

"If the Shoe Fits . . .": Exploring Male Homosexual Foot Fetishism

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This study of 262 respondents from an organization for homosexual and bisexual foot fetishists provides information from a broader sample than clinical cases and was guided by major ideas found in the literature on sexual fetishism. Some researchers see fetishism as the product of early learning experiences. Results of this study showed such experiences to occur around puberty and to be predominantly positive. Sources of learning were experiences with their father, other male adults or older peers, and especially same-age peers. Suggested conditions for learning, viz, restrictive sexual socialization and social isolation during adolescence, did not appear to be common occurrences. Other researchers see fetishism as a correlate of a particular personality profile. Results of this study showed that some respondents fit such a profile, but they were in the minority. Finally, how closely these men fit the profile was found to be unrelated to the salience of fetishism in their lives.

Method

Respondents

All respondents were homosexual or bisexual men who expressed a sexual interest in male feet and/or footwear and who belonged to a mail organization which catered to foot fetishists—the "Foot Fraternity." The Foot Fraternity had a current membership of about 1,000 men, most of whom lived in the U.S. About half of these men were "active" members in that they placed their advertisements in the organization's quarterly newsletter/magazine or roster. The other half simply received the roster.

We mailed 500 questionnaires to the group's active members, which were sent along with one of the quarterly rosters. Inactive members were not sent questionnaires because many of them did not wish to receive mailings other than the rosters from the organization. We included a letter from the director of the Foot Fraternity introducing us and describing the importance of the study. As participation in the survey was voluntary, consent was considered implicit in the return of a completed questionnaire.

Two hundred seventy-two questionnaires were completed and returned, 10 of which we excluded for the following reasons: 6 were completed by members who did not express an interest in feet or

footwear and 4 members self-defined as heterosexual, so many questions on the questionnaire did not apply to them. This left us with 262 respondents, and the corrected response rate was 52%.

The respondents consisted of men between the ages of 21 and 65 ($M = 38$). Eighty-one percent of the respondents were employed in white collar jobs and 16% in blue collar jobs, 2% were students, and 2% were unemployed. Sixty-nine percent had a college degree or a graduate degree, and only 2% did not complete high school. Most respondents (89%) were White. Eighty-eight percent said they were homosexual, and 12% said they were bisexual. Fewer than 10% had ever received professional counseling because of their fetish interests.

Measures

Learning. We asked respondents to what extent they thought their fetish interest developed as a result of pleasurable or negative events in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood to ascertain the type of learning experiences involved. Then, in an open-ended question they were asked how they thought they became sexually interested in feet/footwear and to describe the experiences involved. From these answers, we could again look for positive and/or negative learning experiences, when they occurred, and whether they seemed to involve classical or operant condi-

tioning. How evident were "one-shot" conditioning experiences? We specifically asked the age at which respondents first became interested in feet/footwear and, to tap the reinforcing effect of masturbation, their experiences with fantasies about feet/footwear when they masturbated during adolescence.

Because the family plays a role in some explanations of fetishism, we asked respondents to rank their sexual socialization in the family from very restrictive to very permissive. As other versions emphasize social isolation from the peer group, we asked about their friendships during adolescence. Last, we included questions to investigate fetishism as a graduated phenomenon—one example being the frequency of feet/footwear fantasizing while masturbating.

Personality. Next we used or designed questions that would examine whether respondents' psychological profiles were like those of fetishists in the literature. Some questions came from Rosenberg's (1965) study, viz, those on self-acceptance, interpersonal awkwardness, depression, and loneliness. Others we designed, viz, those referring to sexual self-confidence, problems maintaining relationships, confusion, and guilt, shame, and anxiety over their fetish interests.

Other questions tapping social adjustment asked how secretive respondents were about their fetishism, whether they had gotten

into trouble pursuing their interests, and how socially isolated they were (with respect to partners, participation in the organization, and the homosexual subculture). We also asked questions about how satisfactory their sex lives were.

