analyses from the Hawkinson and Zamboni (2014) data focused on sex differences, so the current study sought to examine relationship characteristics with more depth than previously reported. Specifically, using qualitative data, this paper sought to explore strategies that ABDL individuals may have

used in communicating their ABDL interests to a partner. A second research question sought to explore levels of an ABDL person's romantic partner involvement in the ABDL behavior versus a nonpartner. Finally, this study sought to explore the degree to which relationship status was related to comfort with ABDL interests and negative mood states.

METHOD

Participants

The data for this IRB-approved study were taken from a larger survey of an online ABDL community in which the final sample included 1,795 male and 139 female participants. Thus, the participants and procedure used are described fully elsewhere (Hawkinson & Zamboni, 2014). Briefly, participants were recruited from ABDL community websites. An advertisement with a link to the survey on SurveyMonkey was posted on each ABDL-themed website. The advertisement requested that viewers complete a 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 to completing the survey, and that there was no penalty for stopping at any time during the survey. Participants consented to take part in the study by clicking on the link to the survey, affirming that they understood the consent form, and verifying that they were 18 years or older.

The resulting participants ranged in age from 18 years to over 80 years ($M = 30.7$, $SD = 12.36$). Table 1 shows demographic information by sex. The majority of the participants were males (93%) who were attracted to females only. Female participants tended to be sexually attracted to both males and females (43%) or males only (34%). The highest level of formal

education varied considerably (see Table 1), but most participants had received at least a high school diploma. Income levels ranged from less than \$25,000 per year to over \$100,000 per year, but the largest group of participants reported making less than \$25,000. Participants with a job ($n = 1484$) had spent about 6 years at their current position ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 7.24$).

Measures

Participants were asked to give their age, sexual orientation, education level, length of time at their current job, and income. Participants were asked to specify the number of their committed romantic relationships in their lifetime, whether or not they were in a current relationship (yes or no), and how many years they had been in their current relationship (if applicable). Next, they were asked if their partner knew about their ABDL interests or behaviors (yes or no) and were then asked how many years their current or most recent partner had known about their ABDL interests or behaviors. They had the option to provide qualitative comments about this. Using Likert-type scales, participants indicated how frequently their romantic partner was involved in their ABDL behaviors and how often someone other than their romantic partner was involved in their ABDL behaviors. With both questions, participants had the option of including qualitative comments.

Using a Likert-type response format (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*), participants were asked to give their level of agreement with the statement “I am comfortable with my ABDL practices.” Participants were also asked, “How do you view the ABDL aspects of your life?” (1 = *Extremely negatively* to 7 = *Extremely positively*).

Mood states were measured using Shacham’s (1983) shortened version of the Profile of Mood States (POMS). Thirty-seven items were used to measure six separate factors: Tension-

Anxiety, Depression-Dejection, Anger-Hostility, Fatigue-Inertia, Vigor-Activity, and Confusion-Bewilderment. Participants responded to each item based upon how they had been feeling the past week, including that day. Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). To obtain a total score, subscales were added together (with the exception of Vigor-Activity, which was subtracted). Higher total scores reflected higher mood disturbance. The internal consistency for the overall scale in this study was .94.

Statistical Analysis

Differences by relationship status were examined using multivariate analyses of variance, correlational analyses were used to examine the first two research questions, and both types of analyses were used to examine the third research question. Due to the large number of participants and analyses, the criterion for statistical significance was set at .01.

Grounded theory was used to analyze the qualitative responses to relationship questions in the survey (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Three coders read the participants' responses to identify themes in the data. The coders compared their respective themes, elucidating definitions and resolving differences. The final themes used for data analysis reflect the agreed upon coding scheme.

RESULTS

The overall sample reported a mean number of 2.27 lifetime romantic relationships ($SD = 2.26$; $Md = 2$) and 326 participants (16.8%) reported zero lifetime relationships. Number of lifetime committed relationships was correlated with age ($r = .17, p < .001, n = 1939$). Based on the number of reported romantic relationships and the question of whether or not the participant is currently in a relationship, participants were placed into one of three groups: individuals who

have never been in a relationship, individuals who are not currently in a relationship but have had one in the past, and individuals who are currently in a relationship (see Table 2). This variable was deemed to be relationship status.

An ANOVA was conducted with relationship status (i.e., the three groups) as the independent variable and age as the dependent variable. The overall ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 1939) = 57.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. Power to detect the effect was 1.00. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that individuals who have never been in a relationship were significantly younger than each of the other two groups and that individuals who were currently in a relationship were significantly older than those who were currently single but had prior relationships (see Table 2).

