

Chapter 8

Sex with Men

Autogynephilic Fantasies of Sex with Men Are Prevalent

Behavioral autogynephilia can be defined as the propensity to be sexually aroused by the act or fantasy of engaging in stereotypically feminine behaviors, those that “symbolize femininity to the affected male” (Blanchard, 1991, p. 236). Blanchard observed that “the most common behavioral fantasies of adult autogynephilic men involve the thought of themselves, as women, engaging in sexual intercourse or other erotic activities” (p. 237), especially engaging in penile–vaginal intercourse with a man. Consistent with Blanchard’s observation, many transsexual informants submitted narratives describing fantasies involving sex with men.

The allure of this autogynephilic fantasy is predictable: It is difficult to think of a female-typical behavior that is more basic, culturally universal, or archetypal than being the recipient of vaginal penetration by a man; only breastfeeding and child care would seem to come close. The female reproductive role is the quintessential female role, and the fantasy of enacting the most dramatic aspect of that role is understandably powerful for most autogynephilic transsexuals.

Blanchard argued that autogynephilic transsexuals who report that they are sexually attracted to men are not genuinely aroused by male bodies: He believed that their underlying sexual orientation is toward females, and their supposed attraction to men simply reflects their wish to have their femininity validated by interaction with a male partner. Consequently, these nominally “bisexual” transsexuals can more accurately be thought of as *pseudobisexual* (Blanchard, 1989b, p. 622). He explained:

The effective erotic stimulus in these interactions, however, is not the male physique of the partner, as it is in true homosexual attraction, but rather the thought of being a woman, which is symbolized in the fantasy of being penetrated by a man. For these persons, the male sexual partner serves the same function as women’s apparel or make-up, namely, to aid and intensify the fantasy of being a woman. (p. 617)

Blanchard further observed that bisexual autogynephilic transsexuals, in comparison to their heterosexual or analloerotic counterparts, were especially likely to report that they were sexually aroused by “the sexual fantasy of being admired, in the female persona, by another person” (p. 619). Nearly all of the narratives that discussed sexual fantasies or behaviors involving male partners were consistent with Blanchard’s formulations.

Although Blanchard distinguished between genuine androphilia (sexual attraction to men) and the autogynephilic fantasy of assuming the female role in relation to a male partner, he suggested that this distinction was probably lost on almost all autogynephilic transsexuals:

Even the most scrupulously honest heterosexual male gender patients do not (and probably can not) intentionally distinguish, in their self-reports, between the nature of their interest in sexual intercourse with males, which is related to fetishism in that it derives from the symbolic meaning of a male partner, and true homosexual attraction, which is based upon erotic arousal by the male physique per se, in particular, by the sight or feel of the external genitalia. (Blanchard, 1985a, p. 253)

In fact, Blanchard may have overstated the case somewhat: Although many informants seemingly were unable to make this crucial distinction, a few did so clearly and eloquently.

It is important to note that the allure of enacting the female reproductive role and the appeal of having one’s femininity affirmed by the admiration of others are probably not the only reasons that some autogynephilic transsexuals express an interest in having men as sexual partners. Yet another reason might be that having a male partner signifies that an autogynephilic transsexual is, in at least some respects, *normal*. To be an autogynephilic transsexual is to be deviant. To be able to think of oneself as a “heterosexual woman”—a woman attracted to men—allows one to feel and appear more normal. Steiner (1985) described this phenomenon in an explanation that referenced Laud Humphreys’ (1976) concept of *the breastplate of righteousness*—a Biblical phrase that Humphreys used to denote a public facade of social conformity that conceals secret deviance:

Many writers have noted the extremely traditional and rigid stereotyped sexual and bonding roles that most transsexuals, male or female, adopt. Within the context of public sex in male washrooms or “tearooms,” Humphreys (1976) has noted that participants often expound “exaggerated conservative” attitudes concerning acceptable social and sexual behavior, and he has termed this *the breastplate of righteousness*. He has suggested that this exaggerated righteousness is an example of extreme public conformity as a method of compensating for this “deviant” behavior. Feinbloom *et al.* [1976] suggest that the male-to-female transsexual may be expressing a similar conservatism, as exemplified by the usually complete acceptance of the rather limited, rigid, and stereotyped male and female roles that are more common to Victorian standards than to present-day standards. These authors further suggest that this breastplate-of-righteousness attitude accounts for the fact that the male[-to-female] transsexual, at least publicly, rejects lesbianism as a sexual option. (pp. 359–360)

Although MtF transsexuals no longer invariably reject lesbianism, some of them go to great lengths to maintain a facade of “heterosexual normality.” One can observe this phenomenon on a few Internet web sites belonging to MtF transsexuals who fit the autogynephilic demographic (formerly married to women, male-typical

occupational history, etc.) and have found men willing to marry them. On their web sites, these transsexuals clearly convey their pride in their status as married women; sometimes they even display their wedding photographs, which are often redolent of the kind of Victorian traditionalism that Steiner described.