Given the character of our methods, it was impossible to examine the unconscious family dynamics that may have characterized our respondents. We only relied on our questionnaire to see if there was anything suggestive in this regard.

Saliency of fetishism. There are problems with operationalizing such concepts as *obsession* and *compulsion* to measure the saliency of the fetish interest. To get at this, we asked whether feet/footwear fantasies, or feet/footwear play, were necessary for respondents' sexual arousal; whether feet/footwear was the main focus of their masturbatory fantasies, or in sexual behavior with others; if they could stop their fetishistic fantasies and behaviors if they wanted to; and if they had ever made such an attempt.

These six variables include how much control a respondent feels he has over his fetishism. To these we added five variables that measured further how large a part fetishistic behavior played in their sexuality, which gave us a pool of 11 variables from which we could produce a measure of the saliency of fetishism in their lives. (The five additional variables were frequency of feet/footwear fantasy during adolescent masturbation; frequency of the same currently; frequency of the same without fantasizing about feet; frequency of sex with another person involving foot play; and frequency of the same without involving foot play.) These variables allowed us to examine a central postulate about fetishism: that the more a person exhibits the particular personality profile described earlier, the greater the saliency of his fetishism.

Procedure

The director of the Foot Fraternity wanted a study done on foot fetishism and was given our names as sex researchers. After initial phone contact, we arranged a meeting with him and two other members.

From our initial visit, we learned, as stated previously, that

the organization was a mail correspondence group who sent out quarterly rosters to its members. The rosters contained articles relating to feet and shoes; order forms for photographs, videotapes, and books of an erotic nature that focus on feet; and "advertisements" submitted by the members of the group who stated their fetish preferences, the city and state in which they lived, and a code number for contacting them through the Foot Fraternity. During this meeting we gathered background and historical information about the club, interviewed the three men about their sexual histories and their fetish interests, and watched them engage in "foot play." (Foot play involved a number of practices, the most common being "foot lovemaking," e.g., one man "worshipping" another man's feet by kissing, caressing, sucking, and/or licking them. The second most common type of foot play involved dominance/submission, sometimes involving the appearance of "humiliation" and/or "pain" but more often not.) The meeting concluded with an agreement that we could use the roster of the organization to draw a sample of fetishists to whom we would send a mailed questionnaire.

On our second visit we pretested a draft of the questionnaire that we eventually used in this study and conducted informal interviews with about 20 members of the Foot Fraternity who were attending a bi-annual convention of the organization. We also obtained a videotape of various members engaging in "foot play."

The final version of the questionnaire contained 73 open-ended or close-ended items, some with multiple parts. It was mailed to the organization, who sent it out with their quarterly roster. At no time did we have access to names of any members on the mailing list. The return address was to the university. The data collection for this study was completed in 1990.

Results

Learning Fetishism

We asked our respondents whether they thought their interest in fetishism came from pleasurable

or negative events related to the fetish object. Eighty-one percent said their interest in feet/footwear was "not at all" related to negative events in childhood, 87% to the same in adolescence, and 94% to the same in adulthood. Thus, the link between fetishism and negative reinforcement is almost absent in the minds of our respondents. On the other hand, 45% said their fetish interest developed *More than a little/A lot* because of pleasurable events in childhood (the other responses were *No/A little*), 46% to the same during adolescence, and 33% to the same during adulthood. Thus, most respondents saw positive rather than negative conditioning experiences (e.g., parental punishment) as important in the development of their fetish interests.

Some researchers posit that conditioning experiences are most likely to "take" if they occur around puberty. This idea is supported by our data, the mean age of 12.0 years being the age at which respondents reported first being sexually aroused by feet/footwear. As masturbation plays an important part in sexual learning, we asked how often respondents fantasized about feet/footwear when they masturbated during adolescence. Twenty-nine percent said *Every time*, 32% *Very often*, and 18% *Often*. Only 8% said *Never* (the other two categories were *More than rarely*, 6%, and *Rarely*, 7%). For nearly 80% of our respondents, then, we can see masturbatory fantasies as important reinforcers of their fetish interests.