An ANCOVA was conducted with relationship status as the independent variable and number of lifetime committed relationships as the dependent variable. Participants who never had a romantic relationship were excluded and the analysis covaried for age. The ANCOVA was significant, $F(1, 1613) = 11.46, p < .002, \eta^2 = .01$. Power to detect the effect was .79. Compared to unattached participants, participants in a relationship reported a higher number of lifetime relationships (see Table 2).

Relationship Status and Partner Knowledge of ABDL

Covarying for age and excluding participants who have never been in a relationship, a MANCOVA was conducted with relationship status as the independent variable and the following two dependent variables: the number of years participants were in their current or most recent relationship and the number of years the participants' current or most recent partner knew about their ABDL interests or behaviors. The dependent variables were strongly correlated ($r = .86, p < .001, n = 938$). The overall MANCOVA was significant, Wilks' $\lambda = .95, F(2, 934) =$

26.15, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Power to detect the effect was 1.00. Compared to unattached participants, participants in a relationship reported more years of being in their relationship and more years of their current or most recent partner knowing about their ABDL interests or behavior (see Table 2).

Using only participants who were currently in a romantic relationship, a correlation was conducted between reported length of their relationship and the following two variables: how long their partner has known about their ABDL behaviors ($r = .87$, $p < .001$, $n = 768$) and how long they have been practicing ABDL behaviors ($r = .51$, $p < .001$, $n = 951$). Length of relationship was positively associated with number of years that their partner has known of their ABDL practices as well as number of years of practicing ABDL.

Qualitative Comments on Partner Knowledge of ABDL

Of the participants in a current relationship, 79% ($n = 752$) indicated that their partner knows about their ABDL interests and 21% ($n = 196$) indicated that their partner does not know. When participants had the option to comment on their romantic partner knowing about their ABDL, 305 participants made comments (see Table 3). The most common theme involved individuals who told their partner early in the relationship ($n = 77$). These participants often emphasized the importance of good communication out of respect for their partners and for themselves (e.g., Table 3, quote 2). Other participants reported that their partner is ABDL ($n = 42$), noting that they met their partner via an ABDL social network (e.g., Table 3, quote 4). Another theme involved participants who told their partner 6 or more months after the relationship started ($n = 28$). These participants noted that the topic was difficult to broach and they wanted to have good timing for the disclosure (e.g., Table 3, quote 7).

Some participants indicated that their partner is accepting of their ABDL behavior but do not participate ($n = 26$), while others stated that their partners dislike their ABDL interests ($n = 17$). In the latter theme, it was clear that tensions existed in the relationship (e.g., Table 3, quotes 10 and 11). Several participants described a pattern of their partner progressively discovering their ABDL interests ($n = 21$). Although this was a deliberate strategy by some participants (e.g., Table 3, quote 14), some partners experienced this on their own (e.g., Table 3, quote 15). In some of these cases, participants feigned medical issues to explain their ABDL interests to their partner (e.g., Table 3, quotes 16 and 17). Comments were also made by some participants whose partner did not know about their ABDL side ($n = 22$). These responses suggested that the individuals were concerned about damaging or losing their relationship by disclosing their ABDL interests (e.g., Table 3, quote 18). Several participants who were single ($n = 53$) simply chose to state this, but a few of these individuals described how they would not practice ABDL while in a relationship, suggesting that it might be unnecessary to disclose this to a partner (e.g., Table 3, quote 20).

Partner and Nonpartner Involvement in ABDL Behavior

The frequencies of partner involvement in ABDL behavior and non-partner involvement in ABDL are displayed in Table 4. For participants who were currently in a relationship, over 50% reported that their partner is never or rarely involved in their ABDL activity. This was also evident in the frequencies for nonpartner involvement, where 64% of participants currently in a relationship indicated that a nonpartner is never involved in their ABDL behavior.

To examine further the degree of partner involvement in ABDL behavior, an ANCOVA was conducted with relationship status as the independent variable and frequency of partner

involvement as the dependent variable. Participants who never had a romantic relationship were excluded and the analysis covaried for age. Participants who were single were reporting the degree to which their most recent partner was involved in their ABDL behavior. The ANCOVA was significant, $F(1, 1613) = 121.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Power to detect the effect was 1.00. Compared to unattached participants, participants in a relationship reported more frequent involvement of their partner ABDL interests or behavior (see Table 2).