Attraction to Men Often Reflects Desire for Validation of One's Femininity

Several informants who described their sexual attraction to, sexual fantasies about, or sexual interactions with men perceptively observed that their interest in men primarily reflected their erotic desire to have their femininity validated:

I am clearly much more physically attracted to women than men. Yet my primary fantasies are about being a woman with a man. As I think about this, I would concede that this may have much more to do with feminine validation than attraction. The very idea of being desired by a heterosexual man is erotic for me. (018)

Before the transition process started, I often fantasized I was a woman having sex with a man. A little while into transition, my sexual submission with men seemed to validate my feminine feelings. To have intercourse with men seems to be as womanly as anyone can get. (213)

I had sex with a real man. He made me feel like literally a whole new person. It is as if I have finally discovered sex; like having sex with a man who affirmed my womanhood was some kind of ultimate fantasy. (035)

I have had sexual encounters with eight men. These have been generally less than ideal, since they have all had trouble maintaining erections. None the less, I found I enjoyed the physical aspects of this type of sex and felt I was confirming my womanhood by being a passive partner. (068)

I fantasized about being penetrated by a man and wanted a boyfriend to confirm my femininity. (200)

I am a postoperative transsexual. I have found that I get the most sexually excited now when I fantasize about being sexy and beautiful and when someone else sees me that way. In fact, adoration from someone else plays into it. (069)

It occurred to me that I should consider sex with men—what better way to confirm my new status as a woman? The idea of sex with men used to disgust me, but little by little that changed, and I became tremendously turned on by the superior physical strength men have and my growing ability to turn them on just by flaunting my stuff. Getting men aroused gives me an incredible sexual thrill and confirms my desirability as a woman. (077)

I met a man who fell in love with me. When I was with him, I was happy to be submissive, I was excited to be looked after and to feel pretty and sexy. (214)

I sometimes have the sense that what really thrills me is not my sexual partner (i.e., the supposed object of desire) but rather what he makes me feel like. I would feel thrilled to be a sexy woman capable of arousing a man—a real, straight, masculine man. (189)

When I am a woman, I want to be with a man, acting like a woman, being treated like a woman and being loved like a woman. I know that this would be the ultimate for me. While

I was living full-time, I had a boyfriend that I communicated with by e-mail. I even had a date with him when he was in my town. I enjoyed very much being treated like a lady. (215)

I am powerfully sexually excited by the idea of being desired by men and by the notion of being thought of as beautiful. The turn on is not me, but to attract others. (216)

In all of the preceding narrative excerpts, the informants emphasized the validation they experienced from real or fantasized interactions with men. They described how the real or imagined men they interacted with made them feel about themselves: womanly, desirable, submissive, sexy, beautiful, attractive. They notably did not emphasize how they felt about specific men or about men in general (e.g., they did not describe falling in love with specific men or feeling aroused by specific men's bodies—or by men's bodies generally).

One informant reported that she experienced similar feelings of validation of her womanhood after being anally penetrated by another preoperative MtF transsexual:

I was with an Asian pre-op. She was totally functional, and I bottomed (anal) for her for about a half hour. It didn't hurt at all, and I felt so feminine. I loved that I could cause a penis to orgasm the same way a natal female can. It was so great to be totally submissive. I loved being an object of pleasure for someone. (034)

As this informant suggested, the ability to take a woman's sexual role (or something like it) in relation to another person's penis is sometimes all that is necessary to experience validation of one's femininity. The gender of the person who possesses the penis may be of secondary importance.

Imagined Male Partners Are Often Vague or Anonymous Figures

Blanchard (1991) believed that, in the case of autogynephilic transsexuals who are aroused by fantasies of having sex with men as women, “the male partner represented in these fantasies is usually a vague, anonymous figure rather than a real person and probably has little excitatory function beyond that of completing the fantasy of vaginal intercourse in the female role” (p. 237). Blanchard was not the first to call attention to this phenomenon: Person and Ovesey (1974a) described so-called primary MtF transsexuals—those whom Blanchard (1989b) would later call analloerotic—as typically masturbating “either with no fantasy at all, or with a vague heterosexual fantasy in which the patient saw himself as a woman. The fantasies were impersonal, and the partner was usually a stylized man rather than a real person” (p. 16).

