

# Nonmonotonic Relation of Autogynephilia and Heterosexual Attraction

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In this study I investigated the relation between normal heterosexual attraction and autogynephilia (a man's propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of himself as a woman). The subjects were 427 adult male outpatients who reported histories of dressing in women's garments, of feeling like women, or both. The data were questionnaire measures of autogynephilia, heterosexual interest, and other psychosexual variables. As predicted, the highest levels of autogynephilia were observed at intermediate rather than high levels of heterosexual interest; that is, the function relating these variables took the form of an inverted U. This finding supports the hypothesis that autogynephilia is a misdirected type of heterosexual impulse, which arises in association with normal heterosexuality but also competes with it.

The term *autogynephilia* (Blanchard, 1989a) refers to a man's propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of himself as a woman. Autogynephilia is usually—but not always—found in association with erotic cross-dressing (transvestism).

Autogynephilic fantasies and behaviors may focus on the ideas of possessing female anatomical structures, exhibiting female bodily functions, or engaging in stereotypically feminine behavior. A prime example of men with such propensities are those occasional persons, called “pregnancy transvestites” by Hirschfeld (1918, p. 168), who masturbate with the fantasy of being a pregnant woman or of giving birth. There are, in a similar vein, men whose favorite masturbation fantasy is that they are lactating or breast-feeding, and others whose favorite fantasy is that of menstruating. These physiological functions may also be simulated during masturbation with the aid of appropriate props.

The favorite fantasies of many autogynephilic men involve the thought of themselves, as women, engaging in sexual intercourse or other erotic activities. Male patients at this gender identity clinic, for example, commonly report inserting dildos or similar objects into their rectum while masturbating; this behavior is accompanied by the fantasy that their anus is a vagina. The same fantasy may be inferred in other male populations: Blanchard and Hucker (1991) found a significant correlation, in 117 fatal cases of autoerotic asphyxia, between the presence of dildos at the death scene and feminine attire on the corpse, which suggests that anal self-stimulation had a cross-gender meaning within that group of men as well.

Some autogynephiles fuse the idea of being a woman with their sexual attractions toward real women in sexual fantasies in which they are lesbians engaging in lesbian interactions. The erotic idea of interpersonal sexuality in the cross-gender role may also find expression in the fantasy of having intercourse, as a woman, with a man. 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.

There are, finally, rather simple autogynephilic fantasies that consist of little more than the idea of having a woman's body. These may focus on female anatomical structures, such as the breasts or the vulva, or on typical but acquired characteristics, such as shaved legs.

The first author to differentiate autogynephilia from the variety of other cross-gender phenomena was Magnus Hirschfeld (1918). Hirschfeld noted that one class of cross-dressing men “feel attracted not by the women outside them, but by the woman inside them” (1948, p. 167). This observation actually contains two separate ideas. The first is that autogynephilia may be conceived as a kind of misdirected heterosexuality. The second is that autogynephilia competes with normal heterosexual attraction.

The first hypothesis suggested by Hirschfeld's (1948) observation predicts that one would find higher levels of autogynephilia in heterosexual—or at least nonhomosexual—men than in comparable homosexual men. This prediction has been supported by the results of a study by Blanchard (1989b). The subjects in this study were adult male-to-female transsexuals. These were divided into four groups, one homosexual (attracted to other males) and three nonhomosexual (attracted to females, to both sexes, or to neither sex). The findings showed that all three categories of nonhomosexual males were more likely to report sexual arousal in association with fantasies of womanhood than the homosexual males.

In this study I examine the second hypothesis suggested by Hirschfeld's (1948) observation, namely, that autogynephilia and normally directed heterosexual interest are competing drives (or behaviors or orientations). The subjects were adult male outpatients who reported histories of dressing in women's garments, of feeling like women, or both. These were selected without regard to sexual orientation, and the sample included men who reported all degrees of sexual attraction to adult women.

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The first hypothesis predicted that men who reported little interest in (real) women would also report little autogynephilia; as one would move along the continuum from subjects with low levels of heterosexual attraction toward subjects with intermediate levels, the amount of observed autogynephilia ought to increase. The second hypothesis concerned the middle-to-high range of the heterosexual interest continuum. The notion of intrinsic competition implies that high degrees of interest in the one type of sexual object preclude high degrees of interest in the other. Thus, as one would move further along the continuum from subjects with intermediate levels of heterosexual attraction to subjects with high levels, the amount of observed autogynephilia ought to reverse direction and begin to decrease again. In operational terms, the combined hypotheses imply that a plotted function to relate measures of autogynephilia and heterosexual interest would take the form of an inverted U.