Using only participants who were currently in a romantic relationship, a correlation was conducted between reported length of their relationship and the following two variables: how often their romantic partner is involved in their ABDL behavior ($r = -.09, p < .007, n = 951$) and how often someone other than their romantic partner is involved in their behavior ($r = -.01, p < .807, n = 946$). Length of relationship was negatively associated with frequency of partner being involved in their ABDL behavior. In another correlation using only participants who were currently in a romantic relationship, number of years of their partner knowing about their ABDL interests was negatively associated with how often their romantic partner is involved in their ABDL behavior ($r = -.08, p < .029, n = 768$). This correlation was not statistically significant at the .01 level.

Qualitative Comments on Partner Involvement in ABDL

When participants had the option to comment on their romantic partner being involved in their ABDL practices, 235 participants made comments (see Table 5). The most common theme involved partners who are very involved or who are also ABDL ($n = 46$). They met their partners met at an ABDL function or the partners simply enjoy ABDL activity (e.g., Table 5, quote 2). Several participants stated that their partner does not participate despite accepting or supporting

the ABDL behavior ($n = 42$). Per the data, these partners were not concerned or bothered by the ABDL activity, but they were not interested in partaking in any way (e.g., Table 5, quote 5).

Another theme was participants who described their partner as making some effort to engage in ABDL initially, but eventually discontinuing due to disinterest ($n = 39$). In some cases the experimentation simply did not work because of poor chemistry (e.g., Table 5, quote 8) while in others the process resulted in negative feelings for the participant (e.g., Table 5, quote 9).

Other participants commented that their partner was moderately involved in their ABDL practices ($n = 20$). Responses in this theme described how ABDL is an activity they enjoy occasionally and is not a consistent necessity (e.g., Table 5, quote 12). Some participants reported that their partner dislikes ABDL practices and thus is not involved ($n = 15$). A few participants ($n = 10$) prefer to practice ABDL alone, so their partner is not involved. One individual noted that the fantasy of ABDL activity is better than partnered ABDL behaviors (Table 5, quote 16). A small number of participants ($n = 7$) reported that their partner partakes in ABDL behaviors with them, but not in person (e.g., long distance relationship; see Table 5, quote 17). Several participants commented that they were not in a relationship even though the question did not apply to them ($n = 34$). One individual elaborated by reporting discomfort in starting a relationship due to low confidence (e.g., Table 5, quote 19).

Qualitative Comments on Nonpartner Involvement in ABDL

When participants had the option to comment on someone other than their romantic partner being involved in their ABDL practices, 129 participants made comments (see Table 6). The most common theme was activity with ABDL friends ($n = 40$), followed by the theme that any nonpartner involvement in ABDL activity constitutes infidelity ($n = 16$). In the latter, they

described ABDL activity as special and only appropriate with a romantic partner (e.g., Table 6, quote 4). Several participants expressed that they did not know of anyone who could join them in ABDL activity ($n = 13$). They were either socially isolated or felt that they lacked courage to ask anyone to be involved (e.g., Table 6, quote 7). Some participants reported ABDL activity with friends ($n = 12$) without labeling the friend as ABDL and a few participants indicated that close friends knew of their ABDL interests but did not participate ($n = 8$). In the latter theme, participants noted that their ABDL activity is simply a topic that arises socially at times (e.g., Table 6, quote 10). A few participants ($n = 9$) reported that their nonpartner ABDL activity occurs online only. A small number of participants ($n = 5$) have used or want to use a professional for ABDL activity.

Regardless of themes, several participants made the point that ABDL activity with nonpartners does not include sexual behaviors (e.g., Table 6, quotes 2, 9). In addition to the aforementioned themes, four participants made reference to their partner being bisexual, being in a polyamorous relationship, or being in an open relationship to explain their involvement of a nonpartner. Also, a few participants mentioned that a family member knew of their ABDL interests: a 20-year-old daughter, a sister with incontinence, a brother (though unclear if biological), and a biological mother. The biological mother was described as partaking in ABDL activity. The sister was described as having introduced AB play to the participant as a coping mechanism, AB play that they sometimes do together.

Relationship Status and Comfort

An analysis was conducted to examine if negative mood states varied by relationship status. Covarying for age, an ANCOVA was conducted with relationship status as the

independent variable (i.e., all three groups) and the overall Profile of Mood States score as the dependent variable. The overall ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 1524) = 14.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$. Power to detect the effect was .99. Follow-up comparisons indicated that participants currently in a relationship reported lower levels of negative mood states than both unattached participants who had prior relationships and participants who had never been in a relationship (see Table 2).