In the current study, many transsexual informants reported that the male figures in their fantasies closely conformed to these descriptions. Here are several representative examples:

My most common sexual fantasy now is that I am a woman having sex with a man. No man in particular, just a male. Often he doesn't even really have a face; he's just there inside me as I imagine how that would feel. (148)

I dreamed and fantasized about having sex as a woman with a man penetrating my vagina, yet it was always a faceless, generic man. (217)

I did fantasize about having sex with men as a woman, but it was indeed with faceless male stereotypes instead of real individual men. (122)

I fit in the mold of those who see men as faceless objects, necessary only to fulfill the fantasy. (184)

My current fantasies involve becoming a woman. I imagine that I need to have a man penetrate my new vagina as a sort of rite of passage into womanhood; the man is faceless, and I don't enjoy the sex. (056)

It was bewildering to identify with images of women when sexually aroused and imagine I was them. Who was penetrating me? I don't know, I left it blank. (082)

I was now imagining that I was a woman and a man was making love to me. This man was faceless: He had a head, but no facial characteristics. (006)

My sexual submission with men seemed to validate my feminine feelings. It was just like one of the articles described: a fantasy in which he was a prop. (213)

The thought of sex with a man is erotic, provided I am a woman. In line with your assertions, the man in question is symbolic and featureless. The sexual contact is restricted to penetration only and does not extend to kissing the man, which I find distasteful. (053)

My fantasies of being made love to have occasionally involved a faceless, symbolic man, but I am not attracted to men. (175)

The last two excerpts shed light on a question that might seem to have an obvious explanation but is actually rather subtle: Why are the male figures in so many of these autogynephilic fantasies faceless? It would be easy enough to conjure up the mental image of a specific man—a movie star or celebrity, for example—if one chose to. The obvious explanation assumes that a kind of mental parsimony operates in the creation of fantasies: Because the male figures in these fantasies are purely symbolic, there is simply no need to give them faces or turn them into specific, identifiable men. I suspect that the more accurate and more subtle explanation is that fantasies involving specific, identifiable men could often be experienced as antierotic: Faceless, abstract men can be useful as symbolic fantasy elements, but real men are not only unattractive but also potentially distasteful and even disgusting. Abstract men can enhance fantasies, whereas real men can potentially spoil those fantasies. This conjecture provides a convenient segue to the next topic.

Male Partners Are Often Arousing in Fantasy but Unattractive in Reality

Many informants stated that, although they were aroused by fantasies of having sex with men, they did not actually find men sexually attractive:

When I masturbate now, it is either to the fantasy of being “humped” by a man or imagining myself as my wife being penetrated by a man. I don't get erotic feelings just from thinking of myself as a woman, but I do when I think of being a woman having sex with men, although I'm not especially attracted to men. (218)

Even though I would love to be with a man as a woman and even have normal sex, I am not attracted physically to a man. (215)

I flirted with the idea of having sex with a man; I was very curious, but I never did anything about it. I still didn't see men as being at all attractive, even though I wanted to have sex with them. I just wasn't attracted to men. (217)

In an alternative formulation, some informants reported that they experienced no sexual attraction toward men when they were in the male role but found men attractive when they were in the female role. This suggests that the male partner himself was not intrinsically attractive but that the opportunity to assume the female role in relation to a man was the essential precondition for the experience of sexual "attraction":

I have an increasing sexual desire oriented toward men. I always fantasized myself to be a woman during the sexual act, both with women and with men. I never feel drawn to a man when I come to him as a man, but thinking of myself as a woman makes me regard a man as the most attractive sexual partner. (219)

As a man, I am never attracted to other men. But, when I think of myself as a woman, I do fantasize about being penetrated and giving oral copulation. I would never want a relationship with a man full-time, though. (127)

Some informants went still further and observed that, although they were aroused by the fantasy of having sex with a man as a woman, they actually found men or men's bodies to be disagreeable or disgusting:

By the time I was 13, I would occasionally fantasize about what it would be like to have a man between my legs with his penis inside me. It was during this erotic fantasy that I had my first orgasm. Later in life I did experiment with men, but I didn't find it satisfying and actually found it a bit disgusting. (220)

I live alone and often entertain men for sexual pleasure while I am dressed as a woman. I met a man who took me to dinner as a woman. I slept with him and was very much aroused by the experience. I enjoyed sucking his penis but I thought the balls were disgusting. (214)

I transitioned a little over 2 years ago. I have had strong erotic fantasies in which I was a woman who was sexually submissive to a man. The thought of actualizing this fantasy does not interest me in the least. I can enjoy thinking about it to the point of orgasm, but I'd hate to do it. (186)

I created a female identity on the Internet and had cybersex with many males as a woman. It felt wonderful to get them to come. This really made me feel like a woman. While cybersex is fine, I find males unattractive and think it would be disgusting to really be with one sexually. (109)

In the late 1990s, I became friends with an autogynephilic transsexual who had completed SRS; I will call her Ms. Y. She provided me with a memorable description of her sexual interaction with a male partner, and her account graphically illustrates some of the ideas discussed by the informants above. Note that some details of Ms. Y's history have been changed to conceal her identity. Ms. Y was in her mid-40s and held a doctoral degree in a clinical behavioral science. She had been married twice to women and had been heterosexually active while living as a man. She had engaged in only incidental sexual interactions with men before transition.

