

## Helen Joyce Writes about Anne Lawrence

From: *TRANS (2021)* pp. 42-44. Oneworld.

The first of [the] popularisers [of autogynephilia] was Anne Lawrence, a transwoman who came across Blanchard's work in 1994, aged 44 and about to embark on transition. A medical doctor, she read everything she could find about transsexuality, but little resonated with her feelings and experiences. In the description of autogynephilia, however, she experienced the shock of recognition. "If you had asked, 'are you a woman inside?' I would have replied, 'I don't think so,'" she says. "What I always knew is that I wanted to have a woman's body. I hated the penis; I hated the erections; that's what I had to change."

Lawrence had wanted to transition since at least her teens. She recalls sitting in a university dorm with a utility knife, contemplating self-castration. But she held back from transition because she thought she would not make a sufficiently convincing woman. In her early 40s, however, she started seeing Marsha Botzer, a transwoman practising as a gender therapist in Seattle, who assured her that she would pass very well. If anything, the idea of autogynephilia was "delegitimising in the eyes of the gatekeepers," she says. Moreover, Blanchard's theory made her see what she was embarking on in a more complex light—though ultimately she decided to go ahead anyway. "It made me realise what an audacious thing it was to do—to rebuild your life around your paraphilia with consciousness and deliberation."

In 1998 Lawrence published an essay about autogynephilia on her website, entitled "Men Trapped in Men's Bodies" as a riposte to the trope that transsexuals are women trapped in men's bodies. She then solicited anonymous, first-person accounts from other autogynephiles, and

in 2011 [actually 2013] published an analysis of several hundred in a book of the same name.

Sexual tastes you do not share are inevitably hard to comprehend. But autogynephilia is especially so, since it is rare and even more rarely spoken of. Lawrence reveals a secret world. She talks about the "pain, frustration and incomprehension" autogynephiles feel about not having the bodies they want. Many of their fantasies are clearly sexual, even if unusual—for example, imagining being penetrated in a non-existent vagina while placing something in one's anus. But almost anything coded female or feminine, she writes, can cause an "intense, perplexing, shame-inducing erotic arousal that seems to simultaneously animate and discredit [autogynephiles'] desires to have female bodies." Her informants recount erotic fantasies of pushing a baby buggy, joining a knitting circle, being called "ma'am," having bubble-gum-blowing contests with girls, wearing clip-on earrings, taking birth-control pills, having a Pap smear test, and so on and on.

Lawrence considers the mechanism whereby this inwardly directed desire brings a cross-sex identity into being. She draws an analogy with the way the average heterosexual man not only wants sex with women, but has romantic feelings for his beloved and bonds with her. Autogynephiles, she thinks, do not merely desire their inner woman: they are "men who love women and want to become what they love." Cross-dressing often loses its intense sexual charge over time, and becomes comfortable and relaxing, just as a happily married man becomes less sexually excited by his wife, but becomes ever more deeply attached to her.