Responses to the two statements “I am comfortable with my ABDL practices” and “How do you view the ABDL aspects of your life” (1 = extremely negatively to 7 = extremely positively) were strongly correlated ($r = .59, p < .001, n = 1657$). Covarying for age, a MANCOVA was conducted with relationship status as the independent variable (i.e., all three groups) and the aforementioned two statements as dependent variables. The overall MANCOVA was significant, Wilks’ $\lambda = .99, F(4, 3314) = 5.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$. Power to detect the effect was .92. There were statistically significant differences among the groups for both dependent variables. Follow-up comparisons indicated that participants currently in a relationship reported significantly higher levels of comfort with their ABDL practices than participants who had never been in a relationship (see Table 2). In addition, participants currently in a relationship viewed the ABDL aspects of their life more positively than both unattached participants who had prior relationships and participants who had never been in a relationship (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

This was an exploratory study of individuals in the ABDL online community. There were three main research questions: What strategies do ABDL individuals use in communicating their ABDL interests to a partner? How involved is an ABDL person’s romantic partner in the ABDL

behavior versus a nonpartner? Is relationship status related to comfort with ABDL interests and negative mood states? There is diversity in the responses, but ABDL individuals who are in a relationship often tell their partners about their ABDL interests early in the relationship. Their partners, who are unlikely to be ABDL themselves, usually do not partake in the ABDL activity. Nonpartners are also typically not involved in the ABDL practices. ABDL individuals who are in a relationship are more likely to be comfortable with their ABDL practices and have less negative mood states than ABDL persons who have never been in a relationship.

The sample in this study was possibly over-represented by ABDL individuals who are in committed relationships (i.e., nearly triple the number of participants who had never been in a relationship) and secondarily by ABDL persons who were single but had been in past relationships (i.e., double the number of participants who had never been in a relationship). It is possible that ABDL individuals who are in a relationship are more likely to belong to the ABDL online community because they have gained knowledge and comfort with their ABDL interests over time.

Partner Knowledge of ABDL

The data suggest that partners of ABDL individuals usually know about their ABDL interests. When partners do not know, it is likely because the ABDL individual is concerned about losing the romantic relationship. This fits with other research on disclosure of sexual information that may be stigmatizing, such as sexually transmitted infections (Cunningham, Meyers, Kerrigan, & Ellen, 2007). The data suggest that some persons practice ABDL alone and do not need a partner and some individuals do not practice ABDL while in a relationship. In these situations, the ABDL history or activity may seem irrelevant to a partner. Nonetheless, it

raises a practical and some would argue ethical point: Does ABDL activity need to be divulged to a partner if it is not current or if it simply a solo private activity?

Telling a partner early in the romantic relationship was practiced and advised by most participants in this study. This seemed to be an act of respect for both the partner and the ABDL individual, who wanted to see if they were compatible and the relationship would work. These ABDL individuals may be verifying if the partner is truly accepting and loving of them. This fits with prior research that suggests sexual self-disclosure is related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999).

Other ABDL individuals simply met their partner via an ABDL social venue, making disclosure irrelevant. Some ABDL participants did not tell their partner early, opting to wait six or more months for disclosure. These individuals may have wanted to build a sense of trust or intimacy before they shared a part of their lives that they may consider personal or difficult to share. Other ABDL individuals gradually disclosed their ABDL interests, some of whom would cite medical necessity as a way to make the practices acceptable. Perhaps there is not necessarily one correct strategy of divulging ABDL behavior, but how the information is learned may be important. Accidental discovery by the ABDL participant's partner may lead to feelings of hurt or anger due to the lack of clear and direct communication, as suggested by some data in this study. It is possible that ABDL individuals who wait too long to disclose also run the risk that their partners will be upset due to perceived dishonesty.

Partner and Nonpartner Involvement in ABDL

Although most partners know about their ABDL loved one's ABDL interests, a large portion of them do not participate in ABDL activity. As indicated by both the quantitative and

qualitative data, partner participation in ABDL activity may decrease over the duration of the relationship. For example, some partners were reported to attempt participation early in the relationship, but discontinue due to disinterest. Regular ABDL activity between two individuals may be more likely to occur when both identify as ABDL or the partner enjoys it enough to partake in it more regularly. It is not clear from the results the degree to which ABDL individuals may be disappointed or unhappy that their partner does not engage in ABDL behaviors with them. Future research could examine this with greater depth. Future research should also discern if the involvement of a partner is more important for ABDL persons who prefer role playing versus simply wearing a diaper. The latter activity may not require the participation of a romantic partner.

