



Autogynephilia and Science: A Response to Moser (2022) and Serano and Veale (2022)

J. Michael Bailey¹

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Moser (2022) and Serano and Veale (2022) primarily used their Letters to criticize the theory that autogynephilia—a natal male’s sexual arousal by the idea or fantasy of being a woman—causes nonhomosexual gender dysphoria (gender dysphoria among males not exclusively attracted to other males). (Henceforth, I refer to “Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory.”) Neither Letter included a careful analysis of our article disproving the idea that autogynephilia is common among women (Bailey & Hsu, 2022). Thus, I begin by reminding the reader of our findings, which should have been the focus of any Letter to the Editor: Our study compared four samples of natal males recruited for having autogynephilia, four samples of natal males recruited as controls (without autogynephilia as an exclusion criterion), and two samples of natal females, using the Core Autogynephilia Scale (Blanchard, 1989). The study was large (total $N = 3,388$) and results were clear: the autogynephilic male samples scored much higher compared with the control natal males and the natal females, who were similar. Any theory that postulates that autogynephilia is characteristic of some gender dysphoric men and most women is incorrect. This includes the theory that autogynephilic males are like women in showing intense sexual arousal by the fantasy or idea of being women.

In an essential review article of autogynephilia, Lawrence (2017) demolished most of the criticisms of Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory made by Moser and Serano and Veale, specifically referring to prior work by these authors. None of the latter have meaningfully advanced their arguments since Lawrence’s review. I cannot better Lawrence’s arguments in the space allotted, and there is no point in repeating them here. Anyone sufficiently interested in the ongoing debate regarding Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria

Theory will benefit from reading Lawrence’s article. I focus my remaining remarks on some key assertions by Moser and Serano and Veale, especially those that are new.

Responding to Moser

Moser emphasized the distinction between gender dysphoria and transvestism, asserting that we confused the two. But it is Moser who is confused, for several reasons. First, our empirical study (which Moser was supposed to be criticizing) did not purport to be about gender dysphoria. Rather, we tested the idea, promoted by Moser (2009), that natal females are like autogynephilic males in being sexually aroused by the idea of being and behaving like women. The results of our study showed that this idea is false. Second, the main measure we used did not focus on transvestism. Although the Core Autogynephilia Scale has one item related to transvestism, the other seven have nothing to do with wearing female clothing or impersonating women. Rather, they are about sexual arousal by having female anatomical features (e.g., female breasts or female face) or the idea of being a woman. Third, transvestism is, in fact, highly relevant to nonhomosexual gender dysphoria in natal males, which by Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory is invariably associated with autogynephilia. Most of these individuals have a history of transvestism (Lawrence, 2013). Indeed, it is most common for them to begin as cross-dressers before the onset of the gender dysphoria:

[A]utogynephilic men typically develop strong, persistent cross-gender identities only after years or decades of experience with cross-dressing. Once this has occurred, however, these cross-gender identities feel like and operate as powerful forces in the lives of the autogynephilic transsexuals who experience them. In particular, these cross-gender identities become strong enough to withstand the temporary reduction in auto-

✉ J. Michael Bailey
jm-bailey@northwestern.edu

¹ Department of Psychology, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208, USA

gynephilic arousal that follows orgasm (Lawrence, 2013, p. 148).

Thus, Moser's admonishing subtitle, "It Helps If You Stop Confusing Gender Dysphoria and Transvestism," is inapt.

Moser acknowledged that autogynephilia exists but disagrees with Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory about its importance. The theory specifies that autogynephilia causes gender dysphoria in some natal males. In contrast, Moser believes that autogynephilic arousal is a result of gender dysphoria: "People tend to fantasize about what they want but do not have; it would follow that an individual with a male body and a desire to be female might find fantasizing about having a female body arousing." Does anyone besides Moser find this plausible? Autogynephilia typically and recognizably begins during adolescence, when a boy discovers he is sexually aroused by wearing female clothing, such as lingerie. But think of all the things that adolescent boys want to be but are not: professional athletes, rock stars, astronauts, and presidents. None of these has been associated with autoerotic fantasies and behavior. Nor are all natal males who wish to become women sexually aroused by this fantasy. Blanchard distinguished two forms of gender dysphoria: nonhomosexual and homosexual gender dysphoria. Only the former is associated with sexual arousal by the fantasy of being a woman (Blanchard, 2005).