It was important to demonstrate that any observed curves of the predicted shape were not merely artifacts of the experimental method. To this end, I examined two additional variables, gender dysphoria and sexual attraction to adult men, both of which were assumed, on the basis of clinical experience and my familiarity with the tests I have used in this research, to be monotonically decreasing functions of heterosexual interest.

Four additional psychosexual variables—transvestism, fetishism, masochism, and sadism—were also investigated, largely for exploratory purposes. It was expected, on the basis of previous research (e.g., Freund, Steiner, & Chan, 1982) and clinical lore (e.g., Person & Ovesey, 1978) that have linked these variables to cross-gender behavior in heterosexual but not in homosexual men, that all four would increase over some portion of the heterosexual attraction continuum. There was no empirical or theoretical basis, however, for predicting whether these curves would reverse direction toward the high end of that continuum.

## Method

### Subjects

The on-line database of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry's (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) Research Section of Behavioural Sexology includes questionnaire data on virtually all (literate) male patients who have presented either at that department or at the institute's Gender Identity Clinic since September 1980—the date when the last questionnaire items used in this study were added to the test battery. These items were intended for administration only to sexology patients who presented with complaints of gender dysphoria or transvestism or else revealed cross-dressing or cross-gender wishes in the course of clinical assessment for some other condition. In accordance with these guidelines, the new questionnaire items were administered to 452 of the 3,500 male patients added to the database from September 1980 onward. These 452 cases were searched for all subjects whose responses to key questionnaire items indicated either (a) that they had, since the age of 13, cross-dressed once a month or more for at least 1 year or, alternatively, several times a year for at least 3 years, or (b) that they had experienced themselves as women at least episodically, if not on a continuous basis. Of the 452 clinically preselected cases, 427 were retrieved for this study according to the response criteria. The mean age of the sample was 31.2 years (range, 16–67 years). The mean, median, and modal educational level was Grade 12.

In 392 cases (92% of the sample), the patient's presenting complaint

was gender dysphoria or transvestism, and the questionnaire materials were administered in the course of assessing these conditions. For most of the remaining 35 cases, the recorded presenting complaint (usually the most serious condition present) was masochism, sadism, fetishism, or the courtship disorder cluster (voyeurism, exhibitionism, toucheurism–frotteurism, and preferential rape). It may be noted that previous research has suggested that the proportion of men with these paraphilias who also engage in cross-gender behavior is greater than the number expected by chance (e.g., Langevin & Lang, 1987; Wilson & Gosselin, 1980).

### Materials

The archived assessment data used in this study came from a self-administered, multiple-choice questionnaire, relevant sections of which are routinely administered to male patients in the two departments to which the subjects had been referred. This questionnaire includes previously published scales as well as various experimental items, some of which were used to develop the Extended Fetishism Scale described later.

The single independent variable was the Modified Gynephilia Scale (Blanchard, 1985b), a measure of erotic attraction to physically mature women specifically developed for the assessment of adult male gender patients. The term *gynephilia* is narrower in meaning than *heterosexuality*, because the latter can also refer to sexual interest in prepubescent or pubescent girls.

There were eight dependent variables. The Core Autogynephilia Scale (Blanchard, 1989b) assesses sexual arousal in association with the simple, unelaborated, and contextless fantasy of being a woman. Most of the items ask whether the respondent has ever become sexually aroused while picturing himself with various features of the female anatomy (e.g., breasts). The Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale (Blanchard, 1989b) concerns the sexual fantasy of being admired, in the female persona, by another person.

The Modified Androphilia Scale (Blanchard, 1985b) is a measure of erotic attraction to physically mature men, developed like the Modified Gynephilia Scale, specifically for the assessment of adult male gender identity disorder patients.

The Pure Gender Dysphoria Scale (Blanchard, in press) is intended to assess feelings of discontent with one's biological sex, the desire to possess the body of the opposite sex, and the desire to be regarded by others as a member of the opposite sex.

Transvestism was assessed with the Cross-Gender Fetishism Scale (Blanchard, 1985a, 1988), a measure (for men) of the erotic arousal value of putting on women's clothes, perfume, and make-up and of shaving the legs. The items in this scale focus on the act of cross-dressing rather than subjective feelings of femininity.

Sexual interest in particular materials or inanimate objects was assessed with an expanded and rescored version of a previously published Fetishism Scale (Freund & Blanchard, 1988). This instrument, the Extended Fetishism Scale, was developed in a preliminary phase of this study. (Copies of this scale and its scoring are available on request from Ray Blanchard.)

