
Autogynephilia: An Underappreciated Paraphilia

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Abstract

Autogynephilia is defined as a male's propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought of himself as a female. It is the paraphilia that is theorized to underlie transvestism and some forms of male-to-female (MtF) transsexualism. Autogynephilia encompasses sexual arousal with cross-dressing and cross-gender expression that does not involve women's clothing per se. The concept of autogynephilia defines a typology of MtF transsexualism and offers a theory of motivation for one type of MtF transsexualism. Autogynephilia resembles a sexual orientation in that it involves elements of idealization and attachment as well as erotic desire. Nearly 3% of men in Western countries may experience autogynephilia; its most severe manifestation, MtF transsexualism, is rare but increasing in prevalence. Some theorists and clinicians reject the transsexual typology and theory of motivation derived from autogynephilia; their objections suggest a need for additional research. The concept of autogynephilia can assist clinicians in understanding some otherwise puzzling manifestations of nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism. Autogynephilia exemplifies an unusual paraphilic category called 'erotic target identity inversions', in which men desire to impersonate or turn their bodies into facsimiles of the persons or things to which they are sexually attracted.

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The paraphilic erotic interest called 'autogynephilia' is probably unknown to many clinicians who treat sexual dysfunctions. Autogynephilia literally means 'love of oneself as a woman' [1]; it can be formally defined as 'a male's propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought of himself as a female' [2]. Autogynephilia is the paraphilia that underlies all or almost all cases of male transvestism [3] and many cases of male-to-female (MtF) transsexualism [2, 4]. It is a surprisingly prevalent condition that is not yet widely recognized or understood.

Why is autogynephilia important enough to merit a chapter in a volume devoted to sexual dysfunctions? First, autogynephilia can be thought of as a kind of sexual dysfunction: it is a disordered, variant form of conventional male heterosexual interest that often interferes with satisfying interpersonal sexual expression in men who

experience it. Second, clinicians who treat sexual dysfunctions will inevitably see clients with autogynephilia; the condition is surprisingly prevalent, and affected persons occasionally present with erectile and sexual desire disorders [5]. Finally, autogynephilia exemplifies a little-known but conceptually important paraphilic category, 'erotic target identity inversions' [6]; paraphilias in this category often manifest as disorders of identity, and awareness of this paraphilic category can help clinicians make sense of phenomena that appear to be disorders of identity but have erotic components.

Early History of the Concept of Autogynephilia

The concept of autogynephilia arose from attempts to develop a comprehensive and clinically useful typology for the classification of men with gender dysphoria (discontent with anatomic sex and desire to have the body of the opposite sex); transsexualism is the most severe form of gender dysphoria. By the 1980s, it was recognized that there were two or more different types of gender dysphoric or transsexual men. Many different typologies of male gender dysphoria and MtF transsexualism were proposed [7], but none achieved general acceptance. It was also recognized that some types of MtF transsexualism had characteristics in common with transvestism [8], that transvestism sometimes evolved into MtF transsexualism [9], and that the boundary separating the two conditions was indistinct [10].

Some gender dysphoric men seemed to conform to the familiar clinical pattern of MtF transsexualism: they had been extremely feminine boys, and they grew into extremely feminine adults. Their vocational interests were female-typical. They were sexually attracted exclusively to men. They usually sought sex reassignment in their 20s, sometimes earlier. Their motivations for wanting to undergo sex reassignment seemed obvious: because of their natural femininity and their sexual attraction to men, it was simply easier and more satisfying for them to live in the world as women than as men.

Other gender dysphoric men did not fit the familiar pattern of MtF transsexualism, however. These men had been unremarkably masculine boys, and they grew into unremarkably masculine adults. Their vocational interests were male-typical. They were sexually attracted to women. Most had been married one or more times; many had fathered children. They sometimes sought sex reassignment in their late 30s, but more often in their 40s, 50s or 60s. In most cases, they had a history of sexual arousal with cross-dressing. Their motivations for seeking sex reassignment did not at all appear obvious.

