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NU PROFESSOR DEFENDS CONTROVERSIAL GAY, TRANS RESEARCH

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Staff writer

A skeptical audience gave controversial Northwestern University psychology professor Michael Bailey a cool reception April 28 when he defended his notion that "allowing parents to choose the sexual orientation of their children would be morally unproblematic."

Bailey scheduled the forum at Northwestern's Evanston campus to respond to GLBT groups at Northwestern and elsewhere who have urged gays and lesbians not to participate in his current research.

Bailey's writings on genetic selection and homosexuality, as well as his 2003 book, "The Man Who Would Be Queen," have attracted widespread criticism from gay and transgender academics, activists and critics. In his book, Bailey alleged that transgenders are "especially motivated" to shoplift and that prostitution is "the single most common occupation" among transgenders.

Though his book was presented as science, Bailey, then chair of Northwestern's psychology department, did not footnote it. After it came out, some Chicago transgenders who were discussed in the book alleged that Bailey befriended them in bars but never told them he was using them as research subjects.

Those allegations fueled formal ethics complaints lodged against Bailey at Northwestern and the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation by two professors, a national transgender activist and some of the transgenders Bailey met at Chicago bars. In the fall of 2004 Bailey resigned as chair of Northwestern's psychology department but was allowed to remain on the school's faculty.

Because of the publicity surrounding his work, Bailey has found it difficult to recruit research subjects for new studies on gays and lesbians. In March a graduate student working with Bailey sent an email to a Northwestern GLBT list-serv seeking gay men and lesbians, ages 18-40, with home movies of their childhood, for a "well paid" study.

Lynn Conway, a University of Michigan professor who filed one of the ethics complaints against Bailey, said she believes the study is aimed at proving "one of Bailey's old theories about gay men, namely that they all are 'feminine' as young boys."

The recruitment email generated a hostile response from people on the list-serv, with some warning GLBTs not to participate in any project involving Bailey. They cited his 2001 paper on "Parental Selection of Children's Sexual Orientation," his 2003 book, and a 2003 report by the Southern Poverty Law Center detailing Bailey's ties to the Human Biodiversity Institute.

"This exclusive group of academics, race scientists and right-wing journalists-along with a reported handful of liberals-exchanges thoughts about 'differences in race, sex and sexual orientation' for a chilling purpose: promoting and studying 'artificial (genetic) selection,'" the SPLC report stated.

Prompted by the recent hostile reaction on the Northwestern list-serv, Bailey attempted to defend his theories at the forum last week.

"I think the controversy has mostly been due to misunderstanding of the article," Bailey said, referring to his paper on genetic selection. "Nothing we wrote has any negative implications for gay people."

Stating that he doesn't believe "homosexuality is morally inferior," Bailey said, "My argument here is in no way anti-homosexual but rather pro-parental liberty."

Bailey went on to argue that if it become possible to use genetic selection technology to make it more likely for parents to bear heterosexual offspring, such choices would be "morally neutral."

"To avoid having homosexual children does no harm to anyone," he said. "It is quite hard to see how being heterosexual causes any harm to the child."

Bailey stated that even if parents chose to avoid having gay children for "a bad motive," such as anti-gay prejudice, "Is a bad motive enough to render that action morally wrong?"

In a question-and-answer period, audience members seemed skeptical of Bailey's assertions and motives. A number of questions focused on the possibility that the genetic selection Bailey espoused would lead to more societal intolerance of gays and harm the gay rights movement.

"It is by no means clear that these harms would outweigh parental liberty," Bailey said.

When Bailey recognized one audience member for a question, that person asked why Bailey, throughout the question-and-answer period, refused to recognize a woman who had her hand raised throughout the period. That woman, Angelica Kieltyka, was one of the transgenders cited in Bailey's book and has become a persistent critic of his work. Bailey responded that he had to be somewhere else and said he would not be able to take additional questions.

Internet URL for this article:

<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Bailey/Greenberg-Bailey/Chicago%20Free%20Press%205-04-05.htm>

For further information (including references), see:

"J. Michael Bailey attempts to defend his writings on homosexual eugenics – to an almost empty auditorium," A Report by Lynn Conway, *LynnConway.com*, May 14, 2005.

<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Bailey/Greenberg-Bailey/Bailey%20attempts%20to%20defend%20his%20writings.htm>