For ABDL participants currently in a relationship, a large majority never or rarely involve a nonpartner in their ABDL activity. This has also been shown in research on BDSM (Richters et al., 2008). Given that a notable percentage of these ABDL participants also never or rarely have their partner involved in the ABDL behaviors, it seems that many of these ABDL individuals are practicing ABDL activity alone. The involvement of a nonpartner in ABDL activity seems to be akin to infidelity to many participants. This raises the notion that ABDL behavior may be considered emotional or intimate even if it is not considered sexual. ABDL participants often make the point that their ABDL activity is not sexual in nature (Hawkinson & Zamboni, 2014).

Nonpartners involved in ABDL activity tended to be ABDL friends, some of whom have been sanctioned by the ABDL individual's romantic partner. This suggests that ABDL individuals and their romantic partners may engage in a process of negotiation to allow a

nonpartner to be involved. Future research could examine this process of negotiation to determine how it occurs while maintaining relationship harmony. Permission to involve a nonpartner may depend upon the type of ABDL practices under consideration, which can be another focus of future research.

Some ABDL participants may be off-setting their partner's lack of involvement by practicing ABDL behavior online and using the services of a professional. Level of satisfaction with online ABDL behaviors and practices with professionals should be examined in future research, particularly given that some ABDL participants find ABDL behaviors to be intimate. Still, non-ABDL individuals may derive satisfaction with the same types of activities despite many persons viewing sexual activity as special and intimate (e.g., Savitz, & Rosen, 1988).

Relationship Status and Comfort with ABDL

Although ABDL participants who had never been in a relationship reported higher levels of negative mood states than the other two relationship status groups, it is not clear if these emotions are related to ABDL activity *per se* or unhappiness with being single. It is possible that these ABDL participants are still working to reconcile their ABDL interests with the process of initiating and maintaining a romantic relationship. This conclusion is bolstered by the finding that ABDL participants who never had a relationship expressed less comfort with and less positivity about their ABDL interests when compared to participants who were currently in a relationship. Difficulty with self-acceptance of atypical sexual interests has been reported in the BDM literature (Herbert & Weaver, 2015).

ABDL participants who were single but had been in a prior relationship viewed the ABDL aspects of their life less positively when compared to ABDL participants who were

currently in a relationship. Similarly, the former group had more negative mood states when compared to the latter group. It is possible that ABDL participants who were single but had been in a prior relationship blame their ABDL interests for the breakup of a past relationship and current single status. In this sense, these ABDL participants may also be still working to reconcile their ABDL interests with the challenge of maintaining a romantic relationship. Future research could examine how ABDL individuals who are in a committed relationship can share their life lessons in this regard in order to help others in the ABDL community.

It should be noted that the current project did not fully address the meaning or function of ABDL behavior for the individuals who have those interests. Understanding what needs are being fulfilled via the ABDL behavior could lead an exploration of how those needs or interests can be met in a relationship without necessarily engaging in ABDL behaviors. This is an alternative approach to addressing ABDL issues in a romantic relationship whereby the ABDL motivations are examined with depth and possibly challenged, rather than merely accepted. Such processing can easily occur in therapy sessions, but future research should also examine this approach.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this survey. The results may not be generalizable because people who partake in the ABDL behavior may not all belong to an online community. Members of the online ABDL community may be more comfortable with ABDL practices. The survey was also limited to persons who were literate in English. Not all participants in the study provided qualitative responses to questions in the survey. Participants may have provided biased

responses in order to depict a desired outcome (e.g., under-reporting negative mood states).

Causal inferences cannot be made from the correlations in this study.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study, there are important contributions for clinical work and research. Therapists working with ABDL clients who are struggling with relationship building can promote the idea of early disclosure, working on self-acceptance as needed. When only one person in a relationship is ABDL, therapists can advocate for the idea that committed relationship partners may not have to share the same sex-related interests. Future research might conduct more in-depth examinations of ABDL individuals and direct reports from their partners, exploring how they resolved any differences in their relationships. The communication and sexual negotiation skills espoused by ABDL persons in relationships may be applicable to other relationships, whether the sexuality involved seems typical or atypical.