She was familiar with and accepted Blanchard's theories about autogynephilia, but she nevertheless claimed that after her transition, her sexual interest had become directed primarily toward men. She had found a male partner with whom she was regularly sexually active. I asked her to describe what she and her partner did together sexually. She explained that her preferred sexual activity with her partner was to kneel before him, blindfolded and with her hands tied behind her back, and perform fellatio on him. It seemed to me that Ms. Y had found the perfect behavioral expression of the fantasy that many of the above informants described: She was able to have oral sex with a "faceless" man—at least a man whose face she could not see—and was required to have contact only with his penis, the only part of his anatomy necessary for her to feel that she was enacting the female sexual role.

Attraction to Men Rarely Extends to Feelings of Romantic Love

Sexual orientation is usually assessed by asking subjects whether they are sexually attracted to men or women. An alternative approach, possibly a superior one, is to ask subjects whether the first person they fell in love with was male or female or whether they habitually fall in love with men or women (e.g., Fisher et al., 2010) or with boys or girls (e.g., de Vries, Steensma, Doreleijers, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2011).

Although many informants described sexual attraction to men, almost none raised the issue of romantic love for men, either by reporting such love or by denying it. Only one informant claimed that she sometimes fell in love with men; her unusual account is presented in detail toward the end of this chapter. A few informants specifically denied that they fell in love with men. One reported that she was aroused by the fantasy of having sex with men but fell in love only with women:

I started having crushes, but only on girls. This was very confusing. I dreamed and fantasized about having sex as a woman with a man penetrating my vagina, yet I still didn't see men as being at all attractive, even though I wanted to have sex with them. I just don't get it. Why all the cruising of personal ads for men who like girls like me, when the people I fall in love with and like to look at are women? (217)

Another informant stated that she only wanted to have long-term romantic relationships with women:

I have commonly loved women in long-term relationships and men in short-term relationships. At some point in transition, I began to be more attracted to women. Sex had more and more of an emotional component, and my connections with women keyed into that in a way I had never experienced before. (099)

My clinical experience leads me to believe that autogynephilic transsexuals routinely fall in love with women and rarely or never fall in love with men. This is a neglected area of clinical research, however, and I am not aware of any formal investigations of this issue.

Attraction to Men Sometimes Reflects Men's Propensity to Mistreat Women

One reason some autogynephilic transsexuals find men attractive is that men more than women have a propensity to mistreat women and some autogynephilic transsexuals are sexually aroused by the idea of being a woman mistreated or raped by a man. MtF transsexuals are hardly unique in having sexual fantasies about being mistreated or raped or in being sexually aroused by fantasies that they would never want to experience in reality; many natal women have similar fantasies and feelings (Bivona & Critelli, 2009; Critelli & Bivona, 2008). The point is simply that arousal to the fantasy of being mistreated or raped by a man seems to mediate some cases of autogynephilic transsexuals' attraction to men: It is simply one more way to be a woman in relation to a man.

One informant was aroused by the idea of being forced by a man to have sex against her will and being verbally degraded by men:

The men in my fantasies are usually much larger than myself and extremely well-endowed. A feeling of "Oh my God, I don't know if I can take this, but I have to continue submitting to this pseudo-rape (it's scary, and the urge to beg him to stop is so strong) now that I've let him start" is the key to mind-blowing orgasms. My fantasies usually begin with the whole feminization process and proceed to my going out and prowling bars in a seedy neighborhood looking for my first sexual encounter with a straight man. I often end up getting it from several men on a pool table after hours, reveling in the degrading way they talk to and about me. (060)

Other informants fantasized about experiencing rape:

I have several fantasies I use to achieve orgasm. One fantasy is being taken sexually by a man. I am always very feminine and totally submissive. My partner is so passionate he would simply overpower any resistance on my part. Sometimes I imagine resisting and he date rapes me. (156)

I have never thought of having sex with a guy when I'm physically male. At the same time, I have fantasized myself being a woman and being gang raped. (007)

Some of these fantasies contain features (e.g., being described in a degrading way) suggestive of sexual masochism, a paraphilia that commonly co-occurs with autogynephilia. I will discuss sexual masochism in autogynephilic transsexuals in more detail in Chap. 9.

Reports of Increased Attraction to Men During Transition Are Frequent

Several studies and case reports have documented that MtF transsexuals with a history of sexual attraction to women sometimes report that their self-described sexual preference has shifted toward greater (and occasionally exclusive) sexual attraction to men during the gender transition process and especially following cross-sex

hormone therapy or SRS (Daskalos, 1998; De Cuypere et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Muirhead-Allwood, Royle, & Young, 1999). Whether this phenomenon represents a genuine change in sexual orientation or merely greater expression of the autogynephilic wish to have one's femininity validated by a male partner is open to dispute, although I consider the latter explanation far more plausible. Sexual orientation in males is probably essentially immutable in adulthood (Swaab, 2007). Whitam (1997) was willing to declare categorically that "it is well known that sex reassignment surgery does not change sexual orientation" (p. 202); I agree with his statement, at least as it applies to MtF transsexuals.

