

Letter to the Editor

Something Resembling Autogynephilia in Women: Comment on Moser (2009)

ANNE A. LAWRENCE, M.D., PhD

Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Dear Editor:

In a recent article, Moser (2009) claimed to have documented at least occasional autogynephilic sexual arousal in 27 (93%) of 29 female hospital employees he surveyed, and frequent autogynephilic arousal in 8 (28%). Autogynephilia, a term coined by Blanchard (1989a), is defined as the “propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought of [oneself] as a female” (Blanchard, 1989b, p. 616). Autogynephilia occurs commonly, perhaps almost universally, in nonhomosexual male-to-female (MtF) transsexuals (Blanchard, 1989b; Lawrence, 2005), but it has been theorized to occur rarely, if at all, in natal women (Blanchard, 2005).

Here, I argue that Moser (2009) was mistaken in his claims, primarily due to serious deficiencies in the scale he devised to measure autogynephilia in women. Many of the items in Moser’s scale bear little resemblance to the items Blanchard used to assess autogynephilia, and even those items that do bear some resemblance to Blanchard’s do not adequately assess the essential element of autogynephilia—sexual arousal simply to the thought of being a female—because they do not emphasize that element. Consequently, although Moser may have found something superficially resembling autogynephilia in women, there is little reason to think that he documented genuine autogynephilic arousal in women.

Moser (2009) explained the construction of his scale for measuring autogynephilia in women as follows: “Using the Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale (Blanchard, 1985) and items created for other studies (Blanchard, 1989b), an analogous Autogynephilia Scale for Women was created for this study. . . . An experimental item (#9) not derived from these scales was also

Address correspondence to Anne A. Lawrence, 6801 28th Ave. NE, Seattle, Washington 98115. E-mail: alawrence@mindspring.com

included” (p. 542). The “items created for other studies” are those included in Blanchard’s (1989b) Core Autogynephilia Scale and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale. Moser revealed his unfamiliarity with these scales, however, when he stated that, “I can find no study where MTFs were asked if they were aroused by the simple thought of possessing breasts or a vulva” (p. 540): In fact, items 2 and 5 in Blanchard’s Core Autogynephilia Scale posed these exact questions, and Blanchard (1989b) used them to assess autogynephilia in 212 MtF transsexuals.

Perhaps because of Moser’s evident unfamiliarity with Blanchard’s scales, many of Moser’s items are not genuinely analogous to any of Blanchard’s items. In Table 1, I compare the nine items in Moser’s

TABLE 1 Comparison of Moser’s items and closest similar items by Blanchard

Item from Moser’s autogynephilia scale for women	Closest similar item from Blanchard’s CGFS, CAS, or AIFS
1. I have been erotically aroused by contemplating myself in the nude.	Have you ever become sexually aroused while picturing yourself having a nude female body or with certain features of the the nude female form? [CAS item 1]
2. I have been erotically aroused by contemplating myself wearing lingerie, underwear, or foundation garments (e.g., corsets).	Have you ever felt sexually aroused when putting on women’s underwear, stockings, or a nightgown? [CGFS item 6]
3. I have been erotically aroused by contemplating myself fully clothed in <i>sexy attire</i> .	Have you ever felt sexually aroused when putting on women’s jewelry or outer garments (blouse, skirt, dress, etc.)? [CGFS item 1]
4. <i>I have been erotically aroused by dressing in lingerie or sexy attire for a romantic evening or when hoping to meet a sex partner.</i>	[No similar Blanchard item]
5. I have been erotically aroused by preparing (shaving my legs, applying make-up, etc.) <i>for a romantic evening or when hoping to meet a sex partner.</i>	Have you ever felt sexually aroused when putting on women’s perfume or makeup, or when shaving your legs? [CGFS item 5]
6. I have dressed in lingerie, <i>sexy attire</i> or prepared myself (shaving my legs, applying make-up, etc.) before masturbating.	Have you ever put on women’s clothes or makeup for the main purpose of becoming sexually excited and masturbating? [CGFS item 11]
7. <i>I have been erotically aroused by imagining myself with a “sexier” body.</i>	[No similar Blanchard item]
8. I have been erotically aroused by imagining that others find me <i>particularly sexy</i> , attractive, or <i>irresistible</i> .	Have you ever become sexually aroused while picturing yourself as a fully dressed woman being admired by another person? [AIFS item 11]
9. <i>I have been erotically aroused by using specific articles of clothing, odors, or textures during masturbation.</i>	[No similar Blanchard item]

Note. CGFS = Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale (Blanchard, 1985); CAS = Core Autogynephilia Scale, AIFS = Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale (Blanchard, 1989b). Italic type indicates language in Moser’s items that is not similar to that in any of Blanchard’s items.