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Table 1 Demographic Information by Sex

	Males				Females			
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%
Mean age in years	30.92	(12.54)			26.90	(8.91)		
Sexual orientation								
Sexually attracted to females only			1043	(58)			24	(17)
Sexually attracted to males only			330	(18)			47	(34)
Sexually attracted to both males and females			339	(19)			60	(43)
Sexually attracted to neither males nor females			83	(5)			8	(6)
Highest level of formal education								
Some high school or less			59	(4)			4	(3)
High school diploma or GED			338	(19)			30	(22)
Some college			510	(28)			43	(31)
Two-year college degree			190	(11)			15	(11)
Four-year college degree			362	(20)			17	(12)
Some graduate level coursework			79	(4)			3	(2)
Graduate degree			257	(14)			27	(19)
Mean number of years at current job ^a	6.36	(7.33)			4.59	(5.71)		
Current annual income								
Less than \$25,000			785	(44)			85	(61)
\$25,000 - \$49,999			470	(26)			25	(18)
\$50,000 -			293	(16)			17	(12)

\$74,999								
\$75,000 - \$99,999			124	(7)			9	(7)
\$100,000 or more			123	(7)			3	(2)

Note. For males, $n = 1795$. For females, $n = 139$.

^a $n = 1390$ for males and $n = 94$ for females.

Table 2 Means and SDs of Adult Baby Diaper Lover (ABDL) Variables by Relationship Status

	Currently in a relationship		Single, but had past relationships		Never in a relationship	
	<i>n</i> = 951		<i>n</i> = 662		<i>n</i> = 326	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	33.38 ^a	(12.51)	28.89 ^b	(11.96)	25.94 ^c	(10.18)
Number of lifetime relationships	2.92 ^a	(2.38)	2.46 ^b	(1.91)	--	
Length of relationship in years ¹	8.23 ^a	(9.28)	2.97 ^b	(4.97)	--	
Years partner has known of ABDL ¹	7.05 ^a	(7.77)	3.14 ^b	(4.84)	--	
Partner Involved in ABDL ^{1,2}	2.53 ^a	(1.40)	1.77 ^b	(1.22)	--	
Profile of Mood States	42.19 ^a	(25.41)	49.09 ^b	(26.46)	52.67 ^b	(28.11)
Comfortable with ABDL ³	5.64 ^a	(1.48)	5.41 ^{a,b}	(1.55)	5.16 ^b	(1.75)
Viewing ABDL positively ³	5.03 ^a	(1.26)	4.73 ^b	(1.35)	4.64 ^b	(1.44)

Note.

¹Participants who were single but had past relationships responded to this item based on their most recent relationship.

²Responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale where higher scores reflect greater involvement.

³Responses were on a 7-point Likert-type scale where higher scores reflect greater comfort or positive feelings. Means in each row that do not share the same superscript are significantly different with $p < .01$.

Table 3 Descriptions of Partner Knowledge of Adult Baby Diaper Lover (ABDL) by Theme

Partner was told early (<i>n</i> = 77)	
1.	“I told her right before I proposed to her. I felt it was important for her to know, and decide if it was too far out for her.”
2.	“Since more or less early on in the relationship, I have learned that for myself to have inner happiness and be completely open with the person relations occur with, I need to be completely honest, or let them know, as this resolves early on if things should “proceed” or if the fetish is something which they can’t live with, meaning we are un-compatible.”
3.	“Told her as soon as we started to get serious. It was best thing I had ever done. No secrets between us and it has made our relationship stronger.”
Partner is ABDL (<i>n</i> = 42)	
4.	“We met at an ABDL party, so the party-goers were either ABDLs or very accepting friends thereof.”
5.	“I met my last boyfriend/cub through ABDL networks and we stayed together for 3 years both taking care of each other during this time period.”
Partner knew 6 or more months after the relationship started (<i>n</i> = 28)	
6.	“I told her about it a few weeks after our 1 year anniversary”
7.	“I told my wife after we had been dating for roughly six months. I wanted to give her a chance to get to know me and my other interests before telling her, but didn’t want to wait so long that she felt like I had been lying to her.”
Partner accepts ABDL, but not involved (<i>n</i> = 26)	