Finally, Moser challenged the idea that autogynephilia is a paraphilia. Moser is correct that this classification cannot merely be assumed, but I differ from Moser in how to resolve the issue. Moser thinks one should have a clear definition of "paraphilia" (which he doubts is possible) and determine whether autogynephilia (or its most common manifestation, transvestism) satisfies the definition. That is not how science works. Determining whether autogynephilia is a paraphilia is a scientific question requiring a theory about the concept "paraphilia." We remain in a pre-theoretical state concerning "paraphilia," but I think the concept has promise. At least some sexual interests classified as paraphilias share two non-obvious things: they are especially common among men and they sometimes co-occur. Men who die accidentally during the practice of autoerotic asphyxia (a form of masochism) show signs of autogynephilia about 40% of the time (Blanchard & Hucker, 1991). It seems likely that masochism and autogynephilia share underlying causes. Furthermore, some paraphilias, including autogynephilia, apotemnophilia (sexual arousal by the idea of being an amputee), autopedophilia (sexual arousal by the idea of being a child), and autoanthropomorphozoophilia (sexual arousal by the idea of being a cartoon animal) share a similar structure—sexual arousal by the fantasy of being a member of the type of person or thing to whom one is sexually attracted. The idea that these erotic target identity inversions (Freund & Blanchard, 1993) share fundamental causes is certainly a viable hypothesis. Hsu and

I have been studying this general issue and we look forward to sharing our findings.

Responding to Serano and Veale

Unlike Moser (2022), Serano and Veale (2022) actually spent some effort attempting to refute our study. Their main criticism was that our results are an artifact of pre-selecting autogynephilic samples likely to be high on our measure of autogynephilia. That is incorrect. It would be correct if we had selected autogynephilic samples based on high scores on the Core Autogynephilia Scale, but we did not do this. We merely advertised for men likely to be autogynephilic. That was the point of this important comparison group. To answer the question framing our study—how autogynephilic are natal females—required comparing natal females to precisely the two groups we used: natal males with and without autogynephilia. Natal females were quite unlike the former and nearly identical to the latter. Autogynephilia is not a female trait. Like Moser, Serano and Veale incorrectly assumed that our study was about gender dysphoria, but it was about autogynephilia regardless of gender dysphoria.

Serano and Veale believe that autogynephilic phenomena are best explained by Serano's "embodiment fantasies model." I do not understand this model. Nevertheless, Serano's (2020) recent elaboration of it emphasized empirical findings that women also show autogynephilic phenomena, findings refuted by our article. To the extent that Serano's model depends on the idea that women tend to be autogynephilic, it is false.

Much of Serano and Veale's critique is devoted to calling us unethical and insensitive. (Veale [2015] previously made similar complaints in this journal—it seems to be a pattern.) We disagree with these charges, but regardless, we care more about the truth of what we study and write than whether it offends Serano and Veale. Furthermore, I call to their attention to an Editorial I published in *Archives of Sexual Behavior* entitled "How to Ruin Sex Research" (Bailey, 2019). There I listed several pieces of advice for those who would like to ruin empirical sex research and turn it into the kind of ideological intellectual wasteland that much of academia appears to be headed toward. Serano and Veale have committed at least three of practices I recommended for would-be sex research ruiners: (1) advocate for marginalized groups; (2) focus on linguistic sensitivity rather than efficient communication; and (3) focus on moral and political implications and "sensitivity" rather than accuracy. There is room for improvement if they want to ruin sex research (they missed three pieces of advice), and there is certainly room for improvement if they want to advance sex research.

Current Status of Autogynephilia

Moser (2022) and Serano and Veale (2022) insist that Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory was debunked long ago. However, repeating this conclusion over and over (as they have previously, and as they continue to do in their Letters) does not make it so. Indeed, one wonders why they would bother to respond to our empirical study that is only tangentially related to Autogynephilic Gender Dysphoria Theory, if they truly believe the theory is dead. Certainly, neither Moser nor Serano nor Veale has conducted empirical research threatening the theory.

The attacks on me for writing about autogynephilia in *The Man Who Would Be Queen* (Bailey, 2003; see Dreger, 2008, for a thorough account of the attacks) might have been expected to discourage autogynephilia-related research, discussion, and public endorsement and perhaps this happened for a few years. But there has been a resurgence of interest during the past decade. Before my book was published in 2003, almost nobody had heard of autogynephilia. Indeed, that is the most important reason I decided to write it. Nowadays, autogynephilia is discussed on social media, on podcasts, in blogs, and in magazine essays. There is a steady stream of academic articles about autogynephilia, both empirical and nonempirical (with critical articles concentrated in the latter). There is also an increasing number of thoughtful, highly informed laypersons discussing autogynephilia in forums such as Twitter and Reddit. Increased interest in autogynephilia has occurred during a time when trends in identity politics have been in opposition. Currently it is not a good idea to offend favored minority groups, even if one intends no offense and is dispassionately pursuing truth. But anyone wanting to understand gender dysphoria and paraphilic sexuality in natal males cannot avoid autogynephilia. If one has sufficiently thick skin, ample rewards abound.

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