

## Transsexual Groups in Veale et al. (2008) are “Autogynephilic” and “Even More Autogynephilic”

Anne A. Lawrence · J. Michael Bailey

Published online: 7 November 2008  
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2008

In a survey of self-identified male-to-female (MtF) transsexuals, Veale, Clarke, and Lomax (2008) used hierarchical cluster analysis to divide their respondents into two groups, which they called “autogynephilic” and “nonautogynephilic.” Veale et al. then considered whether the characteristics of these groups were consistent with Blanchard’s (1988, 1989) observations concerning homosexual (i.e., nonautogynephilic) and nonhomosexual (i.e., autogynephilic) MtF transsexuals. Veale et al. reported that their results disagreed with Blanchard’s in several areas.

We argue here that Veale et al. reached erroneous conclusions, as a result of significant methodological problems in their analysis. Specifically, we contend that: (1) In performing their cluster analysis, Veale et al. inappropriately employed two variables that were unrelated to autogynephilia, in addition to two variables that were genuine measures of autogynephilia; (2) consequently, both transsexual groups defined by their cluster analysis displayed substantial autogynephilia: They are best described as the “autogynephilic” and “even more autogynephilic” groups, not the “nonautogynephilic” and “autogynephilic” groups; (3) because Veale et al. failed to recognize that both transsexual groups were autogynephilic, they mistakenly concluded that their results

were partly inconsistent with Blanchard’s. Despite these limitations, the Veale et al. study provided valuable confirmation of another phenomenon that is widely recognized but that until now has been poorly documented: MtF transsexuals who are active on the Internet appear overwhelmingly to be autogynephilic.

Veale et al. used four variables in their cluster analysis: participants’ scores on two scales created by Blanchard (1989), Core Autogynephilia and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy, and on two scales they devised, Attraction to Feminine Males and Attraction to Transgender Fiction. Veale et al. selected these variables because “they were found most effective for classifying transsexuals into groups in a taxometric analysis using the same data” (p. 592). But Veale et al. had too few participants to conduct a valid taxometric analysis: A minimum of 300 participants is recommended (Meehl, 1995; Ruscio, Haslam, & Ruscio, 2006), while Veale et al. had only 169. Even if their taxometric analysis had been valid, however, it would not have justified including Attraction to Feminine Males and Attraction to Transgender Fiction in the cluster analysis, because neither scale bears any theoretical or intuitive relationship to the concept of autogynephilia. Experts advise that, in performing cluster analysis, “variables should only be included if there is good reason to think that they will define the clusters” (Everitt, Landau, & Leese, 2001, p. 179). Variables that are not theoretically relevant should be omitted, because “irrelevant variables are likely to ‘swamp’ the genuine differences of interest” (Gordon, 1981, p. 30; see also Donoghue, 1994). If Veale et al. sought to partition their participants into autogynephilic and nonautogynephilic clusters, they should have conducted an analysis using only Blanchard’s Core Autogynephilia and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy scales, and omitted the irrelevant variables Attraction to Feminine Males and Attraction to Transgender Fiction.

---

A. A. Lawrence  
Department of Psychology, University of Lethbridge,  
Lethbridge, AB, Canada

A. A. Lawrence (✉)  
6801 28th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98115-7144, USA  
e-mail: alawrence@mindspring.com

J. M. Bailey  
Department of Psychology, Northwestern University,  
Evanston, IL, USA

**Table 1** Mean scores on autogynephilia-related measures among transsexual subgroups in Blanchard (1989) and Veale et al. (2008)

	Core Autogynephilia (0–9 scale)	Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy (0–4 scale)
Blanchard's homosexual MtF TSs	2.4 <sup>a</sup>	2.0
Blanchard's nonhomosexual MtF TSs	6.1 <sup>a</sup>	2.7
Veale et al.'s "nonautogynephilic" MtF TSs	6.5	2.7
Veale et al.'s "autogynephilic" MtF TSs	8.9	3.6