Accordingly, I hypothesize that all or almost all reports of changes in sexual orientation by autogynephilic transsexuals simply reflect greater autogynephilic interest in validation of one's femininity by a male partner, not a genuine change in somatotypic preference. The issue has received little formal study, however: I know of only one investigation in which a nonhomosexual MtF transsexual who described a change in sexual orientation toward men following SRS underwent physiologic measurement of her sexual arousal pattern in a laboratory setting (Lawrence, Latty, Chivers, & Bailey, 2005). In this case, consistent with my hypothesis, measurement of neovaginal blood flow did not confirm the subject's reported change in sexual orientation.

However one interprets self-reported change in sexual orientation in autogynephilic transsexuals, several informants stated that they had experienced such a change. They often described the change in a casual, unelaborated way, as though it were the most natural thing in the world:

I have never been attracted to men, but lately, I have begun to look at men in a different light. I look forward to pursuing this when I make the complete transition. (188)

I'm also at the point in my evolving sexuality where, through no effort on my part, men are starting to look good. (144)

I have an increasing sexual desire oriented toward men. I still have sex with women, but a sexual act with a man seems more satisfying day by day. (219)

I began experimenting with sexuality with men (I never had before) and found it arousing and this has essentially replaced the female imagery as my arousal mechanism. (139)

Indeed, some informants suggested that such a reversal of sexual orientation was entirely normal:

Now I find I am aroused far more by the opposite sex. My fantasies have evolved from my origins as male with a female before transition to me being female with a male. I look at men entirely differently now as well. I never had a desire to be with a man ever before transition and I assume that this reversal is somewhat normal for my accepting and being a woman mentally and socially. (221)

I had always considered myself heterosexual. My sexual preference after starting transition actually flipped over to liking men for the first time in my life. It felt completely normal, and I now simply considered myself a heterosexual female. (182)

One informant, however, concluded that the dramatic change in her sexual orientation after transition represented the actualization of her long-standing fantasies of

being treated as a woman by a man and taking a woman's sexual role in relation to a man:

As a man, I was simply not attracted to men. But now, as a woman, I have found great happiness and fulfillment being in a relationship with a wonderful man for the last 10 months. Am I still attracted to women at all? Not with him around I'm not! Reality at this point is finally much closer to what I have always wanted and seen in my mind. Now I am the woman having her cheeks kissed by a loving man. Now I am the woman having her breasts fondled by a man who only sees her as a beautiful woman. Now I am the woman taking her lover's penis into her mouth. I never wanted to admit to myself or anyone what a turn on just thinking about all this was to me. (021)

This informant's description is consistent with Blanchard's explanation that purported changes in sexual orientation in autogynephilic transsexuals reflect actualization of behavioral autogynephilic fantasies.

Two informants explained that they believed it was possible to learn to be sexually oriented toward men, perhaps through a kind of conditioning process:

If a MtF fits your description of an autogynephiliac, finds sexual relations to be the ultimate validation of femininity, and is an unapologetic heterosexual, then a migration in orientation is both necessary and logical. I will even go out on a limb here to further suggest that these MtFs can actually learn to be aroused directly by men through some sort of conditioning process. If an autogynephiliac believes that the ultimate validation of a female body is to have sexual relations with a man, she then learns how to be aroused by men. (018)

Even though I would love to be with a man as a woman and even have normal sex, I am not attracted physically to a man. But I might learn to like it or even love it for the man that is with me. I would love him for accepting me and that would provide the motivation to become sexually attracted to him. After all, women are not attracted to all men, only certain ones; and if the man shows them that they are loved, they are attracted even more. (215)

In fact, there is a great deal of data—most of it from gay men who desperately wanted to become heterosexual—demonstrating that it is essentially impossible for men to change their sexual orientation in adulthood, through conditioning or any other means. Summarizing these data, Swaab (2007) concluded that “there can be little doubt that sexual orientation has become fixed in adulthood and is beyond influencing later” (p. 434).

Repression of Genuine Attraction to Men Due to Homophobia

A few informants with a history of sexual attraction to women believed they had really been attracted to men all along (or had been destined to be so attracted) and had merely repressed their attraction to men because they had internalized the homophobic values of society:

I am a pretty classic autogynephilic transsexual. Yet, I think I could have equally easily been a classic homosexual transsexual if circumstances had been slightly different. When I was younger, I was fearful of being known as a cross-dresser, but I was even more fearful of being gay. Though I had thoughts and feelings that I was attracted to men and not women,

I kept them more suppressed than even my wish to be female. In hindsight, I was homophobic, probably because of the environment I was raised in. Did the environmentally induced homophobia inhibit my homosexual transsexuality? I almost had an experience with a guy in 10th grade. Had I had that experience, it's possible that I would have realized I was not attracted to women and I might have sought relationships with men. I wonder how many of the transsexuals who eventually are attracted to men actually suppress their true orientation in order to fit into society. (222)