Regarding the family context, 31% described their upbringing regarding sex as *Very restrictive* and 23% as *Slightly restrictive*. To make sense of this finding would require a general population statistic as to the percentage who report a restrictive upbringing. The closest data we could find on this came from a representative national sample of U.S. adults in 1970 (Klassen, Williams, & Levitt, 1989). When asked how strict or permissive their fathers were about sexual matters, 33% said *Very strict* and 30% *Somewhat strict*. For their mothers, the corresponding figures were 40% and 31%. Thus, there is little difference

between the fetishists and the non-fetishists.

More in line with the literature is the finding that 53% reported having fewer friends than other children their age during adolescence. Again, though, we have no general population data to know whether this perception is above or below that of most U.S. men as they reflect on their growing up.

The last of the close-ended questions was the salience of the fetish interest. Results show a graduated character: In the last 12 months, 58% said they masturbated while thinking about feet/footwear 3-4 times a week or more; 25% 1-2 times a week; 15% fewer than once a week; and 2% never. Regarding sexual activity involving foot play with another person, 5% said they did this 3-4 times a week or more; 14% 1-2 times a week; 59% fewer than once a week; and 23% never. Statistics not involving feet/footwear sexuality were as follows: 27% said they self-masturbated once a week or more without fantasizing about feet, and 13% said that once a week or more they had sex with a partner without foot play. Overall, these results suggest that respondents cluster more at a high degree of salience concerning fetishism rather than being spread out evenly along a continuum. This should not be surprising, given that our respondents are members of a group organized to facilitate such interests.

Turning to open-ended questions, we asked respondents how they thought they became sexually involved with feet/footwear, particularly what they thought were their most important experiences. There were 204 responses to this question. Of these, slightly more than half (116) did not supply much of an answer. About a third said some variant of "No idea," "Don't know," "Can't remember," or "Not sure why." Another third simply gave a description of how or what it was about feet/footwear that aroused them: "seeing barefoot young men on a beach," "watching male relatives put on their socks," etc. The final third gave some variant of "I've always been interested," "As long as I can remember," or "I was born with the interest" as their answer. This may be taken as rather a high percentage unable to

explain their fetishism and may limit the applicability of one-shot conditioning explanations. On the other hand, because the events probably happened many years ago, it might be the case that they did not remember. This is not to say that learning did not occur, but that perhaps it was subtle and occurred over a span of time. There may be similar problems in asking persons with any sexual interest how this came about (see Bailey, Miller, & Willerman, 1993). Because most of the group reported positive experiences in developing their fetish interests, however, we doubt that failure to supply an explanation was due to repressed memories.

Of the 89 respondents who did supply an explanation for their fetishism, one fifth made reference to being aroused by observations of their father's feet/footwear or some direct sensual experience they recollected involving their father. About a quarter of the respondents attributed their interest to sensual or sexual experiences with older males other than their father, sometimes adults, especially relatives, or sometimes older peers. About a third referred to childhood play with same-aged male peers as their most important experience. This involved mutual discovery of the pleasures associated with feet, the teaching of such to the respondent, and, especially, games involving wrestling, rough housing, and the like. The remaining cases, about 15%, reported a wide range of experiences too unique to form larger coding categories. The three major categories show the conditions under which learning sexual fetishism first occurred.

Experiences with the father. These were among the earliest experiences our respondents could recall that seemed relevant. The most frequently mentioned were the sensual arousal that occurred by contact with feet/footwear, often when the father was unaware of what was happening:

Sleeping upside down with my parents and finding my dad's feet in my face.

I can remember lying on the floor beneath a chair my father was sleeping in and playing with his feet.

Feeling my father's silk stockings as a child.

Smelling my father's moccasins.

In these instances there clearly is a sensual feeling produced by feet or footwear, which parallels the direct association between stimulus and response that classical conditioning stipulates. Also, the meaning of the father to the child and its translation in symbolic form to footwear could be involved. But, because such symbolism often works at an unconscious level, we cannot conclude from our data that this was occurring (see, however, Weinberg, Williams, & Calhan, 1994, for the role of symbolism at adult ages).

