

## Varieties of Autogynephilia and Their Relationship to Gender Dysphoria

Ray Blanchard, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

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*The relationship between gender dysphoria and autogynephilia (erotic arousal in men associated with the thought or image of themselves as women) was investigated. Subjects were 238 nonhomosexual male outpatients divided into three groups: 94 reporting they were most aroused sexually by images of themselves as nude women, 67 most aroused by images of themselves as women in underwear, and 77 most aroused by images of themselves as fully clothed women. These were compared on questionnaire measures of gender dysphoria and other psychosexual variables. The Nude group was significantly more gender dysphoric than the Clothed group, which, in turn, was significantly more gender dysphoric than the Underwear group. These results support the hypothesis that those nonhomosexual men most aroused sexually by the thought of having a woman's body are also those most interested in acquiring a woman's body through some permanent, physical transformation. A secondary finding was that the Nude group was the same age as the Underwear group and significantly younger than the Clothed group. This outcome makes it unlikely that erotic fantasies of having a woman's body are the end result of some progression that necessarily begins with erotic fantasies of wearing women's clothes.*

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**KEY WORDS:** autogynephilia; gender dysphoria; gender identity disorder; transsexualism; transvestism.

### INTRODUCTION

The term *autogynephilia* was coined by Blanchard (1989a) to denote a male's paraphilic tendency to be sexually aroused by the thought or image

<sup>1</sup>Gender Identity Clinic, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, 250 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5T 1R8.

of himself as a female. This term was intended to subsume transvestism (cross-dressing associated with genital arousal) as well as erotic ideas or situations in which women's garments per se play a small role or none at all. Autogynephilia occurs predominantly in nonhomosexual men (Blanchard, 1989b), a fact consistent with Havelock Ellis's opinion that this phenomenon is "really a modification of normal hetero-sexuality" (1928, p. 103). In those men in whom it occurs, autogynephilia tends to compete with normal heterosexual interests (Blanchard, 1992).

Autogynephilic fantasies and behaviors, in addition to the familiar example of cross-dressing, may focus on the idea of possessing female anatomic structures, of exhibiting female physiologic functions, or of engaging in stereotypically feminine behavior. Prime examples of physiologic fantasies are those occasional males, called "pregnancy transvestites" by Hirschfeld (1918), who masturbate with the fantasy of being a pregnant woman or of giving birth. There are, in a similar vein, men whose favorite masturbation fantasy is that they are lactating or breast-feeding (Hirschfeld, 1910/1991) and others whose favorite fantasy is that of menstruating. These physiologic functions may also be simulated during masturbation with the aid of appropriate props.

The behavioral type of autogynephilic fantasy involves the thought or performance of activities that symbolize femininity to the affected male. For example, one individual, whom I have described elsewhere (Blanchard, 1990), reported that his early masturbation fantasies included the thought that he was helping the maid clean the house or that he was sitting in a girls' class at school. Another 33-year-old patient whom I recently interviewed reported that his current masturbation fantasies were knitting in the company of other women and being at the hairdresser's with other women.

The anatomic variety of autogynephilia, in its purest form, is represented by rather static fantasies—one might call them rather images or icons—consisting of little more than the idea of having a woman's body. These may focus on female anatomic structures such as the breasts or the vulva or on typical but acquired characteristics such as hairless legs. A patient seen by one of my colleagues, for example, was sexually aroused by shaving his legs and then contemplating the result.

Autogynephilic men vary considerably in their choice of erotic fantasies. They also vary with regard to cross-gender feelings and behaviors when they are not erotically aroused. Some men, for example, wear women's undergarments beneath their male attire on a daily basis, at work and in all other situations. Others have a strong desire, not restricted to periods of genital arousal, to possess some or all features of the female anatomy and

may pursue this by means of electrolysis, estrogenic hormones, or plastic surgery. The latter type of behavior and motivation is subjectively experienced as a desire for physical union with a feminine self-image. It has a special clinical significance and is commonly known as *gender dysphoria* or, in extreme cases, as *transsexualism*.

The present study investigated the correlation between different types of autogynephilic erotic fantasies and the intensity of the accompanying gender dysphoria. This information has a potential clinical application in the prognosis of individual cases of gender identity disorder. The main purpose of this research, however, was to test the hypothesis outlined below.

This hypothesis originated with the supposition that an autogynephile's desire to unite in the flesh with his feminine self-image corresponds to a heterosexual's desire to unite in marriage with a female partner. If this is true, then there should be some correlation between an autogynephile's desire for physical feminization when he is not sexually aroused and his predilection for anatomic fantasies of femininity when he is. Such a relationship is suggested by the familiar examples of homosexuality and heterosexuality, in which a man's desire for permanent union with a male or female partner correlates with his tendency to respond to such partners with penile arousal.