In the 1980s, psychologist Ray Blanchard attempted to devise an empirically valid, clinically useful system for classifying the various disparate types of male gender dysphoria and MtF transsexualism. Blanchard [11] divided a large sample of MtF transsexual patients into four groups, based on their sexual orientation relative to natal sex: (1) homosexual (i.e. androphilic or sexually attracted exclusively to men);

(2) heterosexual (i.e. gynephilic or sexually attracted exclusively to women); (3) bisexual (attracted to both women and men, at least in theory), and (4) asexual or analloerotic (not sexually attracted to other people, albeit not necessarily devoid of all sexual interests). He discovered that about three quarters of the combined group of heterosexual, bisexual and analloerotic MtF transsexuals reported a history of sexual arousal by cross-dressing, whereas only 15% of the homosexual MtF transsexuals reported such a history. He hypothesized that there might be two basic types of MtF transsexualism: (1) an exclusively homosexual type, comprised of persons who were not aroused by cross-dressing, and (2) a nonhomosexual type, with heterosexual, bisexual and analloerotic subtypes, comprised of persons who were aroused by cross-dressing.

Two additional pieces of evidence led Blanchard to theorize that these two MtF transsexual types were genuinely distinct and that the presence or absence of sexual arousal with cross-dressing reliably distinguished them. First, Blanchard et al. [12] demonstrated, by using phallometry, that transvestites and nonhomosexual gender-dysphoric men who denied sexual arousal with cross-dressing nevertheless displayed physiological arousal in response to audiotaped stimuli describing cross-dressing scenarios. Second, Blanchard et al. [13] demonstrated that in nonhomosexual gender dysphoric men, the tendency to describe oneself in a socially desirable way was strongly correlated with the tendency to deny sexual arousal with cross-dressing and to report some degree of sexual attraction to men. This last piece of evidence dovetailed with the clinical observation that nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals sometimes feign erotic attraction to men [14]. Taken together, these observations led Blanchard to conclude that all (or nearly all) nonhomosexual gender dysphoric men experienced sexual arousal with cross-dressing, denials notwithstanding, and that no (or almost no) homosexual gender dysphoric men experienced sexual arousal with cross-dressing because those who claimed to do so probably were not genuinely homosexual, but were nonhomosexual persons who had misrepresented their sexual orientation.

Blanchard [15] subsequently found that homosexual gender dysphoric men reported significantly greater childhood femininity than their nonhomosexual counterparts (the three nonhomosexual subtypes did not differ significantly) and presented for treatment at a significantly earlier age than their nonhomosexual counterparts (the nonhomosexual subtypes again did not differ). Most importantly, Blanchard [2] demonstrated that nonhomosexual gender dysphoric men were much more likely than their homosexual counterparts to report sexual arousal to the thought or image of having a female body. Because there was no existing term for this concept, which did not involve cross-dressing per se, Blanchard called it autogynephilia, 'love of oneself as a woman' [1]. According to Blanchard's formulation, nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals could accurately be described as autogynephilic transsexuals, and homosexual MtF transsexuals could accurately be described as nonautogynephilic transsexuals. Blanchard [1] summarized his theory this way: 'All gender dysphoric

males who are not sexually oriented toward men are instead sexually oriented toward the thought or image of themselves as women' (pp. 322–323).

Clinical Manifestations of Autogynephilia

Blanchard [3] observed that gender dysphoric men could be aroused by the idea of embodying or enacting almost any element of female anatomy, physiology or behavior. He discovered that these men were sometimes sexually aroused by the idea or reality of (a) having a female body or body features such as a vulva or breasts (anatomic autogynephilia), (b) being pregnant, menstruating or breast-feeding (physiologic autogynephilia), (c) engaging in behaviors considered to be female-typical, such as sewing, going to a beauty salon or having a female-typical occupation (e.g. flight attendant, erotic dancer or prostitute; behavioral autogynephilia), or (d) wearing women's clothing or accessories (transvestic autogynephilia). Not surprisingly, anatomic autogynephilia – arousal to the idea of having a female body, and especially female genitals – was found to be especially characteristic of the gender dysphoric men who most avidly sought sex reassignment surgery, i.e. MtF transsexuals [16, 17].

