

# How J. Michael Bailey Responds to Critics

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## Introduction:

In April 2003, J. Michael Bailey, the Chairman of the Psychology Department at Northwestern University, threw the socially endangered community of transsexual women into serious distress by authoring a book that pseudo-scientifically defamed their identities [1].

Cloaked in the guise of a series of “scientific studies”, the book contained page after page of defamatory labeling and caricatures of transsexual women, such as the following [1]:

*" - - - homosexual transsexuals are used to living on the margins of society" p. 184*

*"Homosexual transsexuals tend to have a short time horizon, with certain pleasure in the present worth great risks for the future." p. 184*

*"Prostitution is the single most common occupation that homosexual transsexuals in our study admitted to." p. 184*

*"Nearly all the homosexual transsexuals I know work as escorts after they have their surgery." p. 210*

*"Do they get married? ... homosexual transsexuals are not very successful at finding desirable men willing to commit to them." p. 209*

When his book immediately set off a firestorm of complaints, he was quoted in the media as making responses such as the following [2]:

*"... the book is intentionally controversial," Bailey said. "I write about things that matter and that people are uncomfortable with. The cover (as well as the book) is meant to be provocative."*

Then, when he began receiving large numbers of well thought out, sincere complaints about the credibility of his scientific pronouncements [3, 4], and about the dangers those pronouncements presented to transsexual women, he cavalierly responded in the media by saying things such as:

*"I can't be a slave to sensitivity" [5].*

When those complaints escalated into a major investigation into ethical misconduct on his part [3, 4], he began to bitterly complain in the media about his life being ruined, while at the same time showing no remorse whatsoever about the angst he had caused in thousands of women [6]:

*"Did I think that people would devote their lives to trying to ruin me? I did not.... I have also never been an advocate of believing things just because it makes people comfortable. Sometimes, when the emperor has no clothes, I'll be one of the first to say it."*

### **How do scientists normally defend their work and respond to critics?**

When publishing general texts that summarize basic research, scientists normally explain the underlying science behind major pronouncements, in order to make that science more intelligible and credible. Seldom if ever do they put forward raw theories as if they were “scientific facts”.

Scientists also list references to the scientific research papers on which they base their reasoning. They do this not by simply naming the researchers and attributing theories to them, but by explicitly referencing the detailed scientific papers on which their theories are based.

If those scientific source works are controversial or not generally held in high regard, scientists also reference research studies that conflict with those works, so as to clearly reveal any contrary theories or evidence regarding the topic under discussion.

If upon publication their general conclusions are widely questioned, either for their logic or because of new evidence, scientists will vigorously attempt to defend those conclusions by revising their logic, improving the tutorial nature of their publication, publishing a deeper analysis which includes additional supporting references, and/or they will begin to modify their positions on the basis of new evidence.

The more controversial or uncertain their results, the more likely it is that scientists will conduct defenses and modifications of their results back within the confines of their scientific community, rather than out within public view and in appeals to a general public forum.

Meantime, it is not a scientific defense to merely dismiss members of the public and attempt to invalidate their criticisms by saying that they are not “experts.” This tactic totally evades the more difficult and necessary trial of defending one’s views back within the scientific community.

Furthermore, it is almost unheard of for a scientist to make remorseless ad hominem attacks on lay critics in efforts to invalidate and silence those critics, as was done in the Bailey case, in which he called his critics liars and accused them of being mentally-ill sexual-paraphilics.

### **Raising questions about Mr. Bailey’s behavior towards his critics:**

Mr. Bailey’s behavior towards his lay critics and research subjects, as uncovered in the ongoing trans community investigation [3, 4], are very troubling.

From the start he showed no surprise at the massive scientific and social criticism of his book. He showed no remorse about the angst that the book was causing amongst thousands of transwomen. He made no effort to clarify or defend his scientific and social views, or to ease the distress those views were causing. He instead aggressively attacked his critics’ sanity and veracity.