The above logic led to the specific hypothesis tested in this study: Within the population of nonhomosexual males with recurrent cross-dressing or cross-gender ideation, those individuals most aroused sexually by the thought of having a woman's body are also those most interested in acquiring a woman's body through some permanent, physical transformation. This is tantamount to the hypothesis that such individuals are the most likely to experience gender dysphoria, as defined above.

The foregoing hypothesis was tested by dividing appropriate subjects into three groups: those most aroused sexually by images of themselves as nude women, those most aroused by images of themselves as women in underwear, and those most aroused by images of themselves as fully clothed women. The hypothesis predicts that the group favoring the image of themselves in the nude should be the most strongly gender dysphoric.

It will be noted that the present hypothesis does not predict whether the "underwear" group should be more, equally, or less gender dysphoric than the "fully clothed" group. It is true that the sequence—nudity, underwear, outer clothes—constitutes a logical progression when one is dressing; that does not, however, make it a basis for rank-ordering men to whom feminine clothing clearly represents something other than relative distance from nudity.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The on-line data base of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry's Research Section of Behavioural Sexology includes questionnaire data on 3500 male patients who have presented either at that department or at the Institute's Gender Identity Clinic since September 1980—the date when the last questionnaire items used in this study were added to the test battery. These cases were searched for all subjects who satisfied the following three criteria:

1. The subject obtained a score less than 10 on the Modified Androphilia-Gynephilia Index (Blanchard, 1985), thus indicating a nonhomosexual partner preference.

2. He indicated either (i) that he had, since the age of 13, cross-dressed once a month or more for at least 1 year or, alternatively, several times a year for at least 3 years, or (ii) that he had felt like a woman at least episodically, if not on a continuous basis.

3. He acknowledged some degree of autogynephilic ideation by endorsing one of the first three options of the following questionnaire item:

Which of the following pictures of yourself has been most strongly associated with sexual arousal?

- (a) As a nude female
- (b) As a female dressed only in underwear, sleepwear, or foundation garments (for example, a corset)
- (c) As a fully clothed female
- (d) Have never become sexually aroused while picturing yourself as a female
- (e) Have never pictured yourself as a female

Questionnaire sections containing the above-mentioned materials are only administered to sexology patients whose presenting complaints concern cross-gender behavior or feelings, or who reveal such phenomena in the course of clinical assessment. Therefore, patients who met the formal entrance criteria actually came from a clinically preselected subset of the data base.

A total of 238 cases was retrieved for this study. In 218 cases, the patient's presenting complaint was gender dysphoria or transvestism, and the questionnaire materials were administered in the course of assessing these conditions. In 17 cases, the presenting complaint was some other paraphilia, but the patient also reported transvestism during a diagnostic interview. The remaining 3 cases came from a pool of paid volunteers, who had been recruited as nonpatient controls for various purposes.

## Materials

All of the questionnaire materials used in the present investigation are embedded within Kurt Freund's unpublished "Erotic Preferences Examination Scheme," relevant sections of which are routinely administered to male patients in the two departments to which the subjects had been referred. These materials included previously published questionnaire scales as well as items combined into scales for purposes of the present research.

### *Scales Developed for This Study*

To test the central hypothesis of this study, it was necessary to develop a pure measure of gender dysphoria containing no references to childhood gender role behavior (which is not always correlated with adult gender dysphoria) or to cross-dressing (which would be partially redundant with the grouping variable). Such an instrument, the Pure Gender Dysphoria Scale, was assembled from five items in the questionnaire data base. The scale itself is presented in the Appendix. Its alpha reliability coefficient was .84.

The other questionnaire scale developed for this study is the Mild Masochism Scale. The reason for constructing this instrument was the author's clinical impression, coupled with some evidence from the literature (Beigel and Feldman, 1963; Stoller, 1970), that masochism in transvestitic or gender-dysphoric males usually consists of mild fantasies of submission or humiliation (although contrary examples of strong and even fatal masochism exist; e.g., Blanchard and Hucker, 1991). This scale, which consists of four items, is also presented in the Appendix. The alpha reliability coefficient of the Mild Masochism Scale was .70.

### *Previously Developed Scales*

Five previously developed self-report scales were also used. The first is the already mentioned Modified Androphilia-Gynephilia Index (Blanchard, 1985), a measure of sexual orientation specifically tailored to male gender dysphorics. The Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale (Blanchard, 1985) is a measure (for males) of the erotic arousal value of putting on women's clothes, perfume, and makeup, and shaving the legs. The Alloeroticism Scale (Blanchard, 1989b) concerns the dimension of sexual attraction versus sexual indifference toward other persons. The Heterosexual Experience Scale (Freund and Blanchard, 1988) is intended to assess sexual experience with women, as opposed to sexual interest in them. The present study used a slightly modified version of this scale, which does not include

the last item. (This item had previously been appropriated for the Modified Androphilia–Gynephilia Index by Blanchard, 1985, who felt that it was more a measure of heterosexual interest than of heterosexual experience.) The Sadism Scale (Freund and Blanchard, 1988) is a broad-band measure of sadistic impulses developed for males in general.

