

# THE IDENTITY-DEFENCE MODEL OF GENDER-VARIANCE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive model to explain the development of the various manifestations of gender-variance amongst birth-assigned males and females. As a background, two previous theories of gender-variance development proposed by Richard Docter and Ray Blanchard are introduced. The model presented in this article is called the *Identity-Defence Model of Gender-Variance Development* because it has two parts: Firstly, biological factors and early childhood influences determine whether, and to what degree a gender-variant *identity* develops. Secondly, personality and environment factors determine whether *defence* mechanisms are used to repress the gender-variance. If defence mechanisms are used, then the resultant outcome is either a non-classical transsexual or cross-dresser, depending on the degree of gender-variance. If defence mechanisms are not used, then classical transsexuals or drag artists are the likely outcomes, again depending on the level of the gender-variance. Sexual orientation and cross-gender eroticism are strongly correlated with the gender-variant outcomes in the model, and this is explained in the model using Bem's (1996) *Exotic Becomes Erotic* developmental theory of sexual orientation.

KEY WORDS: transgender; transsexual; sexuality; crossdressers; gender identity development; sexuality development; cross-gender eroticism; transvestism; drag.

## Introduction

This article introduces the Identity-Defence Model of Gender-Variance Development, which designed to explain the development of various forms of gender-variance in Western

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societies among both birth-assigned males and females. In explaining the model we refer to *gender-variant identity* which we define as a subjective sense of not belonging completely to the gender of one's anatomic sex (derived from Docter 1988, p. 201). We use *gender-variance* to refer to the behavioural expression of this identity. The terms *transmen* and *transwomen* are used to refer to female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals respectively. These persons have a sustained gender identity that is discrepant with their birth-assigned sex along with a desire to alter their bodily appearance towards that of the opposite sex (Buhrich & McConaghy, 1978). The term *drag artist* will refer to those persons who dress in *drag* as the opposite birth-assigned sex for the purposes of performing or entertaining. These persons are usually sexually attracted to the same birth-assigned sex (Schneider et al., 2006). The term *cross-dresser* will refer to those people who enjoy wearing the clothing that is considered by society to be of the opposite sex. These persons are usually sexually attracted to the opposite sex, and this definition does not include those persons who cross-dress for the purposes of performing. These definitions of drag artists and cross-dressers exclude those persons who are also transsexual. Although we prefer the term cross-dresser, the term *transvestite* is used when reviewing previous research that uses this terminology.

To give a background to this area, two important previous theories of gender-variance development are described before the Identity-Defence Model is introduced. Although these two theories were only designed to include the development of transwomen, an understanding of them gives the reader a basic grounding in concepts used in the Identity-Defence Model.

## **Previous Theories of the Development of Gender-Variance**

### *Docter's five-stage theory of cross-gender behaviour.*

Docter (1988) distinguished between primary and secondary transsexualism among transwomen. He believed primary transsexualism involves lifelong feelings of gender dysphoria, beginning from early childhood. According to Docter, these individuals are generally sexually attracted to males (androphilic) from an early age, have more difficulty functioning in traditionally "masculine" roles, and do not report a history of sexual arousal associated with cross-dressing. Docter described secondary transsexuals as typically functioning as cross-dressers and making an attempt to live in the male gender role prior to living in the female role, which usually results in them undergoing transition later in life.

They also tend to be sexually attracted to females (gynephilic), and show a history of sexual arousal associated with cross-dressing.

Docter (1988) provided a developmental theory accounting for both transvestism and secondary transsexualism. He proposed three antecedent developmental factors that predispose a birth-assigned male to develop transvestism. Firstly, young males are given strict boundaries in terms of gender-appropriate behaviour and clothing, which can lead to a curiosity and fascination with the forbidden, and result in an erotic component. *Gender envy* might also develop as a result of the stresses of growing up as a boy and seeing girls having things much easier, being beautiful, and receiving more love and security. Finally, Docter saw inhibitions about sexual relationships with girls during adolescence as a precursor to fetishism. Docter noted that once transvestism develops, the sexual arousal experienced in adolescence is extremely reinforcing, even without orgasm. The “relaxing” and “calming” effect reported by transvestites when cross-dressed may also be reinforcing. Docter’s theory states that once independence from parental supervision occurs a gender-variant identity develops (for example, the development of a feminine name), and this identity is either integrated into the primary (male) self-system when persons are content with a dual identity as is the case with cross-dressers, or causes an upheaval of the primary self to become the dominant identity as is the case with secondary transsexuals. Thus only some of those who Docter defined as transvestites/cross-dressers become secondary transsexuals.