Furthermore, he attempted to evade personal responsibility for his scientific pronouncements, and to avoid having to defend those pronouncements, by claiming that those were not his ideas but instead were those of his scientific hero, sexologist Ray Blanchard:

*“For his part, Bailey calls his book a work of “popular science,” and says he reached his conclusions “from personal contacts” and “understanding these people and their stories through the lens of Blanchard.””* [6]

Although frequently defending his views by claiming that the ideas are really Blanchard's, Mr. Bailey at no time himself exhibited any deep knowledge of, nor any ability to explain in persuasive detail, the research behind Blanchard's "theory" about transsexual women.

As it turns out, the foundation underlying Mr. Bailey's pronouncements about transsexual women consist merely of a couple of minor research papers by Blanchard from the 1980's.

Later, when those old papers were deconstructed, and the reasoning therein invalidated in a logical analysis by research psychologist Madeline H. Wyndzen [7, 8], Mr. Bailey made no response whatsoever. He did not come to Blanchard's defense, nor did he attempt to invalidate Dr. Wyndzen's deconstruction of Blanchard's work.

Rather than confront scientific or methodological criticism with a scientific defense, Mr. Bailey instead undertook a campaign of personal attacks in the media upon the women who had lodged formal complaints against him [9, 10], and upon any others who dared criticize his scientific work, accusing them of being mentally-ill sexual paraphilics who were trying to ruin his life [6]:

*"Their primary sexual attraction is to themselves..." Meaning they're turned on by a vagina, but they'd prefer it to be their own. [10]*

While sweepingly defaming trans women as sexual perverts, Mr. Bailey claimed he himself was simply being scientifically "truthful" about them and couldn't be concerned about their feelings:

*"I'm concerned with science and truth and not the feelings of groups," Bailey said [11].*

Meanwhile, in a defensive effort to rally his sex-science colleagues behind him, to turn attention away from actual scientific debate, and to further isolate transsexual women from any participation in the emerging debate, Mr. Bailey harangued those colleagues with a conference talk about how the critics of his scientific research were engaging in "identity politics" and were endangering sex-science's search for "truth" [12].

This overall pattern of behavior is in very sharp contrast to the manner in which scientists normally respond to critics when defending their work.

### **Observing Mr. Bailey's behavior more closely:**

Having examined Mr. Bailey's behavior closely this past year, we've begun to see evidence of many rather unusual personality features, especially in an exaggerated sense of self-importance and feelings of persecution by others - while he himself is in the midst of making blatant attacks on others without any sensitivity to their feelings:

*"I am very sympathetic to transsexuals. I like these people, except for the people who hate me -- they scare me." [2].*

Amongst the many reports of Mr. Bailey's behavior we've received, we often find evidence of a repetitive pattern of the following personality characteristics: glibness/superficial charm; manipulative and conning; grandiose sense of self; lack of remorse, shame or guilt; shallow emotions; incapacity for love; need for stimulation; callousness/lack of empathy; poor behavioral controls/impulsive nature; irresponsibility/unreliability; promiscuous sexual behavior [13]

### **But how does Mr. Bailey see himself?**

Being an eminent psychologist, does Mr. Bailey notice his own unusual personality profile? After all, he “portrays himself according to Dennis Rodkin as an “impartial social scientist,” who looks at “aggregates,” “lots of similar cases” [14]. According to Rodkin, Professor Bailey “has the goal of finding the commonalities among groups of individuals.” [10]

We suspect that very intelligent persons such as Mr. Bailey “can be so close to their own situation that they can't see it as clearly as an impartial social scientist looking at lots of similar cases” [10]. After all, this is not the way sex-scientists “want to think of themselves”—i.e., as being the kind of person who would lash out at others [10] without remorse. We also suspect that such people are blinded by an awareness of how politically damaging it would be to be seen this way, because that “would make other people less sympathetic and maybe even frightened by” sex-scientists “if [the general public knows that] some of them are motivated” by unusual levels of grandiosity and were impulsive, irresponsible and lacking in remorse [10].