The remaining cases, on the other hand, showed clear instances of the father being instrumental in the respondent's conditioning to feet/footwear but was the result of operant conditioning in the form of the reinforcing rewards of attention, power, etc., that came to the child from an important adult:

I used to pedicure my father's feet from an early age. He loved that.

I used to tickle my dad's feet. I enjoyed his laughter very much. I played a game of tickling my father's feet when I was little and he would feign enjoyment as part of the game.

At about 5 or 6 years old, removing father's shoes and massaging his hot feet . . . The soft, warm feet and the pleasure he seemed to experience—usually going to sleep—and I could kiss and lick his feet.

Experiences with other adults and older peers. These experiences involved the respondents' interactions with older males other than their fathers, although the experiences were similar:

At about the age of three, an experience with my uncle, rubbing his feet with sheer silk socks.

I had a great experience with the neighbor man who was around twenty-two. I was at his house watching TV. We were sitting on the couch. He got tired and put his legs across me. He was barefoot. . . I had a powerful erection all the time.

At 6 or 7 I had my stocking feet worshipped by a 30-year-old uncle. He would massage my feet and either masturbate on them or sodomize me. I began finding men in their stocking feet sexually exciting. My primary fantasy that permeates all my sexual activities is a male with socks on.

I was home alone and saw my uncle's new penny loafers. I went over and started smelling the

fresh new leather scent and kissing and licking them. It turned me on so much that I actually ejaculated my first load into my pants and have been turned on ever since.

This last case, especially, is a clear example of "one-shot" conditioning, the immediate connection between footwear and sexual arousal being readily apparent.

Equally often, the older male was an older peer (child or teenager), rather than an adult male (thus, the age difference was not very large). Commonly, this was with an older brother, especially when a bedroom was shared:

My teenage brother dangled his clean, well-arched, long-toed foot down from the top bunk. Sometimes I tickled it. The smooth skin of the sole excited me to the point of getting erections.

As a young kid I would put my brother's basketball sneakers into my pants and masturbated with them. I also recall how the smell of his new shoes and boots used to excite me. Around 10-13 I would take his work boots to bed and masturbate with them.

As a child, my brother used to hold me down and tickle my feet. I loved it.

My brother and I shared a room. I wanted to smell and feel his feet. I did so while he slept. The warmth of his foot against my face triggered an ejaculation. I continued this. To my knowledge, he was unaware of what I was doing.

Again, the last case seems consistent with a "one-shot" conditioning explanation.

Not all the older peers were brothers. Other boys who were neighbors, friends of the brother, etc., could be involved:

At 7 or 8 I remember neighborhood boys in their early teens—several times they placed their bare feet in my crotch—manipulating my genital area with their feet.

At age 5 I was wrestled to the ground by an older boy. He wore black engineer boots. He pinned me down, laying on top of me. I got an erection. He made me smell the inside of his boots.

These last cases illustrate another theme in our respondents' explanations—being forced to do something involving feet/footwear. These "forced" responses were most often interpreted as positive experiences by the respondents, however.

Experiences with same-aged peers. Experiences with same-aged peers (e.g., cousins, friends) fell into three groups. First, the attraction to feet could involve the discovery of mutual pleasure:

Had a best friend and as long as I can remember we always played with each other's sex organs with our feet.

Playing with a grade school friend—we licked each other's feet. When I was four years old I liked to smell the socks of a male playmate. I would lay on the floor and he would put his socked feet on my face.

Second, and just as often, the friend introduced the respondent to the behaviors:

A friend in grammar school introduced me to foot smelling/kissing. It immediately turned me on. We could engage in foot play in his attic or basement (e.g., 'dad' punishing 'son' by making him smell his smelly socked feet).

At 3 or 4 I was introduced to a foot play game by two friends. Interest in feet had not previously occurred to me but I was immediately 'imprinted' by this experience.