The Mild Masochism Scale (Blanchard, in press) concerns erotic fantasies of submission and humiliation. The Sadism Scale (Freund & Blanchard, 1988) is a broadband survey of strong as well as mild sadistic impulses.

The alpha reliability coefficients of the scales, computed for this sample, were as follows: Modified Gynephilia, .89; Core Autogynephilia, .94; Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy, .84; Modified Androphilia, .96; Pure Gender Dysphoria, .86; Cross-Gender Fetishism, .94; Extended Fetishism, .97; Mild Masochism, .71; and Sadism, .81.

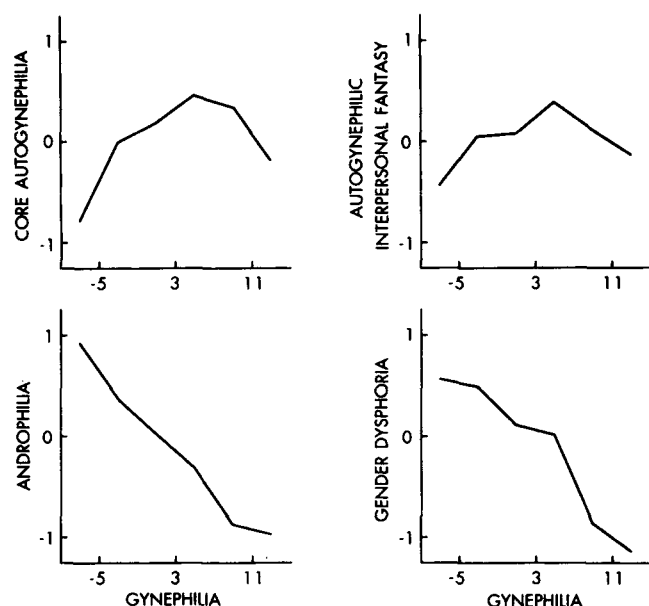


Figure 1. Functions relating core autogynephilia, autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy, androphilia, and gender dysphoria to normal heterosexual attraction (gyneophilia).

### Results

The results are represented graphically in Figures 1 and 2. These figures show the curves that relate core autogynephilia and the seven other dependent measures to normal heterosexual attraction (gyneophilia). In Figures 1 and 2, the dependent measures have been converted to z scores, in order to make the vertical axes comparable. Scores on the independent variable, the Modified Gyneophilia Scale, were collapsed into six intervals: less than -5, -5 to -1, -1 to 3, 3 to 7, 7 to 11, and greater than 11.

As already stated, the hypothesis that autogynephilia arises in association with heterosexuality but also competes with it leads to the prediction that the highest levels of autogynephilia will be found in association with intermediate rather than high levels of heterosexual interest. Figure 1 shows that the core autogynephilia curve displayed the predicted, inverted-U shape, as did the curve for autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy. In contrast, the functions for androphilia and gender dysphoria showed a monotonic decrease, also as predicted.

The four curves whose exact shapes were not predicted in advance are shown in Figure 2. The only variable whose function departed from monotonicity was transvestism, which showed a downturn at the highest level of gynephilic interest. The curves for fetishism, masochism, and sadism all increased monotonically.

The reliabilities of all curves were tested in multiple regressions. Eight separate regression analyses were carried out, one for each of the eight dependent variables. The same predictors, the subject's raw score on the Modified Gyneophilia Scale and the raw score squared, were used in each analysis. Each regression equation was built in two stages: The direct entry of the raw score was followed by *forward*, stepwise entry of the squared score (if significant at  $p < .05$ ). In multiple regression

logic, statistical confirmation of the inverted-U curves for the two autogynephilia variables required that the regression equations for these curves have significant positive coefficients for the linear term (the raw score) and significant negative coefficients for the quadratic term (the squared score).

The results of all eight regression analyses are presented in Table 1. Sample sizes for these analyses varied somewhat, because some subjects had not been administered all questionnaire sections and others had failed to answer relevant items.

The results in Table 1 showed that the functions for core autogynephilia and autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy were reliably curvilinear. A similar, although much weaker, trend was suggested for transvestism. The functions for androphilia, masochism, and sadism were reliably linear. The functions for gender dysphoria and fetishism were curvilinear; however, they were monotonic over their range because in each case the quadratic term had the same sign as the linear term.