8. "I told her before we were engaged, and while not willing to participate she was accepting of my ABDL behavior."
9. "My partner did know and was accepting, but never had any interest in getting involved."
Partner knows and dislikes ABDL (n = 17)
10. "She is not interested in it at all. Turned off by it. A point of contention because I still look at ABDL sites, including porn sites related to ABDL."
11. "I told her in hopes she would accept me and still be able to love me. Though she accepts me she doesn't understand why I would want to wear diapers, she say's many times she wishes that one of us could change. Either her accepting that I have this kink or me being able to give up the desire."
12. "She found out before I had a chance to tell her and it did not go well. She has an easier time accepting my diapers for incontinence than accepting any age play behavior."
13. "She does not approve at all, and thus has driven the behavior underground."
Progressive Discovery (n = 21)
14. "I slowly let her know. I started by coercing her into daring me to wear like in lost bet situation. Then we joke about me wearing when I was drunk. Then I wet in them when I was drunk so she thought I needed them. Then I found she liked to diaper me (she thought it was "cute, she felt maternal) as time went on it gradually developed into both a sexual and casual practice."
15. "She does not like my AB/DL behaviors, but is willing to tolerate them on some occasions. The reason she doesn't like them, is because she found my stock of adult

diapers and bibs on her own one time in my college dorm room. She then snooped around on my computer and in the history files and saw all of the AB/DL stuff. She was infuriated! I believe that had I been honest and shown them to her up front and honestly I would not have had the negativity that I have from her towards my AB fantasies.”
16. “before that she believed what I needed to wear diapers at night for a medical reason, but she has found evidence that suggests more than medical need”
17. “Although she has always known, at first I told her it was a medical need, after we became serious I explained it was, for lack of a better word a fetish.”
Partner does not know about the ABDL (n = 22)
18. “While my current partner does not know about my ABDL behavior my previous one did and it was one of the reasons for relationship breakdown.”
19. “My previous partner did not know I was an AB, but he knew about some behaviours I just attributed to being quirky; sleeping with a pacifier, drinking from a sippy cup and wearing footed sleepers. When I tried to bring up the topic of being an AB he said all ABs were disgusting/perverted etc so I assured him I wasn’t one.”
No current relationship (n = 53)
20. “This sort of thing is something I like to do by myself or with other likeminded people. I wouldn’t do this sort of thing when I was in a relationship.”
21. “I’ve never been that serious about any one person, and I don’t date for purely recreational reasons. This has never been a factor in my choosing to date or not date anyone, and I don’t necessarily expect to continue with it when I marry.”

Table 4 Frequency of Partner and Nonpartner Involvement in ABDL by Relationship Status

	Currently in a relationship		Single, but had past relationships	
How often Partner is involved ¹	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Never	330	(34.7)	427	(64.5)
Rarely	162	(17.0)	83	(12.5)
Sometimes	190	(20.0)	65	(9.8)
Often	160	(16.8)	51	(7.7)
Always	109	(11.5)	36	(5.4)
<u>How often nonpartner is involved</u>				
Never	605	(64.0)	--	
Rarely	155	(16.4)	--	
Sometimes	129	(13.6)	--	
Often	39	(4.1)	--	
Always	18	(1.9)	--	

Note. ABDL = Adult Baby Diaper Lover.

¹Participants who were single but had past relationships responded to this item based on their most recent relationship.

Table 5 Descriptions of Partner Involvement in Adult Baby Diaper Lover (ABDL) Practices by Theme

Partner is very involved or is ABDL (n = 46)
1. “He’s more into it than I am. We met through an AB/DL group of friends on a Disney trip”
2. “She was almost always involved. Unfortunately she has a latex allergy, so there were some things (like bag, hose & nozzle enemas) that she could not participate in. However, I feel that if she could have participated every time I wanted to play, she would have.”
3. “She likes it too, to wear diapers, from a must to fun.”
Partner accepts or supports, but does not participate (n = 42)
4. “He wants me to be happy, but he is not interested in AB/DL.”
5. “Partner knows, but does not share interest. She is though very understanding, so me sleeping in diapers from time to time is no problem.”
6. “My wife is accepting of this part of me, but does not participate”
Partner tried at first, but now is not involved (n = 39)
7. “She only tried a diaper once, but did not like the feeling of urine against her skin.”
8. “We tried solidly for around 3 months with most weekends involving some sort of diaper activity, but it quickly became apparent that I could only fully enjoy the