Again, in the last example, there seems to be evidence of "one-shot" conditioning.

Finally, and most evidently with peers, were instances involving "force," such as rough housing and wrestling, which are common behaviors among young males:

Three of us ganged up on a fourth friend. The other two guys pinned the fourth one down. He was barefoot and I couldn't resist the opportunity, so I grabbed his foot and tickled the sole. I think he had an orgasm. I know I did. I was eighteen, so was he. Wrestling in childhood and adolescence. Grabbing guys' feet, tickling them or being tickled myself.

We used foot tickling as a form of torture if a board game was lost. I found myself always gravitating toward feet.

We ganged up on a kid and held him down. I was the one to remove his shoes and socks. I tickled his bare, smelly feet and made him laugh hard.

Rough housing of this kind seems to reinforce arousal from feet/footwear, as our respondents sought to repeat the behavior. Common was the movement from being the "victim" (chosen or not) to being the perpetrator, as one grew older

or occupied a more central position in the peer group.

Little in the way of restrictive sexual upbringing was reported in the open-ended responses. This is not to say that such a situation did not exist. On the other hand, the answers to the open-ended questions are consistent with the results reported earlier. They fill in the details of what those "pleasurable" events were that respondents said led to their fetish interests. We feel more confident suggesting that fetishism does not seem to compensate for repressed sexuality for most respondents, but seemed rather to hold intrinsic value.

The limited amount of information afforded by our open-ended questions does, of course, mean that studies using other methods may have more success in answering such questions. This was evident in trying to evaluate whether classical or operant conditioning lay behind our respondents' learning experiences. At the least, we failed to find the clear transition from classical to operant conditioning that Gosselin (1987) hypothesized. Rather, both kinds of learning seemed to coexist as fetishism became established. Obviously, operant reinforcement would eventually take over. Once the arousing potential of feet/footwear is discovered, it can provide the basis for masturbation fantasies. Finally, although not appearing with great frequency, "one-shot" conditioning experiences did seem to fit the adoption of fetishism for some persons.

The Personality of the Fetishist

We now examine our results in the light of the literature in which fetishism is seen as a symptom associated with a particular personality type. Questions were deduced from the personality traits proposed in the literature, with the following results.

Regarding lack of social skills, 22% said they "feel ill at ease in the presence of others" (*Strongly agree* and *Agree* responses), and 44% said that they "tend to keep in the background on social occasions" (*Yes* response). For loneliness, 36% said they "often feel lonely" (*Yes*). Regarding problems with intimacy, 34% said they had "problems in establishing or maintaining a close, intimate relationship with a sexual partner" in the past (*A lot* and *More*

than a little responses), and the same percentage said this was true for them currently. For guilt and shame, anxiety and depression over their fetishism, 30% have felt "guilty, anxious, depressed or ashamed of their interest in feet/footwear" (*A lot and More than a little* responses). Thirty-three percent had "felt confused about their interest in feet/footwear" (*A lot and More than a little* responses). Currently, only 4% said they feel confused. A small percentage, 13%, "often feel downcast and dejected" in general (*Strongly agree and Agree* responses). Even fewer, 4%, regretted their interest in feet/footwear (*A lot and More than a little* responses). Finally, for self-esteem, 21% agreed with the statement "I wish I could have more respect for myself" (*Strongly agree and Agree* responses), 28% said that they lack "self-confidence to get a sex partner," and 14% that they feel "sexually inadequate" (both items *A lot and More than a little* categories).

Whether these percentages are greater than in the general population is difficult to say, as we have insufficient general population data on these items. One such study of Houston men in their late 20s (Howard Kaplan, personal communication, February 16, 1993) showed that 10% "often feel downcast and dejected," compared to about 13% of our respondents on the same item. Twenty-one percent of our respondents agreed with the statement "I wish I could have more respect for myself," compared with 27% of this more general population. In addition, comparing our respondents with a norm group of homosexual males studied with reference to many of the same questions about psychological adjustment (Weinberg & Williams, 1974), the homosexual foot fetishists did somewhat better. These skimpy comparisons can only be suggestive, but it does not appear that our group of fetishists is much different in the extent of their psychological problems than wider populations.