In explaining the Identity-Defence Model, we will follow LeVay and Valente (2006) in using the terms “classical” and “non-classical” transsexualism in place of primary and secondary transsexualism respectively because we believe these terms imply less of a hierarchy between different transsexual types.

*Blanchard’s theory of autogynephilia development.*

Blanchard (1989) introduced the concept of *autogynephilia*, which he used to refer to “a male’s propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought of himself as a female” (p. 616). This concept underlies Blanchard’s hypothesis that there are two distinctive manifestations of transsexualism in transwomen: “homosexual” and “autogynephilic.” These are similar to Docter’s primary/secondary transsexual typology; however Blanchard gave more emphasis to the sexual motivations of transwomen. According to Blanchard, gender dysphoria among birth-assigned males who are non-androphilic occurs as a result of autogynephilia, and autogynephilic transwomen are motivated by their sexuality to transition.

Blanchard gave little detail about what motivates “homosexual” (the term androphilic is preferred here) transwomen to transition. However, it has been theorised that this group develops femininity that is usually associated with homosexual males. This femininity is more marked in androphilic MF transsexuals than homosexual males. It has been noted that these individuals often have a difficult time as very effeminate homosexual males “socially, romantically, and sexually, and their transition appears to be largely motivated by a desire to improve their lives in these domains” (see also Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Tria, 2007, p. 524). Similarly, Lawrence (2009) conceptualised androphilic MF transsexuals as “the most feminine of gay men, persons who are so naturally feminine that it is easier and more satisfying for them to live in the world as women than as men” (p. 199). In accordance with this proposal, one study has found that androphilic MF transsexuals were subjectively evaluated to have a physical appearance that more closely matched their gender identity than those who were not exclusively androphilic (Y. L. S. Smith, van Goozen, Kuiper, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2005b).

In terms of the etiology of this femininity, there are theories of childhood gender-variance development, which, given that childhood gender-variance is a component of Blanchard’s androphilic transsexualism, may have relevance here (Coates, Friedman, & Wolfe, 1991; Zucker & Bradley, 1995). These theories propose an interaction between biological determining a child’s temperament and psychodynamic factors, including parental psychopathology and marital discord.

Blanchard believed that there is much commonality between autogynephilic transwomen and transvestites. Blanchard’s autogynophilia concept, however, is broader than transvestism: it includes sexual fantasies in which the wearing of women’s apparel is less important or even absent altogether. For example, the preferred fantasy of many autogynephilic transwomen is simply the mental image of themselves with a nude female body (Blanchard, 1993).

Those of Blanchard’s second type, autogynephilic transsexuals, develop an error in erotic target localisation, which means that they locate their erotic target (towards women) on themselves rather than on other people. This, Blanchard believed is the result of a failure of some developmental process that keeps “normal” heterosexual learning on target, possibly by biasing sexual arousal to external instead of internal stimuli (Blanchard, 1991). When this development fails, a person acquires sexual fantasies of themselves having some or all attributes of the desired object. In the case of transvestism, individuals become attracted to particular garments rather the parts of the female body that the garment is worn over (female

underwear and brassieres are the most striking examples here). In the case of autogynephilia, the desired object is the female physique, and the individual in some way locates these on their own body (Blanchard, 1991).

Blanchard stated that sexual arousal to autogynephilic fantasy may diminish or even disappear due to age, hormone treatment, and genital surgery; and yet the desire to live as a woman does not diminish, and often grows stronger. He saw this as a likeness to heterosexual pair bonding: after years of marriage, sexual excitement with a partner tends to decrease, however one continues to be just as attached to that person. Similarly the desire to have a female body can continue in some permanent “love-bond” (Blanchard, 1991).

A significant number of transsexuals have voiced disagreement with Blanchard’s model (Dreger, 2008; Lawrence, 2007; Veale, Clarke, & Lomax, 2009b). Veale et al. gave transwomen the opportunity to comment on Blanchard’s theory, and found most of their comments were negative. The most common response was that the theory is too narrow, and does not allow for diversity outside of Blanchard’s two types. This criticism can also be applied to the primary/secondary transsexualism distinction outlined by Docter (1988) and the classical/non-classical distinction employed in this article. However, the Identity-Defence Model allows for variation between these types should empirical evidence uncover the need for this.