Behavioral autogynephilia has a wide range of manifestations, but one deserves particular attention: the fantasy or reality of taking a woman's sexual role with a male partner. Blanchard [2] emphasized that this kind of erotic interest did not represent genuine androphilia, but simply the strong desire of some autogynephilic persons 'to have their physical attractiveness as women validated by others' (p. 622); he called this desire 'autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy'. Blanchard theorized that this is the phenomenon that leads some nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals to describe themselves as bisexual or even primarily attracted to men. Although they are fundamentally gynephilic, they also experience a secondary sexual interest in men, derived from autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy.

Autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy seems to become more prevalent or intense in MtF transsexuals who have completed sex reassignment: many such individuals report feeling greater sexual attraction to men after undergoing sex reassignment surgery, and some engage in sexual activity with male partners for the first time [4]. Making sense of this phenomenon requires understanding the distinction between genuine androphilia and the behavioral expression of autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy. Some otherwise astute clinicians who are presumably familiar with the evidence that male sexual orientation is essentially immutable in adulthood [18] nevertheless appear to believe that MtF transsexuals with a lifelong history of gynephilia can suddenly develop genuine androphilia after sex reassignment [19]. This misapprehension reflects a failure to distinguish between androphilia and autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy.

Autogynephilia typically coexists with but also competes with gynephilia directed toward female partners (alloerotic gynephilia). Blanchard [20] observed

that autogynephilic men varied in the relative intensity of their autogynephilic and alloerotic gynephilic sexual interests. In some autogynephilic men, sexual interest in female partners predominates and autogynephilia is a minor sexual interest. In others, autogynephilia appears to be an exclusive or almost exclusive sexual interest, effectively crowding out any interest in female partners. Most autogynephilic men fall somewhere in between: they are genuinely attracted to and aroused by female partners, but are also aroused by the idea of being women. A quotation from the autobiography of Nancy Hunt [21], an MtF transsexual, describes this phenomenon:

I was feverishly interested in [girls]. I studied their hair, their clothes, their figures. And I brooded about the increasing differences between us. I seethed with envy while at the same time becoming sexually aroused – I wanted to possess them even as I wanted to become them. In my nighttime fantasies, as I masturbated or floated towards sleep, I combined the two compulsions, dreaming of sex but with myself as the girl. (p. 60)

The fact that autogynephilia and genuine attraction to women usually coexist led Lawrence [22] to observe that autogynephilic MtF transsexuals are ‘men who love women and who want to become what they love’ (p. 516).

The competition between autogynephilia and alloerotic gynephilia is sometimes a dynamic process, which seems to be mediated in part by the erotic appeal of novelty. Clients with autogynephilia sometimes report that their autogynephilic desires and behaviors weaken or become less frequent when they become romantically involved with new female partners. The desire for sex reassignment has been known to remit completely in nonhomosexual gender dysphoric men, at least for a time, when they become romantically involved with women [20, 23, 24]. When the novelty of these new relationships fades, however, autogynephilic desires usually reassert themselves. When autogynephilia and alloerotic gynephilia coexist in the context of an ongoing sexual relationship, an increase in the relative intensity of autogynephilia can be associated with erectile problems or desire disorders during partnered sexual activity [5, 25].

Autogynephilia in Transvestism

Thinking about sexual arousal with cross-dressing as transvestic autogynephilia offers a conceptual link between nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism and transvestism: both conditions can be understood as autogynephilic phenomena that differ primarily in the type of autogynephilia that is predominant in each. In MtF transsexualism, anatomic autogynephilia is the predominant type, although other types are also present in most cases [17]. In transvestism, transvestic autogynephilia is the predominant type, although other types are sometimes present as well [26]. This conceptualization helps to explain the cooccurrence of transvestism and MtF transsexualism and the apparent ability of the former to evolve into the latter.

Transvestic autogynephilia is not the only type of autogynephilia that transvestites experience. Surveys conducted among members of social organizations for heterosexual cross-dressing men reveal that anatomic and behavioral autogynephilia are not uncommon among these men. Croughan et al. [26] reported that about one third of men who had sought treatment for their transvestism fantasized primarily about being female while masturbating during cross-dressing; this was much less common in transvestic men who had not sought treatment, suggesting that anatomic autogynephilia was associated with greater subjective distress. Moreover, about one third of men who sought treatment for transvestism reported that they had engaged in sexual behavior with men while cross-dressed, as had about one fifth of men who had not sought treatment; this behavior can be understood as a manifestation of behavioral autogynephilia.

