

# A PSYCHOLOGIST EXPLAINS

PROFESSOR JOHN COHEN, one of Britain's most eminent psychologists, has been making his own study of the "drag" phenomenon. During the past year he has visited a number of pubs to watch drag acts and to study audience reaction.

When David Farr talked to him at his office in Manchester University, where he is Professor of Psychology, he gave answers to two important questions:

(1) *Why has drag suddenly become so popular?*

Professor Cohen: Because we are living in a situation in which society is easing up more and more and allowing people to do what they want to do without any preconceived notion of what is perverted or what is not.

In an affluent peace-time society the tendency is to feminise the male. For instance, there are now shops which sell clothes which can be interchanged by both sexes.

In addition there is a good deal of trans-sexing going on where people of doubtful sex have surgical adjustments made. To talk nowadays of two distinct sexes is an oversimplification. There are all sorts of intermediate grades and categories.

## Frills

There is a great coming together of the sexes. Men are less insistent on their image of male masculinity.

They are prepared to accept this feminised image of themselves. Just look at the feminisation of men's clothes — the frills and the fancy shirts and all the other feminine garments they now adopt.

In this situation it is not surprising that something like female impersonation should become popular.

(2) *Why do men — and women — go to drag shows?*

Professor Cohen: Largely because sexuality is something

## 'Men are less insistent on their male image'

which intrigues everybody. There is no doubt that men get a kick out of it.

Some female impersonators are very attractive as so-called women and this can stimulate the heterosexual element in a man.

I have even been told by tough policemen that some of these female impersonators are very attractive to them as women and that when they are watching a show they forget that they are watching a man.

But one must not underestimate the homosexual impulses which are present in men.

It is a mistake to think that men don't get a kick out of looking at attractive men — even though it is invariably a sub-conscious attraction.

An impersonation act gives you somebody who seems to be both sexes and so men can enter into a bi-sexual situation which, according to myth, was the original state of man.

Indeed, this is the present state because everyone is bi-sexual.

It is difficult to say how much satisfaction a spectator gets out of thinking that the artist is a man or that he is a woman.

The fact remains that for most men there is something there to enjoy and they enjoy it.

As far as I can tell, women enjoy these shows just as much as men.

You must remember that lesbianism is just as rife as male homosexuality and, therefore, an impersonation act appeals to the lesbian element which is present in all women just as it appeals to the homosexual element in men.

(12 JAN 1968)