## RESULTS

Subjects were divided into three groups according to their responses to the questionnaire item, *Which of the following pictures of yourself has been most strongly associated with sexual arousal*. There were 94 subjects in the Nude group, 67 in the Underwear group, and 77 in the Clothed group.

The mean age of the Nude group was 32.2 years ( $SD = 8.7$ ), that of the Underwear group was 31.4 years ( $SD = 9.4$ ), and that of the Clothed group was 35.9 years ( $SD = 9.3$ ). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that between-groups differences in age were reliable,  $F(2, 235) = 5.26$ ,  $p = 0.0058$ . A Scheffé multiple-range test at the  $p < 0.05$  level showed that the Clothed group was significantly older than the Nude and Underwear groups, which did not differ from each other. There were no differences in education; the median and modal educational levels were Grade 12 for all three groups.

The prediction that the Nude group would produce the highest gender dysphoria scores was tested in a one-way ANOVA, followed by a Scheffé multiple-range test at the  $p < 0.05$  level. The results, presented in Table I, confirmed this prediction. The Nude group was significantly more gender dysphoric than the Clothed group, which, in turn, was significantly more gender dysphoric than the Underwear group.

As previously stated, the hypothesis that began the study did not predict whether the Clothed group would be more, equally, or less gender dysphoric than the Underwear group. Subsequent comparisons of these groups, therefore, were necessarily of an exploratory nature. In this phase of the study, these two groups (together with the Nude group) were compared on a variety of other psychosexual measures, in hopes of shedding light on their observed difference in gender dysphoria. The results of these additional analyses, which used the same statistical procedures described above, are also presented in Table I.

The first possibility investigated was that the Underwear group was less gender dysphoric than the Clothed group because it was more transvestitic. This notion was tested with the Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale, which showed it to be false. The Clothed group was, overall, just as aroused by women's garments, perfume, makeup, etc. as the Underwear group. Both

**Table I.** One-Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) and Scheffé Multiple-Range Tests for the Six Dependent Psychosexual Measures

Scale	ANOVAs		Group means and results of Scheffé tests <sup>b</sup>		
	<i>F</i> (2, 235)	<i>p</i> <sup>a</sup>	Nude	Clothed	Underwear
Pure Gender Dysphoria	18.5	.0001	7.8	6.8	5.6
Cross-Gender Fetishism	18.3	.0001	2.0	7.4 <sub>x</sub>	7.8 <sub>x</sub>
Heterosexual Experience	0.3	.7602	4.3 <sub>x</sub>	4.5 <sub>x</sub>	4.3 <sub>x</sub>
Alloeroticism	3.6	.0279	2.6 <sub>x,y</sub>	2.5 <sub>x</sub>	2.8 <sub>y</sub>
Mild Masochism	11.0	.0001	0.5 <sub>x</sub>	0.8 <sub>x</sub>	1.3
Sadism	11.2	.0001	0.8 <sub>x</sub>	1.4 <sub>x</sub>	2.5

<sup>a</sup>Probabilities less than 0.0001 have been rounded up to 0.0001.

<sup>b</sup>For every scale, greater mean values indicate higher levels of the relevant attribute. Means sharing a common subscript are *not* significantly different at  $p < 0.05$ .

groups were significantly more aroused by feminine attire than the Nude group, as one might expect.

The second conjecture was that the lesser gender dysphoria of the Underwear group was related to a more extensive history of sexual involvement with women. This was tested with the Heterosexual Experience Scale, which showed it to be false as well. All three groups reported similar levels of sexual experience.

The possibility remained that the Underwear group might have had more sexual interest in women, even if they did not have more sexual experience with them. This direction, investigated with the Alloeroticism Scale, appeared more promising. The mean Alloeroticism score of the Underwear group was significantly higher than the mean score of the Clothed group; the mean of the Nude group fell in between and did not differ significantly from either. The overall magnitude of between-groups differences was much smaller than all other variables except heterosexual experience; this might reflect merely an inadequacy of the Alloeroticism Scale, which consists of only three items.

The last two psychosexual dimensions examined did show a marked difference between the Underwear and Clothed groups. The Underwear group was both more masochistic and more sadistic than the Clothed and Nude groups, which did not differ from each other.

## DISCUSSION

As predicted, the results show that autogynephiles who are principally aroused by images of themselves as nude women are more gender

dysphoric—more desirous of female anatomies—than autogynephiles who are principally aroused by images of themselves as partially or fully dressed women. This finding demonstrates that, within the varied population of autogynephilic men, sexual fantasy and feminization-seeking behavior may be coordinated by a common object. It further suggests, although it does not prove, that an autogynephile's desire for physical union with his female self-image may be functionally equivalent to a heterosexual's desire for marital union with a female partner.