Some transvestites also experience gender dysphoria. This is not surprising, given that more than a few transvestites report anatomic autogynephilia [26], which is associated with more intense gender dysphoria in men for whom gender dysphoria is a presenting complaint [17]. In a survey of over 1,000 cross-dressing men, none of whom lived full time as women, Docter and Prince [27] found that over one half of participants either were currently using feminizing hormones, had used them in the past or were interested in using them, a finding that is indicative of gender dysphoria. The existence of gender dysphoria and anatomic autogynephilia in some transvestites suggests that transvestism and nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism are not discrete entities, but points on a spectrum of autogynephilic symptomatology [28]. This is consistent with a report by Freund et al. [29] that transvestites and nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals exist on a continuum of progressively increasing gender dysphoria.

Autogynephilia as a Sexual Orientation

Autogynephilia is a paraphilic phenomenon in that it reflects an unusual or disordered erotic interest, but it also has dimensions that are not explicitly erotic. In fact, autogynephilia appears to define or give rise to a sexual orientation. Blanchard [16] explained:

Autogynephilia might be better characterized as an orientation than as a paraphilia. The term *orientation* encompasses behavior, correlated with sexual behavior but distinct from it, that may ultimately have a greater impact on the life of the individual. For heterosexual and homosexual men, such correlated behavior includes courtship, love, and cohabitation with a partner of the preferred sex; for autogynephilic men, it includes the desire to achieve, with clothing, hormones, or surgery, an appearance like the preferred self-image of their erotic fantasies. (p. 306)

Sexual orientations are characterized by feelings of idealization and attachment in addition to feelings of erotic desire [30]. For example, gynephilic men do not merely lust for women, they also – at least most of the time – idealize them, fall in love with them, derive feelings of comfort and security from them, and seek to establish enduring

bonds with them. Autogynephilia is much the same: like other sexual orientations, autogynephilia potentially involves all the feelings and behaviors we associate with the word 'love,' broadly construed [22]. Autogynephilic MtF transsexuals are erotically aroused by imagining themselves as female, but they also idealize the thought of being female, experience feelings of comfort and security from their autogynephilic fantasies and behaviors, and usually want to bond permanently with their idealized feminine self-images by completely embodying and enacting them (i.e. by undergoing hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery).

Clinicians who deal with sexual concerns will be aware that men can continue to feel love for and comfort and security from romantic partners for whom they no longer feel much erotic desire [30]. In other words, the elements of sexual orientation that involve attraction and attachment can persist long after the erotic element has declined or disappeared. In the case of autogynephilic MtF transsexuals, this translates into the potential to experience ongoing attraction to and comfort from autogynephilic images and behaviors that no longer carry much erotic charge. Blanchard [3] described this phenomenon:

In later years, however, autogynephilic sexual arousal may diminish or disappear, while the transsexual wish remains or grows even stronger. . . . It is therefore feasible that the continuing desire to have a female body, after the disappearance of sexual response to that thought, has some analog in the permanent love-bond that may remain between two people after their initial strong sexual attraction has largely disappeared. (p. 248)

This phenomenon accounts for the reports by some nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals that even after they are no longer sexually aroused by cross-dressing or imagining themselves as women, they still love the idea of being women, find the idea comforting, and want to live permanently as women. It also accounts for similar reports by transvestites, who often state that they continue to enjoy dressing as women, even after cross-dressing has ceased to be erotically exciting, because they derive feelings of comfort and relaxation from doing so [9].

Epidemiology of Autogynephilia

Transvestism is the most common manifestation of autogynephilia. Lawrence [31] summarized the results of 9 published studies that described the prevalence of transvestism, sexual arousal by cross-gender fantasies, and similar phenomena in men; all these studies had methodological shortcomings, but together they suggested that perhaps 3% of men, possibly more, engaged in cross-dressing for erotic purposes at least occasionally. Two recent European surveys, one of which employed probability-based sampling, reported that 2.7% [32] and 2.8% [33] of adult men had experienced sexual arousal with cross-dressing. If these estimates are correct, then most clinicians who practice sexual medicine or treat sexual dysfunctions can expect to see clients who experience autogynephilia, albeit not necessarily as their presenting complaint.