We suggest that you read about the ongoing Bailey investigation [3], study the clearinghouse of information regarding Bailey, Blanchard and Lawrence [4], study the reasoned responses by transsexual women to Bailey’s defamations of them [14, 15, 16, 17], and read the references below. Think about the questions we’ve raised, and ask yourself if you too begin to see the unusual, scientifically abnormal pattern of behavior in Mr. Bailey’s responses to his critics.

### **A reflection:**

For the Chairman of the Department of Psychology of a major research university to feel comfortably and professionally able to openly engage in personal attacks upon the gender identity, sanity and truthfulness of trans women who filed complaints about his research conduct, and upon any others who simply dared to criticize his scientific defamations of their endangered class of people, is a frightening development in the history of modern “science.”

Even more frightening is the way in which the “scientific establishment” stood by in silence whilst this outrage unfolded, in many cases deliberately turning their backs on trans women who stepped forward to complain about what was being done to them [18].

We believe that the record of these events will in time expose major flaws in the institutional conduct of scientific research involving human subjects, leading to new rules of conduct for researchers, and to more vigilant community self-policing regarding the rogue scientists amongst us. Otherwise, more scientific fields will fall into ridicule and disrepute in the public eye, as has the field of psychology for condoning of the likes of J. Michael Bailey [19]. Thus it is likely that the investigation of these events will “have ramifications far beyond the Bailey case” [6].

Meanwhile, the revolution ignited in response to the publication of Mr. Bailey’s book by the National Academies has become a defining moment in our community’s history [20]. The revolution against psychiatric and psychological defamation of gender minorities that is now underway will insure that in the end the scientific community will be held to account for these offenses – as we move out from under the scientific microscope as “pathological specimens,” seize our full human rights and make our voices increasingly heard.

*Lynn Conway*

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3. Lynn Conway, "An investigation into the publication of J. Michael Bailey's book on transsexualism by the National Academies" (website):  
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5. Robin Wilson, "'Dr. Sex': A human-sexuality expert creates controversy with a new book on gay men and transsexuals", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 20, 2003.

*"...Mr. Bailey is an academic nerd who is just growing into his reputation as a provocateur. He doesn't mind exposing what he considers sexual myths, no matter how much the results might offend people. And he argues that he is "very pro gay," while acknowledging that "the research I do isn't." While he counts female transsexuals among his friends, he says some "have their feelings hurt" when he contends their sex changes were motivated by erotic fantasies... But he adds, "I can't be a slave to sensitivity."..."*

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*"Did I think that people would devote their lives to trying to ruin me? I did not.... I have also never been an advocate of believing things just because it makes people comfortable. Sometimes, when the emperor has no clothes, I'll be one of the first to say it."*

Note: This article opens as follows, articulating some of the deep issues emerging in this case:

*"J. Michael Bailey was visiting the popular Chicago nightclub Crobar to recruit subjects for a study on transsexuals and drag queens, and found himself especially entranced by a transsexual he called Kim. "She is spectacular, exotic... and sexy," he wrote in *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism*. "Her body is incredibly curvaceous, which is a clue that it may not be natural.... It is difficult to avoid viewing Kim from two perspectives: as a researcher but also as a single, heterosexual man."*

*It's this sort of rumination that has gotten Bailey, now chairman of Northwestern University's psychology department, and an expert on the biological origins of human sexuality, into trouble. His book, published last year, has sparked both a bitter ideological dispute and an ongoing university investigation that will likely have ramifications far beyond the Bailey case.*

*In the minefield of sexual research on human subjects, preconceptions can easily taint observations, and the intimacy between researcher and subject can overtake objectivity. The Man Who Would Be Queen is presented as science, but at times it seems more like a voyeuristic memoir by a man admittedly fascinated by the links between sexuality and gender."*

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