Notes: MtF TSs = male-to-female transsexuals. Scores have been rounded to one decimal place

<sup>a</sup> Blanchard (1989) measured Core Autogynephilia using a 0–8 scale, so the values he reported have been multiplied by 1.125, to facilitate comparison with Veale et al.'s (2008) results

The unfortunate consequences of including these irrelevant variables become clear when one examines the mean scores for Core Autogynephilia and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy in Veale et al.'s two transsexual groups. These scores are summarized in Table 1, along with comparison data from Blanchard (1989). Veale et al.'s "nonautogynephilic" group achieved a mean score of 6.5 out of a possible 9 on the Core Autogynephilia scale, and 2.7 out of a possible 4 on the Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy scale. These scores are much higher than Blanchard found in his homosexual (nonautogynephilic) MtF group and are almost identical to the scores Blanchard found in his nonhomosexual (autogynephilic group). The mean scores achieved by Veale et al.'s "autogynephilic" group were, of course, higher still. It is evident that Veale et al.'s cluster analysis really defined an "autogynephilic" group and an "even more autogynephilic" group. In fact, it is likely that almost all of the transsexuals Veale et al. studied were autogynephilic (i.e., nonhomosexual), according to Blanchard's criteria. Perhaps this explains why Veale et al. decided to include Attraction to Feminine Males and Attraction to Transgender Fiction in their cluster analysis: It might have been the only way they could create two groups out of what is actually one relatively homogeneous, autogynephilic group.

Because Veale et al. failed to recognize that both of their transsexual groups were autogynephilic, it is not surprising that they mistakenly claimed to have found results that were inconsistent with Blanchard's. For example, Veale et al. reported that the two transsexual groups "did not differ significantly on sexual orientation measures" (p. 594), but this is just what one would expect, given that both groups were autogynephilic. It is also unsurprising that Veale et al. found that "68% of transsexuals classified as non-autogynephilic scored the highest possible score (4) on the Sexual Attraction to Females scale" (p. 594), given that these transsexuals were actually autogynephilic, and given Veale et al.'s unusual measures of sexual attraction, which assigned the highest possible score for attraction to females to participants who reported that they were only "rarely" attracted to females in fantasy and in reality (see Veale, 2005, p. 129; Veale et al.

2008, pp. 589–590). Because both of the transsexual groups were autogynephilic, it is also unremarkable that the groups' mean scores for Sexual Attraction to Males did not differ significantly.

Although most of Veale et al.'s failures to confirm Blanchard's results reflect problems with their cluster analysis, we also believe that Veale et al. misunderstood some of Blanchard's findings and that the scales they employed were not optimally designed to test Blanchard's ideas. Veale et al. (2008) wrote, for example, that "contrary to expectation, [scores on the] Recalled Childhood Feminine Gender Identity Scale did not correlate with autogynephilia measures" (p. 595). But Blanchard never attempted to measure such a correlation; indeed, he described the relationship between childhood femininity and transsexual typology (Blanchard, 1988) before he ever published his Core Autogynephilia and Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy scales (Blanchard, 1989). Veale et al. also used a different measure of childhood femininity than Blanchard (1988) employed. Veale et al. (2008) likewise expressed surprise that none of their autogynephilic transsexuals achieved "low scores...on both the Sexual Attraction to Males and Females scales that would be expected if they were asexual [i.e., analloerotic]" (p. 594). Blanchard (1989), however, measured analloeroticism using an entirely different and more specific scale. Moreover, even participants who were "rarely" attracted to either females or males would have received a high score on one of Veale et al.'s sexual attraction scales.

It is apparent, then, that the Veale et al. study does not seriously challenge Blanchard's observations concerning homosexual and autogynephilic MtF transsexuals. In our opinion, the principal value of this study lies elsewhere. Specifically, the Veale et al. study provides important confirmation of a phenomenon that is widely recognized but that until now has been poorly documented: MtF transsexuals who are active on the Internet appear overwhelmingly to be autogynephilic (nonhomosexual).