In this article, we use the term *cross-gender eroticism* in place of *autogynephilia* because the term is gender-neutral which fits the purposes of our article better.

## **The Identity-Defence Model of Gender-Variance Development**

The *Identity-Defence Model of Gender-Variance Development* builds on Docter’s (1988) theory and incorporates the work of Seil (1996). This title is used because the theory proposes that two factors influence gender-variance outcomes: the degree of gender-variant *identity* developed, and whether *defence* mechanisms are used to repress this identity. Formulated this way, the model provides a theoretical outline of the developmental pathway to many of the various heterogeneous manifestations of gender-variance. The model is illustrated in Figure 1, and the eight components of the model are outlined in the following sections. We give examples of possible predisposing factors that determine whether a gender-variant identity develops, and whether defence mechanisms are used.

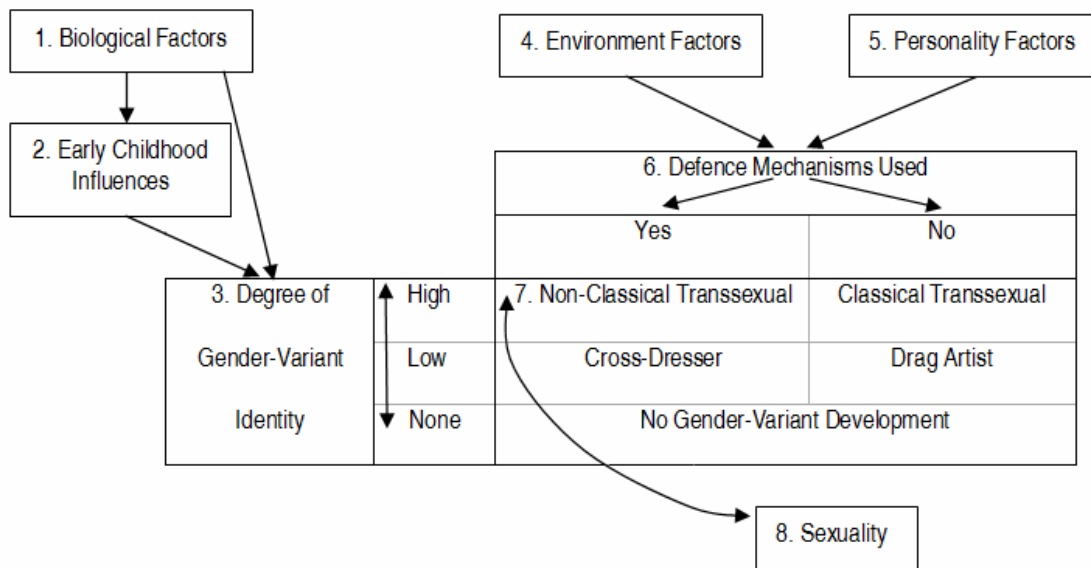


Figure 1. *Diagram of the Identity-Defence Model of Gender-Variance development, showing factors influencing gender-variant outcomes.*

### 1. *Biological factors.*

Some biological factors have been shown to be associated with gender-variance. Veale, Clarke, and Lomax (in press) reviewed previous studies of these factors. They reported evidence for a genetic component of gender-variance, based on studies of twins and other within-family concordance, and of studies that have looked specifically at genes. They also reported evidence that prenatal androgen levels correlate with gender-variance, from studies of finger length ratios (2D:4D) of transsexuals, and of individuals with polycystic ovary syndrome, prenatal exposure to anticonvulsants, and intersex and related conditions who are more likely to have reassigned genders. Also, it seems that transsexuals have some parts of their brain structure that is sex atypical, a greater likelihood of non-right-handedness, and male-to-female transsexuals to have a greater number of older brothers.

### 2. *Early childhood influences.*

A less warm, more emotionally distant, controlling or rejecting father has been associated with gender-variant outcomes in two controlled studies (Cohen-Kettenis & Arrindell, 1990; Parker & Barr, 1982). Studies have also shown high rates of childhood sexual, emotional, and physical abuse among transsexuals (Devor, 1994; Gehring & Knudson, 2005; Kersting et al., 2003; Lothstein, 1983; Pauly, 1974; Veale, Clarke, & Lomax, 2008a), although these studies did not use control groups.