The most severe manifestation of autogynephilia is MtF transsexualism. Population-based figures from Western Europe offer the most reliable estimates of the prevalence of MtF transsexualism overall, but these figures do not distinguish between homosexual and nonhomosexual or autogynephilic subtypes. In Belgium, 1 in 12,900 adult males had undergone sex reassignment as of 2007 [34]. In the Netherlands, as of 1993, 1 in 11,900 adult males had undergone sex reassignment [35]. Data from Scotland revealed that 1 in 7,400 adult males had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, and 1 in 12,800 had been treated with cross-sex hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery as of 1999 [36].

How many of these MtF transsexuals are nonhomosexual and thus putatively autogynephilic? Currently, well over half of MtF transsexuals in Western countries are nonhomosexual [37], but the percentage varies from country to country. In one recent study [38], about 83% of MtF transsexuals in Belgium and 62% in the Netherlands were nonhomosexual. Comparable percentages in the UK and USA are about 80 and 90%, respectively [37]. In most Asian and Latin American countries, however, nearly all MtF transsexuals are homosexual, whereas autogynephilic transsexualism is rare. The reasons for these cross-cultural differences are not well understood.

The current overall prevalence figures for MtF transsexualism are 3 or 4 times higher than a few decades earlier. In the 1960s, the estimated prevalence of transsexualism in adult males was 1 in 37,000 in Sweden and about 1 in 50,000 in the USA (based on an estimate of 1 in 100,000 for the entire male population) [39]. Why has MtF transsexualism become so much more prevalent? Consider that around 3% of adult men are at least occasionally sexually aroused by the fantasy of resembling or becoming women, and that up to one half of them think about turning their fantasies into reality by taking feminizing hormones or undergoing sex reassignment. Men with these sexual fantasies nearly always decide not to act them out; but if only small numbers of them were to reconsider, conclude that they were appropriate candidates for sex reassignment and decide to actively pursue sex reassignment, the prevalence of transsexualism could easily increase dramatically. I theorize that this is what has occurred in recent years: the threshold at which autogynephilic men consider themselves to be appropriate candidates for sex reassignment has become progressively lower in contemporary Western countries. Docter and Prince [27] believed they had observed such an attitudinal shift in the surveys of cross-dressing men they conducted in 1972 and 1997. This explanation is also consistent with the observation that the relative prevalence of the nonhomosexual type of MtF transsexualism has increased over time in several Western countries.

Autogynephilia, like most other paraphilias, usually becomes evident early in life. There are two published case reports of boys younger than 3 years who asked to wear cross-sex clothing and who developed erections when allowed to do so [40, 41]. Heterosexual cross-dressers and nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals often report that

they began cross-dressing in early childhood and almost always before the age of 12 years [4, 27, 42].

Autogynephilia as a Motive for Sex Reassignment

The concept of autogynephilia does more than provide a name for an erotic phenomenon and define a transsexual typology. It also offers a theory of motivation for sex reassignment in autogynephilic transsexuals. It proposes, at least implicitly, that severely gender dysphoric autogynephilic men seek and undergo sex reassignment because they are sexually aroused by (and in love with) the idea of having female bodies and living as women. They want to make their autogynephilic fantasies real by turning their bodies into facsimiles of women's bodies [16, 17] and by assuming women's social roles. This explanation is merely an extension of the generally accepted idea that transvestites cross-dress primarily because they are sexually aroused by the idea of dressing as women and want to act out their transvestic fantasies.

As reasonable as this explanation might sound, it may evoke feelings of cognitive dissonance in some clinicians who hold conventional ideas about gender dysphoria and transsexualism. According to conventional wisdom, severely gender dysphoric men seek sex reassignment because they have strong cross-gender identities that they wish to express and because they experience distressing feelings of 'wrong embodiment' [43]. This explanation is not unreasonable, as far as it goes; but how do the cross-gender identities of these men come into existence? Why does their male embodiment feel so wrong and distressing?