We have observed, based on interviews we have conducted with hundreds of MtF transgender persons, that nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals are often intensely interested

in computers, tend to gravitate toward computer-related occupations and hobbies, and often spend much of their free time using the Internet (see Bailey 2003, pp. 168, 196; Lawrence 2007, p. 514). Hints concerning these tendencies appeared in the academic literature over 30 years ago, when Laub and Fisk (1974) remarked that many of their MtF patients with gender dysphoria displayed a notable “interest in mathematics and computer sciences” (p. 399). Some 20 years later, MtF transsexual activist and author Rachel Pollack commented matter-of-factly that the dual occupations she assigned to the MtF transsexual protagonist in one of her fiction series—prostitute and computer programmer—“were deliberately chosen from the main occupations of [MtF] transsexual women” (Gabriel & Pollack, 1995, p. 48), as though this were common knowledge. But these observations have not been confirmed by formal empirical research, as far as we can determine.

The Veale et al. study strongly supports the hypothesis that MtF transsexuals who are active on the Internet overwhelmingly are autogynephilic. Although Veale et al. did not themselves reach this conclusion, it can be inferred from the facts that (1) 91% of Veale et al.’s participants were recruited from the Internet and (2) virtually all of their MtF transsexual participants displayed high levels of autogynephilia. This interpretation is consistent with the longstanding informal observation, noted earlier, that autogynephilic (nonhomosexual) MtF transsexuals are often intensely interested in computers and the on-line world. The alternative explanation—that homosexual and autogynephilic MtF transsexuals are active on the Internet in roughly equal numbers, but only differ significantly in their willingness to participate in Internet-based surveys—is not impossible, but seems to us less plausible. In any event, the Veale et al. study provides persuasive evidence that the great majority of MtF transsexuals who actually complete Internet-based questionnaires concerning trans-

sexualism are autogynephilic. Given the increasing popularity of Internet-based survey techniques, this would be an important point for researchers to keep in mind.

## References

- Bailey, J. M. (2003). *The man who would be queen: The science of gender-bending and transsexualism*. Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press.
- Blanchard, R. (1988). Nonhomosexual gender dysphoria. *Journal of Sex Research, 24*, 188–193.
- Blanchard, R. (1989). The concept of autogynephilia and the typology of male gender dysphoria. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 177*, 616–623.
- Donoghue, J. R. (1994). *Variable screening for cluster analysis (research report 94–36)*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Everitt, B. S., Landau, S., & Leese, M. (2001). *Cluster analysis* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gabriel, D. A., & Pollack, R. (1995). The power and the passion: An interview with Rachel Pollack. *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism, 9*, 44–64.
- Gordon, A. D. (1981). *Classification: Methods for the exploratory analysis of multivariate data*. New York: Chapman & Hall.
- Laub, D. R., & Fisk, N. M. (1974). A rehabilitation program for gender dysphoria syndrome by surgical sex change. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, 53*, 388–403.
- Lawrence, A. A. (2007). Becoming what we love: Autogynephilic transsexualism conceptualized as an expression of romantic love. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, 50*, 506–520.
- Meehl, P. E. (1995). Bootstraps taxometrics: Solving the classification problem in psychopathology. *American Psychologist, 50*, 266–275.
- Ruscio, J., Haslam, N., & Ruscio, A. M. (2006). *Introduction to the taxometric method: A practical guide*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Veale, J. (2005). *Love of oneself as a woman: An investigation into the sexuality of transsexual and other women*. Unpublished master’s thesis, Massey University, Auckland, NZ.
- Veale, J. F., Clarke, D. E., & Lomax, T. C. (2008). Sexuality of male-to-female transsexuals. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 37*, 586–597.