Autogynephilia Scale for Women with the most similar items from Blanchard's Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale, Core Autogynephilia Scale, and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale; italic type indicates language in Moser's items that is not similar to language in any of Blanchard's items.

As Table 1 illustrates, only items 1, 2, 3, and 6 in Moser's Autogynephilia Scale for Women bear any genuine resemblance to Blanchard's items. Endorsement of these four items by Moser's participants was limited: Only 2 (7%) participants reported frequent arousal to any of them. Moser's items 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 are not genuinely analogous to any of Blanchard's items. Moser's items 4, 5, and 8 ask about sexual arousal in anticipation of possible interpersonal romantic or sexual interaction, which is not related to autogynephilia *per se*. Note, too, that Moser's item 8 emphasizes other people's reactions to oneself, whereas the closest similar item from Blanchard's Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale emphasizes "picturing yourself . . . as a woman." Not surprisingly, Moser's items 4, 5, and 8 were the ones his participants endorsed most frequently. It seems probable that Moser's claims of frequent autogynephilic arousal in 28% of natal women, and at least occasional autogynephilic arousal in 93%, are based primarily on responses to these items, which have little or nothing to do with autogynephilia *per se*.

Even Moser's items 1, 2, 3, and 6, which somewhat resemble Blanchard's, fail to adequately assess the essential element of autogynephilia—sexual arousal simply to the thought of being a female—because they do not emphasize that element. As Table 1 indicates, only one of these four items was derived from Blanchard's Core Autogynephilia Scale, whereas the other three were derived from Blanchard's Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale, which concerns fetishism for women's clothing and accessories. In men, sexual arousal to wearing women's clothing or accessories plausibly indicates genuine autogynephilia, because such cross-dressing is invariably accompanied by the fantasy of being a female (Levine, 1993). In natal women, however, sexual arousal in association with wearing specific items of women's clothing or accessories cannot be assumed to indicate arousal simply to the idea of being a female.

If Moser had wanted to rigorously investigate the essential or "core" element of autogynephilia as it might manifest in natal women, he could easily have constructed an Autogynephilia Scale for Women consisting of items like the following, derived from Blanchard's Core Autogynephilia Scale (CAS):

1. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have a female body? [based on CAS item 1]
2. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have female breasts? [based on CAS item 2]
3. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have female buttocks? [based on CAS item 3]

4. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have female legs? [based on CAS item 4]
5. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have female genitals? [based on CAS item 5]
6. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact that you have a female face? [based on CAS item 6]
7. Have you ever become sexually aroused by the thought or fact of simply being a female? [based on CAS item 8]

I suspect that endorsement of such items by natal women would be infrequent.

If Moser had used items like these in his survey, we might know more about whether or how frequently natal women experience genuine autogynephilia. But, because Moser used seriously flawed items in his survey, all we know is that a few natal women experience something superficially resembling autogynephilia. To his credit, Moser (2009) conceded that, "It is possible that autogynephilia among MTFs and natal women are different phenomena and the present inventories lack the sophistication to distinguish these differences" (p. 544). I contend that what Moser considered possible is actually probable: Autogynephilia in MtF transsexuals is probably quite different from the superficially similar phenomenon that Moser documented in natal women, and Moser's items unfortunately lacked the sophistication to distinguish the difference.

REFERENCES

- Blanchard, R. (1985). Research methods for the typological study of gender disorders in males. In B. W. Steiner (Ed.), *Gender dysphoria: Development, research, management* (pp. 227–257). New York: Plenum.
- Blanchard, R. (1989a). The classification and labeling of nonhomosexual gender dysphorias. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *18*, 315–334.
- Blanchard, R. (1989b). The concept of autogynephilia and the typology of male gender dysphoria. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *177*, 616–623.
- Blanchard, R. (2005). Early history of the concept of autogynephilia. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *34*, 439–446.
- Lawrence, A. A. (2005). Sexuality before and after male-to-female sex reassignment surgery. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *34*, 147–166.
- Levine, S. B. (1993). Gender-disturbed males. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *19*, 131–141.
- Moser, C. (2009). Autogynephilia in women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *56*, 539–547.