I was very repressed. I was almost homophobic. If I was repressed and I was trained to prefer girls as acceptable behavior and trained not to prefer men, then I would outwardly and inwardly lie and prefer women. So, I would suggest that as I begin to acknowledge my transsexual nature and my true feelings, I find myself more attracted to men and less to women. (074)

I also eventually discovered that I really was attracted to men underneath my homophobia, and found that attraction very enjoyable and natural. (119)

I admit that I enjoy being desired and made to feel attractive by straight men as a validation of my femininity. My heterosexual past was entirely due to internalized homophobia. (115)

Note that this “repression of attraction to men due to internalized homophobia” explanation cannot account for the fact that the great majority of homosexual MtF transsexuals and other homosexual males, who are also exposed to ubiquitous homophobic messages from society, somehow manage to become aware of their genuine sexual attraction to men during adolescence or early adulthood, even if they do not immediately act on their feelings. Consequently, I don't find explanations like these to be very persuasive. These explanations are, however, psychologically revealing.

Why might it be important for some autogynephilic transsexuals to be able to tell themselves that they were “really” attracted to men all along or should have been? Some other informants, whose accounts appeared earlier, were perfectly content to assert that their previous attraction to women had been genuine but that their sexual orientation had simply shifted toward men as a result of social transition or cross-sex hormone therapy. I think the answer lies in the fact that any deviation from the “classic” transsexual pattern (“has felt and acted feminine from earliest childhood, has never been sexually aroused by women's apparel, and is romantically inclined toward males”; Blanchard, Clemmensen, et al., 1985, p. 508) can potentially feel discrediting to one's status as a legitimate transsexual. Some of these deviations probably feel more consequential than others to particular individuals. Perhaps the informants who strongly believed that they were really attracted to men all along (or should have been) simply considered a history of sexual attraction to women to be a particularly discrediting feature. Interestingly, all of them acknowledged and most made no attempt to explain away their history of autogynephilic arousal, which many people would probably consider far more discrediting than a history of sexual attraction to women. There is still much to be learned about the elaborate explanations that autogynephilic transsexuals sometimes create to try to make sense of their feelings and histories. I will address some of these explanations in greater detail in Chap. 10.

An Autogynephilic Transsexual “Exclusively Attracted to Men” (with Limitations)

One unusual narrative was submitted by a self-described autogynephilic transsexual who also described herself as “exclusively sexually attracted to men.” She had been evaluated at the former Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto (“the Clarke”), where Blanchard conducted his pioneering studies of autogynephilia in the 1980s and 1990s. She was familiar with Blanchard’s theory and accepted much but not all of it. She stated that she fell in love with and was attracted to men—at least some men—because she was attracted to their spirits, albeit not to their bodies. This informant also stated that she loved another MtF transsexual because she admired her confidence and found her beautiful, despite not being attracted to her body. This informant further conjectured that her love for and attraction to some individuals might be mediated by their gender-atypical traits. Her account is lengthy but fascinating:

There’s a boy where I go to school who I think is absolutely smashing. I was talking to another student, Heather, who is married with two children, saying how amazing I thought it was that she was able to balance all these things. The boy turned to us and said, “She’s a better woman than I am.” We all just about died laughing! But what I saw in him was such incredible support for his friend and such confidence in himself without being fearful for his gender. I just thought he was the most magnificent and wonderful man I had ever met (although I have to admit that it doesn’t hurt either that he holds doors open for me and wishes me a nice day all the time). The point is that, although there always seems to be a gender-bending connection, I am directly attracted to him. I think he’s amazing! But I do concede that my attraction stems from an attraction to his spirit, not his body. Likewise, there is a transsexual woman of my acquaintance who I think is without a doubt the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met. She projects such femininity and self-confidence. I think she’s incredible. When I was a patient at the Clarke, they placed so much emphasis on “are you attracted to men, or are you an autogynephile?” My response was that I was exclusively sexually attracted to men, but I am an autogynephile. They said, “But these men you think about—they’re faceless, aren’t they?” What I’m saying is, that isn’t the case. I fall in love with and am attracted to real live men. (I’m not saying I think my transsexual friend is a man; I am saying I love her but I’m not sexually attracted to her body). Perhaps, though, my autogynephilia is somehow connected with a love and appreciation of people who don’t follow the gender scripts they’re handed. (123)

Although this informant claimed that she was “exclusively sexually attracted to [some] men,” she seemed to be attracted to their personality traits (e.g., their supportiveness, self-confidence, and androgyny), not their physical traits. This is such an unusual and idiosyncratic use of the term “sexual attraction” that it renders the informant’s description of her sexual orientation almost meaningless. But the phrase “exclusively sexually attracted to men” has been widely used in the professional literature about MtF transsexualism, and it has historically functioned almost as a “seal of approval” in certain gender programs. It was—and in a few programs still is—how one needed to describe oneself in order to be taken seriously as a MtF transsexual. It is understandable, then, why some autogynephilic transsexuals would want to claim this specific description, whether or not it is genuinely applicable to them according to conventional definitions.

