

The Silent Treatment Continues at the National Academies:

Report on encounters at the National Academy Press, July 22, 2004.
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On Thursday, July 22, 2004, I was in Washington, D.C. to participate in a meeting of one of the National Academies' boards ([The AFSTB](#)) of which I am a [member](#).

The meeting was held in the Academies' new Keck office building at 500 Fifth Street, NW. The Keck Building is a large metal and glass building with a security-guarded entrance. It's one of those places in D.C. where visitors are screened and can only get in if they are cleared for entry.

That morning the idea crossed my mind that since I was already in the building that day, it would be interesting to introduce myself, at least informally, to the National Academy Press (NAP)/Joseph Henry Press (JHP) staff.

As an elected Academy member I'd often taken advantage of meeting breaks to interact opportunistically with Academy staff. In this case, I hoped to introduce myself to the NAP/JHP staff members responsible for editing, publishing and overseeing the promotion of [The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism](#), a book by Northwestern University psychologist [J. Michael Bailey](#).

Since the publication of that book in early 2003, it has been widely condemned. By now those staff members must certainly be aware of the awful impact its publication has had on the trans community. After all, the author was by now widely discredited in the court of public opinion <<http://www.tsroadmap.com/info/bailey-blanchard-lawrence.html>> for his sloppy science and defamatory caricatures of trans women.

However, up to now Academy leadership and NAP/JHP staff had stonewalled the community, giving us the "silent treatment" by never responding directly to our many complaints and requests to meet with them. It was as if we were invisible as they dismissed us as apparently powerless, friendless and of little consequence to them.

I thought to myself, *"The Academy folks must sense that they should reach out to us a bit and try to build some bridges with the trans community – if they are to have any hope of saving face as Bailey and his supporters go down in infamy..."*

With that thought in mind, I walked out to the lobby area during the morning break and asked the receptionist for office locations for [Stephen Mautner](#) (Executive Editor of the JHP) and [Robin Pinnel](#) (publicist for the Bailey book). She looked up the room numbers for me, and I went upstairs to see if they were in.

The NAP offices are on the third floor of the building, which is also the ground floor of a big multi-story atrium that runs up through the middle of the building. The architecture is

consistent with the antiseptic style of the remainder of the building – spare and colorless, and yet somewhat pretentious in its visual display of bright metal and glass. As in the rest of the building few people are seen moving about. It's very quiet everywhere there, and seems as if most staff members are simply “not in” on any given day.

I walked through the atrium and wandered on into the NAP area. The offices were very nice and many had wonderful outside views. However, even here almost no one seemed to “be in” except for an administrative assistant down at one end of the hall.

I wandered the NAP corridor for a while, looking for Stephen Mautner's office. I found a sign for Joseph Henry Press on the wall, marking off the offices for this function of the National Academy Press. Mautner's office was there, but he wasn't in.

Just then the assistant to the NAP's director, a very pleasant lady named Olive Schwarzschild, walked up to me and asked if I needed any assistance.

I introduced myself, and said I was on a break from a board meeting and thought I'd check to see if Stephen Mautner and Robin Pinnel were in. I mentioned that they were involved in publishing a book that I was interested in – and that I'd hoped to briefly introduce myself to them and say hi while I was here.

Olive seemed nicely surprised by having an elected member of the National Academies stop in at the NAP offices, and she went out of her way to be very polite and helpful. She checked her notes and said that Mautner was away that day but that maybe Robin Pinnel would be in. She called over to Ms. Pinnel's office (which apparently was in another section of the floor), but it turned out that Pinnel wasn't in at work that morning either.

While standing by Olive's desk I noticed out of the corner of my eye a well-dressed middle-aged woman seated at a desk in the large nearby corner office. She was looking at me and listening to what I was saying. I turned my head slightly and read the name on the outside office wall. It was the office of [Barbara Kline Pope](#), the Director of the NAP.

I mentioned to Olive that although Mr. Mautner and Ms. Pinnel weren't in, it would be nice to be able to briefly introduce myself to Ms. Pope while I was there. I said it just loudly enough for Ms. Pope to hear me, hoping that she'd acknowledge my presence and we'd get a chance to introduce ourselves.