The concept of autogynephilia provides an explanation of these phenomena. Cross-gender identity in autogynephilic transsexualism is a secondary, derivative phenomenon that develops after years of partial cross-dressing, complete cross-dressing, appearing cross-dressed in public, and adopting a feminine name [9]. Based on his research on nonhomosexual cross-dressing men, Docter [9] observed that:

Among our subjects, 79% did not appear in public cross dressed prior to age 20; at that time, most of the subjects had already had several years of experience with cross dressing. The average number of years of practice with cross dressing prior to owning a full feminine outfit was 15. The average number of years of practice with cross dressing prior to adoption of a feminine name was 21. Again, we have factual evidence indicative of the considerable time required for the development of the cross-gender identity. (p. 209)

Distressing feelings of wrong embodiment, in turn, plausibly reflect an inability to actualize the erotic wish to have a female body [17]. These feelings are analogous to what nonparaphilic men might feel if they were unable to actualize their sexual desires. In short, autogynephilia is theorized to be the proximate cause of both cross-gender identity and gender dysphoria in nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals.

Challenges to Autogynephilia-Based Transsexual Typology

No one seriously doubts that the phenomenon of autogynephilia exists; too many transvestites and nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals testify that they have experienced it [44]. But some clinicians and theorists believe that Blanchard's autogynephilia-based typology of MtF transsexualism is too limited, while other commentators consider autogynephilia to be an epiphenomenon, not a causal phenomenon. Proponents of the first point of view typically contend that there is a third MtF transsexual type that Blanchard's typology cannot account for. Proponents of the second typically argue that autogynephilia is not unique to transvestites and nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals, but is also found in homosexual MtF transsexuals, natal women, or both. Considering these arguments in detail would require an entire article, but it may be useful to address them briefly.

Is there a 'third type' of MtF transsexualism, one that is neither homosexual nor autogynephilic? It is true that substantial numbers of MtF transsexuals with nonhomosexual orientations deny ever experiencing autogynephilic arousal. In a study by Blanchard [11], 27% denied such arousal, and in a study by Lawrence [4], the comparable figure was 10%. How should those denials be interpreted? The observation that autogynephilic arousal can be demonstrated using phallometry in cross-dressing men who deny experiencing it [12] suggests that some men's self-reports are simply not consistent with the ways their bodies respond. Moreover, the observation that denial of autogynephilic arousal is associated with a socially desirable response style [13] suggests that self-favorable reporting may partly explain this inconsistency. Improved measures of physiologic arousal may be necessary to decide the issue definitively.

Do homosexual MtF transsexuals, natal women, or both experience autogynephilia? Some MtF transsexuals who admit to experiencing autogynephilia claim to be exclusively attracted to men, but their claims are often unconvincing. For example, in a recent study reporting pooled data from 4 Northern European countries [45], 23 (52%) of 44 men with late-onset gender dysphoria claimed to be exclusively sexually attracted to men, but the experienced clinicians who interviewed the men and had access to their records concluded that only 4 (9%) were genuinely androphilic. Autogynephilic men who claim to be androphilic may simply experience autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy, which they mistakenly describe as genuine androphilia.

At least two surveys [46, 47] concluded that some natal women report autogynephilia, or something that appears quite similar. Both studies, however, had serious methodological limitations. The questions they asked arguably did not adequately differentiate between being sexually aroused by wearing sexy clothing or imagining that one appears attractive to potential romantic partners (which many natal women plausibly experience) and being sexually aroused simply by the idea that one is wearing women's clothing or that one has a woman's body (which natal

women arguably rarely or never experience) [48]. Only the latter is autogynephilia, and it remains to be demonstrated that any natal women genuinely experience it. More sophisticated survey techniques will probably be required to clarify the issue.

Clinical Implications of Autogynephilia

The theory that autogynephilia is a paraphilia that underlies nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism as well as transvestism can assist clinicians in understanding some otherwise puzzling clinical manifestations of the former condition. For example, the theory accounts for the increased prevalence of other paraphilic conditions in nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism. Other paraphilic sexual interests, especially sexual masochism, are common in MtF transsexuals who are primarily nonhomosexual [49, 50] as well as in transvestites [51]. The latter observation is easy to understand: transvestism is understood to be a paraphilia, and the paraphilias tend to cluster or cooccur [52]. It is less obvious why paraphilias should be unusually prevalent in nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals; paraphilias are rare in women [53], and MtF transsexuals are usually assumed to be similar to women in many ways. If nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism is understood to be a paraphilic phenomenon, however, the increased prevalence of other paraphilias becomes more easily understandable: it is simply another instance of paraphilias cooccurring.