It is also interesting to notice that this informant, generalizing from her attraction to an androgynous man and her love for another MtF transsexual, pointed to a “gender-bending connection” as the common thread. This is plausible, of course, and it sounds progressive and avant-garde. But another common thread—if one were willing to be politically incorrect—might be “some masculine traits in evidence”; this might arguably be what one would expect from someone supposedly exclusively sexually attracted to men, and its absence is telling. As one who accepts Blanchard’s theories, I tend to notice another common thread, “some feminine traits in evidence.” I believe that autogynephilic transsexuals tend to fall in love with women; consequently, the men they are likely to find most appealing should be those who most closely resemble women, especially in their physical characteristics.

An Autogynephilic Transsexual with Substantial Sexual Experience with Men

Because autogynephilia is theorized to be a misdirected form of attraction to women, it would be logical—and correct, I believe—to conclude that the primary sexual orientation of autogynephilic transsexuals who declare themselves attracted to men is toward women and that their supposed attraction to men is wholly a secondary phenomenon, mediated entirely by autogynephilia. One might consequently assume that autogynephilic transsexuals who engage in sex with men are likely to have only a few male partners and that their sexual activity with men is likely to be rare and of little real importance.

As a statistical generalization, this is not entirely incorrect. For example, in a study of 232 MtF transsexuals who had completed SRS (Lawrence, 2005), I observed that, among 92 MtF transsexuals who were behaviorally bisexual before SRS (i.e., who reported at least 1 male and 1 female partner), the median number of female partners before SRS was 7, whereas the median number of male partners before SRS was only 3, with one-third of the participants reporting only 1 male partner. There were some notable exceptions to this pattern, however: 8 (9%) of the bisexual participants reported 11–20 male partners and 2 (2%) reported 21 or more male partners. These latter respondents reported considerable experience with men by almost any measure.

Some autogynephilic transsexuals not only report substantial sexual experience with men but may have had many more male than female partners and may even have identified as homosexual men in the past. The following narrative excerpt was submitted by an informant with such a history:

I am 38 years old and 8 months postoperative. I had begun cross-dressing as a child and had fantasized about being female. From puberty onwards, I was sexually aroused by the idea of being a woman, wearing women’s clothes, and being made love to as a woman by a man. I identified early (age 12 or 13) as gay or bisexual. I did not date as a teen and was very friendly with girls. I was not particularly effeminate and physically fitted in well with men.

At college, I came out and had numerous affairs with men and, surprisingly, women (much less, more awkward). In college, I met a woman, fell in love, and married. We had two children, and I stopped cross-dressing for 7 or 8 years. With the birth of my first child, a girl, I began to dress again. This continued through the birth of our second child, a girl also. Throughout this time, I was most turned on by the idea of being made love to as a woman by a man. However, I still conceived of these fantasies in terms of homosexual relationships (penises played a big role—mutual penetration and oral sex). At around 30, I began to attend transgender support groups. At this time, in my sexual fantasies, I first conceived of myself as a female being made love to by a man. After my marriage broke up, I dated men. The turn-on was the idea of being accepted by them as female. At that time, I met my current partner. He stayed with me through surgery and we are happily living together. Today, I am powerfully sexually excited by the idea of being desired by men and by the notion of being thought of as beautiful. Thus, I suppose I am still sexually motivated. Yet the turn on is not me but to attract others—in particular men, but I also enjoy being able to attract lesbians. (216)

This MtF transsexual stated that she identified as gay or bisexual at puberty, engaged in numerous affairs with men in college, entered into an unsuccessful marriage with a woman, subsequently resumed dating men, and successfully partnered with a man after SRS. A clinician who did not elicit this informant's history of sexual arousal with cross-dressing and cross-gender fantasy, lack of childhood effeminacy, numerous affairs with women, and falling in love with a woman might mistakenly conclude that the informant was a typical androphilic MtF transsexual. A clinician who elicited these historical details but was not attuned to the fact that the real turn-on for the informant was not her male partners' bodies but the idea that they accepted and treated her as a woman (i.e., that she was not genuinely androphilic) might mistakenly conclude that the informant was both autogynephilic and androphilic. Consequently, it is important for clinicians to bear in mind that some autogynephilic transsexuals have considerable sexual experience with men. When evaluating behaviorally bisexual MtF transsexuals, it is important to ask about a history of autogynephilic arousal, who they habitually fall in love with, and what element of sex with men—their partners' bodies or the validation of one's womanhood that male partners provide—is experienced as primarily arousing.

