

A Different Perspective

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Dreger has written an unusually long article detailing the events of this “controversy,” but she does not comment on how to resolve conflicts between researchers and subjects (or the community being studied) or place the “controversy” in the larger history of dissent against the Autogynephilia theory. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, those issues cannot be discussed here. Dreger also implies that the concerns of transsexual activists are not supported by a careful review of *The Man Who Would Be Queen (TMWWBQ)*; a very different perspective will be presented.

As Dreger did, I believe it is important to detail my background. I also have been on the receiving end of a withering and unfounded personal attack for my professional writing (see Kleinplatz & Moser, 2005; Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005). I am a physician who cares for a large number of transsexual patients, and a psychotherapist who regularly evaluated and counseled transsexual patients prior to my medical career. I am a sex researcher who has been quite critical of the “Autogynephilia Theory,” but critical of the “Feminine Essence Theory” as well.

I do not believe I have ever met Dreger. I know Bailey, Blanchard, and Lawrence both professionally and personally; we have often disagreed, but always in a professional manner. I believe they are good and honest people, trying to find answers to basic sex and gender questions and how to help people with these concerns; I have the same quest. I do believe they are profoundly wrong in the case of Autogynephilia. From my interactions with Bailey, I do not believe he is homophobic, heterosexist, sexist, or transphobic. Nevertheless, from his

writings and statements, I understand how someone could come to the opposite conclusion.

I do not believe that Bailey, Dreger, or any researcher should be the recipient of the treatment outlined in the article for presenting his or her beliefs, research, opinion, ideas, etc. Although I disagree strongly with Bailey’s conclusions about transsexuality and many of his other professional beliefs, he has the absolute right to present them and *not* suffer the attacks he has. I do not know Conway, James, or McCloskey, except by reputation. None of my following remarks should be construed as supportive of them, their accusations against Bailey, or their tactics.

A Different Perspective on the Controversy

Bailey wrote a very provocative book for the lay public. Dreger admits *TMWWBQ* is “unnecessarily snide or even contemptuous in places, lacking evidentiary support” and that “*TMWWBQ* was never envisioned as a work of science.” Dreger noted that some people suggested that the tone or cover be changed prior to publication to minimize the expected negative reaction to the book; Bailey apparently ignored these suggestions. Possibly as intended, publication of *TMWWBQ* created considerable controversy.

The publication of *TMWWBQ* signified the transition of the theory of Autogynephilia from academic journals to the popular press. As Dreger reports, mothers were telling their “daughters” that they finally understood them; that meant for some being told “you are a sexual pervert,” not “I understand your struggle to be accepted as a woman.” In the transsexual community, this was a call to arms.

Some transsexual activists reacted to the book by making a number of accusations against Bailey. These activists asked for support from a variety of organizations and individuals.

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All these entities referred the accusers to the appropriate organization to conduct the investigation, Northwestern University. That investigation took place. It basically concluded that Bailey had not violated any professional, ethical, legal, or moral standards; no penalties were levied against Bailey. It seems the system worked.

In our society, individuals make accusations with some frequency; these usually prompt some sort of an investigation. The investigating body eventually decides if any violation of rules, ethics, law, or standards of practice occurred and the appropriate sanctions for those violations. Some of these allegations have merit and some do not. It is hoped that the system sorts them out correctly. This is the system and this is what happened. It is not clear how else individuals, who believe that they have grievances, could have proceeded. Threats towards Bailey or Dreger and accusations involving their family members are clearly inappropriate and there is no excuse for that behavior.

Dreger implies that ad hominem attacks are a *new* tactic in the attempt to discredit sex research with which one disagrees. This is patently false; Kinsey, Money, Rind, and Bullough, among many others, have suffered such attacks. By the mere mention of their names, some readers will undoubtedly think that those attacks were different because they were either well-founded or baseless. The motivation in all cases was an attempt to prevent the researchers' ideas from being taken seriously and ruin them personally. Dreger's article fails to place the attack on Bailey in its historical perspective.

Factual material can be presented in different ways; some of these are likely to cause strong negative reactions. For example, although it is true that, on average, men have more upper body physical strength than women, it would be inflammatory and inappropriate to call women the *weaker* sex. I doubt that criticizing a researcher for using this politically charged language would be interpreted as infringing on free speech, discouraging research, or political correctness run amok.