As previously noted, nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals sometimes unexpectedly develop an interest in male sexual partners. Understanding that this reflects autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy, not genuine androphilia, makes the phenomenon easier to understand. This conceptual model predicts that nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals would usually experience little or no genuine alloerotic sexual interest in male partners. This is precisely what some nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals candidly admit: they love the way their partners treat them as women, but rarely feel much erotic desire or love for their partners per se [54]. Predictably, many of their sexual relationships with men end quickly, but the usual absence of intense feelings of desire for, idealization of and attachment to their male partners means that the transsexual participants tend to recover quickly when these relationships end.

Finally, the theory that nonhomosexual MtF transsexualism is a paraphilic phenomenon plausibly explains why men who are typically masculine in appearance, behavior patterns and occupational and avocational interests choose to undergo sex reassignment. These individuals have often lived successfully as men for decades; they are not sexually attracted to men, they usually have little realistic hope of being accepted as social women, and they often lose their families, their employment and their significant relationships as a consequence of their decisions. Clinicians might legitimately wonder: does their choice appear to represent the expression of a

long-suppressed feminine gender identity? Or does it appear to represent the acting out of an intensely felt paraphilic sexual desire?

Autogynephilia as an Erotic Target Identity Inversion

Autogynephilia is an interesting and heuristically valuable concept in its own right, but it is also the best-known and most prevalent example of an unusual and fascinating paraphilic category or dimension called 'erotic target identity inversions' [6]. Men who experience erotic target identity inversions want to impersonate, or change their bodies to resemble, the persons or things ('erotic targets') to which they are sexually attracted and which they love. The desire to impersonate or become what one is attracted to typically creates a profound sense of identification with the preferred erotic target, and wanting to become what one loves, rather than simply possessing it in another person, can be seen as an inversion ('turning in') of erotic interest toward the self; this is the origin of the term erotic target identity inversion.

Women are the most frequent erotic targets of men, so it is not surprising that autogynephilia is the most prevalent form of erotic target identity inversion. Some men, however, are attracted to other erotic targets including men, children, women with unusual or specific physical characteristics, animals and inanimate objects with anthropomorphic features [31]. The concept of erotic target identity inversions was originally suggested by the observation that some pedophiles desire to impersonate children or have erotic fantasies in which they imagine themselves to be children [6]. Some men have an unusual wish to impersonate or become amputees; this phenomenon was historically considered to be a paraphilia called apotemnophilia [55], but its etiology was obscure. The observation that most men with apotemnophilia are sexually attracted to amputees and that gender identity disorders are also overrepresented in these men led to the hypothesis that apotemnophilia represents an erotic target identity inversion in men who have a paraphilic sexual interest in amputees [56].

Do erotic target identity inversions occur in men who are sexually attracted to other men? Freund and Blanchard [6] summarized several case reports documenting the analogue of transvestism (called 'homeovestism') in androphilic men, i.e. the phenomenon of men experiencing sexual arousal from wearing (other) men's clothes. Freund and Blanchard suggested that other manifestations of erotic target identity inversion in androphilic men should theoretically exist but would probably be 'subtle and difficult to detect' (p. 562). A recent case report [57] described the first published instance of anatomic autoandrophilia in an androphilic man. Even more unusual types of erotic target identity inversion involve men who are sexually attracted to plush animals (or perhaps to the anthropomorphic cartoon characters these animals often represent) and want to impersonate or become plush animals themselves [6, 31]. A similar phenomenon theoretically should exist in zoophiles, but has not been well documented [31].

Erotic target identity inversions other than autogynephilia represent the intersections of uncommon erotic interests with the unusual paraphilic desire to impersonate or resemble the objects of those uncommon interests. Consequently, they are likely to be observed only rarely. But when clinicians encounter men who want to impersonate or make their bodies resemble something unusual, they might ask themselves whether they are witnessing the cooccurrence of a paraphilic erotic interest and an erotic target identity inversion.

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