### 3. *Degree of gender-variant identity.*

These biological and environmental factors influence the degree of gender-variant identity formed in the young child. If a high degree of gender-variant identity is formed, then transsexualism is the likely outcome in adulthood. If a lower degree of gender-variant identity is formed, then less extreme gender-variant outcomes of cross-dresser or expression of gender through drag are the results. More commonly, if no gender-variance develops then the child will develop no gender-variant identity. It is also likely that culture will play a role in how gender-variant individuals see themselves and come to identify. For instance, in cultures where there is little acceptance for effeminate homosexual males but there is a cultural place for MF transsexualism or a third sex (e.g. Iran, Thailand), gender-variant persons will be more likely to assume the latter identity.

### 4. *Environment factors.*

Environmental influences may determine whether a young child employs defence mechanisms to repress their gender-variant identity and behaviours and protect them from the perceived persecution and resultant cognitive dissonance, guilt, and anxiety they would receive from expressing it. One possible environmental influence is the tolerance of gender-variance in the family environment the child grows up in. If the young child perceives gender non-conforming expressions are, or would be, met with scorn and punishment then their gender-variant identity is more likely to become ego-dystonic, and the gender-variant identity become repressed. If these expressions are not always met with scorn and punishment, and if they are not perceived as strictly inappropriate, or even encouraged, then the young child's gender-variant identity is more likely to become ego-syntonic – meaning that they do not form defence mechanisms to cognitively avoid it.

Gagné and Tewksbury (1998) explored the conformity pressures reported by a number of transwomen in their childhood. They summarised:

Conformity, while distressing, offers valued rewards in interactions and social integration. The result is repression of the authentic self in the interest of preserving valued relationships....As young children and adolescents, the people we interviewed quickly learned that to cross-dress or act feminine was inappropriate and intolerable. Therefore, they learned to hide their transgendered activities and feminine characteristics and attempted to become appropriately masculine....Being a feminine male meant being labeled [*sic*] abnormal, weird, sick, or homosexual. Boys were

scolded, shamed, sent to psychiatrists, and sometimes beaten by their parents for wanting to do feminine things. (p. 87)

Bullough and Bullough (1997b) found that 93% of their sample of 372 birth-assigned males who cross-dress were afraid of being caught cross-dressing, and 56% were never caught. Given the young age of the reported cross-dressing – the median age of first reported cross-dressing was 8.5, with 91% reporting their first cross-dressing incident taking place by age 14 – this shows a strong internalisation of the wrongs of cross-dressing, and a large amount of secrecy from this group. Långstrom and Zucker (2005) found that over 50% of persons reporting transvestic fetishism among a population sample did not see sexual arousal from cross-dressing as acceptable to themselves. The samples of both these studies experience non-classical gender-variance and this is evidence for them to have cognitive dissonance also accompanying it.

Cross-dressers, and non-classical transsexuals are less commonly seen among birth-assigned females than birth-assigned males (Blanchard, Clemmensen, & Steiner, 1987; Chivers & Bailey, 2000). This is accounted for in the Identity-Defence Model because birth-assigned females experience less parental and peer pressure to conform to the gender stereotype of their birth-assigned sex; there is evidence for this in studies of transsexuals (Verschoor & Poortinga, 1988) and non-gender-variant populations (Egan & Perry, 2001; Lytton & Romney, 1991). As a result, gender-variant birth-assigned females are less likely to go through a stage of repressing their gender-variant identity, which the Identity-Defence Model proposes is the antecedent to cross-dresser and non-classical transsexual development. There have however been past documented reports of cross-gender eroticism in birth-assigned females (see Veale, Clarke, & Lomax, 2009c for a review); also see Kaldera (2000) and Devor (1993) for further discussion. It is likely that the persons in these case-reports would have experienced a much greater level of intolerance of their childhood gender-variant expression than they would have experienced today.

The Identity-Defence Model also predicts that in cultures where allowances are made for gender-variance, such as in Samoa (Bartlett & Vasey, 2006) and Thailand (Winter, 2006) then the existence of cross-dressers and non-classical MF transsexualism would be fewer. There is evidence that this is the case (Lawrence, in press). Further discussion of this is given by Veale, Clarke, and Lomax,(2009a)



### *5. Personality factors.*

Aspects of a child's personality may also influence whether they repress their gender-variant identity. Studies have shown that some children are more sensitive to parents' socialisation than others (Kochanska, 1995). Pomerantz, Ng, and Wang (2004) proposed that children who are more fearful of parental discipline are more sensitive to gender-related boundaries enforced by parents, "with even subtle hints from parents eliciting guilt when children have violated a rule" (p. 133). Thus, those children who repress their gender-variant identity may be only those who are prone to guilt and sensitive to parents' real or perceived discipline.