To call a transsexual who denies Autogynephilia vigorously autogynephilic or an autogynephile-in-denial is also inflammatory and inappropriate. One can convey the same point with more cautious language. In general, researchers should avoid inciting hostility from their subjects. Stating that a subject is in denial or misleading the researcher usually leads to an angry reaction. Ridiculing someone for their beliefs, religious, political, or gender identification is never a good strategy. Ignoring these common courtesies will probably lead to an ugly confrontation, such as this "controversy." Being a researcher does not confer immunity from the consequences of incivility.

A Different Perspective on the Allegations

There have been many allegations in this case. Dreger discussed three in detail; conducting research without IRB

approval (which would have included obtaining informed consent from one's subjects), practicing psychology without a license, and engaging in sex with a research subject. It is important to realize that Bailey did field research for *TMWWBQ* without IRB approval, did not obtain informed consent from his "subjects," and he did engage in activities that could be construed as practicing psychology without a license. All these acts were judged *not* to be a violation of law, ethics, or university rules. The complaints were not spurious; they also were not actual violations.

Although there is disagreement as to whether Bailey engaged in sex with a subject, even if he had, that would not be a violation of law, ethics, or university rules either. I have no way of judging the validity of this allegation and frankly do not care.

A Different Perspective on the Autogynephilia Theory

Imagine that you are a male-to-female transsexual (MTF), whom Bailey would classify as an "autogynephile" (because you reported sexual arousal by dressing in female clothing a few times in early adolescence; it was a minor interest that you just outgrew). Also imagine you feel, really feel, that you are a woman trapped in a man's body. It really does not matter if it is true; it does matter that you believe it to your core.

Now imagine some "doctors" tell you that your real problem is that you are an autogynephile, all your feminine feelings are sexually based and false, and you are *just* a generic man with a really unusual sexual interest. This sounds absolutely bizarre to you; you know you are not aroused by thoughts of yourself as a woman, but these doctors say you are lying or deluding yourself. These doctors go further; this unusual sexual interest makes you more likely to have other unusual sexual interests, which include pedophilia. You are disgusted by pedophiles and insulted that someone would categorize you in that way. If, after your surgery, you choose to marry a wonderful man, the theory suggests he is actually nothing more than a prop you use to propagate the erotic fantasy of being a woman. According to the theory, you really love your female self, not your husband. These same doctors tell you that you are in denial about your true sexual proclivities. They say other "autogynephilic" transsexuals find acceptance and understanding from this theory, if only you would recognize it in yourself. You think this is crazy, you do not fantasize about being a woman; you *are* a woman in your fantasies.

You are seething with rage about the way you have been categorized and your own feelings discounted. Your reaction is to fight back with whatever weapons you have at your disposal. Oh, by the way, you often need these doctors to get your hormones and surgery.

The theory is equally distressing for MTFs who are primarily sexually oriented towards genetic males (classic or homosexual transsexuals). The theory suggests that they are not women either, just very effeminate homosexual men with a desire to amputate their penises. They cannot have autogynephilic desires, even if they say they do.

To be classified as an individual with a paraphilia is to be classified as mentally ill, potentially suffer employment discrimination, and denied child custody. Add to that the specific problems transsexuals face, the difficulty obtaining a marriage license, passport, and other government services. Some clinicians will not even approve autogynephiles for sex reassignment surgery. Bailey and other Autogynephilia proponents have condemned strongly the actions of those clinicians, but the discrimination continues.

In *TMWWBQ*, Bailey called for the formal inclusion of Autogynephilia into the Gender Identity Disorder diagnostic criteria in the *DSM*. I believe this would be a mistake on numerous grounds. Placing it in the *DSM* would imply that Autogynephilia is a form of psychopathology. I do not deny that Autogynephilia exists (though it appears to be very different from the other paraphilias listed in the *DSM*), but it does not follow the compulsory association with sexual orientation that *TMWWBQ* suggests. I am also not convinced that Autogynephilia is the cause of gender dysphoria or the motivation to undergo sex reassignment surgery in this “type” of MTF.

Not so long ago, homosexuals were conceived of in a similar manner, incapable of loving someone else, only interested in sex, and likely to sexually molest children. Also not so long ago, when the police were hassling a group of effeminate gay men (a common occurrence at the time), these gay men committed the clearly inappropriate and illegal act of fighting back and violently resisting arrest. It was called the Stonewall Riots and is considered the birth of the contemporary Gay Rights Movement. A few years after Stonewall, homosexuality was removed from the *DSM* and the negative stereotypes of homosexuals described above were being debunked. Sometimes extreme acts lead to political change.

