

Autogynephilia as Thought Crime

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Most of the people who are saying this [AGP] is an unfortunate sexuality, you know I'm a good person otherwise, and then you're like but you are stealing your neighbor's clothes, you know, fuck sake. . . . The upsetting thing when you read these [AGP] testimonies, they're not seeing women as women, they're seeing women as blow-up dolls, it's commonly about "sissification," they imagine . . . forced feminization, they think of women in such a reductive, deeply unpleasant way. Like as a woman to read it, you just think like this man despises us. A quote I remember in Anne Lawrence's book, from one of the many men who sent him [sic] testimonies of what it's like to be AGP, and said you know to be a woman is very humiliating and that humiliation is very sexy. So at that point my compassion has run out. Like, if this is innate to the man, if this is a sexuality, like I don't care, I don't [want to] know about this, I don't want it in the public space, I don't want any space given to this, I don't want any, you know, compassion for it and I definitely don't want those men in women's spaces. Go and have your horrible thoughts about women somewhere else, thanks. - Helen Joyce

The quotation above is taken from an online interview with Helen Joyce (citation below), one of the most prominent voices in the transgender critical movement. The interview begins as a discussion of whether AGP is a sexual orientation in addition to being a paraphilia. Not surprisingly, Joyce rejects the idea. But then the interview quickly turns into an angry rant about the despicable nature of persons with AGP, their bizarre sexual fantasies, and their alleged tendency to steal other people's clothes. What Joyce finds especially disturbing about

autogynephilic sexual fantasies is their supposed misogyny. She contends that they express "horrible thoughts about women," and she would apparently like AGP be rendered invisible so she doesn't have to be reminded of them.

I bear no personal animus toward Joyce. All my interactions with her have been cordial and respectful. I admire her intelligence and scholarship, and there are many issues on which we agree. But because she has in effect become the public face of the transgender critical movement, I believe that her views about AGP deserve close attention, especially when they are expressed with such uncharacteristic vehemence and anger. I suspect that Joyce simply went off-script in the interview excerpt above and unintentionally revealed a side of herself, and of the transgender critical movement generally, that she rarely displays in public.

AGP is a mental phenomenon and cannot be directly observed, so what does Joyce mean when she says she doesn't want to know about AGP and doesn't want it in the public space? Evidently she means that she doesn't want to encounter anything that might lead her to believe someone is having autogynephilic thoughts. Presumably this would include any public display of female-coded appearance or behavior, or any assertion of female self-identification, by anyone she thinks might be autogynephilic. Her feeling of entitlement here is breathtaking: Apparently in Joyce's ideal world, no one would be allowed to publicly do or say anything that might lead her to imagine the "horrible thoughts about women" that are probably lurking in their brains. Persons with AGP must always "keep it in the bedroom" to avoid upsetting her. Joyce would like to police the

public space because she finds the imagined contents of other people's private sexual thoughts to be intolerable. For her, AGP is fundamentally a *thought crime*, and an unforgivable one.

The term *thought crime* was coined by George Orwell in his dystopian novel *1984*. It refers to the unacceptable political thoughts and feelings that Orwell's fictional totalitarian state tried ruthlessly to suppress. For Joyce and her allies, AGP is a thought crime, and with respect to AGP they would probably like to make 2024 resemble *1984*. If anyone doubts that the transgender critical movement has authoritarian aspirations and is intent on regulating public behaviors that supposedly reveal the existence of unacceptable private thoughts, Joyce's statements above should dispel their skepticism.

I should quickly add that aggrieved feminists like Joyce are not the only ones who regard AGP as a thought crime. Many transgender activists feel the same way. They are so incensed by the theory that cross-gender identity in males is sometimes an outgrowth of autogynephilic sexual fantasies that they either claim AGP is irrelevant if it exists at all or else try to sanitize it by saying that it is merely an expression of normal female sexuality. They express contempt for anyone who takes the concept seriously. This reflects their belief that the theory of AGP is inherently stigmatizing, pathologizing, and disrespectful of transgender people's identities. Like their feminist counterparts, these transgender activists feel that the paraphilic contents of autogynephilic sexual fantasies are simply too horrible to acknowledge or condone, whether in themselves or in other people. They consider it a thought crime to believe in the reality and relevance of AGP, and also to believe that one's own transgender desires and aspirations reflect autogynephilic erotic fantasies.

Getting back to Joyce, why does she devote so much attention to the alleged misogyny of males with AGP? Does she have any basis for believing that they are somehow *more* misogynistic than their non-AGP counterparts? This seems unlikely. Autogynephilic males hold strongly positive attitudes toward women: They love women, idealize them, and envy their beauty, fecundity, and erotic power. It is true that many also express misogynistic attitudes, but these do not constitute the whole story, or even most of it. In my opinion, the real reason AGP is considered a thought crime is not because it is misogynistic but because it always expresses an underlying *wish to be a female*, a dynamic long recognized by transgender critical scholars like Ray Blanchard and Stephen Levine. Autogynephilic gender dysphoric males don't just fantasize about being women, they really want to *become* women, or good facsimiles, and they have the temerity to believe that this might actually be possible if they make a sincere effort. That is probably the most unforgivable aspect of their thought crime.

Joyce's disgust with AGP is so intense that her "compassion has run out," and she's entirely unapologetic: "I don't want any, you know, compassion for it." I find this an extraordinary admission. Why would an intelligent, sensitive person feel that there should be no compassion for people who experience distressing sexual fantasies? People don't choose their erotic orientations, so when someone is cursed with a problematic one, shouldn't we try to summon up feelings of compassion for them? Joyce has chosen to harden her heart against persons with AGP, and with all due respect to her, I think this illustrates the corrosive moral consequences of demonizing other people based on their private erotic fantasies, or what you suppose those

fantasies to be. The heinousness of a thought crime like AGP is limited only by one's imagination. This makes it easy to think of autogynephilic persons as contemptible and unworthy of compassion due to the assumed contents of their private sexual thoughts.

The transgender critical movement has authoritarian aspirations and promotes mean-spirited attitudes. This should give pause to anyone tempted to become its ally. It seeks to restrict freedom of gender expression for everyone in the name of suppressing thought crimes like AGP, and it encourages its members to become hard-hearted, small-minded, and

without compassion for people who experience unusual but harmless erotic fantasies. The sooner this malign dynamic is made obvious, the sooner the transgender critical movement will begin to lose influence. I hope Joyce will keep giving interviews about AGP and keep going off-script. She has much to teach us about the movement to which she belongs.

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Helen Joyce interview transcript from TikTok podcast, Sept. 6, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@jackxjewell/video/7411642954906963232>, lightly edited for clarity and conciseness.