We believe that an introverted child is likely to have less confidence to express this gender-variant identity, and it is also possible that children with greater impulse control, agreeableness, or conformity are more likely to cognitively-avoid their gender-variance.

Two previous studies have reported higher levels of introversion among male cross-dressers compared to control groups. Bentler and Prince (1969) found that cross-dressers (non-classical gender-variance) tended to be more inhibited in social interactions and emotional expression. Using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, Wilson and Gosselin (1980) found high levels of introversion compared to male and female controls among a group of 269 members of a cross-dresser club. Y. L. S. Smith et al. (2005a) reported classical transsexuals of both birth-assigned genders scored higher on the extraversion scale of the Dutch Short Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory than non-classical MF transsexuals. Relevant to the trait of agreeableness, Bullough and Bullough (1997b) found that 67% of their sample were considered "good" children, and only 5% reported getting in trouble and getting a "bad" label. However, there was no reference group to compare this figure to.

### *6. Defence mechanisms used.*

The proposed personality and environment factors determine whether the defence of repression is used to cognitively avoid a gender-variant identity. Repression is defined as the unconsciously motivated forgetting or unawareness of internal impulses, feelings, thoughts or wishes (derived from Vaillant, 1992, p. 276).

Previous authors have observed the defence of gender-variant identity (Bockting & Coleman, 2007; Lawrence, 2000; Seil, 1996), and psychoanalytic authors have previously described the development of a "false self" in childhood (Winnicott, 1965) which may be analogous to a repressed gender-variant identity. Cramer (2006) writes:

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A child may learn that the expression of certain feelings or needs would arouse a negative reaction in the caregiver; as a result, these feelings “go underground.” Keeping the unacceptable feelings out of awareness helps maintain a relationship with the caregiver.... its result is the development of a “false self.” (p. 7)

The proposed repression acts through early childhood and often into adulthood. Studies have shown that denial – a defence mechanism closely related to repression in that both involve the refusal to believe anxiety-provoking information (Nairne, 2006) – is the most commonly used defence mechanism for children until age seven (Glasberg & Aboud, 1982; W. P. Smith & Rossman, 1986). Lawrence (2003) found that the mean age that a group of mostly non-classical transwomen first realised that they wanted to change sex was eight. Maturity, independence, and gathering of knowledge are reasons we speculate for the defence of the gender-variant identity becoming broken down in late childhood or adulthood. After these persons are able to confront their gender-variant identity within themselves, there is often also a significant time lag before they are able to tell other people about it. For narrative accounts of transwomen’s denial experiences, see Mason-Schrock (1996).

We believe this outcome is more discrete than the other major outcome variable of the Identity-Defence Model – degree of gender-variant identity. The gender-variant identity is either repressed or it isn’t during childhood, although we are aware it may be possible for persons to alternate between periods of repression and conscious awareness. As noted above, previous authors have proposed the existence of different *types* of transwomen, and a taxometric analysis has found some evidence of discrete differences in sexuality among transwomen (Veale, Lomax, & Clarke, 2007). However, room for variation between the extremes is allowed for in the model.

### *7. Gender identity outcomes.*

This part of the model is a two-dimensional matrix of possible gender-variant identities. If no gender-variant identity develops then an identity consistent with biological sex is the outcome. If a gender-variant identity develops and defence mechanisms are used to repress it then the outcomes are cross-dressers or non-classical transsexuals depending on the level of gender-variant identity. If defence mechanisms are not used then the outcomes are classical transsexuals or drag artists, again depending on the level of gender-variant identity.

We would like to emphasise that even though we have only given four gender-variance “points” on the matrix, we are aware that not every gender-variant person fits neatly into these categories. The model allows for variation between these points. An example of an

intermediate point between cross-dressers and non-classical transsexuals is described by Buhrich and McConaghy (1979) as a “marginal transvestite” group.

#### 8. *Sexuality outcomes.*

Sexuality is strongly correlated with these outcomes. Those participants not employing defence mechanisms (classical transsexuals and drag artists) are more likely to develop a sexual attraction towards males (Docter, 1988). Those participants employing defence mechanisms (non-classical transsexuals and cross-dressers) are more likely to develop a sexual attraction to females and cross-gender eroticism (Blanchard, 1989).