The controversy surrounding *TMWWBQ* is not solely about the content of the book, but the oppression transsexuals experience and their belief that it stems from the Autogynephilia theory. Bailey’s book with its unnecessarily derisive comments and contemptuous tone is just the flash point. Even if Bailey had added all the appropriate qualifiers to his book, he did not address the transsexual community’s concerns that this theory is oppressive to them.

Dreger identifies three main protagonists, but the chatter on numerous transsexual websites has been how the book symbolizes their oppression. Bailey surely did not deserve the treatment outlined in the article, but his attitude, actions, and responses are partially responsible for the escalation of the controversy (see below).

A Different Perspective on Dreger

With all due respect to Dreger, was she the correct person to tell this story? She admits she was not unbiased. She has been attacked by the same detractors as Bailey and she has her own political agenda.

Dreger is a prominent figure in the Intersex movement; I was surprised there was no discussion about the friction (to put it mildly) between the Intersex and Transsexual Movements. The diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder (Transsexuality) in the *DSM-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) specifically omit individuals with a physical intersex condition. Nevertheless, as Dreger notes, some people (both transsexual and professional) believe that transsexuality is a type of neurological intersex condition. Some intersex activists are quite dismissive of this possibility and point to the Autogynephilia theory as a way of distinguishing and distancing themselves from transsexuals.

Dreger (1998) has stated: “...the experiences and advice of adult intersexuals must be solicited and taken into consideration. It is incorrect to claim, as I have heard several clinicians do, that the complaints of adult intersexuals are irrelevant...” If one were to replace the term “intersexuals” with “transsexuals” in the above quote, it would suggest that Dreger would be critical of Bailey for ignoring the transsexual activists’ perspective and complaints. Dreger seems to be inconsistent in her admonitions about the right to self-definition.

This is an article about a scientist who was maligned. It is surprising that Dreger chose to malign others in her article. I am not talking about Conway, James, or McCloskey, but I see no reason why Dreger needed to report that Dr. Millie Brown settled a lawsuit brought against her by a former patient. The implication that Brown was guilty of professional misconduct appears to have been added just to undercut her credibility as a proponent of the Feminine Essence Perspective.

Dreger neglected to add that Brown was advised to accept the settlement by her insurance company, which is quite common with this type of lawsuit. Brown chose to follow her insurance company’s advice and move on with her life. The terms of the settlement are confidential, but did not require any admission of wrongdoing (M. Brown, personal communication, September 14, 2007). In this case, Dreger acted like Bailey’s accusers, stating facts out of context to impugn someone’s reputation.

A Different Perspective on How to Manage “Controversies” in the Future

As I am writing this commentary, Bailey is taking part in radio interviews (August 22, 2007; <http://www.kqed.org/>

[epArchive/R708221000](#)), giving interviews to the press (New York Times, August 21, 2007), and calling one critic “...a big fat ugly liar, and I am thinking of suing her” (Bailey to Sexnet, p.e.c., August 22, 2007). This only reinvigorates the opposition. In my opinion, Bailey is not clearing his name, but fomenting further controversy.

From my experience as a researcher who has been the subject of an ad hominem attack, I have some advice on how to handle these controversies. If you do not like controversy, do not want people making accusations or saying nasty things about you, I suggest that you make your point with respect and kindness. I believe it is often best to refuse all interviews, respond only in scientific forums, avoid speaking to the press, and refrain from name-calling. If you need to respond, do so with formal statements, posted to a website or faxed to reputable magazines or newspapers. Although it is very tempting to confront your accusers, you cannot control the media. Lies always make for more sensationalistic press than the truth. Which do you think they will print?

Epilogue: A Different Perspective

Dreger asked, “How could there be so much smoke and so little fire”? The same could be asked of Dreger. Did she uncover a pattern of lies and false allegations? No, the allegations were basically true; they just did not constitute

any formal misconduct. I agree that the many voices in this debate “...have been repeatedly silenced, misrepresented, or misheard...”, but this has occurred on both sides of the debate, not just by the Autogynephilia critics as Dreger implies. Did she find anything but a small group of women who felt that this popular book was a threat and let their displeasure be known quite loudly?

My last bits of insight are to remember the Golden Rule. Remember also that you reap what you sow. The death of free speech and academic freedom has been highly exaggerated. Science is not free of politics, never has been, and never will be. The origins of transsexuality are still not known and the concept of Autogynephilia is still controversial.

Can we all get back to science now?

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