experience if my partner was also excited by it. So no matter how much effort he had put into it, it didn't work. So we went back to normal, with me wearing occasionally when the need arose."
9. "At first she experimented but several years ago decided she is uninterested. This has had a negative impact on our sexual relationship. Her personal participation is unnecessary, but that way in which she rejected it "feels like" a personal rejection to me. I don't believe this to be true, but I still feel that way."
Partner has moderate participation (n = 20)
10. "I don't push my lifestyle upon my current partner, we enjoy it in moderation and that works for both of us."
11. "My partner has worn a diaper for me and has urinated in his own diaper and in my diapers before. The activity is not self-initiated and is purely for foreplay for me if I request it. While he doesn't mind any of those behaviors he doesn't get turned on by them and therefore doesn't engage in it of his own accord."
12. "We role sometimes with it. But it's not a necessity for either one of us. It'd be like how some couples roleplay other things sometimes - not always, but occasionally."
Partner not involved and dislikes it (n = 15)
13. "Therapy has helped me understand an emotional need I have for diapers. My wife is trying to understand, but hates the thought of me wearing diapers and does

not want to see me in them, them at all or know anything about my wearing.”
14. “He found it to be a huge turnoff.”
I do ABDL alone, so partner is not involved (<i>n</i> = 10)
15. “I do this alone”
16. “I prefer to masturbate. I have fantasies about involving her, but when I do, it never lives up to my fantasy (not because of her! It’s just better in my head).”
Partner is involved, but not in person (<i>n</i> = 7)
17. “Being in an LDR, Mama can’t always be there to get involved with my activities. Every day we do some form of RP though.”
18. “Baby talk over texts; we’ve never had alone time together to do anything besides that.”
Currently Single (<i>n</i> = 34)
19. “Not in a relationship. I’m scared to start a relationship. I guess I have a fear of being in a relationship and I have self-image issues as well and not confident about myself or about the things I do.”

Table 6 Descriptions of Nonpartner Involvement in Adult Baby Diaper Lover (ABDL) Practices by Theme

ABDL friends (n = 40)	
1.	“I have a strong social network of diaper lovers where I live (luckily), some of whom are 24/7. Sometimes we have DL parties with groups of 10-15 people. I have changed others and been changed before, but mostly I am just around when people change themselves or I change myself.”
2.	“Not in a sexual level, but she allows other trusted AB/DL friends change my diaper.”
No one else involved because it seems like infidelity (n = 16)	
3.	“Guess I'm too moral for this one. I've always read about how others with ab desires find someone else or others to ‘play’ baby with but I don’t think I ever could/can....I feel like it'd be cheating on my wife, something I've never done.”
4.	“I believe that this lifestyle is something that should be shared with someone you love. I don’t believe that other people need to know what happens behind closed doors, thus no one is ever involved in our activities.”
5.	“Even when I was just dating, if I was in a relationship with somebody, I felt it was cheating if it involved another person.”
Do not know others who can be involved (n = 13)	
6.	“I'd like to explore that possibility, just haven’t worked up the courage to ask yet.”
7.	“Because of the taboo nature of AB/DL interests, I personally know very few people who are also interested. Also, My partner and I are not in an open relationship in which

another person can enter into our dynamic unless in the context of a friend (i.e. no sisters). I also haven't gotten up enough courage to ask for a play-date with anyone."
Unspecified friends involved (<i>n</i> = 12)
8. "Some friends know about it and a few friends participate in the AB/DL behaviors"
9. "I have a male friend who sometimes acts as a "daddy" in a non-sexual way. I also have a female friend who sometimes acts as a "mommy" but she only rocks me and gives me milk from bottles, never changes diapers or acts sexually."
Friends know but not involved (<i>n</i> = 8)
10. "Often in the sense that some of my close female friends know about my interest and we sometimes discuss it. Concerning any physical relation my only participation is with my ex. Which is only a few times a year."
11. "I have only told my VERY best friends, none of whom have gotten involved. I never ask, and they never offer. We don't discuss it, although one of my friends does occasionally refer to it in a jokingly teasing manner."
Online activity only (<i>n</i> = 9)
12. "I do look at diaper pornography online, but I do not have anyone in real life that shares my interests in that regard."
13. "Always through text or online. Second Life."
14. "Involved through online contact only."

Using a professional (<i>n</i> = 5)
15. “I visit a professional AB nanny about once a year. She has a full wardrobe of AB clothing and I will spend two hours as a sissy baby girl.”
16. “Approx every 4-8 weeks I visit a Pro Dom (Fem) to indulge in my fetish.”
17. “I have thought about using a professional domination or “mommy” service but have held back as I do not want to get into legal difficulty, lose my license to practice, get divorced, etc”