Research on the sexuality of cross-dressers has found that the majority are heterosexual (Bullough & Bullough, 1997a; Docter & Fleming, 2001; Docter & Prince, 1997; Prince & Bentler, 1972). Studies of the sexuality of MF transsexuals have found their sexuality to be relatively evenly split between androphilic, gynephilic, bisexual, and asexual, among clinical samples (Blanchard, 1989; Freund, Steiner, & Chan, 1982; Johnson & Hunt, 1990; Lawrence, 2003; Veale, 2005). Studies of the sexuality of FM transsexuals have found that the majority of them are sexually attracted to females (Chivers & Bailey, 2000; Devor, 1993; Okabe et al., 2008; Y. L. S. Smith et al., 2005b). Studies of drag artists have found that the majority of these persons are homosexual (Taylor & Rupp, 2004).

We use Bem’s (1996) *Exotic Becomes Erotic* developmental theory of sexual orientation to explain these sexual orientation patterns among gender-variant persons. Bem’s theory suggests that instead of coding for sexual orientation, biological variables code for childhood temperaments, which determine whether a child will favour the activities and company of peers of the same or opposite sex. This results in children feeling different from children of the sex they do not associate with, and perceiving them as exotic. This in turn generates autonomic arousal to the unfamiliar/exotic peers, which later results in erotic arousal to persons of that sex (Bem, 1998; see Bem, 2000 for articles building on his theory).

Applying this to the Identity-Defence Model, those birth-assigned males who do not use defence mechanisms to cognitively avoid their gender-variant identity would express more femininity in their childhood and thus more likely to prefer female activities and to associate with females. Because of this, these birth-assigned males are more likely to view males as exotic, and later develop a sexual orientation towards them. In contrast, those birth-assigned males who develop defence mechanisms are more likely to conform to expectations to participate in boy’s activities, and associate with other boys. Depending on whether these boys also desire to participate in female activities and associate with females as well, a

gynephilic or bisexual sexual orientation will result. The converse would be the result for birth-assigned females. A weak to moderate relationship (correlations around .30) between sexual orientation and recalled childhood feminine gender identity has been found previously in studies using transwomen (Blanchard, 1988, 1989; Johnson & Hunt, 1990; Y. L. S. Smith et al., 2005b; Veale, Clarke, & Lomax, 2008b) and transmen (Chivers & Bailey, 2000).

Cross-gender eroticism is also correlated with the gender-variant outcomes in the Identity-Defence Model. According to the model, this attraction is most commonly found among those who employ defence mechanisms to suppress their gender identity in childhood: cross-dressers and non-classical transsexuals. Two theories could be drawn on to account for this phenomenon. Firstly, psychoanalytic theory proposes that fetishism develops as the result of using defence mechanisms to guard the ego against guilt and anxiety at early stages of development (Seil, 1996). According to Seil, the repressed gender-variance usually reappears at puberty under the guise of erotic arousal (see also Bockting, 2008). Bem's (1996) Exotic Becomes Erotic theory can also be applied again for a possible explanation of the development of this sexual attraction. Using retrospective reports from male cross-dressers, Docter (1988) noted the strict boundaries given to them in their youth in terms of gender-appropriate behaviour and clothing – barriers are placed in the way of using women's clothing and participating in female-typical activities. This results in an arousal-provoking perception of the forbidden, which, Bem's theory suggests can result in an erotic component. Docter also noted that it is common for cross-dressers to describe high levels of autonomic arousal in their early cross-dressing experiences. The key mechanism here is the autonomic arousal as opposed to the exotic perception of the gender-variant stimuli. It is likely to be common for young persons to find behaviour and clothing of the opposite sex "exotic" – however, we propose that only those who repress their gender-variant identity will receive a high level of autonomic arousal from these stimuli to result in an erotic component.

Figure 2 shows Bem's Exotic Becomes Erotic theory applied to the Identity-Defence Model with modifications to include cross-gender eroticism development. As with Figure 1 biological and early childhood influences determine whether a gender-variant identity develops, and personality and environment factors determine whether defence mechanisms are used to repress this gender-variant identity. When no gender-variant identity develops, an erotic attraction to peers of the opposite birth-assigned sex will eventuate (left column of Figure 2). If a gender-variant identity develops and it is repressed in childhood, an erotic attraction to gender-variant stimuli and/or erotic attraction to peers of the opposite birth-assigned sex will result (left and middle columns). If a gender-variant identity develops that

is not repressed in childhood using defence mechanisms, erotic attraction to the same birth-assigned sex will be the outcome (right column).