To use the data on psychological problems to evaluate the degree to which the respondents fit the proposed personality profile of the fetishist, we did a cluster analysis (see Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Ward, 1963). This particular "quick clus-

ter" method grouped individuals based on their similarity across the variables said to indicate psychological problems associated with fetishism. Results indicated that respondents cluster into two groups according to whether they share these psychological problems. We thus referred to High and Low Problem groups, the former providing the closest fit with the personality profile. Statistics for the items determining each cluster are found in Table 1: 23% of the respondents fell in the High Problem group. These were people who were at the high end of most items that measure psychological problems. From this, we concluded that fewer than one in four clearly fit the picture of the psychologically troubled fetishist found in the literature. It is not our position, however, that fetishism and psychological problems are not related, but rather that the results from clinical samples have been overgeneralized to all fetishists.

There still remains the fact that there are fetishists who fit the personality profile. In what other ways does this group differ from those fetishists who score low in psychological problems? Table 2 shows the additional differences we found between the High and Low Problem groups. Concentrating on the High Problem group, we found that they were more likely than those respondents in the Low Problem group to have their interest in feet begin earlier—as a result of pleasurable events in childhood. They were also more likely to say they fantasized about feet/footwear during adolescence. Additionally, those in the High Problem group were more likely to say they had a restrictive sexual upbringing. A final difference that characterized their earlier life is that they reported having had fewer friends in adolescence than did men in the Low Problem group. An early start to fetishism with a sexually restrictive family and a socially isolated adolescence is consistent with the literature, as are the subsequent findings that suggest additional problems, both psychological and sociological, that beset the already troubled fetishist.

Those in the High Problem group also reported being more secretive

about their interest in feet/footwear, both before joining the Foot Fraternity and at the current time. Too, they seemed to have greater problems in integrating their fetishism into their sex lives. They were more likely to have gotten into trouble over someone discovering their interest in feet/footwear. This may be related to the fact that they were less likely to be in a steady relationship with another man. They reported a lower sexual frequency with a partner (involving feet/footwear play and without it) and less satisfaction with their sex lives in general and their feet/footwear interests in particular.

Finally, the High Problem group was distinguished by its lesser social involvement. First, with regard to their membership in the Foot Fraternity, they were less likely to correspond with other members, meet others with similar interests, engage in feet/footwear play with another member, or see the organization as facilitating their interests than were those in the Low Problem group. In relation to the homosexual world, High Problem fetishists less frequently got together with gay friends or went to gay restaurants or discos. From all of these results, then, it seems that those respondents who most closely fit the personality profile of the fetishist were also characterized by other problems.

The Salience of Fetishism

The literature indicates that the more a man approximates the personality profile described previously, the more fetishism will be central to his sex life. First, we looked at our results regarding the centrality, or salience of fetishism, as we call it.

When asked whether foot fantasy was usually the main focus of their self-masturbation, 51% said *Yes, the main focus*. To a similar question asking whether feet were usually the main focus of their sexual activity with others, 35% said *Yes, the main focus*. When given a direct Yes/No option, 44% said that feet/footwear fantasy, and a third that feet/footwear play, were necessary for their sexual arousal. Finally, 69% did not feel they could stop their feet/footwear fantasies

even if they wanted to (although 90% said they had not seriously attempted to stop their interest in feet/footwear).

These variables, along with others, were used to construct a Salience of Fetishism Scale. A principal components analysis was performed on the 11 variables using varimax rotation. Eliminating the variables that did not load at .30 or above left eight variables to form the Salience of Fetishism Scale, which explained 37% of the variance along this dimension and which had a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for reliability (see Table 3). The variables that remained were whether foot/footwear fantasy and/or foot/footwear play are necessary for the respondents' sexual arousal, the degree to which feet and footwear are the main focus of the respondents' self-masturbation and sexual activity with others, the frequency of self-masturbating with and without fantasizing about feet/footwear, as well as the frequency of masturbatory fantasies about feet during adolescence, and whether the respondents felt they could stop fantasizing about feet if they wanted to.

