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to

THE MYTH OF AUTOGYNEPHILIA

by Roberta Angela Dee

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

1. To address the absence of cultural diversity in Western psychology; and

2. To address the cultural biases adversely affecting any interpretation of so-called gender dysphoria with the transgendered and transsexual communities.

INTRODUCTION

Each of us is at risk at losing our intrinsic value as human being when anyone attempts to define who we are on the basis of his or her own prejudices and biased information. Shoddy research is not without consequences. Casual use of terms like gender identity disorder, gender dysphoria, and autogynephilia can create negative conditions and images for entire communities. And unless these communities speak out against such stereotypes and disinformation, the culture will continue to be transphobic as the term applies to cross dressers, and as it applies to transgendered or transsexual men and women.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Anne Lawrence, M.D., a post-operative physician, cites Ray Blanchard frequent in writings on autogynephilia. The physician even credits Blanchard with inventing the term autogynephilia that he defines as "the propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of oneself as a woman."

Ray Blanchard, a clinical psychologist at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, hypothesizes that there are two fundamentally different types of gender dysphoric males: those who are exclusively or almost exclusively aroused by men (androphilic), and those who are aroused by the idea of being women (autogynephilic).

In attempting to crate a correlation between androphilic and autogynephilic behavior, Blanchard fails to distinguish between sex and gender. Such failure is excusable among the lay public. However, it is inexcusable for any scientist or researcher. Androphilic behavior has to do with sexual preference. Autogynephilic behavior has to do with gender preference.

For whatever reason, Anne Lawrence fails to see this as a problem. In fact, the physician embraces the idea and later elaborates on it in subsequent articles.

This alone disturbs me. However, what disturbs me even more is the total absence of cultural diversity in any of the research by Blanchard, and any of the writings by Lawrence. They both seem to live in a world where everyone is subject to Anglo Saxon norms. No other cultures exist. Furthermore, neither the doctor, nor the researcher seems capable of acknowledging that what might seem to be gender dysphoric in one culture might be totally acceptable in another.

This is not solely symptomatic to studies on autogynephilia. It is symptomatic of psychology and medicine generally.

A recent study demonstrated that physicians, when examining African American men with the same heart condition as Caucasian men, significantly prescribed less aggressive treatment for African American men. The study confirmed a belief held within minority communities for decades.

Let us assume that the transsexual community in the United States consists of one-tenth of one percent of the population. This would suggest that there are 270,000 individuals in the country who would either want to change their sex, or want to live as a member of the opposite sex. It is obviously a small percentage of the population. Still, Blanchard's study only examines 200 alleged transsexuals. This amounts to only 7.407e-4 of the total population. It is far too small a sample from which to draw any meaningful conclusions as to human behavior, even if the study were to be limited to one culture and one ethnicity.

It is impossible to respect any research that draws global conclusion as to the human condition but only examines one portion of it, while failing to acknowledge the cultural biases that exist both within the sampled population and the researchers themselves.

Thus far, none of the studies pertaining to autogynephilia or androphilia have even made as much as a modest attempt to be cross-cultural. Each assumes that European culture and values is applicable to all cultures.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

What is dysphoria? What does it mean?

The dictionary defines dysphoria as "an abnormal feeling of anxiety." Gender dysphoria is as one might imagine a feeling of anxiety about one's gender.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - 4th Edition (DSM - IV) pertaining to transgendered behavior, as published by the American Psychiatric Association, speaks mostly of gender identity disorder. Gender dysphoria is defined as a person with a persistent discomfort with gender role or identity.

According to the DSM-IV definition for gender identity disorder, the average heterosexual man who walks into a room filled with women, and feels a degree of discomfort with being the only man in the room, may be said to momentarily suffer a gender identity disorder. Without a means to measure discomfort, the phrase serves little if any clinical purpose.

Every transsexual, whether male-to-female or female-to-male, is said to be gender dysphoric. Yes, as Lawrence suggests in some articles, transsexuals raise families and parent children. In fact, the overwhelming majority of transsexuals function and succeed socially, in spite of their often secret desire to be a member of the opposite sex.

With this in mind, one must again ask, "What is dysphoria? What does it mean?"

Blanchard and Lawrence use the phrase gender dysphoria almost indiscriminately. They use the phrase as though it defines something specific and measurable, but it does not. And they use the phrase without regard for the cultural values that might affect the degree to which and individual adversely suffers a gender identity disorder, if he or she can be said to suffer at all.

CONCLUSION

In what appears to be a rush for some physicians to validate themselves as psychologists, and for sopme psychologists to validate themselves as scientists, some otherwise intelligent people seem to hae forgotten the complexity of the human spirit. The validity of their so-called discoveries must be questions, as well as their methods.

What clever word or phrase do we use to describe the man who strongly desires to be a woman but resolves himself to cross dressing for the sake of his spouse and possibly his children? Isn't all the hype about autogynephilia little more than the varying degrees of euphoria any of us can have when we imagine ourselves to be anyone that might be the subject of a better life?

Can anyone ofus imagine that an individual would undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS) simply because he or she has had a sexual fantasy of what it might be like to live as the opposite gender? I would think we would call such an individual gender delusional rather than gender dysphoric.

As for my own prejudices, I must confess to my not having been very much impressed with Dr. Lawrence's methods of presenting transsexuals to the world. It is certainly the doctor's right to employ any method acceptable to the doctor's conscience. In most instances, it's a matter of taste. And I can suffice it to say that we have different tastes as far as our presentation of topics concerning gender. Still, of all the doctor's alledgedly academic or scientifc exploits, this preoccupation with autogynephilia has impressed me least of all.

We people who gender beyond the ordinary definitions of "boys have a penis" and "girls have a vagina" deserve considerably more respect than afforded to us through either Lawrence or Blanchard.

The End

Anne Marie Tobias

to

Cool dissertation Bobbi,

I'm of a similiar mind... that is, that there are surely thousands of people who the androphilic, autogynephilic model fit to aaaa... well a T. I belive this is a small and nonrepresentative slice of the community. I don't find myself the least bit fetishistic in my experience of having a female form... I am however filled with a sense of peace and joy, that body and mind... body and soul seem to be now coherent.

I didn't do this to get men...

I didn't do this to become a woman...

I didn't do this to look like a woman...

I did this to become whole and complete... to finally discover a personal sense of integrity.

Marie

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