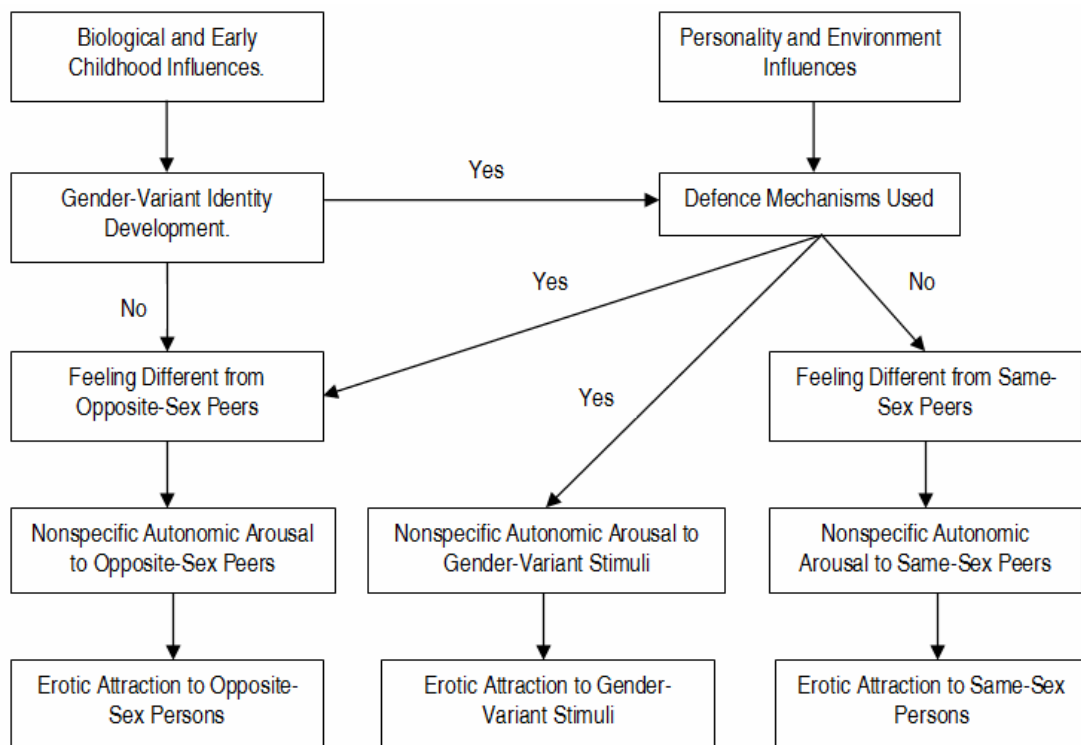


Figure 2. *The development of erotic attraction as proposed by the Identity-Defence model combined with Exotic-Becomes-Erotic theory.*

## Discussion

The Identity-Defence Model should be viewed as an expansion and integration of previous theories. The formulation of the gender-variant identities on a continuum has been previously proposed by Blanchard (1989) and Docter (1988), the use of defence mechanisms to repress a gender-variant identity was originally outlined by Seil (1996), and the sexuality outcomes of the model are explained using application of Bem's (1996) theory.

Prospective studies of gender-variant boys have found that although some grow up to be transsexual, the majority grow up to be homosexual (Green, 1987; Zucker & Bradley, 1995) which seems contrary to the Identity Defence Model. However, we believe the boys in these studies do not experience a gender-variant identity to the higher level that transsexuals do. According to our model, those gender-variant boys who grow up to be homosexual can experience a level of gender-variance where they express it through drag and/or express themselves in a more feminine way in their everyday life than the average male – although,

of course, not all homosexual men experience a feminine gender identity in adulthood (Bailey, 1996). In line with this proposition, studies have shown a greater amount of childhood gender-variance in transsexuals than homosexuals using retrospective and prospective studies (Blanchard & Freund, 1983; Blanchard, McConkey, Roper, & Steiner, 1983; Drummond, Bradley, Peterson-Badali, & Zucker, 2008; Ehrhardt, Grisanti, & McCauley, 1979; Freund, Langevin, Satterberg, & Steiner, 1977; Lutz, Roback, & Hart, 1984; Wallien & Cohen-Kettenis, 2008). However our model considers their sexuality as a correlate, rather than a cause of their gender-variant identity.