The finding that the quadratic terms in the regression equations for the autogynephilia variables had negative coefficients is consistent with the prediction that autogynephilia scores would decline toward the high end of the Modified Gyneophilia Scale; however, this finding is not by itself conclusive. Further analyses were needed to eliminate the possibility that the true autogynephilia curves simply flatten out at high values of gyneophilia (because of a ceiling effect) and that the decreases shown in Figure 1 represent random fluctuations around plateaus in these curves. It was also necessary to conduct additional analyses to show that the observed data were not artifacts of nonhomogeneity in the questionnaire materials or in the sample.

### Reliability of the Descending Portions of the Autogynephilia Curves

As previously noted, the curves in Figures 1 and 2 are each made up of six points. These points represent unequal numbers

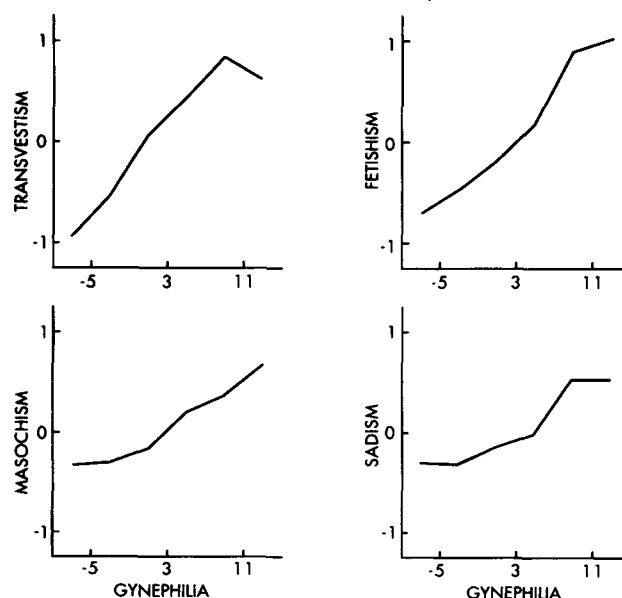


Figure 2. Functions relating transvestism, fetishism, masochism, and sadism to normal heterosexual attraction (gyneophilia).

Table 1  
*Curvilinear Regression of Each Dependent Variable on Modified Gynephilia Scale (MGS) Scores*

Dependent variable	n	Beta coefficient	
		MGS score	Squared MGS score
Core autogynephilia	427	.58**	-.38**
Autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy	427	.33**	-.25**
Androphilia	418	-.66**	
Gender dysphoria	417	-.42**	-.25**
Transvestism	427	.77**	-.16*
Fetishism	408	.56**	.12*
Masochism	427	.33**	
Sadism	422	.32**	

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .0001$ .

of cases (from left to right, Group 1 to Group 6,  $ns = 98, 65, 71, 82, 83$ , and  $28$ ). These sample sizes show that the number of cases with the highest gynephilia scores (although still substantial) was smaller than the numbers in the other groups. It was therefore especially important to show that the mean autogynephilia scores of this group represented a reliable decrease.

This question was investigated for all three variables whose curves showed a downward trend, core autogynephilia, autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy, and transvestism. The subjects were in the three groups plotted at the right side of these curves, that is, Groups 4, 5, and 6. These groups were compared with one-way analyses of variance followed by Tukey multiple range tests at  $p < .05$ . The results for core autogynephilia showed that Group 6 had significantly lower scores than Group 4 or 5. The findings for autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy showed that Group 6 was significantly lower than Group 4; Group 5, which lay in between, did not differ significantly from either. These analyses confirm that autogynephilia actually drops, rather than merely levels off, at high degrees of heterosexual interest. The Tukey test applied to the transvestism scores, on the other hand, did not confirm a decreasing trend; Group 6 did not differ from Group 5.

### *Homogeneity of the Questionnaire Materials*

A second possibility is that the inverted-U shape of the autogynephilia curves, although statistically reliable, was an artifact of nonhomogeneity in the scales used to measure the relevant variables. This was investigated in several ways.

Principal components analyses were carried out on the scales used to measure gynephilia, core autogynephilia, and autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy. In each case, a scree test of the eigenvalues revealed only one factor.

For all three measures all interitem correlations were positive, and—inevitably, given the interitem findings—all item-total correlations were positive. For the Core Autogynephilia Scale, the interitem correlations ranged from .47 to .86, and the item-total correlations ranged from .64 to .87. For the Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale, the interitem correlations ranged from .51 to .65, and the item-total correlations ranged from .63 to .73. For the Modified Gynephilia Scale, the interitem correlations ranged from .25 to .72, and the item-total correlations ranged from .49 to .77. These rather high internal

correlations are related to the fact that these three scales (and the other six used in the study, for that matter) are constructed entirely of face-valid items, and each scale covers a narrow content area.