Because the variables used in the scale have different ranges for possible scores, it was necessary to standardize. To do this, we made each variable range from 0 to 1. Summated scores for each respondent were calculated across the eight variables in the scale.

Results show that 22% of the respondents had the highest possible score on most of the eight variables and that there was a range of salience among the respondents, even though most clustered at the high end of the scale (Table 4).

Because we already had determined which respondents were most likely to fit the personality profile of the fetishist (the High versus the Low Psychological Problems group), we examined whether the level of a person's psychological problems was related to the salience of fetishism in his sex life. The specific hypothesis was that those high in psychological problems would show higher scores on the salience scale (e.g., Were the 23% of those respondents who fell in the high problem group the same persons as the 22% who were in the

highest salience category?). We did not find such a relationship (Pearsonian correlation coefficient = $-.10$, n.s.). Thus, it is possible for a man to have little in the way of psychological problems, yet have fetishism be very important in his sex life. In sum, the degree of a man's self-reported psychological problems was not predictive of the salience of his fetishism.

Discussion

This article on sexual fetishism differs from most previous studies, which are based on clinical cases, by reporting on a large group from a non-clinical source and dealing with homosexual and bisexual rather than heterosexual fetishists. Although this group is not representative of all such foot fetishists, it does succeed in going beyond the limitations of using only clinical cases. The group is probably biased in the other direction. It is most likely representative of the less secretive fetishist. Moreover, it could be argued that the psychologically healthy fetishist would most likely join an organization like the Foot Fraternity. Thus, results may underestimate the fetishist with psychological problems, the reverse of the problem of overreliance on clinical case studies.

Guided by the literature, we asked about respondents' learning experiences with fetishism. Results showed that fetishists most commonly reported first being sexually aroused by feet/footwear around the time of puberty. The role of pleasure was elaborated by answers to an open-ended question. Many feet/footwear fetishists were introduced to and/or reinforced in their attraction to feet/footwear by sensual experiences with their father's feet or footwear. Many, too, were taught the pleasures associated with feet from other male adults or older boys. Even more reported were experiences with their same-age peers. They either mutually discovered the delight of feet or were taught this by a friend, or through wrestling and rough housing, they learned a new source of arousal and eroticism. Further, there was some evidence for "one-shot" conditioning, and classical and operant conditioning seemed to work together rather than in some sequence.

Also, guided by the literature, we asked whether respondents were characterized by a distinctive personality profile that was correlated with sexual fetishism. Results showed that fewer than a quarter of the respondents fit such a profile, supporting our assertion that explanations of fetishism based on clinical cases are overgeneralized. We can be as prone to overgeneralize, though, given the uniqueness of our sample source. At the least, we must add to a typology of fetishists (see Chalkey & Powell, 1983), one for whom the salience of fetishism and psychological problems do not go together. This "social fetishist" has come together with like minded others to establish subcultural forms that facilitate contact with people who share the same sexual interest (see Weinberg et al., 1994, for a more detailed description of this process).

Most professional concerns still remain with those persons for whom fetishism is problematic. Although we believe they are a minority among fetishists, they do exist. We can ask why such persons should be members of an organization like the Foot Fraternity. Their membership in the Foot Fraternity may represent an attempt to resolve their psychological problems. However, in our analyses we found they are not distinguished in terms of their membership being related to removing confusion about their sexual interests or increasing their self-acceptance. They were less socially involved with the organization than were other group members. Lower social involvement was also the case for relationships outside of the organization, suggesting a "loner" quality to these men. It seems that, along with a distinct personality, social isolation played some role in the development of their fetish interests and continues to play a role in the unsatisfactory integration of these interests into their current lives. We should not make too much of this, however. After all, these men joined an organization that might reduce the social isolation associated with their sexual interests, and many are involved in ways that may reduce some of their psychological problems.