Another point worthy of discussion is whether cross-dressers and non-classical transsexuals have a gender-variant identity prior to the onset of their sexuality. Blanchard's and Docter's theories both hold that this is not the case, and it is their cross-gender eroticism which causes their gender-variant identity. Our model proposes that the gender-variant identity is present throughout life, albeit in a repressed form in childhood for some. Although cross-gender eroticism can precede awareness of a gender-variant identity, we propose this is due to the onset of sexual desires at a time when the gender-variant identity has not yet reached full consciousness. We have some evidence for this conclusion – narratives of transwomen's experiences with cross-gender eroticism reveal that many of these women believed they had gender-variant feelings prior to experiencing cross-gender eroticism (Lawrence, 1999a, 1999b). An avenue for further research on this would be to ask those who experience a later-developing gender variant identity whether they believe their first experiments with gender-variant expression were the manifestation of something new or recently developed within them, or something they believe had always been there, just not allowed into consciousness.

Before concluding this article we outline three limitations of the model. Firstly, the model makes the assumption that gender-variant outcomes all lie on a two-dimensional continuum with little empirical evidence to support this. Theories that cross-dressers and non-classical transsexuals (Blanchard, 1991; Docter, 1988), and homosexual males and classical transsexuals occur on a continuum have been previously proposed (Bailey, 2003). However, no previous theories have proposed that all of these four gender-variance outcomes occur on a two-dimensional continuum.

A further limitation of the model is its heavy reliance on Bem's exotic becomes erotic theory. Bem's theory is far from universally accepted, and has been seriously questioned (Nicolosi & Byrd, 2002; Peplau, Garnets, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1998). The developmental pathway proposed by Bem (1996), however, does not need to describe the

universal pathway for the development of all sexual attractions to be successfully applied to the Identity-Defence Model – the pathway only needs account for the development of a reasonably significant portion of person’s sexualities. Bem (1996) acknowledged that his theory was not able to explain all individual variations in sexuality development.

The Identity-Defence Model’s conceptualisation of sexuality also has difficulty explaining the changes of sexual orientation towards androphilia reported by many transwomen after their transition (Daskalos, 1998; Lawrence, 2005). However, this phenomenon could be incorporated into the Identity-Defence Model’s framework if this androphilia is a manifestation of cross-gender eroticism as Blanchard (1989) contends, or if these women are primarily bisexual, but are consciously or unconsciously adhering to societies norms by consistently expressing heterosexuality.

Finally, there are limitations with the definitions and subsequent categorisation applied to the gender-variant groups in the model. There are some persons who could be included in our definitions of drag artists and cross-dressers who do not experience a gender-variant identity, but have various other reasons for their gender-variant expressions, such as employment, fun, rebellion, emotional comfort, or creativity. The Identity-Defence Model does not intend to explain the motivations for gender-variant expression in these cases, it only explains those persons who are expressing a gender-variant identity – whether or not they are aware of it at the time. Conversely, there are some persons who would fall under our definitions of cross-dressers or drag artists who experience an identity of the opposite birth-assigned sex, but may not be able to live full-time in the cross-gender role due to factors such as personal safety, employment, or relationship requirements. The diversity within these groups is substantial, and indeed there are likely to be gender-variant persons who do not fall under any of the definitions we have given. However, the Identity-Defence Model allows for gender-variant outcomes along continuum to allow for as much of this diversity as possible, whilst still keeping the model relatively concise. Indeed, it is possible that only two dimensions of gender-variant outcomes in the model is too simplistic, however we believe it is prudent to propose a simpler model until more is known about possible further variables.

Despite these limitations – and even though further evidence may call for modification or rejection of the Identity-Defence Model – we believe that the model provides an explanation for gender-variant identity development that is as plausible as anything that has been previously proposed. Even though the model has been presented using categorical descriptions of gender-variant outcomes, the structure of the model allows for outcomes along continuum. Finally, we would like to emphasise that the model does not intend to

explain a universal path to gender-variant outcomes – it is possible that these outcomes are arrived at because of factors outside of the model. Rather, this model is proposed as a framework that might promote a structured discussion about the importance of factors affecting gender-variant outcomes, and a platform for investigating how apparently similar circumstances can have widely differing outcomes.



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