For the final analyses of this series, each individual item of the Core Autogynephilia Scale was correlated with the total score on the Modified Gynephilia Scale. All the correlations were positive, ranging from .22 to .45. Similarly, the individual items of the Autogynephilic Interpersonal Fantasy Scale were correlated with the Modified Gynephilia Scale. Only one correlation had a negative sign, and it was virtually zero ( $-.01$ ). The others ranged from .14 to .25.

The above item analyses indicate that the three relevant scales are homogeneous in composition. It is therefore unlikely that the study's main findings were artifacts of complex interactions among item subsets.

### *Composition of the Sample*

A final series of analyses was necessary to demonstrate that the central findings were not artifacts of nonhomogeneity in the sample. These examined the influence of two subgroups, (a) patients whose recorded presenting complaint was something other than gender dysphoria or transvestism and (b) preferential homosexuals. The former subgroup consisted of those 35 patients previously mentioned. The latter subgroup was identified with the Modified Androphilia-Gynephilia Index (Blanchard, 1985a), which is calculated from the subject's score on the Modified Androphilia Scale minus his score on the Modified Gynephilia Scale. Previous research has established a cutoff score of 10.0 for this measure (Blanchard, 1985a) and has shown that with this cutoff score the index classification agrees with the clinical assessment of sexual preference in 92% of cases (Blanchard, Clemmensen, & Steiner, 1987). The number of subjects classified as homosexual was 126, and the number classified as nonhomosexual was 292. The remaining 9 subjects could not be classified because they had missing androphilia scores.

The regression analyses for core autogynephilia and autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy were rerun without the other complaints subgroup, the homosexual subgroup, and both subgroups. The regression equations were built in one step, with

Table 2

*Regression of Autogynephilia Variables on Modified Gynephilia Scale (MGS) Scores, With Control for Erotic Attraction to Adult Men (Androphilia) and Presenting Complaint*

Dependent variable	n	Beta coefficient			
		Androphilia	Complaint	MGS score	Squared MGS score
Core autogynephilia					
Less miscellaneous complaints	392			.59**	-.34**
Less homosexual cases	292			.42**	-.38*
Less both	266			.40*	-.33*
With control for both	418	.07	.04	.66**	-.36**
Autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy					
Less miscellaneous complaints	392			.35**	-.21*
Less homosexual cases	292			.38*	-.37*
Less both	266			.36*	-.31*
With control for both	418	.41**	.02	.64**	-.26**

\* $p < .005$ . \*\* $p < .0001$ .

direct entry of the predictors. The results are presented in Table 2. The findings remained significant under all conditions.

The effects of sample variance on the main findings were also investigated by including homosexual attraction and presenting complaint in the regression equations. This strategy avoided dichotomizing the subjects as homosexual versus non-homosexual; it also made it possible to assess the importance of the variables at the same time that it controlled for them. Therefore the regression analyses for core autogynephilia and autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy were rerun with two additional predictors, subjects' scores on the Modified Androphilia Scale and their presenting complaint (coded as 1 for *gender dysphoria* or *transvestism* or 0 for *other complaints*). All predictors were forced into the equation. The results are shown in Table 2.

The central findings in regard to the relations of the autogynephilia variables to heterosexual attraction remained the same or grew even stronger. Presenting complaint proved unimportant in either analysis. Androphilia was related to autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy but unrelated to core autogynephilia. This last result is consistent with previous research that showed that autogynephilic interpersonal fantasy is especially characteristic of bisexual gender dysphorics whereas core autogynephilia is not (Blanchard, 1989b).

In summary, the study's main findings remained significant despite various manipulations of presenting complaint and degree of homosexual interest. This suggests that the observed inverted-U-shaped curves relating autogynephilia to heterosexual attraction were not artifacts of heterogeneity in the sample.

## Discussion

The results of this study support the hypothesis that autogynephilia and normal heterosexual attraction are competing phenomena. It is not possible at this time to specify exactly how or when they compete; we do not know how sexual orientations, including heterosexuality, develop in the first place, let alone precisely how they interact. There are, however, some bases for speculating that autogynephilia and heterosexuality may compete in two distinct ways.