The last point made above is admittedly conjectural; however, this notion had a successful heuristic role in the present research and it might be used to generate other testable predictions. It should be noted that this notion is, in effect, an expanded version of Ellis's idea that autogynephilia is "really a modification of normal hetero-sexuality."

It is necessary to consider one alternative interpretation of the above finding. Many clinicians believe that "transvestites" (a label commonly applied to all autogynephiles, regardless of their preferred erotic self-image) sometimes, if not usually, become more gender dysphoric as they grow older (Bancroft, 1972; Meyer, 1974; Person and Ovesey, 1974; Stoller, 1971). If the Nude group were the oldest of the three groups, then the fact that they had the highest level of gender dysphoria might relate to their average age rather than the specific content of their erotic fantasies. The results show, however, that they were not the oldest of the three groups; they were the same age as the Underwear group and significantly younger than the Clothed group. This outcome, therefore, rules out the possibility that the study's main finding was an artifact of age.

The age data also make it unlikely that autogynephiles typically progress to fantasies of having women's bodies from fantasies of wearing women's clothes. That notion similarly implies that the Nude group should have been the oldest.

The finding that the specific content of autogynephiles' erotic fantasies relates to their degree of gender dysphoria has potential relevance for practical clinical prognosis. The majority of nonhomosexual male gender dysphorics who present for assessment or treatment are living predominantly in the male role: Many are still residing with their wives in more-or-less intact marriages; many are functioning successfully (as men) in good jobs. Whichever way one counsels such patients can entail some risk. For example, a man unwisely encouraged to remain in the male role might father one or more children before the pressure of his gender dysphoria forces the inevitable dissolution of his marriage. On the other hand, a man poorly advised to undertake a trial period of living full-time as a female might do unnecessary and irreparable damage to his relations with family, friends, and co-workers before he decides against sex reassignment and re-



turns to the male role. It would therefore be desirable to identify a set of prognostic indicators that, combined or weighted in some fashion, might help the clinician to anticipate the patient's future behavior in this regard. A few investigators have begun to attempt this task (Dixen, 1982; Kockott and Fahrner, 1987). This study's central finding indicates that the precise content of a patient's sexual fantasies may prove such an indicator and suggests that this variable should be included in future prognostic research.

The hypothesis tested in this study made no prediction regarding the relative gender dysphoria of the Clothed and Underwear groups, and it offers no explanation for the finding that the Clothed group was the more gender dysphoric of the two. Comparisons of these groups on other psychosexual variables showed that the erotic preference for images of oneself in women's underwear was associated with higher levels of self-reported masochism and sadism. These findings obviously do not constitute an explanation of why that preference should also be associated with lower levels of gender dysphoria, but they might contribute to future efforts to construct one.

One last point should be made explicit. The three experimental groups in this study do not represent discrete syndromes. Other research suggests, for example, that 90% of autogynephilic men who have been aroused by the idea of having a woman's body have also been aroused by the act or thought of wearing women's clothes (Blanchard, 1991). Thus, the between-groups comparisons in the present study should not be construed as efforts to validate a new typology. The purpose of this study was to investigate correlations between certain classes of behaviors in the autogynephilic population, and the division of subjects into groups was simply a methodological device to that end.

## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire Scales with Scoring Weights Given in Parentheses

#### *Pure Gender Dysphoria Scale*

1. Between the ages of 6 and 12, did you wish you had been born a girl instead of a boy? Often (2); Occasionally (1); Never (0).
  2. Between the ages of 13 and 16, did you wish you had been born a girl instead of a boy? Often (2); Occasionally (1); Never (0).
  3. Since the age of 17, have you wished you had been born a girl instead of a boy? Often (2); Occasionally (1); Never (0).
  4. Have you ever wanted to have an operation to change you physically into a woman? Yes (2); No (0); Unsure (1).
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5. If you have ever wished to have a female body rather than a male one, was this: Mainly to please men but also for your own satisfaction (1); Mainly for your own satisfaction but also to please men (1); Entirely for your own satisfaction (1); Entirely to please men (1); About equally to please men and for your own satisfaction (1); Have never wanted to have a female body (0).

#### *Mild Masochism Scale*

1. Which kind of behavior do you prefer in females age 17–40? Obedience (0); Sharing in making decisions (0); Being somewhat domineering and/or bossy (1).

2. Would you like to be treated by a female as if you were her servant? Yes (1); No (0).

3. If you were insulted or humiliated by a person to whom you felt sexually attracted, did this ever increase their attractiveness? Yes (1); No (0); Unsure (0).

4. Has imagining that you were being humiliated or poorly treated by someone ever excited you sexually? Yes (1); No (0).

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