Just then, Ms. Pope picked up the phone and called someone. It was 10:45 am.

Olive asked if I'd like to sit down somewhere to wait for a few minutes, but I said “*no, that's OK, I'll just hang out here in hopes of having a couple of minutes to meet Barbara.*” Olive assured me that Ms. Pope knew that I was there, saying that she had mentioned to her who I was shortly after I'd first introduced myself.

I stood outside Ms. Pope's office and waited - and waited.

Suddenly, a little after 11:00, Ms. Pope hung up the phone, walked towards the office door and, without looking at me, said quite loudly to Olive *“I have a meeting at 11:00.”*

This seemed odd to me, because Olive apparently didn't know about any meeting, and there was no one else waiting outside Ms. Pope's office (plus, as things would turn out, Ms. Pope didn't leave the area after I had left nor did any other visitors enter the area...).

Anyways, by now Ms. Pope was standing in the middle of the office a few yards away from me, and she started to turn back towards her desk.

I turned towards the office door and said *“Hi Barbara, I'm Lynn Conway”*.

Ms. Pope turned back slightly towards me, but was silent.

I then said, *“I'd like to introduce myself...”*

Thinking that she would at least briefly invite me into her office, I started to bring my right hand up to invite a friendly handshake.

However, she cut me short by saying *“I know who you are!”* in a rather firm tone and with heavy emphasis on the “you”. This response stunned me, since I'd never met or communicated with her, but had only criticized one of the books she had published.

I then said in as nice and calm a voice as possible: *“I'm in a board meeting here and thought I'd stop by and see if Stephen and Robin were here – I thought it might be helpful to put names on faces so we'd all feel we knew each other a bit better – and it's nice to have this chance to see you while I'm here, too”*.

Ms. Pope was expressionless and silent, and made no move whatsoever to greet me or respond to me, much less invite me into her office. This was a long and awkward silence.

At this point I decided to shift gears and ask some questions while I had Ms. Pope's attention. After all, she'd set the tone for the interaction by her odd refusal to acknowledge my initial gesture of openness towards her.

“You are aware of what a horror you folks have caused out there?” I asked, as politely and calmly as possible.

“We've learned a lot”, Ms. Pope responded rather quickly, blankly and off-handedly.

“Then why are you continuing to so heavily promote Bailey's book?” I asked.

“Because we have a responsibility to the author!” she asserted very strongly.

I was absolutely stunned by this response, and stood silent for a while.

Recalling the [Southern Poverty Law Center's expose of the violence against young trans women in D.C.](#) and [the role of hate science in fueling such violence](#), I asked her:

"But didn't you feel any responsibility towards a very large, endangered community?"

This led to another, very awkward silence.

Ms. Pope stared blankly at me for quite a while – clearly not knowing what to say – and possibly oblivious to what I was even referring to.

I didn't know what to say to break the silence either.

Sensing that the interaction was over, I simply said, *"Well, good luck to you."*

She then turned away. The interaction was over.

Olive had been right there during all this, and seemed quite taken aback that Ms. Pope had not greeted me, had not shaken my hand and had acted so strangely during the interaction. I felt sorry about Olive being put in this unexpected position, especially since she'd been so polite and welcoming to me as a member of the Academies.

Not wanting Olive to think that she had somehow done something wrong, I mentioned to her that the NAP/JHP had published a book that is causing lots of angst in an endangered social community, and that was probably why Ms. Pope was uncomfortable – i.e., that Ms. Pope was likely feeling a bit on the defensive about that book. Olive didn't appear to have heard of the controversy, but now sensed Ms. Pope's uneasiness was simply due to some kind of ideological problem with a publication, and I think this made her feel better. I thanked her for her help and left the NAP office area.

Although I was running late returning from my board-meeting break, I took my time heading back through the atrium towards the elevators. Sitting down in the cafeteria, I jotted down key details of these interactions while they were fresh in my mind.

Meanwhile, I kept an eye out for possible visitors going into the NAP office area to meet with Ms. Pope. No one went into that area while I was sitting there, and at around 11:25 I headed back downstairs to the board meeting.

And so the "silent treatment" continues at the National Academies...

Lynn Conway

Report completed and filed with the [BBL Clearinghouse](#) on September 19, 2004