In some if not most sexual variations, a man's sexual attraction to a variant object commonly occurs at the expense of sexual interest in physically mature women. Sexual attraction to the male body is usually accompanied by sexual indifference to the female body (Freund, 1974; Van Wyk & Geist, 1984), and strong attraction to the prepubescent female physique is frequently associated with diminished interest in the mature physique (Barbaree & Marshall, 1989). Similarly, a powerful sexual attraction to such nonreproductive structures as the feet is generally associated with unresponsiveness to the vulva (see Ellis, 1936). Such trade-offs usually stabilize by adolescence, although the relative strengths of a man's heterosexual and variant tendencies may not be reflected in overt behavior until much later, because of guilt, fear, or limited opportunity. These models suggest that one type of competition between autogynephilia and heterosexual attraction primarily operates during psychosexual development, with permanent consequences for the mature man's relative responsiveness to autogynephilic versus heterosexual stimulation. I refer to this type of competition as *developmental competition*.

Clinical experience suggests that there may be a second type of competition observable in men who reach sexual maturity with substantial levels of both heterosexual and autogynephilic motivation. This type of competition occurs when a previous equilibrium between these erotic interests is disturbed by another sexual development, namely, romantic love. It is not rare for a heterosexual male cross-dresser or gender dysphoric to report that when he first met a woman and fell in love, his desires to cross-dress or engage in other cross-gender behaviors diminished or disappeared, sometimes for longer than a year. When, however, the intensity of passionate love resolved into the mellow comforts of married life, his desires to dress or live as a female reasserted themselves. This type of competition I characterize as *dynamic competition*.

In this two-component competition model, developmental competition determines an adult man's baseline levels of heterosexual and autogynephilic motivation, whereas dynamic competition—in autogynephiles who fall in love—produces local fluctuations in these levels, temporarily increasing heterosexual motivation at the expense of autogynephilic motivation.

Although this model implies that developmental and dynamic competition conjointly determine an autogynephile's behavior at any given time, it is likely that my data primarily reflect developmental competition. That is because patients usually present before they have fallen in love or after they have fallen out of it; they rarely present while they are falling in love (and losing interest in cross-gender activities). Perhaps they prefer, in that state, to forget about problems that seem to have cured themselves anyway. At any rate, patients' uniform tendency to seek help when they are not in love means that the great majority are assessed when they are at or near their baseline levels of heterosexual and autogynephilic motivation. Thus, the main finding of this study probably reflects individual differences in baseline levels—the end results of developmental competition—more than it does individual differences in current amatory status.

This investigation did not find that significantly lower levels of transvestism were reported by subjects who experienced the highest levels of heterosexual attraction. This result suggests that heterosexuality and transvestism are relatively compatible orientations. That conclusion seems to contradict Person and Ovesey's (1978) clinical observation that in transvestism "interpersonal sexuality is almost always attenuated" (p. 307). My findings for transvestism, taken together with those for autogynephilia, suggest that it may not be transvestism per se that competes with normal heterosexual attraction so much as the autogynephilia that often accompanies transvestism.

The methodology of this research was suggested by a finding from Blanchard and Hucker's (1991) large-scale study of autoerotic asphyxial fatalities. They investigated the relations among paraphilic activities carried out concurrently with self-asphyxiation. The two most common activities were bondage (the self-application of ropes or other constraints mechanically irrelevant to the asphyxial apparatus) and transvestism. The curve relating the number of constricting devices to the number of feminine garments on the corpse took the form of an inverted U. Blanchard and Hucker suggested a twofold explanation of this result: The occurrence of the one interest increases the likelihood of the other, at the same time that it competes with it for attention or expression. They conjectured that other erotic interests, when examined pairwise, might also prove to have inverted-U-shaped relations, and they cited in this connection Rooth's (1973) remark that those exhibitionists with the highest rates of exposing might be less prone to acts of sexual violence than exhibitionists with lower rates of exposing.

This study is probably the first to predict a nonmonotonic relation between psychosexual variables beforehand, and its results reinforce Blanchard and Hucker's (1991) conjecture that such relations may not be rare in sexology. These empirical findings underscore the general principle that one must examine the curves relating pairs of variables before using statistical procedures that assume linearity (e.g., correlation or correlation-based techniques). The inappropriate use of such procedures will produce misleading results in factor-analytic or other exploratory studies of variant sexuality designed to identify clusters of related paraphilias (e.g., Paitich, Langevin, Freeman, Mann, & Handy, 1977).

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Received October 9, 1990

Revision received June 26, 1991

Accepted July 10, 1991 ■