Making Sense of Autogynephilic Attraction to Men

A few years ago, I was consulted by a gender dysphoric male client with a history similar to those given by many of the informants in this chapter. He was married to a woman, and he had engaged in several romantic relationships with women before marriage. He had never been attracted to a man while presenting himself as a man. He had not been effeminate as a child, he had served in the military in an elite combat unit, and he held two advanced degrees in the physical sciences. By his own description, he experienced transvestic, anatomic, and behavioral autogynephilia, but the last of these predominated. His most intense erotic arousal came from engaging in sex with men while presenting himself as a woman. His intelligence was in the very superior range, and he had read most of what I had written and much of what

Blanchard had written about autogynephilia. His presenting concern was deciding whether or not he was “really” androphilic—sexually oriented toward men.

It seemed evident to me that this client was not genuinely androphilic: He was clearly an autogynephilic man whose most intense source of erotic arousal involved the most common type of behavioral autogynephilia, autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy involving a male partner. But what was evident to me was not at all evident to this client, even though he was probably more intelligent than 99.9% of the population and had read more about autogynephilia than most psychologists and psychiatrists who specialize in the treatment of gender dysphoria. The most intense and rewarding sexual experiences of this man’s life had involved sex with male partners. How could he not wonder whether his real sexual attraction was toward men? His uncertainty about an issue that seemed so straightforward to me was a reminder of how profoundly confusing this type of behavioral autogynephilia can be, even to highly intelligent, well-informed people. Eventually, this client recognized that he was not genuinely androphilic, but this realization occurred only gradually.

Unfortunately, I suspect the kind of confusion this client experienced is likely to remain widespread among autogynephilic gender dysphoric men for the foreseeable future, for several reasons. First, many professionals who specialize in the treatment of gender dysphoria dismiss Blanchard’s ideas about autogynephilia for reasons that are primarily political rather than scientific: that is, because his ideas “directly contradict basic tenets of the worldwide transgender movement” (Nuttbrock, Bockting, Mason, et al., 2011, p. 249). Consequently, these professionals are not attuned to the concept of behavioral autogynephilia manifesting as a desire for sex with men; they are unlikely to ask about it or recognize it and are unlikely to be willing or able to educate their clients about it.

Second, there exists a naive but prevalent belief that sexual orientation in nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals can sometimes genuinely change, especially after cross-sex hormone therapy, in contrast to the more skeptical view that this treatment merely sets the stage for more confident misinterpretation and misreporting of an underlying sexual orientation that not only remains unchanged but is, in fact, unchangeable. Consider this passage by Meyer-Bahlburg (2010), who is one of the smartest and best informed gender specialists in the world:

One feature of animal models of the sexual differentiation of brain and behavior that has not yet found sufficient consideration in human research on gender development is the observation in rats that males have the neural circuitry of all aspects of female sexual behavior. That circuitry is usually blocked by perinatal sex-hormonal defeminization, but can be activated by the induction of an atypical sex-hormone milieu in adulthood (de Vries & Södersten, 2009). Perhaps related mechanisms...contribute to the sexual orientation change observed in many trans[sexual] persons after onset of cross-gender hormone treatment. (p. 466)

Does female sexual behavior in rats (i.e., lordosis) really provide a useful model for something as complex as androphilic sexual orientation in humans? What about the fact that the female sexual behavior that de Vries and Södersten (2009) referred to had been elicited by a very specific combination of estrogen and progesterone that is quite unlike the type of cross-sex hormone therapy that most MtF transsexuals receive? Meyer-Bahlburg’s statement demonstrates that even knowledgeable

experts will sometimes clutch at straws to avoid the unpleasant conclusion that most or all nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals who report a change in sexual orientation after hormone therapy are simply engaging in unintentional self-deception. The willingness of some serious scholars to suggest that sexual orientation in nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals is potentially malleable lends an air of validity to the idea that a formerly heterosexual man could actually become genuinely androphilic.

Third and finally, the belief that some nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals experience a change in their sexual orientation can serve as a basis for rejecting all sexual orientation-based typologies of MtF transsexualism (see Cohen-Kettenis & Pfäfflin, 2010), including Blanchard's. Such a blanket rejection lends credence to the idea that Blanchard's concept of autogynephilia and his MtF transsexual typology are simply inapplicable to many nonhomosexual MtF transsexuals. It thereby gives some clinicians a further excuse not to take the concept of autogynephilia seriously and not to learn about it, ask about it, or educate their clients about it.

Can anything change this state of affairs? Perhaps the accumulation of more narratives like the ones in this chapter can eventually effect a change. These narratives demonstrate that the "attraction to men" that some autogynephilic transsexuals experience looks nothing like genuine androphilia. Unlike genuine androphilia, autogynephilic attraction to men is validation seeking rather than object seeking; it values faceless abstractions over real male bodies, which are experienced as unappealing or disgusting; and it rarely, if ever, extends to romantic love. These characteristics are indeed manifestations of a sexual orientation, but that sexual orientation is autogynephilia, not androphilia.